
THE MESSENGER

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Swedenborg Meets St. Teresa of Avila

This is the fifth article in the series [Swedenborg Meets the Mystics] presented by faculty and students of the Swedenborg School of Religion

Wilma Wake

There are certainly some obvious surface differences between St. Teresa and Swedenborg. She was a Catholic nun living in Spain during the Reformation. He was a Lutheran who lived and wrote about 200 years later. Yet, there are also some important similarities in the lives and beliefs of these two mystics. Teresa herself was critical of her order and became an activist reformer of the Carmelites, just as Swedenborg was critical of his Lutheran church and an activist mystic in Sweden. Their lives and their mysticism have some important elements in common. Let's begin by looking at St. Teresa's life.

She lived from 1515–1582 in Spain. Her mother died when she was twelve years old, and her father sent her to a school of Augustinian nuns. She didn't particularly like what she saw of the monastic life, but after being sent home with a severe illness, she came to feel that she was called to be a nun. Her father protested, and she ran away, joining the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila.

Teresa lived as a Carmelite sister for several years until she became severely ill once again and was sent home. She almost died, and was left paralyzed and in pain for much of her life. While ill, she read Franciscan friar De Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. He spoke of prayer as intimacy and friendship with God. He said that God

is waiting in the center of the soul for friendship—closer even than a mother to a baby. The soul enters into this relationship leaving behind all that is not God and focuses on total desire of love.

After reading this, Teresa felt Christ calling her from a mediocre spiritual life into intense intimacy with Him. But she struggled and resisted for 20 years. She struggled to integrate her relationships with the world and with God. Prayer led her more clearly to a

Teresa describes a more romantic and personal relationship with the Lord than Swedenborg wrote about, but her seven stages to the center of the Castle have some similarity to Swedenborg's stages of regeneration. And for both, the end result of the spiritual life is the same: action in the world.

discouraging realization of her faults.

Then two spiritual experiences transformed her life: In 1554 she saw a statue of the Lord in suffering. She could actually feel his pain and she begged Him to strengthen her. She trusted him completely. She was also transformed by reading the *Confessions of St. Augustine*. When she learned about the voice that called him, she felt she heard herself being called.

She began a prayer life of passive

quiet and union. In the midst of the Protestant Reformation, the Inquisition was strong, and there was much suspicion of mystical spirituality. The Catholic church began stressing the importance of keeping the eyes open in prayer and moving the lips. The mental prayer that Teresa did—with its similarities to what we would call meditation—was quite controversial. But she continued to practice it and to advocate it—especially for women as an avenue to deeper relationship to God.

Her spiritual directors were suspicious of her many mystical experiences and she was frustrated by their difficulty in understanding her spiritual life. Accusations of self-delusion and demonic influence accompanied her all her life. She often needed to call upon learned theological men to speak in her behalf of the orthodoxy of the theology she received in her experiences.

Like Swedenborg, she was very involved in the life of the world. When she heard about the Conquistadores in America she declared herself a pacifist. She was opposed to the revolt of the Lutherans, but she was also upset by the books forbidden by the Catholic Church. The Inquisition was seeking out the disloyal through much of her lifetime, and she was at times in danger from her unusual mysticism.

She was distressed by the casual life in the Carmelite convents of her time. In those days, girls were commonly sent to a monastery by families who didn't want to have to find husbands for them. Wealthy nuns brought relatives, friends, servants, cooks to

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Fetch Wood, Carry Water

I've been reading with great interest the "Swedenborg Meets the Mystics" series our professors and students at SSR have been writing for *The Messenger*. The articles emphasize that Swedenborg's kind of mysticism (apparently shared by a majority of other well-known mystics) is that of the "working" mystic, one who does not retreat from the world, but instead balances periods of prayer, meditation and seclusion with being of use in the world. "Pragmatic mystics" put the insight and revelation they've gained into practice, working diligently on their own regeneration, and then they put those spiritual principles to work in the world in ways that are of benefit to their fellow humans. Or, as the Buddhist saying goes: "Before enlightenment: fetch wood, carry water. After enlightenment: fetch wood, carry water." And have fun with it. (For further enlightenment on the fun aspect, I suggest you see the film *Michael*, with John Travolta playing a somewhat different sort of angel from those traditionally seen or imagined).

My understanding of practical mysticism was brought even more into focus following a recent conversation I had with the editor of Real People Press, publishers of Wilson Van Dusen's new book, *Returning to the Source: The Way to the Experience of God*. I was concerned about the paragraph in Eli Dale's review (p. 40) in which she states that the publication is "rife with grammatical rockslides which compromise its value."

After I spoke with the editor to request book-cover art, I asked him if there had been any further editing of Van Dusen's book between release of the galleys for review and the final publication. He said no, there had not. I then read him the paragraph Ms. Dale had written, and asked if he had any response to her comments. He replied that someone who is that nit-picky would never make a good mystic. He may have intended the remark to be humorous, but it was also dismissive of the idea that sound

grammatical structure is of much importance to the quality of a book. The ideas and concepts, he was implying, were the important things—and the true mystic is above all those tiresome details.

I am reminded of a witty friend of many years ago who commented that he once considered becoming an architect, but was discouraged from entering that profession because he drew plans of buildings with beautiful flowing staircases that had no undergirding; in some cases their points of origin were even somewhat nebulous. "I realized that I was attracted to architecture," he said, "because I was in love with staircases. Fortunately I acted on the prevailing wisdom and pursued another field."

Structural principles are there for the purpose of support, strength, definition, and clarity; the bones on which to hang the flesh, and grammar is no exception. Most of us recall that silly sentence used as one example of the confusion that can result when we ignore the rules of grammar: "Mary likes jam better than her mother." And we know a well-misplaced comma can create all kinds of havoc.

Then there's the famous story of Thomas Wolfe's relationship with his editor, Maxwell Perkins—Wolfe in his brilliant but untrammelled verbosity would never have been published or read without the loving patience and the skilled honing of his work by a fine editor.

Writers need and deserve the kind of painstaking editing that is, it seems, becoming something of a rarity. Writers should be able to rely upon caring editors who know about and take care of certain basics. Readers have a right to expect this as well, especially the children we are encouraging to read more. The small presses are not exclusively at fault; many larger publishers are churning out books that are poorly edited and proofed. This does, indeed, tend to reflect on the credibility of the content, the author, and the publisher.



In all fairness, I don't think that those of us who complain about this state of affairs should be regarded as poor candidates for mysticism, or anyway, not *pragmatic* mysticism. On the other hand, we must recognize that not everybody is going to get this concept of *pragmatic* mysticism. It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it. (I think my pronoun lacks an antecedent in that last sentence, but, no matter, we can rise above it).

Patte LeVan



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Swedenborg, Buddha of the North

Suzuki, D. T. *Swedenborg, Buddha of the North*. West Chester, PA. The Swedenborg Foundation, 1996; 168 pages.

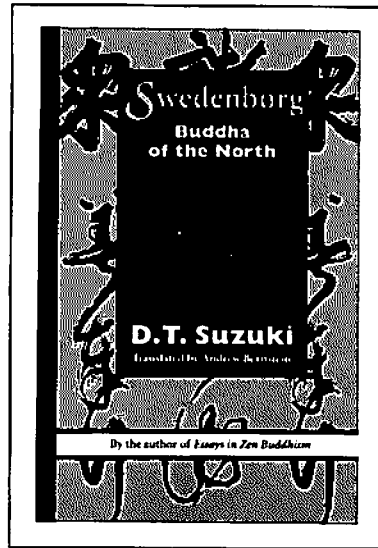
Reviewed by Steve Koke

Buddhism is a religion of great tolerance for other religious ideas, and its very strong philosophical and psychological development can add insights to established faiths and theologies anywhere. Daisetsu Taitaro Suzuki (1870–1966) was a profound student of Mahayana and Zen Buddhism who found a similar breadth of understanding and usefulness in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. He once said that Swedenborg is "your Buddha of the North." That remark should be taken seriously, for many parallels can be drawn between Buddha and Swedenborg, and Suzuki expressed himself very directly. That he should then recommend the study of a Christian theologian to his Japanese readers was very natural for him.

Suzuki was a prolific writer; his collected Japanese works alone, devoted mainly to Zen and Mahayana Buddhism, are in thirty-two volumes. He produced several works in English (e.g., *Living by Zen* and *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist, the Eastern and Western Way*) and translated four of Swedenborg's theological works into Japanese (*The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, *Heaven and Hell*, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, and *Divine Providence*).

This volume has a large cast of writers, and it works well as a primer on Suzuki and on some basic ideas in Buddhism. Its flaw is that we see too little of Suzuki, compared to his commentators. He occupies only 89 pages, while his supporting cast fills all of 66, almost as many, including endnotes.

The book opens with a Foreword by Tatsuyama Nagashima, who was interested in bringing Suzuki's Zen Buddhism to bear on the needs of Japanese Christians. He then got interested in Swedenborg as well. That is followed by a very well-written survey of Suzuki's life and background by the translator for this volume,



Andrew Bernstein. Then come Suzuki's *Suedenborugu*, his general survey of Swedenborg's life and work, and a short supplement to it, *Swedenborg's View of Heaven and "Other Power,"* about the vital concept of *innocence*, the recognition that God, not ourselves, is the author of the good that we do.

David Loy, a professor at Bunkyo University, Japan, on its Faculty of International Studies adds a long and sometimes obscure Afterword ("The Dharma of Emanuel Swedenborg: A Buddhist Perspective") on the significant parallels between Swedenborg and Buddhism. He finds that Swedenborg and Buddhism agree that the self is an illusion, but he does not dispense with obvious questions about *who* might be having this illusion—since illusions always belong to somebody—and why an illusion is nevertheless able to make significant choices. Answers are undoubtedly available, but Loy is tough sledding at times, and to start out with the common word *illusion* with its implications of a real self who necessarily *has* the illusion, is not a good idea. A free-standing illusion is hard to imagine. The best clarification seems to lie in some of his endnotes, especially a very lucid one (22) taken from author John Hick, who really does mirror Swedenborg on the subject.

Loy tries hard to align Swedenborg with Buddhist ideas, and he sometimes

In Japan, western-style industrialization was moving fast in the same direction and would eventually launch a war. A spiritual vacuum was growing, and Suzuki felt that his country was already in spiritual crisis. He wrote, "Now, in Japan, the field of religious thought is finally reaching a state of crisis. Those who wish to cultivate their spirit, those who bemoan the times, must absolutely know of this person."

seems to force the issue. But he does succeed in raising the possibility that Swedenborg, oddly enough, may have been more in tune with eastern thought than with western thought.

Suzuki's *Suedenborugu* (1913) is unusually short for a biography and survey of someone's work. It is an introduction to Swedenborg with the basic facts of his life, personal habits, outstanding incidents, and basic teachings, often with surprisingly long quotes from his writing. Suzuki scatters comments here and there, though, that penetrate more deeply and give us some feeling for what a Buddhist mind might appreciate in

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"Relax-He Is Risen"

Luke 24:36-43
John 20:19-23

Robert Lindsey served as a missionary in Jerusalem for more than forty years. Over time he developed a close friendship with David Flusser, a Jewish professor at the prestigious Hebrew University. In a book of his memoirs, Dr. Lindsey recalls a pivotal experience with Professor Flusser on one of Flusser's trips to the United States. The professor always exhibited extreme nervousness at customs counters, and on this particular trip his nervousness was so pronounced that one of the officials finally said to him, "Mister, don't be so worried—just relax!"

Evidently Flusser had never heard this American phrase before. It made a full-bodied impression upon him. He did relax. He felt himself filling up with a calm and an inner assurance that everything was O.K. He began meditating on this new phrase, which struck him as containing the seeds of profound spiritual psychology. Later, the Jewish scholar said to his friend the Christian missionary, "Isn't that what Jesus is all about? Jesus says to people, 'Relax!'" And Lindsey writes that in that moment he saw that he had hit upon the genius of Easter: No matter what problems we are facing, what anxieties plague us, what fears secretly stalk us, the best news we can possibly receive is: Relax, everything is O.K. All is well with the universe, and all can be gloriously well with our lives, too.

Jesus' appearances to different people and groups after the resurrection seem to be amazingly relaxed and relaxing. In one he asks for a piece of fish. His first recorded words after the resurrection reflect this same attitude. To the women at the tomb, he said, "Don't be afraid" (Matthew 28:10). He gently, almost playfully, teases the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13ff.). When he appeared in the midst of the ten in Jerusalem, he said, "Peace be with you" (John 20:21). Dear fellow pilgrims, the central message of Easter is, "Relax—He is risen."

We can relax for the three very best

reasons. We may relax because our greatest problem now has a solution; our deepest need now has been met; our greatest hope has now been realized.

We Can Relax Because Our Biggest Problem Has Been Solved

What is the biggest problem you have? Don't we all universally share, almost daily, this nagging sense of falling short of the mark? We have new opportunities every day to become creative participants with God in redeeming agape love with our fellow human beings, and though we may have many friendships and rich experiences, aren't we all plagued by a disappointment in the quality of much of our human interaction—and we know that much of the responsibility lies at our doorstep? For the fact is, we sin in spirit, and most of us feel it, and if we don't come to understand and practice the spiritual cleansing agent of forgiveness, life becomes unbearably heavy.

But that's all O.K. now, because we've been given a solution to this daily crucible comprising our biggest problem. Through the crucifixion, Christ unleashed the transforming redemptive force of forgiveness.

The gifted South African playwright Athol Fugard, who has become that nation's foremost dramatist, has exposed in play after play searing portrayals of one of our world's clearest examples of collective human sinfulness in the immeasurable inhumanities of apartheid. But in his newest work, *Playland*, a black night watchman who has killed a white man encounters another white man who has killed many blacks while fighting in Namibia.

In the course of their mesmerizing encounter, they confess to one another. Can they be a source of forgiveness to one another? Can they release one another from the bondage of their sin? Can people who have deeply hurt one another become the channels of grace for one another through forgiveness? In an interview on CBS, playwright Fugard put forth

his deepest spiritual conviction: "There's no way you can forgive big events like Sharpeville, the massacres of Soweto or of Boipatong. What we can forgive and what we should forgive is one of those individuals who took part coming in all sincerity saying, 'I know I did wrong, I know my soul is in jeopardy. Please forgive me.' My faith in the ability of people to change is the foundation on which not only my work but my whole life is based. If I ever believed that there was a human being beyond redemption, I would have to stop writing."

But it isn't only the enormous sins of history that the Easter event can cleanse: perhaps more importantly for most of us is the freeing power of forgiveness in all of the little mistakes, disappointments and shortcomings in our daily rounds that can provide us with real power for living and real growth in our regeneration. When Jesus first appeared to the full inner circle after his resurrection, he said: "Receive now the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Let us hear loud and clear a new shorthand version of this Easter scripture: Relax—He is risen!

We Can Relax Because Our Deepest Need Has Been Met

What is our deepest, inner need in our daily living? It is for our failures and our broken experiences to be redemptive. Jesus once warned, "Every day has trouble enough for its own" (Matthew 6:34). Easter would not be an existent reality without the spiritual knowledge and courage of Good Friday. Christ taught us to go through our crosses, not around them or away from them, because our real power for spiritual growth lies through pain of stretching our boundaries and those experiences that force us to understand the greater things.

Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday the followers of Jesus were fearful, defeated, doubting, and

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"Relax—He Is Risen"

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despairing. They spent most of their time behind closed doors. After the resurrection, they became courageous, daring, bold, triumphant evangelists for a new way of being, a new way of knowing, and a new way of loving. The fearful became fearless and the inept did the impossible. Now what might we expect for our Easters today?





Writer Matthew Brady remarked that the stained glass in this house of worship is the most beautiful in the city. Have you ever thought about the profound correspondence of stained glass in the risen Christ's church? The most exquisite stained glass is that in which chemicals creating the various colors are added to the sand during the actual melting process to make the glass. The color must become part of the glass itself. To become a window, then, each piece must be broken and then joined together by lead strips with other broken pieces. The final effect is left to God: it is only when the light of the sun passes through the mosaic of broken, stained pieces that the whole comes together in a luminescent beauty. And so it is with our living, when we receive God's redemptive grace in the broken experiences of our living and make of them spiritual growth and understanding: that is when light shines through our painful experiences and both we and the universe are better for having lived through it.

On display in the French Academy of Science is an artifact that doesn't look much like a marvel of science. It is a simple shoemaker's awl—a pointed tool for making holes in leather. It is there because behind that little awl is a story for all humanity. It fell one day off a shoemaker's table and put out the eye of his nine-year-old son, who was lying on the floor. Within weeks the child was blind in both eyes, and so had to be taken out of his regular school and put into a special school for the sightless.

In those days the blind read by using large carved wooden blocks that were clumsy and very awkward to handle. It took forever to read a single sentence. That shoemaker's son one

day saw in his inner eye a better way. He began devising a new reading system of punched dots on paper in different configurations: and here's the most important thing—to do it, Louis Braille used the very same awl that had blinded him.

Seeming tragedy—brokenness—visits the lives of everyone. The question is not why God permitted something painful to happen, but rather how can we be empowered through it? That is our Easter message—Christ came *through* his cross, his burden—and through that fire he gives imaginative power to all who have ears to hear and eyes to see. We can relax—He is risen.

 *The final effect
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We Can Relax Because Our Greatest Hope Has Been Realized

We can live in an ever-expanding conscious spiritual life—fusing, merging, uniting into god's blissful joy and a transcendental peace—to grow into such delight forever and ever and ever? What would it be like if we could be freed from the fear of death? What if we could truly view death as a normal stage of life—like birth? We struggle against birth. We are brought into the world kicking and screaming. We struggle against death, too. But what if death is merely birth into a new life of unlimited possibilities? My first year in seminary I helped out at a funeral home as part of my training. I'll never forget rounding a bend on the way to an old, country graveyard and seeing a sign that read: "This road ends in the cemetery." Swedenborg tells us that no roads end there.

When he was very aged, Somerset Maugham wrote, "Dying is a very dull,

dreary affair, and my advice to you is to have nothing whatsoever to do with it." Though he meant it in a radically different way, Jesus says the same to us on Easter morn: Have nothing to do with death!

We can believe the most incredible truth possible: the last breath we take on this physical earth is the first breath we draw in a new realm of consciousness for which this life has hopefully prepared us wisely. We need never worry that our days are running out, that the best times are in the past, that any goodbyes have been final. On this Easter Sunday it is good for us to receive the promise of Christ: "Because I live, you will live also."

What a great day this is: our biggest problem has been solved; our deepest need has been met; and our greatest hope has been realized!

So, let's relax. He is risen.

The Rev. Dr. James Lawrence is co-minister at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church.

Reprinted from the April 1995 church newsletter. ❖

..... Bridgewater Sermon Service

The Bridgewater, Mass. New Jerusalem Church has started a sermon service. The sermons of its pastor, the Rev. Lee Woofenden, are available either by email or by Postal Service mail. There is no charge for the email sermon service. Simply send a message to Mr. Woofenden at leewoof@novalink.com asking to be added to the sermon list. If you wish to receive the sermons by Postal Service mail, the cost for one year (to cover copying and mailing expenses) is \$25 to receive the sermons weekly, or \$15 to receive them every other week. Please send your check to: New Jerusalem Church, Central Square, Bridgewater, MA 02324.

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Returning to the Source

Returning to the Source by Wilson Van Dusen, Real People Press, 280 pp.

Reviewed by Eli Dale

You've gone to the country cottage for a week with your Uncle Van. In this quiet and remote setting, you and he will sit on the front porch, overlooking the lake, and Uncle Van will talk to you about things spiritual. You want to spend this week with Uncle Van, listening, because Uncle Van is a mystic and that's cool.

He wants to tell you that you, too, have the capacity to be a mystic. Experiencing God is for everyone. There is a way that will work for you. And it's simpler than you think.

In *Returning to the Source, The Way to the Experience of God*, Wilson Van Dusen draws from his own experience and from many writers from many spiritual traditions to illustrate his message. Unlike other Van Dusen books with which a Swedenborgian may be familiar

(*The Country of Spirit, The Presence of Other Worlds*), this book is not an exposition of Emanuel Swedenborg's writings, although Swedenborgian principles of ruling loves, use, how we assign ourselves to heaven or hell, and influx are prominently featured throughout.

There are some promises made early in the book which gave me the impression this book would be a how-to manual on mysticism: how to do it and what to expect. This is *not* a how-to manual. This is Uncle Van musing—in a fairly organized way—telling you what he has gleaned of mysticism from long personal experience and lots of research.

Much of the tone of this book implies "leisure." The material is given at a leisurely pace. The examples (looking at flowers and going to the art gallery) have a leisurely feel. The

author presumes you have time for this pursuit and are sailing on a fairly even keel.

For the reader who may be experiencing an emotional or psychic emergency there is little accommodation or empathy, giving the book a lopsided feel, with scant attention to our human tendency to hurt each other. Van Dusen is a clinical psychologist who deals with people who are profoundly mad, and he describes their conditions occasionally to make a point. Despite his familiarity with humans in deep suffering, little practical instruction is offered for finding God in the midst of tragedy. What there is usually refers to self-inflicted trauma; such as, what happens to my conscience when I rob a bank or go on a binge. But for a reader in the midst of suffering inflicted by external events, a book of phrases like "just appreciate what's in front of you," "all is good," and "it's all just

play" can sound abusive, no matter how true. Be that as it may, I recommend everyone read the section entitled "Dualities and the Dark Side of the Divine," six wonderful pages on demons and evil.

This is not a book for beginners. Its kaleidoscopic style leaves a lot of gaps to be filled in

by the reader. Van Dusen assumes that you have some maturity, have done a fair amount of reading, can figure out the essence of what he's saying without spelling out every little thing for you. By a statement such as, "The whole quality of existence depends on you" [p. 264], I am assuming he means "The whole quality of *your* experience of *your* existence depends on you." Also, there are apparent contradictions which readers are left to untangle themselves. On the one hand, Van Dusen tells us that no matter what we do, there is no guarantee we will encounter God because "only God gives the experience of God." [p. 257]

Then he writes, "When both lovers seek there is bound to be a finding, especially when one of the lovers designed the way and is all the seeking and all the finding." [p. 267] Keep your "both/and" Swedenborgian hat on.



"The mystic simply remembers and treasures what others forget, and makes it a central focus of his or her life."

Some other writers separate the concepts of religion and spirituality, designating the former as serving control and the latter as serving freedom. Van Dusen states that he is "working at the foundation of all religions," using the term "religion" in its highest and best sense: models by which different cultures relate to God. To Van Dusen, "religion" and "spirituality" are virtually interchangeable.

Returning to the Source was written in an altered state (co-authored by "mystery"). Van Dusen makes it clear that much of the material for this book "came to me" or was writing itself. Occasional self-referencing passages about what is happening as a particular section is being written—music playing. Van Dusen dancing—bring the reader intimately into the process of the creation of the book.

This is exceptionally nice about Van Dusen's approach: it is obvious that he is having a walloping good time being a mystic and thinks you should, too. This is not about sitting seriously

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NCC Begins New Quadrennium 1996-2000

Robert McCluskey

The first meeting of the General Assembly of the NCC was held November 11-13, 1996, in Chicago. This was the first session of the new quadrennium under the Council's new structure. The Executive Board, meeting three times a year, is now responsible for carrying out most of the work of the Council. The Assembly deals more with reports and reviews of the past year, as well as decisions concerning the direction of the Council in the year ahead. The annual Assembly meeting is intended to increase dialogue and a sense of familiarity among the various delegates and their traditions, and to give them a more comprehensive overview of the work and needs of the Council. It was pointed out that an important responsibility of delegates is to provide an information link between the Council and their individual churches.

The opening worship service built upon the theme of "Jubilee," the biblical image of restoration and renewal that was commanded every fifty years (Lev. 25:8-24). The Bible study was on the biblical meaning of land as humanly and spiritually significant, rather than as an economic value. The Rev. Dr. Heidi Hadsell, Dean of McCormack Theological Seminary, explored the questions: "How are we going to relate to the land which sustains us, to each other inside the community, and to those outside the community in a way that reflects faithfully the overriding and unforgettable fact that God is God and that God is our reason for being?"

Also on the first morning, the Council presented its first annual **Common Ground Award to Cardinal Joseph Bernadin**. The award was established in honor of the Cardinal's work to promote unity and relationships among diverse religious groups. Father Bamian, ecumenical officer for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, accepted the award for the Cardinal, whose illness prevented him from attending. Also presenting the award was the Rev. Dr. Donald

Argue, head of the National Association of Evangelicals. Afterward, Dr. Argue addressed the Council, marking the first time since it was founded that a top NAE executive addressed an NCC assembly. NCC General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, described it as "a significant milestone on the journey toward Christian unity."

Later that day, assembly members gathered for the world's shortest CROP walk (about three Chicago blocks in unseasonably cold weather!) to the United Methodist Chicago Temple for a presentation on the **50th Anniversary of Church World Service**. The celebration continued that evening with a special dinner and address by Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. He continued the theme of Jubilee extending it to the issue of the international debt. As he said at a later press conference, "The struggle against apartheid was the moral issue of the recent past. Now the new moral struggle is Jubilee...cancellation of the enormous burden of foreign debt that so many Third World countries have had to bear for so many years. We need to work for a more equitable global economic system."

On Thursday evening, delegates attended a **Special Session on the Burned Churches**, highlighting the work and plans of the project. This moving presentation featured pastors of three burned churches that had been rebuilt. Special recognition was extended to Deval Patrick, U.S. Assistant Attorney General, and James Johnson, U.S. Assistant Secretary for the Treasury. Both spoke of the transforming effect this work had on them and their colleagues, as the underlying pattern of racism was revealed and examined. The Council will continue to work for the rebuilding of churches and the dismantling of racism.

In plenary session, several items addressed the poor and marginalized of our society. In a **Public Witness Report**, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, David Wilhelm (political organizer), and

Rabbi David Saperstein (of the Religious Action Center of Reformed Judaism), offered a "post-election review," exploring the implications of the recent election for the work of the Council.

On the issue of **welfare reform**, a panel of speakers encouraged Assembly members to make the new welfare law one of their top policy issues, and to be intentional in their role in the entitlement planning that will take place at the state level. Also raised up was the need to counter the stereotyping and labeling of those who are in need; the black face of welfare, and the illogics of immigrant motives: "they're all on welfare."

The Assembly reaffirmed NCC policy in support of **Affirmative Action**, and thanked the Council's officers for issuing a pastoral letter deploring the enactment of Proposition 209 in California. It also addressed the recent controversy involving charges of racism against Texaco, Inc., calling on the corporation "to act quickly in order to allow the public to reestablish its belief in Texaco, Inc., and review their court cases with a view to a reasonable settlement of them."

No Barriers for Deaf People is the name of a new policy statement that had its first reading at the Assembly. It is directed to meeting the spiritual needs of three distinct groups: deaf people who use American Sign Language as their primary language and who identify with deaf culture values; deaf and hard-of-hearing people who use English-like signing and who identify with a mix of deaf and hearing cultural values; and hard-of-hearing people who use spoken and written English and who identify with hearing culture values. A second reading and vote for adoption is scheduled for the 1997 Assembly.

A number of international issues were also presented by the **Church World Service and Witness Unit**. A report on *Christian churches in China* highlighted the successful efforts of churches to grow, often in the face of

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Book Review: Returning to the Source (Continued from page 38)

upright in a lotus position for 15 weeks at a go. This search is about profound joy experienced in daily awareness of little delights.

The difficulty with this front-porch chat is that it comes to us in a book. Books and chats are both useful communication techniques, but each also has a form that brings its usefulness to the fore. Some constructions that you might not care about while listening to someone in person, such as several topics cascading into one paragraph or the most important point being buried in the middle of a paragraph, mar the presentation in a book. The book contains considerable repetition, useful or forgivable when we are speaking to make a point over time; a bit tiresome in a written volume. While this book is full of lovely, useful, inspiring, true statements, the experience of coming upon them is rather like running in gravel.

There is an additional condition that makes reading this book, published by Real People Press, less pleasant. This publication is rife with grammatical rockslides which compromise its value. Pronouns don't have antecedents: modifying clauses aren't attached to something to modify; verbs don't agree with subjects; commas exist where they don't belong; commas are missing where they do belong. Within one paragraph, one human could be identified as "one," "you," "they," and "we." Attempts to make statements gender neutral turn ideas into mince meat. These conditions made reading this book a chore. There were sentences and sometimes whole paragraphs I had to reread in an attempt to find the meaning. I was left wondering what the editor did for a living.

Why read this book? If you are a mature spiritual seeker, you could use it to get acquainted with Van Dusen. If you are in the foothills of your spiritual climb, it can give you lots of useful pointers. None of the pointers is unique; but Van Dusen attempts to collect ideas from several sources and traditions into this one book. If you are groping for the trailhead of your spiritual journey, mistakenly ending up in dead-end alleys and swearing a lot, this book is meant for you; but you may find that you have more regeneration/recovery work to do before these ideas really seem useful.

Here are some basics: the way to God is simple and available to you; appreciate what's in front of you; be still; pay attention to the little things; follow your bliss; ecstasy is ok; keep at it and be sincere; God is everywhere, including inside you; God is looking to you to look for God and will help with the search.

Some Gems to Pocket

"Once I was carrying out the garbage when I noticed the cool moist quality of the air and went into a momentary ecstasy." p 142

"I have had so many piddly little requests answered that I have gradually come to the conclusion that God is not too busy and enjoys relating to me." p 163

"If all your prayers remain unanswered, then it is time to work on the relationship; there is something awry in the understanding between you." p 164

"[The way to God] is openly shown to those who approach it with a good heart.... The sacred is only hidden from the profane." p 214

This God wishes to be discovered or This One would not have left trails all over the place in all of the various religious traditions." p 98

"The longing for what seems good is the key. If I keep in this longing, existence will educate me." p 102

Eli Dale is an active member of the Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church. ❖

Proposed Changes to National Women's Alliance Constitution

ALLIANCE OF NEW CHURCH WOMEN—CONSTITUTION

ORIGINAL VERSION - ARTICLE IV OFFICERS

Section 1. The officers of the Alliance shall be a President, a First Vice President, a Second Vice President, a Secretary and a Treasurer.

Section 3. No officers except the Treasurer shall serve in the same office for more than three (3) successive terms. The Treasurer shall serve for no more than nine (9) successive terms.

BYLAWS ~ ARTICLE I DUTIES OF OFFICERS

Section 4. The Treasurer shall receive and hold all moneys belonging to the Alliance and make disbursements as directed by the Alliance or its Executive Board. She shall keep accurate accounts through bank deposits of money received, and vouchers for all expenditures. She shall submit an audited report to the Annual Meeting.

Section 5. The Vice-Presidents, the Secretary and the Treasurer shall constitute a President's Council which shall act in an advisory capacity to the President and assist in preparing the program of the Annual Meeting.

ALLIANCE OF NEW CHURCH WOMEN—CONSTITUTION

1997 REVISED VERSION - ARTICLE IV OFFICERS

Section 1. The officers of the Alliance shall be a President, a First Vice President, a Second Vice President, a Secretary, a Treasurer and an Assistant Treasurer.

Section 3. No officers except the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer shall serve in the same office for more than three (3) successive terms. The Treasurer shall serve for no more than nine (9) successive terms.

BYLAWS ~ ARTICLE I DUTIES OF OFFICERS

Section 4. The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer: The Treasurer shall receive and hold all moneys belonging to the Alliance and make disbursements as directed by the Alliance or its Executive Board. She shall keep accurate accounts through bank deposits of money received, and vouchers for all expenditures. She shall submit an audited report to the Annual Meeting. The Assistant Treasurer shall assume all the duties of the Treasurer in her absence and shall assist the Treasurer in the performance of her duties. The Assistant Treasurer must serve a minimum of one year as the Assistant Treasurer prior to assuming the position of Treasurer.

Section 5. The Vice-Presidents, the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer shall constitute a President's Council which shall act in an advisory capacity to the President and assist in preparing the program of the Annual Meeting. ❖

OPINION

Risking on the Side of Compassion

(Regarding the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence's article in the November 1996 Messenger, and subsequent responses.)

To the Editor:

Two basic things are evident about gay people. First, they are just as much people as any of us and deserve the fundamental rights that everyone else has, lest we deny even our own humanness. Second, we don't understand homosexuality. We don't know what causes it. We don't know that God intends it for anybody, so any proposed theological niche for the phenomenon is not yet ready for prime time. We used to think that it was a product of parental influences. Now some scientists suspect a gene that has decided to shift its character or has perhaps gone awry, as some will.

Homosexuals simply discover themselves to be that way. It is therefore not a sin; it has not taken place because of some human decision. Consequently, we face a challenge to serve a special set of needs in people who innocently cry out for more of a place in society, something usually denied them. That includes giving them effective ministry. We are being asked to do what we can for real people who are *irreversibly* on a different path, while we continue to be circumspect about our traditional vision of marriage.

I haven't gotten the impression that Jim Lawrence thinks of the San

TO THE EDITOR

Francisco church's ceremony as the same as a full-fledged wedding. We may need to keep alive the possibility that the two ceremonies are *not* the same. Jim's term "gay blessing" (p. 139, column 3) I like.

Two types of ceremony should therefore be available but distinct; and while explaining the difference, we should be very candid with a gay couple about our own need to honor three things, all at the same time: real feelings and their personal significance, our teachings about the special nature of heterosexual marriage, and our ignorance of what homosexuality really is. Both sides of the arrangement need to understand each other. That kind of honesty usually turns out to be acceptable.

Steve Koke
Rough 'N Ready, California



To the Editor:

I've read the numerous reactions to Rev. Lawrence's article with great interest, since I am one of the members of the San Francisco church who, when the congregation was polled, gave my approval for providing ceremonies for gay couples. I imagine the theological debate could go on forever. I admit to being a lightweight

in my knowledge of both Scripture and Swedenborg's writings, and my "vote" was not particularly based on either. For me, it came down simply to this:

Several wonderful, generous gay men have been and continue to be members of our congregation. I could not fathom saying to them: "You are welcome to join us for worship on Sunday. We will gladly accept your tithes. Thank you for being a greeter, an usher. Your bright smile and warm hug as we walk into church starts our Sunday off right! Thank you for all your help in raising money for the new organ. Thank you for all the time you give working in the garden, organizing the library, serving on committees, setting up coffee hours. Your love for this church is so evident! But, when you are ready to enter a life-long union with another person and you want to celebrate this commitment before God, in the place that has become such a meaningful part of your life, we're sorry, but we can only suggest you try City Hall."

Penny Pietras Goldstein
Highlands Ranch, Colorado

Faith and Order

Dear Editor:

I look forward immensely to further reports by the Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven about the work of the Commission on Faith and Order (NCC "Faith and Order," January 1997 *Messenger*). What a crucial endeavor for these times.

Ella Baker
Lexington, Virginia

Part-time Ministry Inquiries Invited

The Portland Swedenborgian church welcomes letters of inquiry from clergy interested in opening a dialog about part-time ministry. We are an active young community in the process of determining exactly what our congregational ministry needs are. We are searching for a way to support our strong volunteer involvement. Some expressed needs include: religious education, occasional worship leading, small-group support, inspiring lay persons in their ministry to each other, facilitating visitor welcoming and integration, and pastoral care/challenge. Please write to the President, Portland Swedenborgian Church, 302 Stevens Avenue, Portland, ME 04103 or call (207) 772-8277.



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Presenters:

Facilitator: Lorraine Sando, ART, WRITING, MEDITATION (Seattle, Washington)

Asst. Facilitator: Carol Anne Fusco SONG, DRAMA, MESSAGE (Portland, Maine)

Sue Frid and Carolyn Buchanan: THERAPEUTIC TOUCH (Kitchener, Ontario)

Pat Tukos: BRAIN GYM (LaPorte, Indiana) ~ Susan Harris: QIGONG (Boston, Massachusetts)

For more information contact: Lorraine Sando (206) 242-7354

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ADDRESS _____
CITY, STATE, PROVINCE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

REGISTRATION: \$75.00 Per Person (by May 1) \$85.00 Per Person (after May 1)

BOARD: (3 meals a day) \$15.00 per person per day

ACCOMMODATIONS: (Please check one)

☐ Single Occupancy \$15.00 per day ☐ Double Occupancy-2 people in a room \$7.50 per day per person

ARRIVAL: I/we will be arriving by car _____, airplane (list dates, airline, and flight times)

(Please see CONVENTION REGISTRATION for more details)

SPECIAL NEEDS: (Please Specify) _____

Please Note: This Workshop Will Be Taking Place at the Same Time as the Council of Ministers Meeting and Ministers' Spouses Meeting

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June 1, 1997

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ADVANCE CONVENTION '97 REGISTRATION

Hutchinson Community College ~ Hutchinson, Kansas ~ July 9 - 13 1997



"Let The Earth Rejoice"



<p>Please complete in full— one application per family</p>	<p>Last Name _____ First Name _____ Last Name _____ First Name _____ Address _____ City, State, Province _____ Zip _____ Phone _____ Accompanied by _____ Children: 1. Name _____ Age _____ 2. Name _____ Age _____ 3. Name _____ Age _____</p>
<p><i>SCYL Members between the ages of 13 and 18 please complete.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> My parents will attend convention. They are _____ <input type="checkbox"/> My guardian at Convention (if no parent is present) will be _____</p>
<p>Arrivals and Departures <i>Shuttle service will be available by convention host from Mid-Continent Airport. There will be a fee of \$10 per person, round trip, for this service.</i></p>	<p>I/We will arrive on the Hutchinson Community College campus Date: _____ My/Our first meal on campus will be: Date _____ Breakfast <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch <input type="checkbox"/> Dinner <input type="checkbox"/> My/Our Last meal on campus will be: Date _____ Breakfast <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch <input type="checkbox"/> Dinner <input type="checkbox"/> (Last meal served will be a box lunch at noon 7/13.)</p>
<p>Special Needs</p>	<p>I am not able to climb stairs or walk very fast. _____ I have these medical requirements _____ I am <input type="checkbox"/> diabetic <input type="checkbox"/> a heart patient Other health problems _____ Other physical/dietary/special needs: _____</p>
<p>Children <i>The children's program will begin on Wednesday evening, July 9 and end as lunch on Saturday so that children can accompany their parents on outings.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> My child/children will be participating in the Children's Program for ages 5 to 12 beginning on: _____ Names: _____ Ages: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I will need child care for age 4 and under beginning: Names: _____ Ages: _____ Special needs _____ Have your children attended pre-school? _____</p>

ADVANCE CONVENTION '97 REGISTRATION

Rates for 1997 Convention Room & Board

*There are various motels available locally.
Information and telephone numbers will
be available on request.*

*All room and board charges must be paid
in advance and received in the Central Office
before 6/17/97.*

Board (3 meals a day, refreshments, etc.)	\$15.00 per person per day
Board for children 5 and under	FREE
Dorm Room (Single occupancy)	\$45.00 per day
Dorm Room (Double occupancy)	\$ 7.50 per day per person

All rooms are air conditioned

Children under 12 may sleep on the floor (sleeping bags or mattresses)
in parents' room at NO CHARGE. Children older than 5 years will still
be charged for board and registration fee.

All prices are in US dollars.

*Some financial assistance is available for teens and children.
Please ask for more information if you would like to apply.*

Accommodations

*There are various motels available locally.
Information and telephone numbers will
be available on request.*

*All room and board charges must be paid
in advance and received in the Central Office
before 6/17/97.*

☐ I would like to share a room with

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Registration

All prices are in US dollars

Children under 12	\$ 20.00
Teen League (SCYL participant 13-18)	\$ 30.00
Other Teens and Adults	\$ 55.00
Family maximum (Parents and children)	\$150.00

Late fee if received after 5/1/97 \$ 15.00

Registration is per person and covers some special costs and events.
No registration refunds after June 1. Please mail this form with your
check, made out to The Swedenborgian Church to:

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The Swedenborgian Church
48 Sargent Street
Newton, MA 02158

Early Arrivals and Delayed Departures

Facilities are arranged for from 7/5 to 7/13.
No rooms are available prior or after these dates.

Early Arrivals and Delayed Departures

*For children and young people, please contact
Central Office
48 Sargent St.
Newton, MA 02158*

Book Review: Swedenborg Buddha of the North

(Continued from page 35)

Swedenborg. How do you introduce Swedenborg to people? How do you describe the universe and give two examples? He sets up a gentle model of how to do it.

He assumes that his Japanese readers are already spiritually inclined and believe in some kind of world beyond the senses. When Swedenborg tells us about his spiritual travels,

his statements are quite sincere. They are free of the slightest exaggeration and, viewed from the standpoint of common sense, seem to accord well with the truth. This is the first reason that Swedenborg is of interest.

Even if we think that the circumstances of this other realm have no moral connection whatsoever to the mundane world, there is plenty that is of interest to science and philosophy. This is a second reason to examine Swedenborg.

Third,

Swedenborg's theological doctrines greatly resemble those of Buddhism. ...Furthermore, he says that love is greater and more profound than wisdom and that there is nothing great or small that is beyond the reach of divine providence.... These sorts of issues attract the interest of religious scholars, and especially Buddhists.

They certainly do. The point that love is greater and more profound than wisdom is still unsettled in our culture. Swedenborg broke sharply with eighteenth century thought, and his reversal of western values still has unexamined implications far beyond church doctrines about faith alone. In more mundane circumstances, we still think instinctually in terms of the superiority of wisdom—in the form of intellect and its related external powers and accomplishments—over love, which is still hampered by the feeling that it is basically vacuous, soft, and sentimental. In Japan, western-style industrialization was moving fast in the same direction and would eventually launch a war. A spiritual vacuum was growing, and Suzuki felt that his country was already in spiritual crisis. He wrote,

"Now, in Japan, the field of religious thought is finally reaching a state of crisis. Those who wish to cultivate their spirit, those who bemoan the times, must absolutely know of this person. This is the reason for this book." (Preface)

Suzuki's simplest argument is that Swedenborg is historically unique. "When we consider how difficult it is to find a similar example, we cannot help but feel that he must not be neglected." Suzuki describes him as

a likable old man, with an aura of renunciation flowing from his brow.... As he walks through the mist, a wonderful joy seems to well up and play beneath his feet.... His accounts do not resemble bizarre illusions at all. He relates them no differently than if they were mundane events in our world.... Listeners are shocked, their minds probably bewildered. Nevertheless, he coolly regards these things as if they were daily fare. This is why it is not easy to fathom him.

So why haven't more people picked up his theology and philosophy? One reason, Suzuki says, is that "his writing is extremely verbose."

He points out that people get suspicious of too much calm and matter-of-factness about ideas that contradict common sense. We would expect Swedenborg to show a more frenzied excitement over the mysteries and breakthroughs he experienced. It would tell us that he had been shaken by real events; if we don't see it, he will seem strange. The only explanation that seems to be left, Suzuki says, is that Swedenborg is mad (p. 8).

Furthermore, to go into so much intimate detail is incredible. For example, that certain great historical figures are only in the first level of heaven and are now thinking differently about things, seems to be too much to believe. He would have been more credible if he had been more general. His descriptions seem all too real because of their detail. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Suzuki thinks, may have become skeptical because of this.

In the final analysis, however, such matters are insignificant.... Swedenborg's accounts are consistent, and have an air

of sincerity and honesty about them...there is certainly a valid source for [them] that is worth investigating. Considering that this fact is of special relevance to our moral and religious life, we must not ignore it. (p.9)

Again there is that gentle tease—although we don't claim to have proof and all the answers, *we cannot ignore* such a unique chance to learn something. It fully respects the autonomy of the reader, and it appeals only to his own interests, if any, in exploration. That is a more effective approach than one might think.

Suzuki remains the star of this book because of his impeccable character and transparency. The name *Daisetsu* means "the great simplicity." At the heart of Buddhism is the sense of wisdom and its identity with an ultimate and hard-won simplicity. Swedenborg did champion the same thing, and the essay that follows on "Other Power," the vital role of *innocence* in religion, brings that out well.

It has been a question why Suzuki didn't continue to comment on Swedenborg after that essay was written. Bernstein gives a lengthy and interesting answer, and I would only add that if Swedenborg really was sympathetic with fundamental ideas in Buddhism, he may not have been the breakthrough for Suzuki that he has been for western readers. Buddhism is universal in its outlook, and any wise teacher is notable—and therefore able to be left as one moves on to others. Western religions tend to form schools that are innately competitive and become defensive outposts. The Buddhist virtue of *non-attachment* may in a case like this recommend that one not be defined by any one of them.

Steve Koke is a longtime Swedenborgian with current membership in the San Francisco church. He is a copy editor for the Blue Dolphin Press and is presently writing a book on the millennium for the Swedenborg Foundation.

❖

Swedenborg Meets St. Teresa of Avila

(Continued from Cover)

live there with them in spacious quarters. Poor ones lived in a dormitory. The wealthy got food and clothes from home, especially in hard times, while poorer nuns starved.

She received a terrifying vision of hell and determined to live the Carmelite rule in greater perfection. She became very critical of the wealth and ease in many monasteries of the time. She wanted one small monastery with eleven nuns to dedicate themselves to contemplative life according to Carmelite rule, observing unceasing prayer. She advocated austere poverty and contemplative prayer, with the wealthy giving up their family connections. She envisioned a monastery where all the nuns sincerely wanted the life, and were not just escaping marriage or being dumped by their families.

Teresa admired the movement of the "discalced"—"shoeless" nuns in new spirit of reform. She became a leader of this movement among the Carmelites, despite much protest from her convent and from Rome. Again, she was opposed by many people in power in the church hierarchy, but she kept returning to the inner guidance that was such a profound part of her life. She began an active life of founding new Carmelite monasteries. She founded 14 new ones for women, and recruited John of the Cross to work for reform with the Carmelite monks. Her life involved frequent and strenuous travel under difficult conditions, dealing with a range of people. She kept up an enormous correspondence—sometimes writing until two a.m. despite rising at five a.m. every morning. Her health was poor throughout her life. She died at 67 when sent on an arduous journey by her superiors. Forty years later, she was made saint. In 1970, she was the first woman to be made a doctor of the church.

Her life, like Swedenborg's was a mixture of action in the world and a deep inner spirituality. One of her best known works is *Interior Castle* which she wrote even while earlier works of

hers were in the hands of the Inquisition. The Lord told her to write an account of her spiritual journey, and she feared she had nothing to say. So she was given a vision portraying the Lord as King of the Castle, with many rooms—or mansions—leading to the center. "It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places...in the center is the King of Glory."

Interior Castle is the most complete expression of the synthesis of her spirituality. She described seven mansions: three requiring human effort and grace; and four a passive or mystical spiritual life. It was written to her fellow sisters. She said to them: "So, my Sisters, since in some way we can enjoy heaven on earth, be brave in begging the Lord to give us His grace in such way that nothing will be lacking through our own fault; dig until it finds this hidden treasure. The truth is that the treasure lies within our very selves." [p. 86].

Many live outside the castle gates, not wanting to enter. The gate of entry is prayer, and it activates the personal relationship. One walks through the seven mansions encountering many trials and sufferings. Yet, throughout, one's relationship with the Lord becomes stronger. The pilgrim experiences a rebirth, much like the butterfly emerging from the cocoon. She describes the latter stages of the journey in romantic terms, with the soul falling in love with the Lord, and experiencing betrothal and finally marriage to the Beloved. One comes at last into union with God, understanding finally the Lord's sacred humanity. The person's spirit is one with God and cannot be separated—it is like the rain falling into the river.

The end result of this journey is to live like Christ, for the fruits of spiritual marriage are good works.

Teresa describes a more romantic and personal relationship with the Lord than Swedenborg wrote about, but her seven stages to the center of the Castle have some similarity to

Swedenborg's stages of regeneration. And for both, the end result of the spiritual life is the same: action in the world. Swedenborg talked of the regenerating person as living a life of charity.

He says in the *Arcana* 3934[8]: "Moreover be it known that the Lord's kingdom commences in a man from the life which is of works, for he is then in the beginning of regeneration; but when the Lord's kingdom is in a man, it terminates in works, and then the man is regenerate."

So in Teresa we have an example of a life that Swedenborg commends to us: a life of exploring the inner Kingdom so that it will lead us to an integration of external and internal. Both Teresa and Swedenborg said that while on the earth, we need the church to provide us some structure for this life. They had very different images of what that church should be, but they both were critics and reformers of their own traditions.

As Teresa went deeper and deeper within herself, she became more and more active in the world. The life of faith and charity became integrated for her, just as Swedenborg says it will be for us if we have the courage to begin the journey and allow the church—God's Kingdom on earth—to guide us to the Kingdom in Heaven.

Swedenborg was somewhat of an "outsider" regarding church life. Teresa, on the other hand, was much more a product of the church of her times. Even though a critic of it, she was also a loyal nun, declaring on her deathbed: "At last I die, a daughter of the church." Both offered a concept of spiritual development: Teresa through the seven-room mansion and Swedenborg in regeneration. There are some differences in those two concepts and in their writings overall. But when Swedenborg at last made his way into the eternal kingdom it is probable that he found in Teresa a companion with whom he had much in common!

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is Associate Professor of Practical Theology at the Swedenborg School of Religion. ❖

BIRTH

Woofenden—Caleb Louis Woofenden, 8 lbs. 2 oz., was born January 30, 1997. The proud parents are the Rev. Lee and Patty Woofenden, Bridgewater, Mass. (Caleb Louis was born on the 112th anniversary of the birth of his great-grandfather, the Rev. Louis Dole).

BAPTISM

O'Keefe—Tyler Reid O'Keefe, son of Ryan and Hope (Kiesman) O'Keefe, was baptized into the Christian faith January 25, 1997, at the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Ken Turley officiating.

WELCOMED INTO MEMBERSHIP

Sullivan—D.J. Sullivan was welcomed into the membership of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church January 26, 1997.

DEATHS

Booth—Beth E. (Wiley) Booth, age 39, entered the spiritual world in Lewiston, Maine, January 14, 1997. A resurrection service was conducted at the Fryeburg New Church January 18, 1997, the Rev. Ken Turley officiating.

Charles—Byron W. Charles entered the spiritual world January 5, 1997, in Lancaster, New Hampshire. He was formerly of Fryeburg, Maine. A resurrection service was conducted at Wood Funeral Home January 8, 1997, the Rev. Ken Turley officiating.

Klassen—Elizabeth (Bess) Klassen, longtime member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, entered the spiritual world September 16, 1996. A memorial service was conducted September 19, 1996, the Revs. Ron Brugler, Paul Zacharias and Eric Allison officiating. Mrs. Klassen is survived by her husband Dave, and children Debbie Gehl and Peter Klassen.

Prust—Anne Prust, daughter of the late Theresa Prust and longtime member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, entered the spiritual world November 13, 1996. A memorial service was conducted by the Rev. Paul Zacharias November 24, 1996.

Richardson—Dorothy I. (Bennett) Richardson entered the spiritual world in Portland, Maine, January 19, 1997. She lived in East Fryeburg, Maine. A resurrection service was conducted January 23, 1997, the Rev. Ken Turley officiating.

Schneider—Dorothy Schneider, church organist at the Kitchener church for many years, entered the spiritual world November 4, 1996. A memorial service was conducted November 7, 1996, the Revs. Ron Brugler and Paul Zacharias officiating. Mrs. Schneider is survived by her daughter, Lynne Dowsett and grandchildren Jennifer and Jordan.

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

The denomination's Treasurer John Perry was admitted to Bath Memorial Hospital in Bath, Maine, January 28, 1997, with a pulmonary embolism. At this writing, his wife Anne expects him to be in the hospital for about a week. Cards may be sent to his home address:

John Perry
RFD #5, Box 2341A
Brunswick, Maine 04011

NCC Begins New Quadrennium 1996-2000

(Continued from page 39)

persecution. A statement on *Bosnia-Herzegovina* called for continued support of the peace process and the protection of refugees. "A Message on Jerusalem" reaffirmed the Council's assertion of Jerusalem's importance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. The World Council of Churches has initiated a petition campaign on *Climate Change*, based on recent scientific findings that link the gradual warming of the atmosphere to the consumption of fossil fuels. Look for more on this later. Finally, the Assembly also approved a letter to President Clinton regarding the plight of 15 *Puerto Ricans* who were imprisoned over 16 years ago for engaging in activities to promote the independence of Puerto Rico. Although religious leaders hold diverse views on the status of Puerto Rico and the acts and beliefs for which these people were incarcerated, they are united in calling for the release of these prisoners in light of the time already served.

In its report, the Counseling Committee noted that, while most communions have wrestled with the issue of homosexuality in a variety of ways, there has been little communication among different communions. Seeing that the Council provided a unique forum for such potentially fruitful sharing, the Committee proposed a consultation that would bring together members of the Council on this issue. It was also noted that, in order to be effective, such a consultation would need to be inclusive of the diversity of viewpoints that surrounds this issue.

Iman E. Deen Mohammed, a religious leader of some 2.5 million Muslim Americans, addressed the Assembly on Friday morning. Like Dr. Argue's address earlier in the week, this event marked the first time an American Muslim has addressed the NCC's top policy-making body. In conjunction with his presentation, the Interfaith Relations Committee reported that it was beginning a four-year process of producing a policy statement on interfaith relations. If you would like to make a contribution to this effort on behalf of the church (and you are invited to do so), please let me know.

Finally, a special word of thanks goes to the **Rev. Sue Turley Moore** for initiating a new procedure within our delegation. Sue has identified several individuals who are already involved in ecumenical or social issues on behalf of the church. Immediately following General Assembly, she will be sending out copies of those items that pertain to those individuals' work or interest. If you would like to be kept informed of specific Council projects (e.g., racism, ministry to deaf people, religious education, etc.) or would like to serve as an NCC "contact person" for your local church, please let me or Sue know of your interest.

The Rev. Robert McCluskey is the minister of the New York Swedenborgian Church and is one of our delegates to the National Council of Churches. ❖

Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London 15 years after his death. This 1787 organization eventually spawned the present General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches. As a result of Swedenborg's own spiritual questionings and insights, we as a church today exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions. Swedenborg shared in his theological writings a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of Scripture as a story of inner-life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg would conclude, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

A Continuing Vision

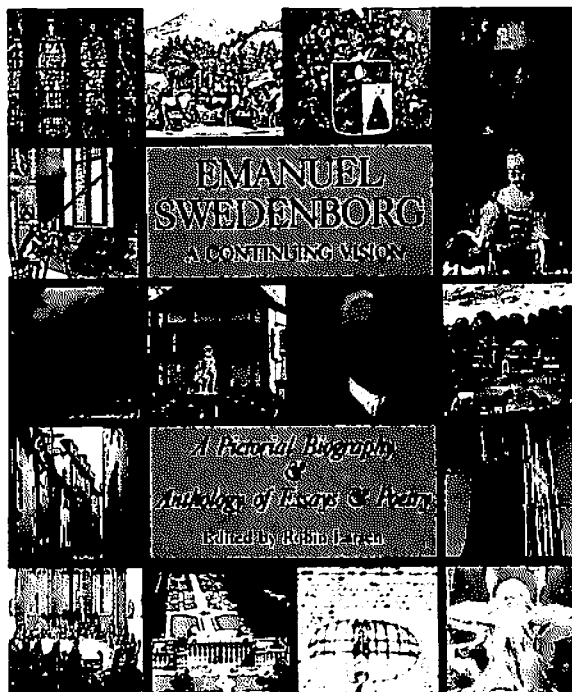
Emanuel Swedenborg—A Continuing Vision is an excellent vehicle to promote interest in the writings and the New Church.

The Jim and Effie Temple Outreach Fund, a function of the Bath New Church, has purchased 25 of these books for distribution into local and college libraries. Placement has been accomplished in the libraries of: Bowdoin College, University of Southern Maine (2 libraries), Maine State Prison at Thomaston, and the municipal libraries of Bath, Lisbon Falls, and Lisbon. Placement will soon be completed in additional colleges and town and city libraries.

Please help us in the planting of these "seeds." Have your society order two or three or more copies and place them in local libraries and nearby colleges. The books we have given have been very well received. They're a great buy at \$15.00 apiece.

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Noyes Lawrence
Lisbon Falls, Maine



As of mid-February, 1997, General Convention has not yet received an offer to host the 1998 Convention. If you are thinking of hosting a convention in future, why not consider 1998? Housing arrangements must be secured on a college campus far in advance, as well as attending to the other vital details of putting together an annual convention, so time is growing short!

Please call or write to Central Office, Attention President Edwin Capon or Mrs. Martha Bauer, 48 Sargent St., Newton, MA 02158. Phone 1-617-969-4240, or FAX 1-617-964-3258.

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