

A Christmas Study

The Word became flesh. John 1:14

The Christmas story and message can hardly be told more briefly than in this passage from the prologue to John's gospel, because few words bear such a heavy load of imagery and theology as these three: *word, became, and flesh*.

The Word

The word, "word," or *logos* in the Greek that John wrote, meant more to a reader of Greek than "word" means in common-place, non-biblical English. *Logos* did mean a word that could be spoken, heard, written, read, and understood, but it also meant truth, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

To a Jewish reader of Greek—a class of readers that obviously was prominent in John's mind as he wrote—*logos* meant all that and more, for it was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *dabar*. *Dabar* meant a word that could be spoken to name a thing, or (and at the same time) the thing that could be named by the word. Hebrew thought (and therefore Hebrew language) made no distinction between the sound of the word "rock" and the rock that could be picked up and thrown. "Sticks and stones, *etc.* . . ." comes from a totally different thought world, for the ancient Hebrew felt that words could indeed hurt, because words were real and substantial.

John took this entire package of meanings, traditions and thought patterns, and radically expanded it in the first verses of his gospel. In one of the most brilliant poetic devices in the literature of any language, he linked the substantial reality of a word, and the objectification of wisdom, with all the imagery, tradition and theology of the story of creation in Genesis.

The first thing that happened, "in the beginning," when there was only God, was the Word. In the imagery of Genesis 1, there was no *sound* when God said, "Let there be light" (a sound which someone could hear, and go make light—for there was no one to hear, and only God *could* make it); but "and God said . . . and there was . . ." means that when God spoke, something happened. Not the sound of a word, but the *thing* of a word. When God spoke, he *was* the word he spoke, he was his act of creation. So the Word of God "was in the beginning with God," and "the Word was God," and the Word-that-was-God created everything that was created.

Spanning centuries of time, and bridging the chasms of thought between Hebrew religion and Greek philosophy in a few dramatic verses, John established a context that made one word carry the whole message that God—who is love, the creative energy that formed the universe—is also truth, the creative principle that shaped and ordered the universe, and also enlightens those who live in it.

Not only that, but the Word (which means all that) *became flesh*.

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Became

Becoming is a deceptively simple concept. It is simple because it is universally familiar. It may well be that all of us know much more from our experience about *becoming* than we do about *being*. That is to say, our whole experience of living is the experience of a process, an experience of evolving from what we were to what we will be. Our awareness of what we are is so fleeting we seldom can grasp it, so we are most aware of the process of our development—our *becoming*.

The simplicity of universal experience is deceiving, however. Poe's ruse of hiding "The Purloined Letter" in plain sight is an oft-cited illustration of the

fact that we frequently do not see the very things we look at the most. The process of becoming, universally familiar, is almost as universally obscure. We speak so easily of a boy becoming a man, or an acorn becoming an oak, that we seldom notice the implications of novelty-balanced-against-continuity that the word entails. Certainly *becoming* involves something new, something more; but just as certainly it involves the continuation of the former thing into the latter, of the past into the present and the future. An oak tree is different and greater than an acorn, and there could be no oak without an acorn. To speak of *becoming* is to link the past, present and future together in the necessary pattern that is called process.

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CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS



Holidays!"

rom sometime near Thanksgiving until sometime in early January, the words are, "Merry Christmas!" The cards and letters we send and receive, our newspapers, magazines, television, billboards, store-fronts, the greetings between friends, almost all our communication includes the words, "Merry Christmas," or their secular translation, "Happy

Some of the "merriness" is dimmed this year. Reflective plastic streamers across the streets of shopping districts hang darkly, entwined with strings of unlit lights. Houses are cooler. Some holiday trips and visits are cancelled. In some homes, there is the threat of unemployment. In many, there is the danger of running out of fuel on the cold night before the dealer's stocks are replenished.

That makes Christmas less merry this year. Right?

One answer, of course, is "Wrong!" That's a good answer, springing from deep sources of our holiday tradition. Christmas is in the heart, not the trees or store windows. Christmas is love, a form of energy that is in short supply only when it is withheld and hoarded, and is in greater abundance the more profligately it is expended. If there is an energy shortage at the heart of Christmas, we have only to love more. Family or friends together at Christmas can generate more sparkling brightness, more comforting warmth, than any number of electric lights or the most modern central heating.

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After all, the Yuletide traditions were so strong before electricity and central heating, that much of what makes Christmas what it is merely imitates a time when there was an energy crisis every day until the horse was fed and the wood was chopped. Electric lights on trees imitate candles, tinsel imitates icicles, and the Yule log was heat before it was a quaint tradition. The carols, the worship, the remembering, the family being together, the friends stopping in, the loving one another as we were loved by Him we celebrate in this season . . . these things light and heat the merriness of Christmas as much this year as in any.

Some might even remember Christmases when it was really hard to be merry—when shortages cut more deeply, when loved ones were away, in danger, perhaps dead. And some will be aware that there are many—this Christmas as in Christmases past—who cannot turn their thermostat down to 68° because they have no central heating, and they never had it that warm in the winter anyway. Yet in war, and poverty, and grief, and all manner of tragedy and deprivation, Christmas can be blessed, which is far better than just being “merry.”

Christmas can be blessed.

That distinction is important to me. Many years ago, I received a letter at the radio station where I worked, a letter from a Catholic nun. It was a business letter, but the time was shortly before Christmas, and the letter ended, “May you have a blessed Christmas.” That year, as some other years before and since, it had seemed to me there was something rote, mechanical and overly commercial about the ubiquitous cheeriness of “Merry Christmas,” and that sister’s wish struck a deep chord in me. I remember thinking that it was one of the significant rewards of the religious professions, that they entitled one to use such an appropriate, satisfying, yet unfashionable greeting. I remember, too, that I recalled that letter, and my appreciation of it, when I made my career decision to prepare for the ministry.

I feel now that I had the cart before the horse. Far more than her title entitling her to use the greeting, it was her concern that I and others should have a blessed Christmas rather than a merely merry one, that led to her taking religious vows. It wasn’t her position that led her to use that greeting, but her love for those she encountered even routinely, and her understanding of what Christmas is all about.

In a real and important way, she made my Christmas more blessed that year by wishing it so: partly because her wish reminded me of the meaning of the holiday, and partly too because she touched me, gifted me with some

of the love and wisdom that is Christmas.

It would make me very happy to be able to share that gift. For many this year, the energy shortage may indeed dim some Christmas merriness; for not all of us can enjoy candle-lit trees, and yule logs for heat. But if Christmas is blessed, then it brings a fundamental joy that bubbles over into real merriment—the kind that colored lights are supposed to symbolize, but cannot bring by themselves. May you have a blessed Christmas.

Robert H. Kirven

Woman to Top Post

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ELECTS CLAIRE RANDALL AS GENERAL SECRETARY

At its meeting in New York, October 13th, the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches—federation of 31 national church bodies—including the Swedenborgian Church, elected Ms. Claire Randall of New York City to the council's top executive post.

Ms. Randall, associate executive director of Church Women United, will succeed Dr. R. H. Edwin Espy, who will retire as general secretary Dec. 31.

The single nominee of the board's official "search" committee, headed by United Methodist Bishop Paul Washburn of Chicago, Ms. Randall will become the first woman general secretary in the council's 23-year history.

She defeated the only other candidate considered for the post, the Rev. Albert M. Pennybacker, pastor of the Heights Christian Church, Shaker Heights, Ohio. The vote was 110 for Ms. Randall, 61 for Mr. Pennybacker, whose name was placed in nomination from the floor.

An ordained elder of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., Ms. Randall has held a variety of church agency executive posts in the past 24 years. In the past decade her work with Church Women United—an interdenominational fellowship with

2100 state and local affiliates—has covered a wide range of activities, from organizing efforts that led to the federal school program to bringing women together to discuss theology. She is a key figure in what has come to be regarded as the women's movement in church life, dedicated to enhancing the role of women in the church.

In remarks to the press following her election, Ms. Randall said she hopes to help steer the council toward "an increasingly open system," among the 300 member staff and in relations with the constituent churches in the cooperative agency. "It's a style I'm committed to," she said. "I wouldn't consider myself at the top of a pyramid, but rather as a core person. . . in an open structure."

As general secretary she will have oversight responsibility for 60 and more different programs the council carries on in behalf of the member churches. They range from literacy and material aid for the needy overseas to domestic programs in stewardship and Christian education. The council's budget to carry on this work amounts to \$14.6 million for the current year.

The election was held the day following a farewell testimonial dinner given by the Governing Board in honor of Dr. Espy at The Riverside Church in New York City. Approximately 250 guests heard from a notable group of church leaders in praise of Dr. Espy's leadership during the ten years of his service as general secretary. Among the special guests were a number of past presidents of the National Council of Churches, together with Dr. W. Sterling Cary, current president.

ANCL. . . .

A Christmas Gift...

Last Christmas I was in Switzerland in the middle of my European trip. It was sad being away from family and friends, but it was also a new and exciting experience.

We were in a hostel chalet at Grindelwald, high in the Alps with fellow travellers from Australia, Japan, Africa and North America. I suppose each of us felt lonely for our homes, so we decided to make it a memorable Christmas. We carolled in the town, roasted chestnuts in the old fireplace, and strung popcorn for the tree which had been brought from the woods the day before Christmas.

On Christmas Eve everyone gathered for a big dinner and later, the candles on the tree were lit and the hundred people softly sang the same carols we had sung every year at the Christmas eve candle-light service at home. Outside the sky was filled with stars and there seemed to be one which shone brighter than the rest. Was it my imagination? Maybe, but it seemed possible because of the feeling of peace surrounding me. There was such a feeling of fellowship with all these people from different parts of the world.

Christmas day we hiked up into the mountains to an Alpine meadow and sat in the sun watching the postcard scene spread out before us. It was when we came back to the hostel that I really noticed a letter which had been tacked up in the hall. It seemed to say exactly what I felt, and I'd like to share it with you.

Christmas Greeting from Germany

Here in Germany everyone has gone home to friends or relatives' homes for their Christmas and I am left alone. But in spirit I have been given a splendor beyond man's deepest dreams, for before my eyes is a wonderland so magnificent, so inspiring that if there were angels they would be crying tears of joy.

I am surrounded by a whole forest of the most

beautiful pine-scented living Christmas trees, reaching toward the sky, a hundred times taller than myself. At the tips of those trees are thousands of stars shining and twinkling and sparkling everywhere I look. All around me is an aura of Christmas music, the little stream nearby is a choir of many voices singing the carols of Christmas, two dogs running back and forth across the old wooden bridge are the sound of cymbals and drums. Every so often a night bird cries out like Christmas chimes. The wind blowing through the branches is the violins playing "Silent Night." The frogs are the horns and the crickets are the flutes and together they all are my symphony of Christmas present.

My Christmas is a living real experience. Even Tom-Tom the turkey looks far more beautiful in his pen, his autumn colored feathers fanned out with such pride, than cooked sitting on the table.

God, thank you for your Christmas gifts to me, and for the mistletoe high in the trees, the pine cones sitting on their branches, the red berries on the bushes, the acorns on the ground, and the poinsettias growing near the barn. And most of all, my family and friends who I dearly love and miss, no matter how far away. You have given unto me the discovery on this Christmas eve that the most valued of gifts we can give or receive is the meaning of life through the spirit of love.

This Christmas I'll be home with my family, but the memories of last Christmas will still be with me. Hopefully I'll be able to overlook the commercial aspects of Christmas so prominent in North America and go back to the simplicity I experienced in the Alps.

Hope your Christmas is a happy one!

Mary Chivers

"The Lord was born from the virgin Mary, but born as any man; but when he was born again, or became divine, it was from Jehovah."

Arcana Caelestia, 2798

The Use of Slides in Sunday School

How long has it been since your Sunday School children have been shown a filmstrip or slides? Now that classes have been in session for a couple of months, perhaps a slide show would be a welcome change from the usual routine.

In choosing slides (or filmstrips) the New Church teacher will want to use a great deal of care. Impressions received by children go very deep as will be seen when we consider that the very elderly often remember vividly things that happened in childhood, while things of the less remote past escape them.

Ideally a slide show should not replace the lesson, but enhance it. The reading and studying of the Word are always primary.

One of our basic responsibilities is to present the Lord's Word to the children as He has given it to us; therefore, we should be careful that any materials presented are accurate. Many commercial slide stories include details which are imagined by the editors and are not found in the Bible account. If these are used, they may confuse the children's minds as to what the Bible really says.

Visual impressions added to the hearing of Bible stories make the effect all the more vivid. Much that would otherwise be left to the children's own creative imagination is thus furnished ready-made. If, for example, a child sees a picture of Jesus cleansing the temple with an angry expression on his face, it may make a lasting negative impression. In the New Church we know that the Lord is never angry; thus we might consider what such a presentation might do to undermine our efforts to teach the true nature of the Lord.

Since any slides should be thoroughly reviewed before being shown, they will have to be ordered some weeks in advance. This may be somewhat of a nuisance, but is well worth the trouble.

There are many sources for visual aids. Your local religious bookstore will probably have slides for rent or purchase. Large companies such as Whittemore's have catalogs to help you order by mail.

One source which should be explored even before the above outlets is the General Church Visual Education Library (Cairncrest, Bryn Athyn, Pa. 19009). At your request you will receive a lengthy list of available slides illustrating Old and New Testament stories and topical subjects. One of the most exciting sets is the Tabernacle set, with beautiful color slides of their model of the tabernacle, showing the plan and elevation, the furniture, vessels, details of construction, and the garments of the priests and Levites. The rental is nominal, only one cent per slide per month, plus postage, and the service is very prompt.

One other possibility is to make your own slides. You could use scenic or informal shots to illustrate certain psalms and other passages, or staged enactments of Bible stories. Or photographing your 1973 Christmas pageant (during a dress rehearsal, so that you can pose the subjects or retake some shots) would give you a permanent addition to your school slide library. In making your own slide stories, the important things to remember are accuracy and a reverent attitude. Lack of professionalism in the costumes or staging are not as critical as the mood achieved and the lesson taught.

Perhaps you already have slides that other Sunday Schools might use. If so, we would like to hear about them. We need suggestions, addresses of good sources, and descriptions of presentations you have found successful, for inclusion in a later issue of *The Messenger*.

Please write to:

Mrs. William R. Woofenden,
Visual Aids Chairman
48 Highland Street
Sharon, Mass. 02067

The Messenger invites letters and short articles from readers. Letters of over 250 words, if accepted, may be edited for space requirements.

Open

DEAR DAVID FEKETE:

I am over three times as old as you are and yet I agree with you entirely, in what you say in the A.N.C.L. column in the October issue of *The Messenger*. Except under protest I have not been to a Worship Service in our church in ages.

I did, however, go to worship several times with the little group known as the Temple City Church, that meets in a home under the leadership of John (Jack) Odey. Here they sit in a semi-circle on comfortable chairs and couches. There is more meditation and sincere prayer here and less, yes much less ritual, in fact hardly any. And the "sermon" is quite short—and somehow more intimate and personal.

Afterward you don't stand around and try to make conversation, you sit down around a round table over light refreshments with plenty of conversation about the sermon which reveals new insights into its purpose and meaning.

I wish I wan't so tied up in church work and its organization so I could go to Pasadena, where the Temple City Group meet more often.

Keep plugging. I'm with you.

Alice Spear
Los Angeles Society

May I venture a partial reply to the well-written article by David Fekete on the subject of youthful objections to worship in a pattern we are accustomed to? Half a century ago when I was young, I remember asking my father why we had to have the same responses, psalms, etc. every Sunday; I also objected to the sameness and the repetitiveness. My father replied, "Oh, you want surprises in the church worship." "No," I said, "not surprises, but variable offices, with a change in psalms, responses, etc. something like the six different offices for morning worship in the General Church book."

Now, after half a century, I look forward each Sunday to the well-chosen passages from the Word which are incorporated in our worship. They are very meaningful, and take my attention away from self, and focus it on the Lord. If one is thinking of self-gratification in worship, one is worshipping himself, not the Lord. Worship is pleasing to the Lord when our attention and our love is centered on Him. Worship is for man's sake, because the Lord knows a man needs it. But for man's sake it must be focused on the Lord, away from self.

I still think, after half a century, that it would be wise to incorporate in our Book of Worship half a dozen different forms for the Office of Morning Worship, forms similar in structure but varying in content. The very informal worship which young Fekete describes should be effective for a League meeting, for example, or for worship at a retreat camp or other informal gathering.

I have experienced no lack in being able to participate in our worship as in the Book of Worship, but would feel such a lack if a guitar were to be substituted for the organ (except in a retreat, etc.) We do need to provide for needs of persons in all stages of growth, and this should be thought of, and acted upon.

Alice Van Boven

PURLEY CHASE: ENGLAND'S ALL-YEAR SUMMER CAMP

"Purley Chase" is a name that conjures up affectionate memories for many New Church people in Britain and it is the name of a large mansion in Warwickshire where summer schools and other church schools and week-end study sessions have been held for almost 50 years. The first summer school was started in 1925 by Rev. E.J.E. Schreck, and was based on that which he began at Almont in 1900 while he was a Convention Minister. Living conditions were rather Spartan in those days, but these early schools are still remembered and

Forum...

discussed by the students who attended them, and they obviously made a deep impression on them.

The summer schools continued until the war, when Purley was used for billeting troops. Afterwards, the building, which did not benefit from its military occupation, was unoccupied for several years and slowly declined into disrepair with the assistance of the predatory ivy and thieves who stripped the lead from the roof.

In 1950 the building was bequeathed to the General Conference in memory of Rev. E.J.E. Schreck and of Alderman Slack, the donor. A combination of voluntary and paid efforts and many gifts have slowly restored it to its present state in which it provides a reasonable standard of hostel accommodation set in a wooded landscape in the heart of England. Purley can accommodate a maximum of 50 people in a combination of small bedrooms and dormitories. In addition to these rooms and the kitchen and wash-rooms, there is a large room used as a chapel/lecture-room/lounge, a dining-room, a library and a games room. More energetic activities can be carried out in the grounds, and it is hoped that the installation of a swimming pool will soon be completed.

Two years ago, Purley gained some New Church wardens, Wilf and Irene Woodhouse, and their short period of occupation has already resulted in an increase in the number and variety of the activities that take place there. There are schools for young married couples, parents with small children, children aged 11 to 14, young people and retired people. Some church Societies have a communal holiday there, while others have weekends for study and worship. The Ministers have an annual seminar there, and various Conference committees hold meetings at Purley because of its central location, so in one way or another there is something for everyone at Purley. Please don't get the impression that people spend all their time studying or working there because they also enter enthusiastically into dances and social activities inside, and

games, walks and barbecues outside. It is also during these off-periods that people acquire a more intimate friendship with each other, and that they join in those deeper discussions and conversations which don't seem to happen in the rush of normal living. I think that it is these occasions that help to give Purley its special atmosphere.

What has all this to do with the Convention? The holding of the World Assembly three years ago made us more deeply aware of our kinship with other New Church organizations, and one result of this has been that the General Church in England has held its international summer school at Purley Chase for the last couple of years. It occurred to us that there is probably a significant number of Convention people who come over to England each year and who might like to meet other New Church people, and perhaps even join in one of the study sessions if they knew that the opportunity existed. We would certainly like to meet you if you were able to come. Purley would also be a good centre for visiting Nottingham, Derby and Birmingham (all with New Church Societies), Coventry Cathedral, Warwick castle and Stratford-on-Avon, which are all within 40 miles. If you would like further information about visiting Purley, please write to:

David Haseler
55, North Drive,
Handsworth,
Birmingham, B20 3SX.
England

Do make sure that you make arrangements in advance, or you might well find that there is no room if Purley is fully booked. Total charges including all food are about four dollars per day. We hope that you will come along and join us in learning more about the New Church and the way we live our lives. See you some time in 1974 or 1975!

David Haseler
on behalf of the Purley Chase
Committee
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A RESPONSE TO RESTLESSNESS

by Julia Schleicher

This evening, November 10th, my husband handed me a copy of the October, 1973 issue of *The Messenger*, which he had read, and which I had as yet not read. In it I read an article written by David Fekete called "Objections Expressed," which listed various expressions of resistance to the format of the Swedenborgian Church order of worship used today, and no doubt used long in the past as well. My own reactions to this article are stronger and more deeply felt than I might have expected, as a comparative newcomer to the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, which I conclude are an indication of my having absorbed far more of the instructional and inspirational nature of this religion than I might have supposed, had not the statement by its very opposition to my own feelings (up to now unexpressed) unleashed my own desire to comment upon that which I might have heretofore taken for granted as to my own thoughts. For this I should be grateful to the article by Mr. Fekete.

First, let me say that the Swedenborg order of worship in its regularity of scheduled responses, invocation and prelude to the sermon, is much like that upon which I have been brought up. I surmise that most recognized church services have more or less rigid formulas for the service—all based, let it be noted, upon time-honored traditions which transcend the need to "please," whether the majority be "young people" or older people, or a mixture of both. To me, the house of God is a true temple of worship, where I can go for surcease from the daily secular whirlwind of activity, where peace and quiet necessary for true contemplation are not punctured by someone's impulsive choice of a record to play, or a random selection on the guitar, which I can hear in any elevator, restaurant, radio or television program whether I wish to hear it or not. The religious music of Bach, Beethoven and other great composers conveys the message of the sublimity of our Creator in the profoundest of terms, and was intended for the church service itself.

I feel that the essence of my reaction to this article in *The Messenger* is based upon a most important

factor, which is this: The notion of my wishing to have given to me for my pleasure, a format of service satisfactory to my needs of that moment, instead of one strong and enduring enough to sustain my various moods and mortal appeals whenever I attend such services—whatever my age may be—such a notion is to me not only preposterous but presumptuous of me in the extreme. I am but mortal, and I have a soul. I have one life and one soul, both intertwined, and they are precious to me. Can I not sit quietly for a mere twenty minutes or so following "forty minutes of preliminaries"—the order of worship—in order to contemplate the spiritual side of my life which is so neglected in the hurry of life during the week, aside from my daily prayers? Does not the mysticism of India, so much studied and favored these days by the young in the Western Hemisphere, require long periods of meditation, long moments of peace and tranquillity, and systematic exercises by both body and spirit? Does not our Lord say, "My peace I give unto thee?" Do I not detect in the earnest objections of the young writer of that article, a restlessness and impatience with the calm and quiet of a holy church service, which indicates not only an immaturity of youth which the gradual procession of the years will gently erase, but an actual intolerance of God Himself, as if someone were saying, "Come, Lord, give us something new, something different each week, the way we see a new program on television!" I object truly and most emphatically to this new idea of constant variety and newness which is now reaching into the very strongholds of the church itself. As a young person years ago, I was content to realize that those more mature than I had much to show me and to teach me, and that as I grew older, I would be making more and more decisions of my own and eventually could express to others my convictions which by then would be seasoned with an understanding to which only the lengthening number of milestones of progression through life can lead. The farmer does not harvest his crops before they are ready; the musical composer and the artist do not display their creations before they are as perfectly put together as their abilities can bestow. The astronauts' vehicles are not sent into outer space before everything is in perfect order. How, then, can one decide that the Church forsake its spiritual fortress for one more flimsily built. There is an old belief that to improve something you

must produce something even better. For me, there is nothing better than the quiet haven of the church with its atmosphere of dedication to the Almighty God for whom it was built. I respect reverence, and if I am called upon by the young to explain just what I mean by reverence, I shall refuse, for it needs no explaining, and one who might ask me to do so would only prove to be, as yet, through the very asking of the question, too immature to handle such a concept without, say, the minister's informed teachings.

If I feel that the service is carried out with sameness each time, it is not the fault of the service, but of my own lack of awareness that it is I who am different each time I come to church. My needs are different each time, and to have both the service different and my own self different would only produce intellectual, spiritual and religious chaos, as far as I am concerned. Does the tide wash over the sand? Yes. Yet the sand moves and disappears from the same place, while the rock remains. I need my Saviour, and I know in my complete faith that He wants to save me, and if I required Him to present Himself differently each time I come to Him, I would indeed be other than the human being which I am—I would be no more than a bundle of atoms without a soul, and thus incapable of receiving the Divine Word. To me, the service is not impersonal. If I felt so, it would be I who would be guilty of bringing the impersonal aura to the service, not the other way 'round. As all mature persons know, a slow pace does not indicate dullness. In a secular sense, remember the fable of the tortoise and the hare. It is not more variety that we need, but less, in this harried, noise-weary, frantically-paced world. As for any lack of being able to participate, should I not tire of hearing my own endless suggestions and instead listen attentively to the minister's inspiring thoughts? Yes, they are inspiring—can you think of any you have produced this week that are more so? This is an age of homogeneity, which is suffocating the individual voices trying to make themselves heard above the cacaphony of the group participants. If everyone talks at once, so to speak, little sense can be gleaned. If one has the inner tranquillity and the grace to listen, and to think, one can learn much, and perhaps can someday become worthy to be heard and listened to, him-

self.

If the writer of the article herein discussed feels the need for a certain type of atmosphere for a service (and he writes specifically of such a place, even to the description of how the congregation shall sit, and what kind of musical instrument shall be played), he is only exchanging one format for another. He mentions only that which will serve youth. Perhaps he will be kind enough to prescribe in a future article that which will be adequate for the "mature congregation," as he most clearly excludes any excepting one segment of church attendants.

In church I am at one with God. If I am not, I should be. That is why I am there. God is my surcease and separator from the daily forms of variety and the disorganization of my secular activities. He is with me in my home, in my travels, whether I am alone or with others. I do not need to lay down rules for the manner in which God can help me and give me solace. I do know, however, that the church service is a symbol of Divinity, which I am bound to respect humbly as a human being, and therefore I defend its power to renew my spirit and to give me the inner strength which I, like every other human being, cannot supply alone.

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07901

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Andre Diaconoff
810 Holly Ave.
St. Paul, Minn.
55104

STUDY cont'd. from p. 195

John's Greek word, *egeneto*, bore the same implications as the English "became." Furthermore, like *logos*, it was put into a very explicit context by the earlier verses of his gospel. That context is more evident in the Greek than in the English, because the translations use a variety of words where John repeated the same one. It would be poorer English, but would preserve the parallels that John established, to read:

All things *became* (in the sense of "came to be") through him, and without him, nothing *became* that *did become*. . . (John 1:3)

A man *became* sent by God, whose name was John . . . (V. 6)

And the world *became* through Him. . . (V. 10)

. . . power "*to become*" (a kind of past infinitive that doesn't exist in English) the sons of God . . . (V. 12)

And the Word *became* flesh. (V. 14)

This repetition of *egeneto*, in John's precise and deliberate use of words, is a statement that the same process, the same development-of-what-was-into-what-is-in-becoming-what-will-be, characterized creation, revelation, regeneration, and the Glorification of our Lord.

On this reading, John's prologue is a radical statement of what has come to be called "process theology." Generally considered to be a distinctively twentieth-century mode of religious thought, the term is also an accurate description of Swedenborg's position—and, by this evidence—the position of the Fourth Evangelist.

Flesh

John's word, *sarx*, equates with our understanding of "flesh" much more directly. As in English, it means meat, as in "my flesh is meat indeed" (Jn. 6:55); it means the human race, as in "all flesh shall see the salvation of our God (Lu.3:6): human nature, as in "the will of the flesh" (Jn.1:13); and the correlative opposite of spirit, as in "the spirit gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (Jn.6:63).

Much has been written about fine distinctions between *sarx* and *soma* (body), but the difference closely parallels English, body having a wider range of meanings than flesh. There may be major significance, or simply difference in style, in the fact that John uses "flesh" twelve times, and the other three evangelists use it a total eleven times between them, while John uses "body" five times against thirty-five times for Matthew, Mark and Luke together. In any case, certain usages, such as "he who eats my flesh . . ." (Jn.6:56), and "Take, eat, this is my body" (Mt. 26:26), are virtually synonymous.

When the full impact of "the Word" and "became" are taken into consideration, "flesh" makes the statement a full telling of the Christmas story, I once read, in a work whose name and author I have mercifully succeeded in forgetting, that the prologue to John was written as an explicit denial of Luke's story of the virgin birth! Of course, this was written by one of the scholars (the great majority, in fact) who feel certain that John was written long after the other gospels. It would be just as easy, however, if one considered this point alone, to see John's prologue as the original statement, and Luke 1 and 2 as the narrative explanation of this astonishing metaphysical pronouncement.

That the Word (the creative power of God) became (by the same process as creative) flesh (human nature in its finite physical form) is one of the most remarkable claims in the history of religions. More startling philosophically than Luke's account is physiologically, it sets forth the only structure of reality in which the Lukan story is possible. If it is emotionally less warming than the legend of the Babe in the manger, it is intellectually more comprehensive.

But there is also the late, great, Paul Tillich. Since I first expressed in *The Messenger*, some dozen years or so ago, my appreciation for his original contribution to theological language (which opened new possibilities for the communication of Swe-

denborg's techniques), I have never ceased to admire the systematic clarity of his thought. On the focus of this study, however, Tillich says:

If the *egeneto* in the Johannine sentence, *Logos sarx egeneto*, the "Word became flesh," is pressed, we are in the midst of a mythology of metamorphosis. And it is natural that the question should arise concerning how something else can remain at the same time what it is. Or did the Logos otherwise disappear when Jesus of Nazareth was born? Here absurdity replaces thought, and faith is called the acceptance of absurdities.

This leaves me with the sad obligation of asking one of my heroes—who can no longer answer—"Did you start reading John's gospel only at verse 14?"

Of course, the logos became something else, something more. Of course, it didn't disappear. What was John saying with seven repetitions of a past tense of *ginomai* in the fourteen verses? Was the Incarnation and Glorification only a good story for the evangelists to tell? John's good news is that God became the Word, became the creation, became revelation, became regeneration, became the Christ (the Glorified Lord), and God only knows what is yet to come to be.

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. Emotional shepherds and intellectual wise men alike, we have beheld his glory.

Robert H. Kirven

To all church Societies ---

Have you thought of applying to the Housing Assignment department of the Registrar of Voters for your city, to see if your church could be used as a polling place for voters?

Not only would Swedenborg's name be before the public, but there is remuneration offered, usually.

Alice Spear

The following article is reprinted from The Register, a Cape Cod, Mass., weekly, from information supplied by Mrs. Marion Priestnal.

Swedenborgians in Yarmouth Port

THE NEW CHURCH HAS A BIRTHDAY

On Tuesday, August 14th, the Society of The New Jerusalem (familiarily called "The New Church") in Yarmouth Port will celebrate an anniversary. At that time John Bishop, a resident of Yarmouth Port, will give an organ recital, the program for which has been selected to demonstrate the versatility of the Church's manual "tracker organ" as well as the skill of the musician. A "tracker organ" is, according to John, one where the musician's pushing of the keys manually opens the air valves to the pipes, as opposed to those fancy semi-modern "electric" organs where pushing the keys activates an electric switch which opens the valves to let the air out. A supermodern "electronic" organ is full of multivibrators, of which there are none in the New Church.

The celebration to be held next Tuesday was originally intended to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the construction of the edifice. Regrettably, that centennial occurred in 1970. "Three years late but still fervent," as Mrs. Marion Priestnal, wife of the pastor, recently observed, the show is going on. The concert will begin at 8 pm Tuesday in the New Church opposite the Common in Yarmouth Port.

In many ways, 1973 is a better year for a celebration as well as giving the church time to age gracefully since the whole history of this local group seems to revolve around the figure three. The first meeting of receivers for worship in the faith was held in the autumn of 1823 at the house of Andrews Hallett. At these early meetings, sermons which had been delivered elsewhere were read to the group gathered in a local home. Those present at the first meeting were Caleb Reed, Warren God-

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dard, Ruth Cobb, Prince Howes, Andrews Hallett (the host) and Mrs. Hallett, Benjamin Hamblin and his wife, and Benjamin F. Wing. While at Harvard, Caleb Reed's brother had started reading the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. This horrified their father, a Unitarian minister, who suggested to Caleb (also a Harvard man) that he try to bring his brother back to Unitarianism. Instead, Caleb liked what he read and was filled with enthusiasm to spread the word. Yarmouth received his message because (after Harvard) Caleb came here to study law with another brother. Before too long, the law office became a reading room for the writings of

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Swedenborg, who had never intended to found a new religion at all.

On Tuesday, December 29, 1828, the little gathering heard its first original sermon from the Rev. T. Gilman Worcester. It was necessary that the date be in the middle of the week, since Rev. Worcester had his own parish to tend on Sunday, and then travel by stage or packet to Yarmouth. Although this meeting was conducted in a public hall, the group at that time had moved their regular meetings from the house of Andrews Hallett to that of the Misses Abby and Lucretia Gorham, which is the first house west of the Barnstable line on Rt. 6A—the red house at present, occupied by Mrs. Gorham Bacon.

Shortly after this sermon, at the beginning of 1830, the group ceased to function, since all the movers and shakers had left town. This should not be blamed on the Rev. Mr. Worcester, however, since it was merely that the members had migrated to Boston where they joined the group in that city. Throughout the history of the Yarmouth church, there have been strong ties between Boston and this town. One Boston minister referred to it as a “mother-daughter relationship” concerning which Mrs. Priestnal points out that “many New Church people eventually had homes in both places, summering on the Cape and spending winters in Boston, attending each church in turn.”

The group remained dormant here until 1836, when Nathaniel Stone Simpkins founded The Yarmouth Register, revived the church group, and began the dynasty that eventuated in John Bishop, the organist who will play next Tuesday. In September of that year meetings were started again, going back to the house of Andrews Hallett, where they had begun.

Shortly thereafter, the group started to seek a public meeting hall, primarily for the founding of a school for the young people, whom Caleb Reed had been teaching. During the same year the first ordained minister spoke to the group, giving one sermon at the Methodist church and two at the schoolhouse.

In May, 1837, the group entered the first of the

four buildings they have occupied—a room over the store of Thomas Thacher, which stood on the site at present occupied by Parnassus Book Service, at the curve in Rt. 6A opposite the Old Yarmouth Inn. In September of 1838, the school was opened in the same premises.

In February, 1839 more room was needed, and they moved across the street to Yarmouth Hall. This building, which stood just to the west of the Old Yarmouth Inn, was erected about 1810 for a school and other purposes and the downstairs was later known as Holmes's Market. At the meeting of February 27 of that year, the group voted to spend \$100 for an "aeolian." Ten dollar shares were subscribed for this purpose, with the understanding that it was to be "at the disposal and under the sole direction of a majority of the proprietors, each proprietor voting according to the number of his shares." No mention is made in the compact as to whether the proprietors had to know how to play the instrument.

Getting back to the digit "3," in 1843, September 20, the Yarmouth Society of the New Jerusalem was instituted by the Rev. Thomas Worcester. The ceremony took place at the home of the Misses Gorham. Present to form the Society were Nathaniel S. Simpkins, Abigail T. Gorham, Sarah Eldridge, Frederic Matthews, and Lucretia T. Gorham. Nathaniel Stone Simpkins was elected Chairman of the Church Committee; William S. Fisher was made Secretary of the Society, with Frederic Matthews Treasurer. The ceremony took place at 2:30 pm on a Wednesday afternoon, almost one hundred and forty years ago.

In September of 1858 the Society moved back across the street. Alden A. Knowles had moved the old building to the south and had constructed what is now Parnassus Book Service with the second floor specifically designed as the Church meeting hall. The side door of this building leads directly to the stairway upstairs. This was the first building to be formally dedicated as a church, and continued to be the meeting house until December 27, 1870, when the present edifice was completed and dedicated. This last building apparently had the organ installed at the time of construction, which must have been the retirement of the old

"aeolian." There seem to be no records of what happened to those ten dollar shares in that instrument.

The first pastor of the Yarmouth Society was Rev. John Philander Perry, who had been minister since 1853 and was installed as pastor in 1859. Rev. Mr. Perry had been educated under the auspices of the Congregational church, which left him under obligations to minister in that sect, which he did for several years. When, however, his ordination was proposed, the council, called in Surrey, N. H., refused to ordain him. Down he came to the Swedenborgians in Yarmouth, where he remained for the balance of his life. He also was known for inventing a contrivance for planting pine seeds, which device cannot be found in the present building.

The succeeding minister was William H. Mayhew, who began his service in October 1870 in time to assist at the dedication of the new edifice, and was installed as pastor November 8, 1874. Rev. Mr. Mayhew resigned in 1887 and returned again in 1890, but it was decided that his absence didn't count because no interim pastor had been appointed. For that reason, it was not necessary to reinstall him. Since that time, the pastors of this church have been the Rev. D. V. Bowen (1910-1914), the Rev. James Priestnal (1915-1948), and his son, the Rev. Clayton Priestnal, since 1949.

The New Church functioned year-round until about 50 years ago. Services were limited to summers only beginning in 1923. There goes that numeral "3" again—come to think of it, organist John Bishop has just finished his 3rd year of high school!

C. A. Holbrook, Jr.

IN MEMORIAM

The Rev. Jack Hardstedt, pastor in Stockholm, Sweden, for many years, died on Nov. 4, at his home in Stockholm. The Resurrection service was conducted by the Rev. Alfred Regamey on Nov. 15. A memorial will appear in a later *Messenger*.

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