

# THE MESSENGER

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## Small Church! Small World!

On our way to the airport from our meetings of the National Council of Churches in Atlanta, MaryAnn Fischer and I were joined by a staff person from the NCC. While looking for a bite to eat, we were explaining to Bruce how small our church is, with most of our centers being north of the Mason-Dixon line. For instance, we said, the possibility of running into another Swedenborgian, as opposed to a United Methodist or Episcopalian, was quite remote at this airport. Well, we found a good but crowded restaurant which had additional seating upstairs, so up we went. It turned out there was quite a line for those seats, and as we were considering moving on, it happened. We were recognized and approached by two up-and-coming Swedenborgians, Andrew Dole, son of the Rev. Dr. George Dole and a student in theology at Yale University, and his wife, Sarah Buteux, student at the Swedenborg School of Religion. They were enjoying a quick lunch as they prepared to attend the American Religion Association meetings in Nashville. I had to eat my words along with my lunch that day, realizing that you just never know when or where a Swedenborgian (or two) will pop up!

—Robert McCluskey



## The Household of God

Report on the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.

Robert McCluskey

"We hold in this room some hope for the world, that we can disagree but not be disagreeable, come together bearing witness to different visions, be strengthened by them and grow in grace."

—NCC General Secretary, Dr. Bob Edgar

Ever so slowly, on its own timetable, the spirit of God moves us to unity, drawing us to himself and to each other. This spirit is palpable in the ecumenical movement, as Christian churches seek to respond to Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17. At this year's General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ, held in Atlanta, Georgia, November 13-17, there was much that was new and promising. A new general secretary (The Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar) and president (Ambassador Andrew Young) led us in new ways to relate to each other, the ecumenical movement, and the challenges that we all face. A host of new delegates and church leaders mingled with oldtimers in a format that was less parliamentary, and more conducive to conversation and dialogue. Representing the Swedenborgian Church were the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, Mary Ann Fischer, and the Rev. Robert McCluskey.

Isaiah 65 speaks of a new heaven and a new earth; of Jerusalem rejoicing; of peace and prosperity for God's people; of the wolf lying down with the lamb. These passages were woven into each and every worship service and appeared in almost every workshop, presentation, report, and celebration. Everyone was encouraged to ponder the possibility of centuries of difference and division giving way to a future of harmony and unity: the "wolf of

doctrine and tradition co-existing with the "lamb" of service and fellowship. Two new initiatives, developed over the past year, formed the central focus of our time together: **Expanding the Ecumenical Table** and the **Mobilization to Over-come Poverty in the Next Ten Years**.

The NCC is made up of 36 denominations or "communions." They include the mainline Protestant Churches, the historic Black Churches, the Orthodox Churches, and the Peace Churches, as well as a few that don't fit those categories, like ourselves. The Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church, have, for a variety of reasons, never been members. The initiative to **Expand the Ecumenical Table** formalizes the NCC's efforts over many years to explore this issue. In his keynote address, Dr. Michael Kinnamon, of the Vision Committee, shared a history of the NCC's commitment to ecumenism and offered several insights into our current and future mission.

In 1981, a "cooperative agency of churches" became a "community of communions," and members began to relate differently to one another. In too many instances, though, ecumenism has become a matter of tolerant cooperation rather than a matter of challenge, growth, and articulation. And so, he asked, "What is the ecumenical future that God is creating for the churches, and how can we best embrace it?" The new unity we are seeking transcends our traditional terms and categories, which were themselves formed in a pre-ecumenical period.

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Editor's Note: *The following editorial was written prior to the final outcome of the presidential election.*

# One Great Fellowship of Love

Guest Editorial  
by Eric Zacharias

After listening to and watching recent newscasts and journalists, this question came to mind. "Is the United States a Christian nation?" We have assumed this to be the case, have we not? Our Founding Fathers pledged themselves to one nation under God. Our new president, as he takes the oath of office in January, will lay his hand on the Bible and make the promise to uphold the laws of the land. All of this has become part of our national heritage. We tend to take it for granted. What would happen, I wonder, if, one morning, Mr. Lieberman, a Jew, would be required to take the oath of the presidency? Would the Bible take its traditional role, or would the Torah be used or the Old Testament only? Further, what would happen if, one day, we elected a Muslim to the office of presidency?

On asking the question, "Is the United States a Christian country," I had in mind not so much a request for a judgment of our decisions and actions but rather that we give some thought to the diversity of our population. It is estimated that we have living among us six million Muslims, an equal number of Jews, a large Asian population that is largely Buddhist. In addition, of course, we have those among us who profess no religion, those who are atheists, those who have accepted doctrines of white supremacy and who have taken it upon themselves to foment religious and racial tensions.

Is the United States a Christian nation? For each of us the answer must come out of our conviction and value system. I am convinced that our Judeo-Christian heritage continues to shape and mold our national psyche—the

values we support and try to weave into decision-making processes that give direction to our role within the world community in our relationships with one another. "To do what is right because it's the right thing to do."

At the same time, the question must be asked, "Are we prepared to make room in our society for those who live and believe, for instance, according to the Koran—not the Bible?" Are we prepared in our society to make room for those who live according to "The Four Noble Truths" that form the core of the Buddhist faith? These folks are Americans. Will these folks forever be a silent segment within a dynamic and forward-looking nation? I doubt that! Already we hear voices that ask for a fuller partnership in steering the nation into a more tolerant and accepting future.

No. 328 in Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* reads, "It may be seen that the Lord's church is distributed over the whole world—it is universal—that it includes all people who live in the good of charity in accord with their own religious persuasion, that the church where the Word is known through it, is to those outside the church like the heart and lungs in a person, from which all members of the body live—differently in keeping with their forms, locations, and connections."

Yes, indeed, we see that the Lord's church is distributed over the whole earth. The church is one family, one fellowship in which are Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, followers of Confucius, Humanists, etc. The ideal we find expressed in that familiar hymn, "In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no South or North; but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth." Each one of these many bodies of faith and life, under the Lord's divine providence, offers something that is essential to the health and well-being of the whole family that is our common humanity.

The Muslim shares with us his belief that God is One and absolute...and that the duty of man is Islam, submission to that God.

The Buddhist shares with us his belief that The Way is not of thought or

worship. It is the way of mental discipline. The whole universe is in endless flux, a ceaseless becoming; naught endures but change.

Confucius would share with us this thought: It is not possible for a man to teach others who cannot teach his own family, for from loving examples of one family, the whole of society becomes loving; while from the ambition and perverseness of one man, the whole state may be led to rebellion and disorders. Such is the nature of influence."

What can be done to bring all the children of God's family into a closer, more harmonious union? What can you and I do? First of all, we can not only recognize, but ever more fully appreciate, that all of us are interconnected. I am convinced that if the high hysteria of ultra-nationalism and the screaming rhetoric of those who call for the waging of a "Holy War" could be toned down—and folks had the opportunity to reflect upon alternatives to bloodshed and violence—it would be discovered that there is a channel of common longing and yearning and aspiration that flows through all of humanity.

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# The Household of God

(Continued from cover)

He then set forth three points to be kept in mind as we build a new ecumenical "table." To begin with, a council of churches is not a/the church. It's not about what churches *do* together but what they *are* together. The NCC is not "them," but "us." The churches are in relationship to each other, not to the council. Secondly, the fellowship that occurs within the council should be dynamic. Things should happen and change as a result of being together. And so the council is not just what we are together, but what we can *become* together. Finally, church councils must be provisional, ready to give way to new kinds of community. We must form and maintain relationships among the churches so that the Holy Spirit can work to bring us into genuine inner unity.

One insight that struck me from later discussions was that, as we move forward with this initiative, it would be best to focus not on forms of worship, doctrine, and evangelism, but on spirituality, prayer, and service. Sound familiar?

Later in the week, the Rev. Dr. John L.T. Ford, of Catholic University, and the Rev. Dr. Bernard R. Wilson, Executive Minister at Riverside Church, New York, offered respectively the Catholic and Pentecostal Vision for the Future of the Ecumenical Movement. Their comments were well received and helped to clarify areas of commonality and difference between their traditions and those of the NCC member communions. In particular, Ford used the image of a family reunion to describe the diverse unity that could characterize the ecumenical movement. At such events, differences and eccentricities are not a cause for suspicion or division; rather, they are accepted—more, they are cherished and celebrated. Our integrity is not threatened by the behavior or appearance of our sister or cousin or distant uncle. In the same way, we were encouraged to move beyond toleration to a genuine acceptance and celebration of the whole Christian community, sharing what we

have in common, while respecting our many differences.

"The continued existence of poverty in the 21st century is the moral equivalent of slavery in the 19th century." With this "bumper-sticker" slogan, Andrew Young opened our discussions of the **Ten Year Mobilization to Overcome Poverty**. We have all heard, for some time now, of the growing disparity between the rich and the poor, the widening gap between the "haves" and the "have nots." While the Council has steadily addressed this issue over the years, the current economic boom has served to heighten this contrast, and its real-life effects are seen more and more in society and in the church. There is a need now to mobilize, to organize, to coordinate, so that this common scourge might be addressed effectively.

In keynote addresses, Jim Wallis of *Call to Renewal*, and editor of *Sojourners* said, "In a time of unprecedented prosperity, one in six U.S. children live in poverty, and one in every four children of color lives in poverty. In this country we have a contradiction that is harder and harder to endure. I believe it is pricking the nation's conscience. It is the unanswered moral question, 'What is this prosperity for?'" He went on to say that we must acknowledge the link between race and poverty. And that in order to overcome poverty, everyone must do his or her share, everyone should do what he or she does best, and no one can sit on the sidelines!

Former Congressman William Grey, of the United Negro College Fund, reminded us that there is no going back to the good old days. (Even if there were good old days to go back to, which for millions of Americans, there aren't.) Rather, things are changing, and we must keep pace with them. We must take a stand, even if it is unpopular.

Noting that "neither individual Christians nor the churches have been adequately reflective and self-critical about the nature of the US economic system and its consequences," the initiative challenges us to re-examine our notions of the causes of poverty, the character of the poor, and what is required of those who enjoy privileges denied to others.

And finally, delegates noted the importance of linking these two initiatives together; they need each other. The mission for the poor cannot succeed if it is not shared and owned by all; the ecumenical table cannot be expanded by theological dialogue alone, but requires common action and mission.

Other issues were addressed as well. A strong resolution was offered on the current conflict in the Middle East, calling for renewed efforts at peace and critical of Israeli policies of containment. The passage of the Debt Relief Act by Congress, and the work of Jubilee 2000, were celebrated. Church World Service (CWS) reported on extensive aid and relief efforts around the world; floods, landslides, hurricanes, drought, famine, educational and medical and agricultural supplies: the doctrine of use writ large. A resolution was adopted on AIDS in Africa, as was a plan to craft an NCC policy statement on Africa.

At the Ecumenical Program and Leadership Awards ceremony, a number of people were honored for good work in the area of ecumenism. One in particular deserves mention. At the age of 85, Blanch Lamone, of Atlanta, lost her driver's license. So she began to walk and soon learned about CROP walks, sponsored by CWS. On November 16th Blanch was honored for having contributed a record \$136,656.38 to CWS through CROP walks. She is now 102. Keep on truckin', Blanch!

Delegates were informed of a letter sent to President Clinton regarding global warming, calling on him to complete the negotiations of the Kyoto protocol at the Convention on Climate Change, held at the Hague November 13-25. Ron Brugler was among the signers of this letter, which sprang from the Eco-justice working group, headed by Rich Kilmer, who left for the Hague from Atlanta during our meetings, after getting just a few more signatures.

The National Alliance of Baptists was welcomed as the 36th member communion of the NCC. Born in 1987 in the "white heat of controversy" within the Southern Baptist Convention, the NAB is committed to historic Baptist principles and a radical inclusiveness of all God's children among us. In

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## One Great Fellowship of Love

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Thankfully, this discovery is already lighting the road to a more peaceful and accommodating future. In a recent newscast from Israel, there were scenes of Palestinians and Israelis, in an area of the country some distance from the centers of conflict, where they were shown together harvesting the fruit of an orange grove. "We can live together," was their response to the ongoing crackle of rifle fire.

Thankfully, too, it is heartening to know that, here in south central Kansas, new programs are being initiated to promote reconciliation between those involved in criminal activities and their victims. Bethel College in Newton is developing a program called, "Restorative Justice," in which victims of vandalism, for instance, will be given the opportunity for dialogue with those who perpetrated the vandalism—and, hopefully, young first-time offenders can be reintegrated into the community. It's all about conflict resolution. It's all about all of us—in our family life and in our communities taking upon ourselves the responsibility to encourage those attitudes and ideals that promote an appreciation and tolerance of the diversity within the human family.

This may well be where all these who live by the faith, the hope, the promise of the Christian WAY can lead the world into a more peaceful future. Jesus taught, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13.

*The Rev. Eric Zacharias is a retired Swedenborgian minister, ministering to the Pretty Prairie and Pawnee Rock churches in Kansas as he is called and needed. He is editor of The Plains Banner, a ministry of the Kansas Association of the New Jerusalem. The above editorial is reprinted from The Plains Banner, November 2000.*



## Eruption of truth

An interview with Raimon Panikkar

by Henri Tincq and Joseph Cunneen

*Raised in Spain by a Catholic mother and a Hindu father, Raimon Panikkar has made inter-religious dialogue his life's work. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1946, and is attached to the diocese of Varanasi in India. Panikkar is the author of some 40 books, including The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, The Trinity and World Religions, The Silence of the Buddha, The Cosmotheandric Reality and, most recently, the revised edition of The Intrareligious Dialogue (Paulist Press, 1999). After many years as professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, he is living in retirement in Spain, revising his Gifford Lectures, "The Rhythm of Being," for publication. He gave this interview to Henri Tincq, religion editor of the Parisian daily Le Monde. The interview has been translated by Joseph Cunneen, founding editor of Cross Currents.*

**How is it possible to combine a heritage that is both Christian and Hindu?**

I was brought up in the Catholic religion by my Spanish mother, but I never stopped trying to be united with the tolerant and generous religion of my father and of my Hindu ancestors. This does not make me a cultural or religious "half-caste," however. Christ was not half man and half God, but fully man and fully God. In the same way, I consider myself 100 percent Hindu and Indian, and 100 percent Catholic and Spanish. How is that possible? By living religion as an experience rather than as an ideology.

**How do you explain the Western attraction to Asian religions and philosophies and the fear that this produces in Western churches?**

One might well turn the question around and ask instead why the West exercises such an attraction on the East. The answer to your question, however, is that contemporary Christianity has given insufficient attention to many key elements of human life, such as contemplation, silence and the well-being of the body.

There is in this attraction a salutary slap by the Spirit, which is telling the churches in the West to wake up. The discovery of the other, the search for greater peace of mind and bodily calm, for joy and serenity, are sources of

renewal. The whole history of Christianity is one of enrichment and renewal brought about by elements that came from outside itself. Do not Christmas and Easter, and almost all the Christian feasts, have a non-Christian origin? Would it have been possible to formulate the basic Christian doctrines without the hellenic tradition, itself pre-Christian? Doesn't every living body exist in symbiosis with its external milieu?

Then why this fear? If the church wishes to live, it should not be afraid of assimilating elements that come from other religious traditions, whose existence it can today no longer ignore. Prudence, however, is a value that should be maintained; I certainly understand the voice of Catholic authority when it is raised against widespread superficiality.

**Don't most conflicts in contemporary society come precisely from the fear of a destruction of identity, a fear that has led to all those forms of religious withdrawal called integralism?**

Someone who is afraid of losing his or her identity has already lost it. In the West identity is established through difference. Catholics find their identity in not being Protestant or Hindu or Buddhist. But other cultures have another way of thinking about one's identity. Identity is not based on the

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degree to which one is different from others.

In the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity), people seek God in difference—in superiority or transcendence. Being divine means not being human. For Hindus, however, the divine mystery is in man, in what is so profound and real in him that he cannot be separated from it, and it cannot be discharged into transcendence. This is the domain of immanence, of that spiritual archetype that is called brahman. In the Hindu system, people are not afraid of losing their identity. They can be afraid of losing what they have, but not of losing what they are.

Being afraid is always a bad sign. Christ says, "I give you peace" and "Do not be afraid." Contemporary Christians feel surrounded and are afraid of being dissolved. But what does the gospel say? "You are the salt of the earth." The salt has to be dissolved in order for the food to be more tasty. The leaven is there to make the bread rise. The Christian vocation is to lose oneself in others. From an institutional or disciplinary point of view, I can understand today's reactions of prudence in the churches. But the duty of the Christian is to be dissolved, to "lose one's life," in order to communicate it to others. The Christian faith even tells us that by losing our life we gain it. It is here that we find the meaning of the resurrection.

**You believe in interreligious dialogue. On what conditions can it succeed?**

The days are over when religions could take refuge in splendid isolation. In Europe, for example, religious people can no longer ignore the existence of the millions of foreigners with different cultures who are now living there. They can no longer ignore the fact that, across three quarters of our planet, the dominant religion is not Christianity. Hence there must be dialogue; the question is, what kind?

We must distinguish between *interreligious* dialogue and *intrareligious* dialogue. The first confronts already-established religions and deals with questions of doctrine and discipline. Intrareligious dialogue is something else. It does not begin with doctrine, theology and diplomacy. It is *intra*, which means that if I do not discover in myself the terrain where the Hindu, the Muslim, the Jew and the atheist may have a place—in my heart, in my intelligence, in my life—I will never be able to enter into a genuine dialogue with him.

As long as I do not open my heart and do not see that the other is not an other but a part of myself who enlarges and completes me, I will not arrive at dialogue. If I embrace you, then I understand you. All this is a way of saying that real intrareligious dialogue begins in myself, and that it is more an exchange of religious experiences than of doctrines. If one does not start out from this foundation, no religious dialogue is possible; it is just idle chatter.

**But how does one avoid falling into a vague religious syncretism made up of different expressions of religion?**

I am obviously against what is fashionable today, which seems to be a matter of going here and there in search of spiritual satisfaction, and which ends in leading nowhere. The dialogue route that I propose is existential, intimate and concrete. Its purpose is not to establish some universal religion, to end up with a kind of United Nations of religions. Reread Genesis: God destroyed the tower of Babel. Why didn't God want a world government, a world bank, a world democracy? Why did God think it better, to facilitate communication among men and women, for them to live in small huts on a human scale, with windows and streets, rather than on information superhighways?

For a Christian, the answer is in the incarnation: because the divine mystery is made flesh. For the philosopher, it is in order that human relations remain personal. I cannot have human contact with a computer; a machine is not a person. Genuine dialogue between

religions, therefore, ought to be this duologue: between you and me, between you and your neighbor; it should be like a rainbow where we are never sure when one color begins and another ends.

**But can one still speak of religion, if one is not convinced of possessing the truth?**

When, during his trial, Jesus is asked "What is truth?" he does not answer. Or he leaves the answer in silence. In fact, truth does not allow itself to be conceptualized. It is never purely objective, absolute. To talk about absolute truth is really a contradiction in terms. Truth is always relational, and the Absolute (*absolutus*, untied) is that which has no relation. The pretension of the great religions to possess all truth can only be understood in a limited and contingent context. Not to be conscious of our myths leads to integralism. But in order to be aware of our myths, we need our neighbor, and therefore dialogue and love. The truth is first of all a reality that permits us to live, an existential truth that makes us free.

I am not such a relativist as to believe that the truth is cut up in slices like a cake. But I am convinced that each of us participates in the truth. Inevitably, my truth is the truth that I perceive from my window. And the value of dialogue between the various religions is precisely to help me perceive that there are other windows, other perspectives. Therefore I need the other in order to know and verify my own perspective of the truth. Truth is a genuine and authentic participation in the dynamism of reality. When Jesus says "I am the truth," he is not asking me to absolutize my doctrinal system but to enter upon the way that leads to life.

**Nevertheless, what is the point of believing and committing one's life to something, if it is not a matter of defending one's truth? Doesn't the kind of religious dialogue that you are asking for, in which each would come, first of all, not to defend individual**

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convictions but to share experiences, easily become reduced to a friendly chat?

I hold to my truth. I am even ready to commit my life to it and to die for it. I am simply saying that I do not have a monopoly on truth, and that what is most important is the manner in which you and I enter into that truth, how we perceive it and hear it. Thomas Aquinas said, "You do not possess the truth; it is truth that possesses you." Yes, we are possessed by truth. That is what makes me live; but the other lives, too, by virtue of her truth. I do not engage myself first of all to defend my truth, but to live it. And the dialogue between religions is not a strategy for making one truth triumphant, but a process of looking for it and deepening it along with others.

**The Christian churches strive to insert the message of the gospel into the diversity of cultures. How is it possible to reconcile the respect that you have for other religions and cultures with the necessity, for a Christian like yourself, of "inculturating" the gospel?**

It is of *intercultural* that we need to speak—that is, of a meeting between traditions and cultures, and not the implantation of one culture in another. It would only be a proof of colonialism to pretend that one religious message, like the New Testament, has the right and the duty to inculturate itself everywhere, as if it were something supracultural. The church ought to take existing traditional cultures more seriously, and work for their mutual fecundation. How? By means of that mystical inspiration which is too often missing in its theology. For example, the best way to explain the "scandal" of Christianity to classical Hinduism is not to speak about Christmas or Jesus of Nazareth, but about the risen Christ and even the Eucharist. Do you know that the expression the 16th-century Council of Trent used to describe the

Eucharist—"the unique sacrifice that saves the world"—is already found in a Vedic text that appeared 2,000 years earlier? In other words, the sacrifice that saves the world is first of all a kind of commerce between the human and the divine, something the Hindu understands as well as the Christian.

I believe in the incarnation, and I think that after the misadventures of the past 2,000 years Christianity should stop being the religion of the Book and become the religion of the Word—a word that Christians should hear from a Christ who lives, as Paul says, yesterday, today and always. Then their faith can become more of a personal experience. To present the faith to men and women today doesn't mean trying to introduce a little Thomism here, a little Judaism there, and so forth, but to reach them at their deepest existential, humble and mystical level.

The Christian truth is not the monopoly of a sect, a treatise imposed by a land of colonization, but an eruption that has existed since the dawn of time, which St. Paul defined very well as "a mystery that has existed since the beginning," and of which we Christians know only a very small part.

**Is that the reason why you are asking for a second Council of Jerusalem, following the example of the first, which decided to stop imposing Jewish rituals on new converts?**

The crisis today is not that of one country, one model, one regime; it is a crisis of humanity. A council should be opened whose concerns would no longer be interecclesial—dealing with priests, bishops, women's ordination and so forth—but would center on far more essential problems. Three quarters of the world's population live under inhuman conditions. Humanity is in such great distress and insecurity that its leaders believe they must keep 30 million men in arms! The church cannot be a stranger to such distress, to such institutionalized injustice. It cannot remain deaf to the cries of the people, especially of the humble and the poor. The council I propose would certainly not be exclusively Christian but

ecumenical, in the sense that it would give a hearing to other cosmologies and religions. Its purpose would be to determine how the Spirit is inspiring humanity to live in peace, and to bear the joyous news of hope.

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## How is Your Love Life?

Ken Turley

**I**t's February and I have to ask: How is your love life?

Are you getting enough love in your life? Remember what Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." If you are feeling the need for more love in your life, one of the best ways to fulfill that need is by taking the initiative to actively give some love to someone else.

And do the people in your life that you love know just how much you love them? Remember what Jesus said, "No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bushel basket." So be sure that the people who light a fire in your heart get a chance to see the light shining in your eyes and feel the warmth of your love for them. You can't just assume they know. Of course, they do know, but they need to hear it and feel it from you just the same.

And does the God of your life receive a fair share of your love? Remember what Jesus said was the greatest of all commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." That is a pretty tall order, one that is easy to forget in that God doesn't usually stand there in front of you and remind you. But God can be sneaky—ok,

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Hopefully, not many of the readers will get the "joke" of the title, which dates back to the dear old ignorant, insensitive days, when this was a left-handed compliment to Jews. (My best friend, Joel Barmann, turned the tables on me with "You're Swedenborgian? You don't look Swedenborgian!") Lately, though, I have had experiences in which the term "Christian" is not what I had learned it to be, or more to the point, what I perceived it to be.

I was born an Irish Catholic and was raised mostly in Jersey City, New Jersey, which in the fifties and sixties was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. Christianity, as I understood it from Sunday school and after-school religious instruction, denoted some form of adherence to the teachings of Christ and to the New Testament. Four years of Catholic high school gave me a rather slanted view of religious history. Those who did not belong to the RC church were those involved in various "schisms," "heresies," and "revolts" against the "Church." The "Orthodox" church which many of my Eastern European neighbors belonged to was a really gray area that few of us, including its members, could figure out. (The best that any of us could come up with, is that they, the ROs, did not believe in the pope.) The rest were filthy black Protestants ("black" referring not to their race, but the state of their souls).

However misguided we felt these people to be, I was always taught that they were nominally Christians, as opposed to the few Jews in our midst who believed in . . . well, most of my neighbors in my formative years were from Poland, the Ukraine, etc., so use your imagination as to what they believed that Jews believed in. The Protestants and ROs believed in Jesus, only they just didn't worship him properly. I'm sure that the Protestants believed that we RCs were one step above killing chickens before wooden idols. But, grudgingly, we all accepted that we were Christians—sort of.

Fast forward to the 1992 Republican convention: Pat Buchanan's speech outlining the "Culture War" banded about the term "Christian" quite a bit. At the time, I had not attended any

## "FUNNY...YOU DON'T LOOK CHRISTIAN !"

form of organized worship, Christian or otherwise, for almost 30 years. It would be almost three years before the divine intervention that brought me to the New Church would occur. But, I surmised that the type of "Christians" Pat was talking about were not the Irish Catholics that I once identified with or the Black (this time denoting their race) Protestants that I lived and worked with.

I intuited that Pat was talking about white, male, conservative, non-urban, borderline fundamentalist, anti-abortion, prayer-in-the-schools type Protestants. At the time I fit only one of the categories (white). Now I fit two—white and Protestant. But a New Church member?

FUHGEDDABOUTIT! (Whether a New Church member is a Protestant is another subject for another article.)

Anyway, this was the kernel of the idea that the concept of what a Christian is was changing. Like most things, my experiences with the "new" Christianity came in threes. All were different. But the common thread was that this was not the way I had defined the word "Christian."

My best cyber-pal is Brenda from Houston. A while back, she was experiencing difficulties, and I offered her words of comfort within my limited abilities, both in e-mails and one-on-one chats. One time, after offering her some of what I considered minor consolation, she typed:

*dint no ur Christian. Translation: I didn't know that you are a Christian.*

My cyber thought was:  
????????????????

Why just Christian? Mostly what I was offering her were ideas gathered from AA meetings. True, Lois Wilson, wife of the founder of Alcoholics

Anonymous, was a member of the New Church, and Bill Wilson did apparently crib some of our philosophy (great!!), so Brenda was getting some good New Church theology. But couldn't a Jew or a Muslim or a Buddhist have the same ideas? If you look at most religions, you will find more similarities than differences.

I was fortunate to meet Brenda in July 2000, and we talked of many things, including why she identified me as a Christian. What is a Christian? A believer. In Christ and His teachings? Yes, and more. A believer in the Word, in ideas of honesty and goodness. Apparently, what I had typed was consistent with her ideas of Christianity. OK! After all, we are a Christian church.

The next experience was with the pretty child who cuts my hair, Adrienne. She is at least 20 years younger than I am, but lives in my old stomping grounds, Bayonne, New Jersey. As we were talking of things familiar to both of us in Bayonne—"old-timers" with whom we are both acquainted, and life in general—I mentioned I was active in my church (as much as possible). She asked me what kind of church it was and I said, off the top of my head, "Christian."

"I would never have thought that you were a Christian," she said.

Getting back to the title of my article—there were times in my life when it was assumed that I was Jewish because I "looked" Jewish. I was thinking of a clever comeback when she continued, "You are a regular person. I can talk religion and philosophy with you without an argument." I wanted to pursue this, but we moved on to other topics.

The next time I saw her, she told me of her girlfriend's conflicts, as she is a Catholic and her boyfriend's family is "Christian."

It gets better. According to Adrienne, who is half Russian Orthodox on her mother's side and her Latino father converted from R.C. to R.O., her upcoming wedding party will consist of Orthodox persons, Catholics, Jews and Christians. Her idea of Christians apparently doesn't just mean Protestants (as opposed to R.C's and R.O.'s), but stiff-necked, preachy,

(Continued on page 24)



## FUNNY...YOU DON'T LOOK CHRISTIAN !

(Continued from page 23)

pushy, intolerant, and generally obnoxious people. Not the types you would invite to a party.

Adrienne writes:

*"We were also told that we would burn in hell for believing in the Blessed Mother. This is why we had only bad experiences with Christian people. You are the first one I met who tried to educate me, instead of change my religion. This gives me a great respect for you."*

I'm flattered!

Is she a Christian?

*"I believe, however, as long as it makes you a good person, who helps and doesn't harm others mentally or physically, you lead a Christian life. God is in many forms to many different people. He loves, and forgives all our sins, and made us and loves us all."*

I didn't get a yes or no on the Christian question, but isn't what she said something...well, uh, that Jesus said?

This wilderness is not entirely new. I was in the eighth grade and our English teacher wanted to illustrate the concept of denominationalism with the accent on ISM. As I mentioned before, Jersey City was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. So, to illustrate...ism, we have Catholicism. She then asked, Who is not Catholic? One or two hands were raised. She asked Karen, "You are a ...?" "A Christian," said Karen. After a few questions more, it was established that Karen was a Lutheran—Lutheranism. So, even 40 years ago there was this idea of a difference between a Catholic and a Christian.

Finally, here is one more idea of what constitutes a Christian.

In the July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000, *New York Post* Op-Ed section, Brent Bozell's column was titled "Open Season On Christians." The article basically was the story of the Family Research Council's Robert Knight's appearance on *The Early Show* to lend his and his organization's support to the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Boy

Scouts' decision to ban gay scoutmasters. The article went on to decry *Early Show* host Bryant Gumbel's vociferous opposition to the decision, which included Gumbel's mouthing certain basic expletives on-air.

For those of you not familiar with the *Post* let me give you an idea of the way the paper is oriented. When asked at the end of 1999, Who were the most evil people of the last millennium? *Post* readers voted Adolph Hitler #1—and Bill Clinton #2 (Hillary was a write-in and made #5). Bozell's article was typical fare. What is disturbing is that Bozell writes: "Bob Knight's a conservative. Less, he's a Christian." Bozell was essentially conveying that the liberal media engages in what is termed "Christian bashing"—in other words, Knight was being disparaged by the liberal media because of his "Christian" values.

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"New" Christianity  
came in threes.  
All were different.  
But the common thread was  
that this was not the way I  
had defined the word  
"Christian."*

The thinking here is that a true Christian is anti-gay, anti-gun control, anti etc., following the conservative line à la Pat Buchanan. Do Orthodox Jews and Muslims—as well as what I'm sure that the conservatives feel are "pseudo-Christians" such as the Catholics and the Black churches—agree with this line of thinking? Why does it seem that a conservative outlook must necessarily be a white Protestant thing?

As I wrote earlier, the New Church (at least in my experience) does not meet the narrow standards discussed here. Swedenborg uses the term "Christian," but without much definition. Then again, I am hardly a Swedenborgian scholar. But in looking through the materials I have, I mostly found

ideas such as, *"The Church of the Lord is spread over the whole globe and is thus universal. All who live in good and charity according to their own religious faith are members of it."* This definition broadens rather than narrows. It would seem we Swedenborgians have a big enough tent to accommodate a lot of different concepts.

I kicked ideas around with New York church members John and Will, who consider themselves conservative Republicans. I asked: Do they consider themselves Christians? Yes! How about me, a middle of the road Democrat? Am I a Christian? Yes!

Am I any closer to the answer to "What is a Christian?" No.

Who are these Christians? Which are the "real" ones? When the Christian soldiers start marching, which ones are they? Are they for or against gun control?

*A.J. Geddes is a member of the New York New Church and lives as a Christian in Hoboken, New Jersey.*



## The Household of God

(Continued from page 19)

voting to admit the NAB, the Swedenborgian delegation once again joined with the United Church of Christ and members of the United Methodist Church delegations in noting our pain and dissatisfaction with the continued exclusion of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches from membership in the NCC.

Hosea Williams, a leader in the civil rights movement and friend of Andrew Young, died on Thursday afternoon in Atlanta. As Ambassador Young spoke to the delegates, he said that from the time of his work with Hosea and Martin Luther King, Jr. to now, the goal has always been the same: never to pit black against white, but to redeem America from the three scourges of poverty, racism, and war. Can the churches do any less?

*The Rev. Robert McCluskey is pastor of the New York New Church in New York City.*





# VISITATIONS

## *from the Afterlife*

### True Stories of Love and Healing



by Lee Lawson  
HarperSanFrancisco. 2000

Reviewed by Kelly  
Mahan-Jaramillo

Lee Lawson has given those of us who grieve the loss of a loved one a beautiful gift in her lovely anthology of people's recollections of visitations from those who have passed on.

Though it's not a lengthy book, (223 pages), it should not be read in one or two sittings. Each story is personal, different yet the same, and if taken in all at once can start to feel repetitious, the reader ultimately losing the deep message. This book needs to be beside the bed, taken in small doses, and slowly absorbed. Each recollection will touch the individual who reads it in his or her own special way, and some may not.

Essentially, however, the stories themselves are not what this book is about—it is that these people who have shared their stories show us one undeniable fact—there is life after death. And earthly death as the final curtain call with our only options being heaven or hell is a man-made myth born out of fear of the unknown. *Visitations* shows us that there are so many more layers and dimensions after the soul has left the body that the possibilities are almost staggering. If we keep ourselves open, we can receive messages from many, and in many different ways.


Having had, over the last five years, many visitations from my deceased husband, I would find myself either excitedly trying to recount the event for someone, or keeping my mouth shut, fearing that I was losing my mind. In the former, the telling of the phenomena that I had just experienced somehow didn't translate. I was not able to articulate the intensely magical moment, and usually felt as if I had given away a part of myself that really didn't belong to anyone else. I noted that oftentimes in this book, the retelling simply doesn't come across, as it is so personal and so intimate that it renders any kind of recounting almost impossible. That was actually a comfort to me, as I had been assuming that if I were a more skillful narrator, I somehow could have gotten this amazing incident across to the person! Another comforting aspect of this book, for those of

us who say nothing for fear that others will judge us insane, is that after-death visitations are actually a common experience. The fact that author Lee Lawson brought together so many people to share their stories with us tells us that we are not insane or psychotic.

The book is divided into fourteen sections, each one chronicling a different kind of visitation, and the intended healing that it brings, then the individual stories correlating to that specific heading. Each one can bring tears to the reader's eyes; personally, I found the one on "Making Peace; Forgiveness and Reconciliation" the most touching. Odd, perhaps, since that was not the case with my husband. He lived a loving life and died a good death, surrounded by friends and loved ones. However, in so many families, my own included, there are often rifts that seem, and many times are, irreconcilable. One often thinks, "But what if they die and we still never spoke or attempted to fix our problem?" I believe that those tears can be the most bitter ones a grieving soul can shed, as the chance for reconciliation seems irrevocably taken away. This chapter shows that sometimes there is a second chance from the afterlife

when there is a deep chasm in desperate need of healing. It was a beautiful chapter, as they all are. No matter what your loss may be, there is a heading and a recollection in here that will cause you to cry, smile, think, and possibly believe.

This is an extremely uplifting book on death, and I encourage anyone who has experienced loss to read it, and even if you have not, someday you will, and perhaps it will help make that future difficult time a little bit easier to bear.

Kelly Mahan-Jaramillo works in the film industry as an assistant music editor. Among her film credits are *Saving Private Ryan*, *Schindler's List*, *Amistad*, *Jurassic Park*, *Analyze This*, and she is currently working on the upcoming posthumous Stanley Kubrick film, *A.I.* (Artificial Intelligence). She lives in Venice, California, and occasionally writes reviews for *Rapport*, *West Coast Review of Books and Music*. 

*Essentially, however, the stories themselves are not what this book is about—it is that these people who have shared their stories show us one undeniable fact—there is life after death.*

# Documenting the Architectural Heritage of the Greater Swedenborgian Community

*A Report on Work-in-Progress*

Carol Lawson

For almost one hundred years, thriving New-Church Societies built lovely and useful houses of worship across the North American continent. This busy building period began (in Baltimore) in the early 1800s and lasted through the early 1900s, at which time the exquisite Bryn Athyn cathedral arose in Pennsylvania.

Many of these lovingly constructed Swedenborgian churches, some decorated and designed by distinguished artists and architects, are still being used today by the same congregations that conceived and funded them. Some of the churches, however, were torn down in the urban renewal era of the mid-1900s, and some have been sold to other denominations.

This Swedenborgian architectural heritage is being documented in a book I am writing titled *Enterprising Angels and the Aesthetics of Faith*, presently being researched for the Swedenborg Foundation, to be published in 2002. The book will include the General Church's and the General Convention's buildings that are still part of the greater Swedenborgian community as well as such buildings that are no longer with us.

The project got underway by the Foundation writing for information to some eighty North American General Convention and General Church Societies. Officers of most societies responded enthusiastically with volumes of historical materials, which I am still reading, sorting, and working on—hoping to completely assimilate all the data generously furnished to the Foundation.

During the year 2000, I have continued to gather information for the book with site visits. I started at the General Convention's image archive, then housed in the library of the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton (Massachusetts), just before the archives were placed in storage. With Larry Conant and Martha Bauer to guide the search, I ended up with a large file of photocopied photographs, drawings, and *Messenger*

articles covering the start-ups of many Swedenborgian churches, which I carried back home to Virginia. (The original photographs and drawings will be borrowed from the archives later, closer to the book's actual production and printing.)

Last March, I spent several days at the New Church on Thirty-fifth Street in New York City. That Society's library contains a fabulous collection of New-Church periodicals, dating from the early nineteenth century to the present. Arthur James, Mona Conner, and Robert McCluskey helped, and again I went home with photocopies of invaluable photographs, sheet music, and newspaper clippings. In November, I added to that collection by visiting the New York Public Library, which houses many nineteenth-century Swedenborgian pamphlets bequeathed to the city by John S. Bigelow as well as the complete series of the latter's handwritten journals, in which Bigelow cites Julian Smythe sermons he liked, taking his children to Sunday school, and his frequent discussions with another New York Society member, Professor George Bush. I also interviewed Virginia Branstion, who donated for my research a paper from the late Alice Spears (of the Los Angeles Society). Virginia also answered questions about the old Brooklyn Society. Chet Burger of New York's Central Presbyterian Church took me to visit the former site of the Brooklyn Heights New Church.

A visit to the LaPorte Historical Society and Public Library in May 2000 yielded much information on the early founders of the LaPorte Society. Afterwards I visited the Chicago bookrooms where Karen Feil got some of the early Chicago Society records out of ancient metal boxes. The lists show memberships, baptisms, confirmations, and include the family church records of Joseph Sears, who in 1894 built the Union Church in Kennilworth (Illinois).

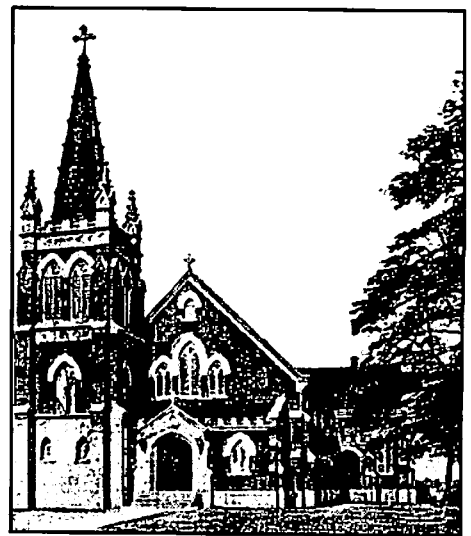
In June, Annabel and Bill Junge of the Glenview Society took me to see the Union Church. The World Parliament of Religions (held in Chicago in 1893 as part of the Columbian anniversary) inspired Sears to build this interdenominational house of worship. Annabel had arranged a special tour of the church. One of its features is a leaded stained-glass window with likenesses of Swedenborg, John Clowes, Johnny Appleseed, and with special New-Church symbols.

In September I made a preliminary trip to the Swedenborg Library in Bryn Athyn.

An October visit to Cleveland's Public Library and Photographic Archive yielded up news stories of the several Swedenborgian churches in Cleveland but only one image: the postcard shown below. In the meantime, I have received valuable data and materials on the Cleveland Society, as well as leads on people who still remember its history, from longtime members there, Norman and Jean Bestor.

Architectural styles reflected in the lively period of high Swedenborgianism in America include Green Revival, NeoGothic, and Romanesque, but finding art-quality photographs of the exteriors or interiors of the buildings is proving to be a most difficult task.

*(Continued on page 29)*



*This picture-postcard shows the second house of worship built in the 1800s by the Swedenborgian Society of Lakewood, Ohio. The image was found in the photographic archives of the Cleveland Public Library.*

# SOCIAL JUSTICE

## My Nine Months as a Handicapped Person

Sharyl H. Webster

When I was approached about writing an article for the "Social Justice" column, I think the hope was that I would be willing to write about my experience of being "disabled"; I was willing to take the bait.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999, I was involved in a motorcycle accident. The accident followed a wonderful 3 1/2 hour ride; this was an accident, and caused by someone being careful because he was concerned about the road we were on. The tibia and fibula in my right leg (it took the full weight of the bike) were "cut in half" by the motorcycle. I ended up having to have my leg set three times and finally set the fourth time under anesthetic. All seemed to be going fairly well and then on March 23<sup>rd</sup> an x-ray revealed that the bones had moved and surgery was required. On March 28<sup>th</sup> the surgery was performed. It involved putting a nine-inch metal plate on my bone, held in place with twelve screws. For the next eight weeks I was totally non-weight bearing. On June 23<sup>rd</sup> I was told I could walk without my crutches using just my cast, and on July 21<sup>st</sup> the cast was removed and I am, at this writing, almost back to normal and walking around.

So for 35 weeks I was among those people in our society who are barred from doing so many of the things that I very much took for granted. Even though I thought I was fairly aware of people with disabilities and some of the struggles they have, I found out I was extremely uneducated about the issue. I was extraordinarily fortunate that I have family and friends who were more than willing, dare I say eager, to make sure that I had as normal a life as possible during my recovery. It was to my mind, however, the number of places and things that I couldn't access that was appalling.

I couldn't get my mail. Somehow that seemed really hard. A link with the rest of life, and for 35 weeks I was dependent

on someone else to pick up my mail every day. The post office was unwilling to bring it any further than my street mailbox. My hope is that people with long-term disabilities are better treated.

Be aware of where the products you want are located when you are grocery shopping. A couple of times I was driven to the grocery store and used one of those electric carts which you see at grocery stores. My guess is that at least 85% of what I buy was not reachable using those carts. Almost everything I wanted was either on the top or bottom shelves—so the person who took me had to do the majority of my grocery shopping anyway.

One day my sister-in-law, Nancy Salmon, decided I was stir crazy enough that I needed to go to the Maine Mall and do some shopping. That was another eye-opening (or close your eyes

***It is, unfortunately, very true that thousands of people will be unable to go into many stores that they might enjoy, attend the church of their choice, eat at a restaurant they really want to try, attend concerts.***

and scream) experience. I was in a wheelchair and Nancy was pushing me. It is so difficult to explain how such a combination can make one feel invisible, but believe me, it truly felt as though we were. People would cut in front of us, force us to stop suddenly, give us looks of such scorn and disgust that we were in their path when they wanted to get from point A to point B. It made me wonder how our society became so fast-paced that we often ignore one another.

It is, unfortunately, very true that thousands of people will be unable to go into so many stores that they might enjoy, attend the church of their choice, eat at a restaurant they really want to try, attend concerts. I would have LOVED to go see and hear Barry Manilow, but I

didn't dare. I did go to a concert at Merrill, and even that was difficult. The ushers provided little or no help and forced me to rush out at the end of the concert. The list is endless. A ramp too steep, no ramp at all, restroom facilities too small for a wheelchair or someone on crutches or not on the same floor. To get to many places I had to go up steps backwards sitting down and pushing myself up with my arms. I have gone through basement tunnels to get to art shows. I have had people carry me into places where the steps were too steep. I will repeat. I WAS LUCKY! My family and friends made all of the above possible. If I had been alone I can't imagine what my life would have been like.

But the dependency—oh, the dependency. How horrible. Just think about having to ask for someone to do EVERYTHING for you. It is awful. And among us there are people who have to do that every day of their lives! I want to continue to be aware. I want everyone to be aware. When we able people see or hear something which is unacceptable regarding someone with a disability, speak up against it! I want us to continue to help others be more aware of people around them and how they can help and how little things make life unbelievably difficult for so many people. I ask again PLEASE, notice. Be aware, help, and please don't make the life of people with disabilities any more difficult than it already is. I am so fortunate. I am better now, my bones healed and eventually I will be able to do almost everything I want to do or was doing before the accident. I am so much more blessed than so many people, and for that I am unbelievably grateful. I ask all of you who are currently able-bodied to say a small prayer of thanks for how lucky you are as well.

Editor's Note: Sharyl Webster's article is reprinted from the Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church August 2000 newsletter, one of their continuing series on Social Justice. When I contacted Sharyl through Portland member Eli Dale, Sharyl emailed the following:

(Continued on page 28)

## NEW CORRESPONDENCE COURSE AT SSR

Ted Klein

What concepts in Swedenborgian theology help guide your decisions about life issues? Have you sometimes been excited about a theological idea but not sure how to apply it to practicalities of daily life? Have you sometimes wondered what perspectives can help you to know what is best in a situation? How can Swedenborgian perspectives assist you at home, at work, or in other contexts? These kinds of issues are part of a new correspondence course being taught at the Swedenborg School of Religion.

The new course, Swedenborgian Concepts and Life Issues, is being taught by the Rev. Dr. Ted Klein. Six students are taking the course, and they live in a wide geographical range including New Hampshire, Michigan, Ohio, and California. Swedenborgian Concepts and Life Issues is more basic and less comprehensive than the *Overview of Swedenborg's Theology* correspondence

course which has been taught at SSR for many years. The graduate level Introduction to Swedenborgian Concepts course, being taught for the first time in an on-line format this year, is more advanced and has its applications focused on ministry. Swedenborgian Concepts and Life Issues considers a wide range of applications and practical life situations in relation to basics of Swedenborgian theology.

Swedenborgian Concepts and Life Issues begins with a consideration of what God is like and explores the relationship between God and persons. There is an emphasis on how persons, aided by God, can bring love and wisdom into action, community, and service. The relation of God's providence and human freedom is considered, and there is an emphasis on how people can cooperate with God. The differences between good and evil are explored, along with the freedom to choose between them. Much emphasized are processes of rebirth or regeneration and living a life of uses or charity.

The course consists of fifteen lessons, each lesson having central theological themes. Each lesson includes reading assignments in one or more of Swedenborg's theological works, notes on the lesson themes and readings, and questions for reflection and exploration. Lessons are grouped into four units, with a concluding writing assignment for each unit. This course can be done through regular mail, but is much enhanced when students have e-mail. Readings are included from the followings works of Swedenborg:

*Heaven and Hell*  
*Divine Love and Wisdom*  
*Divine Providence*  
*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*  
*True Christian Religion*  
*Arcana Coelestia*, Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10.

All of these works are now available on-line through the NewSearch website as well as in various print versions.

It is a great new adventure to be involved in teaching this course.

*The Rev. Dr. Ted Klein is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at the Swedenborg School of Religion and author of The Power of Service, published in 1998 by J. Appleseed.*



## New Rosamond Kent Boyce Memorial Fund at SSR

The Swedenborg School of Religion recently received a letter containing the following:

"Enclosed please find a check to establish a Memorial Fund in memory of my dear mother, Mrs. Rosamond Kent Boyce, who died in 1990, a loyal Swedenborgian to the day of her death. I recall many long talks I had with her about religion, life, science, and Swedenborg, and the angelic life she led made me feel that her religion had been partly responsible, though of course the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ was mostly responsible as He lived through her.

"My mother was generous and kind in the most intense way, giving all her money and love to others. She would have wanted the enclosed check to go

to the church she loved so much with all her heart. I hope there are still people in the church who remember her and my brother Herbert Warren Boyce, also a Swedenborgian, who died of pneumonia this past June. He too was a great example of the holy life. He had a gentle, unspoiled and innocent spirit and was also generous and kind."

Sincerely,

Louise E. Boyce  
West Newton, Massachusetts"

SSR is very honored to establish the new fund, and invites others to join Louise Boyce in making contributions in honor of Rosamond Kent Boyce.



## SOCIAL JUSTICE

(Continued from page 27)

Actually, I am not a member of the church in Portland. They honor me by treating me as one of their own and have been very kind to me. I am a practicing Catholic and I attend the Swedenborgian Church to accompany their choir. I rehearse with them on Thursday nights and play usually on alternate Sundays when they sing. I love to play the piano and people we know in common asked me if I might consider playing for the church and then asked Eli to contact me. I believe this is my fourth year. So, this wonderful group of people is one of the places where I offer my services and in return I receive a great deal of love and respect. Our relationship is quite symbiotic...it is a joy to work with them.

Sharyl also works as an office administrator for Burgess Advertising and Associates in Portland.



## How is Your Love Life?

(Continued from page 22)

subtle—sometimes. Maybe God's trying to get your attention and not having much luck

And if we are to honor the first commandment, we might just as well honor the one that is just like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This one is often the hardest to do. It is the least glamorous, and at times the most challenging. But if our love for God is not practiced in the basic stuff of life, well, then where else?

All of this is coming because it is February, the month of Valentine's Day: my favorite holiday. A day devoted to love of all kinds, from the deepest and most devoted, to the most innocent and playful, even the downright silly! Ah, but it is love and that is what makes the world go 'round. Not surprising really, when you realize that the world is God's creation and God is love, after all. So live it up and brighten someone's day by letting your love-light shine!

Blessings and a little bit of love to everyone.

*The Rev. Ken Turley is pastor of the Fryeburg New Church, Fryeburg, Maine.*

Reprinted from the February 2000 Fryeburg church newsletter.



### Church Calendar Dates

Feb. 1-5	Augmentation Fund Committee Ft. Myers, Florida
Feb. 8-11	Wayfarers Chapel Board Meeting
Feb. 15-18	SSR Board Meeting San Francisco, California
Feb. 25-Mar. 1	Edfest Carefree, Arizona
Mar. 8-11	MINSU Deland, Florida
Mar. 16-18	General Council Washington, DC

*The following Letter to the Editor was sent to Correspondences, the newsletter of the Virginia Street church in St. Paul. It is reprinted from their November/December 2000 issue.*

To the Editor:

I found God while reading *Heaven and Hell*. One day I came home from work with my arms loaded with grocery bags and a supper to get on for my family and two boarders.

I had to pass a bookcase in the hall, and with no thought except that I had to

TO THE  
EDITOR

do it, I pulled out that book and started to read, standing there among the grocery bags.

It has been so long ago that I don't recall what happened to supper, but I did read that book—a book my father had given me years before. I had often opened it, but it was always too deep for me and I always put it back.

God must have decided it was time and gave me a little shove. Since then, I read everything Swedenborg that I can find.

God is now my friend and co-being. Aren't we lucky.

Alice Ford



## Documenting the Architectural Heritage of the Greater Swedenborgian Community

(Continued from page 26)

Equally hard is locating the names of the people—the "enterprising angels"—who made both large and small donations to fund New-Church buildings. If only there were more treasures like the pamphlet I found at Christmastime in the District of Columbia Public Library: a booklet prepared by the treasurer of the national committee that gathered the funds and managed construction of our national church on Sixteenth Street in Washington. The booklet listed everyone (from donations of one dollar to that of forty-four thousand dollars) who had given money for the building, plus the architect, the construction company, and the minister (Frank Sewall) who had guided the project.

If *Messenger* readers have such information or church photos, please contact me, Carol Lawson, or the Swedenborg Foundation. My e-mail address is [chrysalis@hovac.com](mailto:chrysalis@hovac.com) (or phone 804-983-3021).

A number of our church patrons were unusually open-minded individuals who had prospered during America's period of high industrial growth from manufacturing or distributing goods. It can be argued that it was their very open-mindedness that led these innovators to the nonsectarian inclusivity of

Emanuel Swedenborg's theology. Some of those families gave substantial sums and energies to constructing our beautiful Swedenborgian houses of worship. Most of their names, however—including their special contribu-

***This Swedenborgian architectural heritage is being documented in a book titled *Enterprising Angels and the Aesthetics of Faith*, presently being researched for the Swedenborg Foundation, to be published in 2002.***

tions to American enterprise and to the growth of the New Church in North America—were unrecorded and have been lost to history. Perhaps if enough New Church people get interested in contributing information to this book, we can make it as historically rich as it should be.

*Carol Lawson, a former associate editor of The Messenger, is a director of the Swedenborg Foundation and series editor of the Foundation's annually published anthology, the Chrysalis Reader, a book series that examines themes related to the quest for wisdom. The Swedenborg Foundation can be contacted at 1-800-355-3222.*



## Debates With Devils; What Swedenborg Heard in Hell

(Continued from back)

"translated." And there is this sentence on page 7: "Of course allusions to devils appear again and again in the literature of the world, among them Christopher Marlow and the German writer Goethe, who both wrote of . . ." an unclear sentence suggesting that Marlow and Goethe may be two of the devils referred to.

It is a pleasure to discover the work of Swedenborg translator Lisa Hyatt Cooper. Her translations of Swedenborg in the book are wonderful transformations into modern English of the heavier, more formal language of earlier translations. She is part of the team that is producing the New Century Edition of Swedenborg's theological works for the Swedenborg Foundation.

It was a discovery unusual for Swedenborg's time, but often needed still, that the inner self can be vastly different from the outer, moral self. How we cover up the inner self and even forget about it and the need for self-examination is a frequent message to those who have recently died. The result of pushing it out of sight can be an unpleasant surprise, for heaven is usually where the outwardly moral expect to end up after death.

So we end this review with an example of Lisa Hyatt Cooper's work in *Debates*, her translation of *True Christian Religion*, n. 568. Included here is a warning of what is ahead, in a stirring no-nonsense speech typical of angels who address large gatherings of people who have recently died. Cooper's translation of Swedenborg continues:

"At this point, they firmly believe that they will be going to heaven, and they speak intelligently and act prudently. 'We've lived morally,' say some. 'We've aimed for integrity. We haven't deliberately done anything wrong.' Others say, 'We've gone to church, attended Mass, kissed the holy icons, poured out prayers on bended knee.' Still others say, 'We've given to the poor, brought help to the needy, read devotional books; the Word, too.' And so on.

"After they've said these things, angels make their appearance. 'All the things you've mentioned,' they say, 'are things

you've done on a surface level. You don't yet know what you're like on the inside.

"You're now spirits in a body made of real substance. The spirit is your inner self. It's the part of you that thinks about the things you wish for and wishes for the things you love, and what you love is the joy of your life.

"All people as small children begin their lives focusing on external concerns. They learn to act morally and speak intelligently. When an idea of heaven and its blessings begins to dawn, they start to pray, attend church, and practice their religious traditions. Yet when evil wells up from its inborn spring, they learn to hide it in the secret folds of their minds and cunningly cover it up with false justifications, to the point where they themselves fail to recognize it as evil. And then since they've covered it up and put a layer of what you might call dust on the top, they don't bother to think about it any more except to make sure it never shows.

"The result is that people focus all their attention on leading an outwardly moral life, and, in this way, they become two-faced. They turn into sheep on the outside and wolves on the inside; they resemble a golden casket concealing poison within; they take after a person with bad breath sucking on a mint to

*I had resolved  
very seriously years ago  
never to see another  
horror film  
or read any more dark,  
supernatural stories.*

keep bystanders from detecting the odor; they become like a rat skin that smells of Balsam.

"You've said that you lived morally and pursued a course of piety. But I ask you, did you ever examine what you were like inside? Did you ever discover an appetite for revenge, extending even to murder? for indulging your lust, even to adultery? for practicing fraud, even to theft? for engaging in deceit, even to "false witness"?

"Four of the ten commandments say, "These things you are not to do" and the last two say "These things you are not to covet." Are you convinced that your inner self matches your outer self in these matters? If you do think so, perhaps you

deceive yourselves.'

"What is the inner self?' their listeners have replied. 'Isn't it one and the same as the outer self? We've heard from our ministers that the inner being is nothing but faith. They say that piety on the lips and in the moral life is the sign of faith because it shows that faith is at work.'

"The faith that leads to salvation does exist in the inner self,' the angels answered. "Charity the same. They give rise in the outer self to a Christian hold on faith and Christian morality.

"But the appetites I mentioned earlier might remain in the inner being and so in the will and the thoughts (which rise out of will). If they do, it's proof that you love them deep down, even if you don't act or speak that way on the surface. Under those circumstances, evil ranks higher than good with you, and good ranks below evil. No matter how you talk with apparent understanding or act with apparent love, in consequence, evil lies at the core and takes such appearances as a cover. Then you're like a clever chimp that apes human gestures without the least bit of sincerity.

"You know nothing about the nature of your inner self because you haven't scrutinized yourselves or followed scrutiny with repentance. In a little while, however, you'll have visual evidence of that nature when you've shed your outer personality and come into possession of your inner one.

"When that happens, your own companions won't recognize you any more, and neither will you yourselves. I've seen paragons of vice then look like wild animals, eyeing their neighbor savagely, burning with deadly hatred, and blaspheming God, whom outwardly they had worshiped."

"These words caused a mass exodus. 'You'll see what your lot in life is soon,' the angels were saying all the while. 'You'll be giving up your outer veneer shortly and coming into your true inner self, which is the spirit you now are.'"

Angels can be tough, and the inevitability of a soul-shaking transformation can be either the best or the worst news one can get.

*Stephen Koke is a member of the Communications Support Unit, and author of Hidden Millennium, the Doomsday Fallacy, published by the Swedenborg Foundation.*

For ordering information, call 1-800-355-3222.



# Transitions Report

Jenn Tafel

I admit it is difficult to think of writing about our fall retreat when the article will not be printed in *The Messenger* until February. When I think of February the first thought that comes to mind is of love due to the fact that we celebrate Valentine's Day during this month. It is with this thought that I begin.

The October Transitions retreat was held in the Farm House at the Temenos Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and the theme was "Distinguishable Oneness." The focus, therefore, was on the combination of love and wisdom and how they are distinguishably one. I now come back to how the fall retreat and Valentine's Day are combined—the thought of love and how, in our church, it is not love alone; but rather love and wisdom. So now that the theme of the retreat is hopefully better understood I can discuss the retreat itself.

I have to be honest. I missed the first two sessions because of preparations for my move and journey east. So I will report about those activities in which I was able to participate.

Saturday morning's session began with all of us on our feet imagining that we were trees, and that the different paths we take in our lives are like the branches of trees. We then began a discussion about our different "branches" and if we feel as though we are doing what we love. (We are all jealous of Bill Baxter who gets paid to make and play with toys—his love.)

We broke for lunch, which was an excellent meal (yummy chicken noodle and veggie soups and grilled cheese sandwiches) prepared by Dean Currie. A lot of people enjoyed the "hangout" time after lunch. This hangout time is very important to us, and no retreat would be complete without it! During this time several people enjoyed a good walk, while some loafed and chatted, and me? I took a nap!

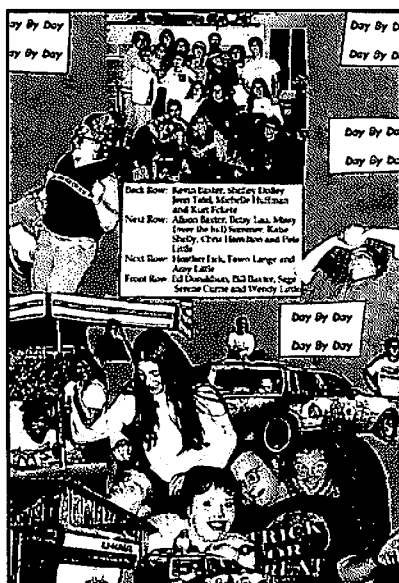
The afternoon session was devoted to the idea of how we express love in our various relationships. We broke into small groups and found enough different parts of the Farm House to accommodate these groups. I will not go into more detail, because we were sharing such an intimate aspect of ourselves. We got back into the large group and compared notes.

During the rest of the afternoon and early evening the hangout time was suspended while we all cleaned up the Farm House and began preparation for dinner (yummy tacos). Also during this time Wendy Little led a group of people who took time to discover art in nature.

I must mention that Amy Little and Heather Fick led people in yoga and other forms of stretching and "active relaxation" before the morning sessions. I cannot give a more detailed report due to the fact that I am not a morning person!

So once the delicious dinner (held in the main dining room of Temenos) was over, we participated in communion with one another led by the Rev. Susannah Currie. We also "performed" an excellent rendition of "Day By Day." (Please contact Kurt Fekete for information about upcoming "tour" dates!) We then took care of some Transitions business and enjoyed some more great hangout time with one another. It was awesome to feel the love and wisdom among the group which is a distinguished part of Transitions.

Jenn Tafel is "public relations" person for Transitions and has recently moved to Sharon, Mass.



## PASSAGES

### CONFIRMATIONS

Green, Lubiszewski, Sarti, Swart—Kitty Green, Mary Alice Lubiszewski, Nancy Sarti, and Ken and Sarah Swart were confirmed into the faith and life of the Swedenborgian Church November 19, 2000, at the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan, the Rev. Renee Billings-Machiniak officiating.

### MARRIAGES

Billings and Machiniak—the Rev. Renee Billings, minister of the Royal Oak Church of the Holy City, and Joseph Machiniak were united in marriage October 14, 2000, at the Almont New Church Conference and Retreat Center in Almont, Michigan. The Rev. Kit Billings, brother of the bride and minister of the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church in St. Paul, officiated.

Abler and Erickson—Carla Abler and Jim Erickson, both members of the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church, were united in marriage September 16, 2000, at the Virginia Street church in St. Paul, the Revs. Kit Billings and Edwin Capon officiating.



### Change of Address

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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.

## Debates With Devils; What Swedenborg Heard in Hell

by Donald L. Rose

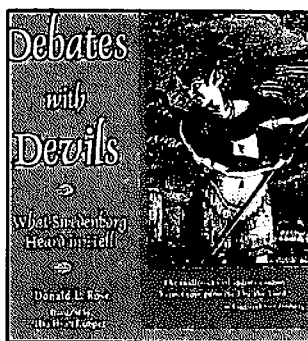
A Chrysalis Book, Published by the Swedenborg Foundation with translations from Swedenborg's Latin by Lisa Hyatt Cooper, ©2000.

*Reviewed by Stephen Koke*

I'm not sure that I should recommend this book. It's not that the book is bad. It's very good. In fact, it's so good, it's bad.

It's "bad" in the same way that the descriptions of hell in Swedenborg's books are bad—they make the sensitive, imaginative reader nervous. Some of Stephen King's best novels are bad in that sense. So was *The Exorcist* when it came out years ago. Evil, vividly described and lodged in the supernatural, is an enlightenment, but it stimulates the imagination and stirs up disquieting thoughts and fears, some of which may seem to be answered from who knows what dark corner of reality. I had resolved very seriously years ago never to see another horror film or read any more dark, supernatural stories. There were too many inner aftereffects, feelings of insecurity. Then *The Exorcist* came around, and a woman friend of mine pleaded with me for fifteen minutes over the phone to go see it with her. I stuck to my guns, and she went alone. She told me afterwards that she didn't sleep well that night. She had disturbing dreams and felt bad.

This is serious, and I don't know what to recommend to anyone who wants to write about hell. It does have to be described and shouldn't be censored. Don Rose is a good writer, with a gift for clear and sympathetic presentation. But the



material *itself* is not inert.

Somewhere inside we are pretty close to these things.

The title is therefore slightly misleading. We do find numerous debates and intellectual exchanges between Swedenborg and devils, and they are interesting. But there is also information about the non-intellectual powers and temperament of devils (bad people whose evils had emerged, as is typical of

both good and evil in the spiritual world, in their purest, least ambivalent forms), with emphasis on their malevolence and desire to completely destroy any living person. Lacking any higher overview, they could only argue in the debates from the pleasure principle, reducing their arguments to mere expressions of delight in what they did. Other observations abound, and academic studies of the criminal mind can learn much from Swedenborg's inside view.

A great asset in this book is the Introduction by Leonard Fox. Here is an incisive, painstaking, and well-tailored essay on the origin of evil, the best I've seen. It also answers the old question of why bad things happen to good people. Skeptics of religion still put out old arguments that God cannot exist, or at least cannot be good, if he allows so much evil to run amok. Fox's study of Swedenborg should be placed in their hands.

There are some errata, typographical errors that happened to occur a bit more often than in other books I've seen. They are all very minor, but on the cover we read the title and author's name, followed by "translated by Lisa Hyatt Cooper." It suggests that Cooper translated Rose from a foreign language. This could be helped in any later editions by substituting the word "translations" for

(Continued on page 30)

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