

THE MESSENGER

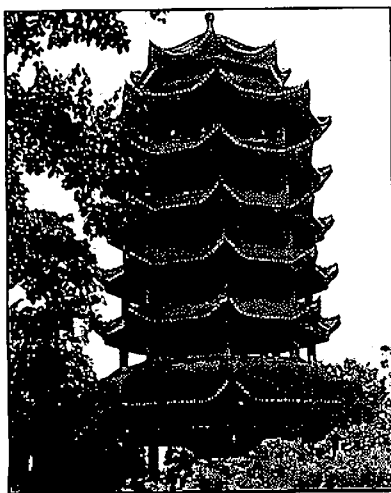
Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

January 2007

Impressions of and Musings about The People's Republic of China

Mareta Tafel

When *Messenger* editor Patte LeVan asked me to share our impressions of a recent trip to China, I really wondered where to begin as we saw so many new sights that were small pieces of a huge country. Our first encounter with the Chinese government was at the Consulate in downtown Los Angeles, coincidentally a half block from the previous location of the Los Angeles Swedenborgian Church. Harvey had to sign under oath that he would not practice his profession while in China. He dutifully did so and we proceeded to get our entry visas.



The Buddhist Temple

Our tour (totally escorted and purchased through AAA Travel and



Friendly folks everywhere we went

General Tours (aka TBI Tours) provided everything promised and more. China does not allow the open practice of religion but is very proud of its religious heritage. We visited Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist temples which were decorated by some of the finest craftsmanship we have ever seen. The ornate designs and attention to detail help to create the mystical atmosphere inherent in those belief systems. The sacred was present everywhere in these temples. The Temple of Heaven (Buddhist) is surrounded by the city of Beijing which could be seen from the hilltop on which the temple sits. It is a white, circular pagoda-like structure topped with a bright blue roof (heaven). It was built for the Emperor (as the Sun of Heaven) to give offerings for a fruitful harvest.

There is a square courtyard around it with rooms for the monks also ornately decorated. It was recently restored and opened just a week before we arrived in anticipation of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics.

Another temple that left a lasting impression was located along the Yangtze River in Fengdu known as the "Ghost City," touted as a Taoist shrine with Hindu overtones. It is perched on a hilltop reached by 350 stairs. We

(Continued on page 3)



Entrance to the Forbidden City

The Revs. Freeman Schrock, Kevin Baxter, and Carla Friedrich have each had formal installation services this fall into their LaPorte, Cambridge, and San Diego church parishes (respectively). Congratulations!

IN THIS ISSUE:

Video Conferencing • Barbara Mark's Eulogy
Book Review, *Paradise Misled* • National Church Renewal • Readers Write

The President's Mid-Winter Update

In my city, (Midland, Michigan) winter arrived over a period of twenty-four hours. One day it was fifty degrees and the sun was shining, and the following day the temperature fell steadily, as did first rain, then sleet, and, finally, snow. And snow on the ground means that it's time to share with you the past five months' journey of the president of the denomination.

I'm delighted to do so because it also means that I can publicly thank each of you for the care, love, hard work, and dedication you bring to our various ministries. It is a joy to visit, either in person or via phone, fax and email. Thank you all! And Happy New Year!

Since the Bible was closed at the end of the 2006 annual Convention, I have presided over the post-Convention and fall meetings of the General Council. I facilitated a new electronic and phone model of the annual Cabinet meeting, which worked quite well and saved significant airfare, food and lodging costs for eight members. As an *ex*

officio with vote member, I have attended the September meeting of the Wayfarers Chapel Board of Managers, the September meeting of the Augmentation Fund Committee, and the October meeting of the Swedenborgian House of Studies Board of Trustees. The president of Convention is a voting member of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, and I attended that meeting in October. As *ex officio* without vote, I attended the August meeting of our Ministries Support Unit.

On a less organization-focused note, I've taken part in services at our San Francisco and Elmwood churches (with thanks to the Revs. Rachel Rivers and Donna Keane, respectively) and I've also had the honor of presiding over three installation services this fall. On October 1, a service of installation was held for the Rev. Freeman Schrock at the LaPorte (Indiana) New Church, and I was ably assisted by a great group of kids from the LaPorte Sunday School and by the board president, Judy Freeman. The following week, a special Sunday afternoon service of installation was held for the Rev. Kevin Baxter at the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge (Mass.), and the Rev. Gladys Wheaton and local board president, Rebecca Esterson, assisted. On November 12, the Rev. Carla Friedrich was installed in the San Diego Swedenborgian Church, and the Rev. Harvey Tafel, president of the Pacific Coast Association, and local board president, Irv McCallum, assisted. These are occasions of joy, fellowship and commitment, and are some of the wonderful experiences of the denomination president!

In the next few months, I'll write articles about some of the

specific things that are going on in the life of the denomination. We have been poised for a while now on the edge of "choice." The focus for this year is on change: Should we? Can we? How much? In what ways? It is my belief that there are new avenues that we must pursue; new ways to be at work in the world. I also know that change can't happen without good planning or without a clear understanding of where we've been. Without a solid foundation of history, we can't move forward. So, as this year progresses, many of our boards, units, councils and committees are looking at ways to effect change that honors what's gone before while opening up new possibilities. I'd love to hear from you with your ideas about church in the twenty-first century.

(chris.laitner@swedenborg.org)

Chris Laitner ☩



THE MESSENGER

Publisher: The Communications Support Unit
Published monthly, except July and August, by the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America).

January 2007
Volume 228 No. 1
Whole Number 5316

Typesetting & Layout
Town and Country Press
Plymouth, IN

Patte LeVan, Editor
Editorial Address:
The Messenger
P.O. Box 985
Julian, CA 92036

TEL: (760) 765-2915

E-MAIL: messengerpwl@ixpres.com

Business & Subscription Address:
Central Office
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460
E-Mail: manager@swedenborg.org

The opinions of the contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Communications Support Unit, or represent the position of the church. Subscription free to members of the Swedenborgian Church; non-members, \$12.00 a year; foreign \$15.00 a year; gift subscription from a member, \$5.00 a year; single copies \$1.00.

Deadline for material: Six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

Impressions of and Musings about The People's Republic of China

(Continued from page 1)

took a chair lift up to the 250- step level and then climbed the rest which began with another ornate gate. Along the ascent were placed statues of tortured souls (ghosts) to remind the faithful what would happen to them in the afterlife if they misbehaved. The guide told us that the Taoists here believed in heaven, the earth—or nature—and hell. At the top of the stairs the statue of the lord of hell (ugly) sits inside his own shrine guarding the entrance of the “Chinese Torture Chamber.” One proceeds to a diorama of miniature statues of all the horrible tortures done to those in hell. It was gruesome. After exiting across an open park, there stands a lovely Buddhist pagoda in which sits a serene-looking Buddha. Surreal would be a good description of the experience.

All of the sights we visited reinforced the feeling of ancient times brought forward by an

impetus to live in modern times. We walked on the Great Wall (a lifelong dream for both of us). We viewed the Xian (pronounced shee on) Terra Cotta Warriors that were sculpted to guard Emperor Xian on his way to the afterlife. He was buried in an earthen tomb shaped like an Egyptian pyramid but at least twice as big and not looted. The “dig” was truly amazing—miles and miles of artifacts. While in Xian, we saw the Wild Goose Pagoda which in reality is a Buddhist library. Xian also has the only complete city wall still totally intact in the whole of China today. It dates from 200 BC. Other places of interest were Ming tombs near Beijing, an herbal medicine market, gardens in Beijing and Shanghai, the Summer Palace, Tienamen Square, the Forbidden City, a tea ceremony, The Shanghai Acrobats, a Dumpling banquet and the Tang Dynasty Dancers. The night lights in Shanghai put Las Vegas and Times Square to shame.

The cities of Beijing and Shanghai are modernizing as fast as possible. There are grand-scale building projects everywhere. We rode the Meglev high speed magnetic train (built by the Germans) which reaches speeds up to 435 KM/H. Steel and cement are in high demand in this “socialist market economy.” Healthcare and housing are no longer “free.” High-rise condos are replacing the sprawling hutongs (old, one-story homes without indoor plumbing or stoves). There is still a huge gap between the haves and the have-nots. A middle class is emerging slowly. Also there exists a professional class of beggars who pursue tourists everywhere. The population (1.3 billion) must buy the new condos after being displaced by the destruction of their homes. If you do not buy health insurance, you cannot be admitted to a hospital. If

you get sick and die, the government is not concerned.

It seems Americans and Chinese have different ideas about individual freedoms and life. The building of the Three Gorges Dam and the resulting relocation of millions of people is a perfect example of this difference. The government formulated the plan, put it into action, and so many lost their ancestral lands and homes. There was no recourse for complaint. Local government officials are appointed by higher levels of government (not so different from the era of the emperors) and if they disagree with the central government’s decisions, they are replaced by those who do agree. Totalitarianism is entrenched in China even though the Chinese Communist Party organization would try to have you believe otherwise.

The Three Gorges Dam is indeed a monument to flood control and hydroelectricity which will alleviate suffering of one kind while creating another. The Yangtze River is a major trade route from the mountains to the coast, so the dam is creating a smoother, more consistent economic stability. The landscape is still breathtaking and well worth visiting even with the changing shoreline.

We also had the opportunity to visit local artisans at work at a jade factory, silk weaving plant and a lacquer ware manufacturer. At all three workshops the workers had no safety equipment in place. OSHA would have heart palpitations viewing the conditions there. No safety goggles were worn by the jade carvers who used electric stone grinders to create exquisite artwork. If anyone gets injured, there are lots more workers available as replacements.

(Continued on following page)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Impressions of and Musings about The People's Republic of China	1, 3-4
The President's Mid-Winter Update	2
Supplement Your Programming	
Via Video-Conferencing	4-5
Barbara Mark's Eulogy	5-7
Important Church Dates	7
Photos from China	8-9
Paradise Misled	10-11
The World Behind This One	11
General Council	
Summary Report	12-13
Readers Write: Theholycity.net	
Further Explained	13
Readers Write: Interpretations of	
<i>Earth's in the Universe</i>	14-15
Alliance of New Church Women	15
And Looking Forward to	
Next Year's Convention	15
Passages	15
National Church a Site of Building	
Restoration and Renewed Energy	16

Supplement Your Programming Via Video-Conferencing

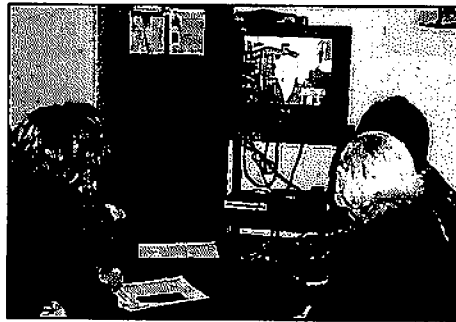
Karen Feil

During Fall 2006, the Swedenborg Library in Chicago was pleased to bring Rev. Dr. George Dole in for a five-week course on basic concepts in Swedenborgianism. As he had done for the Swedenborgian House of Studies in Berkeley previously, George conducted the discussion from his home in Bath, Maine.

In these days of DSL and broadband phone service, adding video-conferencing to your church society's capabilities can help you expand the quality of your programming while avoiding the costs and strain of travel on the part of presenters. And, for those who develop programs, being able to "take them on tour" without leaving home provides some incremental income for their creative efforts.

Variety, Quality, and Without Burn-Out

For our small but devoted denomination, video-conferencing is a good way to stretch investment in programs while avoiding member and clergy burnout. Drawing



The Swedenborg Library in Chicago welcomed George Dole via video-conference.

upon presenters both within and outside of the greater church community is a good way to provide quality outreach and member programming. Video-conferencing enables "face-to-face" two-way communication between the presenter and the audience.

"It's great to be able to question and learn from one of the foremost scholars in the Swedenborgian movement today without having to leave Chicago," says Robert (Bud) Phillips, who participated in the sessions. "It was just like having George in the room with us," he added.

While you can video-conference using your church computer, communications will be clearer and smoother using a video-

conferencing system—important qualities when a small group is gathered around a TV, engaging in dialogue. A video conferencing system such as Polycom boosts the quality of the video and audio signal you send and receive.

You may be able to find a used system from a local business that is upgrading to a more sophisticated system, or by shopping the Internet. Costs range from a few hundred dollars for a refurbished system, to \$1,500 for a new system, and upwards to \$5,000 for systems that enable multiple remote locations.

The multi-location systems also present the possibility that far-flung members of Support Units might meet without travel expense if this type of system rotated with the position of chairperson. Because DSL or broadband connections are used, the phone expense is the equivalent of a local call, also.

All you need to use such a system is a phone line (preferably a DSL or broadband line), modem, and a television set that accepts video in-out cables. A modem cable provided connects the video-

(Continued on following page)

Impressions of and Musings about The People's Republic of China

(Continued from previous page)

Our greatest wish for China is the development of clean air and water controls. We were instructed upon landing in Beijing not to drink any tap water and use only bottled water which was supplied by the hotels. We had only one clear day in two weeks. Chongqing had the worst air I have ever breathed. My skin itched throughout the entire bus ride from our Yangtze River Cruise Ship to the airport. It is a city of 31 million and has only 1400 hours of sun-

shine a year. Multiply the worst L.A. smog by ten to get a picture of the brown haze of China. Hopefully improvements will be well underway by 2008 when the world descends upon Beijing. We enjoyed the ancient and modern sights and wouldn't have missed this trip for all the tea in China (to quote Harvey).

Mareta Tafel is the Rev. Harvey Tafel's wife, and mother of Jennifer

Tafel, worship leader of the newly incorporated Lansing Swedenborgian Church in Michigan. Mareta recently retired from many years working in the travel department of AAA. Rev. Tafel is the administrator at Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, and the president of the Pacific Coast Association, in which they are both members-at-large. ☒

More photos on pages 8-9

Barbara Mark's Eulogy

Barbara Mark was a gifted teacher and channel who co-authored many books on angel awareness with her sister Trudy Griswold. Their books: *Angelspeak* — *How to Talk to Your Angels*, *The Angelspeak Book of Prayer and Healing*, *The Angelspeak Storybook*, and *Heaven and Beyond* — *Conversations with Souls in Transition*, have helped many to connect directly with a divine support team. After a four-month illness, Barbara transitioned peacefully on July 23, 2006, and her memorial was held at the Swedenborgian Church in San Diego, on Friday, August 4th. This is the eulogy of her daughter Suzanne Mark. Sharing this beautiful tribute seems like a good way to start the New Year.

There is an old Zen Story that talks about three blind men feeling the different parts of an elephant. One feels the leg and said, "This beast is strong and immovable, like an old tree." The other feels the trunk and says, "No, this beast is flexible and supple like a snake." The last man, feeling the tail, said, "This beast is hairy and fast, like a whip."

I think about my mother, and I think of so many who loved her, and



I realize that she had the ability to be something unique and different to each person. Once I was walking down the hall behind her on the way to the laundry room, and I saw her as if I had never seen her before. I thought, "Who are you??" It was around this time I realized that she was a MYSTERY, even to me. Mom had a special gift of making everyone feel as if she saw them for who they really were and of connecting with them as if they were a kindred spirit, or best friend. Indeed, she had many, many, best friends.

As I traveled with Mom through the years, I noticed this gift more and more. People would phone me or pull me aside to tell me how

much they loved her and how much her work had changed their lives. Part of this ability to make others feel special was due to her gifts and the way that she really lived in them and related to others through them. When she talked to someone's angels, she didn't see the bad, or the difficult parts; she saw the goodness and the sincerity with which each of us live our lives. Even if we were misguided or hurting or not living in our best self, she saw us through the lens of love to our essential beings. When she tuned into someone, and gave them a reading, or just enjoyed them as a friend, I think they could really feel this recognition.

(Continued on following page)

Supplement Your Programming Via Video-Conferencing

(Continued from previous page)

conferencing system to your modem. Once the system has been installed, you use the system's remote control to key in the remote location's IP address and to dial it.

Eliminating bright back-lighting in the room will make it easier for the remote viewer to see the group gathered around the table. The camera embedded in the console may be adjusted up and down if the remote viewer can't see the group gathered.

Caveat

Although the Swedenborg Library's equipment was new, two calls to Polycom's service technicians to adjust the default settings were required before a successful

connection was made with George's modem—the second technician being more thorough than the first—so allowing a week or so to test your connection well beforehand is advised. Hardware failures do happen, so be forewarned—after a few uses, even with a surge protector, our phone port failed three minutes into a recent class. Having a speaker-phone handy saved the class that evening.

If users will be connecting video conferencing equipment to a DSL line, be sure to have ordered a "static IP address" level of service from the phone company. In Chicago, that involves a one-time charge of \$79 plus a router, and a visit from a technician to set it up.

Basic DSL service uses a "dynamic" IP address, which means it doesn't remain the same, making it difficult for the remote location to

connect to you consistently. This is why our calls with George were dropping—a rather essential fact that we did not have in originally setting up the equipment.

For program providers who do not have their own video-conferencing units, access to video-conferencing is offered by business service firms, including some Kinko's stores. Comparing the cost of an hour's rental for a video-conferencing room to travel expense, you may find that you can offer multi-week programs for the cost of a one-time event, increasing opportunities to develop community and depth to your educational journeys.

Karen Feil is a member of the Chicago Society of the New Jerusalem. Bud Phillips is president of the Good Shepherd Church, Des Plaines, Illinois. ☒

Barbara Mark's Eulogy

(Continued from previous page)

Once I was with my mother at a promotional event in the West Covina Barnes and Noble. She gave

her talk, and then went around the room giving little "readings" to the attendees. To one woman, she said, "You need to de-

clutter! You have too many Marie Callendar pie plates in the cupboard." The woman, embarrassed at first, laughed and said, "You got that right! There are *quite* a few!" Then she proceeded to another woman and said, "You know that book, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, by Og Mandino?" The woman sat nodding silently. "That is *your* bible. It is a really important book for you." The shocked woman then proceeded to take that very book out of her purse.

The last reading she gave that day was for a man who shyly came in late with his wife and young daughter. "Would you like a reading?" She asked him gently. "Yes," he replied.

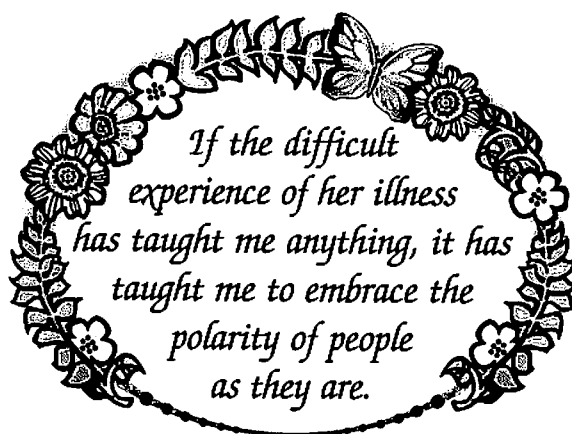
"You must just feel like you got hit by a truck!" He and his wife looked at each other in disbelief. He answered, "I DID get hit by a truck. It knocked me over a hundred feet and I have plates in my head now." That was just one amazing evening with my mother. There were many.

At times before and during her illness, my mother had doubts that her work had really mattered, or had an effect.

Recently, I gave the Angelspeak Books to a friend, Patti M., and she did her first angel reading on May 25th. She has been writing ever since about every day to every other day.

Through tears of relief and joy, she explained to me how important the AS work has been to her in such a short time. I quote:

"I had felt my whole life that I had needed so much help that was just not available, the answers were illusive and they were not in religion. The extraordinary part was having both HELP and answers that are delivered in a loving way. One of the biggest pieces of information that I got out of the book itself was that there is HELP from the angels, and it is loving, not scolding, not angry, not judgmental. That is what made me want to do the writing. The readings have taken a burden off my back. Before, I was going to have to do everything on my own, and I was going to be judged. The angel writing changed that to the fact that I am never alone. I have celestial helpers without all of 'the shoulds.' The answers I receive have been



about the bigger picture and for the first time I feel like "Wow, I am actually important enough to know something and I am not even a priest, or minister." I have access to "bigger picture" information, and that is important for me. They have helped me by finding medical help; they helped me pick out the right practitioner *and* helped provide the money to go. The big miracle is the way that your Mom and Aunt wrote the books—they answered my every question. I knew on the first

reading that it was *the* angels, because it was exactly how they had described it down to the details. I knew exactly what to expect. The angels have challenged me to make a list of things I want and they are giving it to me piece by piece with no strings attached. What an amazing gift."

Some people know that my mother was an alcoholic who sobered up in 1981. In the beginning of my mother's recent struggle with cancer, I was speaking to a friend who has been in AA for several years about miracles. I said, that if anyone was due a "miracle" it was Barbara. She pointed out that because Barbara was an alcoholic who recovered from an illness that the great majority of people die from, she already *was* a miracle. Her entire life was a miracle. She had such immense odds stacked against her, yet she not only overcame them, she thrived, and went on to live an amazing life in her sobriety.

Barbara's favorite prayer was the 3rd Step prayer from AA. "God, I offer myself to thee, to build with me and to do with me as thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, so that I may better do thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help, of thy power, thy love and thy way of life, may I do thy will always." I think the

reason she liked this particular prayer is because it was about surrender. One of these facets of Barbara that some of us were able to see is that – during her sobriety — she lived her life as an OFFERING. It was surrender that led her.

She offered herself to God, one day at a time, in her sobriety. She left a 27-year marriage because in her heart she felt the urgency to offer herself to a bigger and different life. She did not know what that life

(Continued on following page)

Barbara Mark's Eulogy

(Continued from previous page)

would be or where it would take her, but she *knew* that she had to move more deeply into surrendering to the mystery.

When the Angels woke Mom early one Sunday morning in 1991, the encounter brought a deeper surrender to God and to truth than any of us could have dreamed possible. That openness



and surrender to the blessed work of God and the angels, healed many and sent us all on a great adventure. Simply because Barbara was willing to look into the unknown and the intangible and surrender to God come what may.

This was no easy task. There were many, many times when she was afraid and worried about how God was going to support her and still she continued to move deeper into surrender despite many challenges and struggles. She was able to manifest many great things in her humanity and in the difficulties that she experienced.

When she was diagnosed with cancer, some of the first thoughts she shared with me were thoughts of surrender. She again offered herself to God, through this devastating illness, and gave herself to it piece by painstaking piece. This illness may seem terrible, or unfair – and it is – but I see it as part and parcel of her continuing lesson in surrender and the offering of her life to a greater wisdom than she could know with the limited mind.

The thing I liked best about Mom was her ability to like everybody. And she was such a likeable

and funny person that I often thought that if someone did not like her; there was something wrong with *them*!

If the difficult experience of her illness has taught me anything, it has taught me to embrace the polarity of people as they are. This was something that Barbara could be very good at. Just letting people be who they were. Don't get me wrong, Barbara could be

saintly, but she was no saint. She had her rough spots. She worked on them. Or she ignored them. She was many things. Sometimes opposing things. Just take a moment and think of someone you love (or even someone you don't).

Can they be?

Funny or serious
Greedy or generous beyond belief
Absent and unavailable or reassuring and supportive
Fearful or trusting
Controlling or embracing
Critical or accepting
Closed and bitter or open and forgiving
Mean or sweet
Angry or peaceful
Human or angelic

Barbara was all of those things. But the greatest thing that she was, was love. LOVE is the container in which all of these poles of experience reside. The dissolving solution that holds all of the polarities. If we stopped for a moment during the difficulty of watching our beautiful friend, teacher, sister, lover and mother leave this earth, we knew that the greatest common denominator was the love. The love we felt for her, and for each other, within the devastation (and the beauty) of

holding someone we loved so much through such a trial. It was quite an experience!

I think that for me, the most important and honoring way to hold Barbara is for the *whole* of who she was. The parts I enjoyed, the parts I didn't. The things I absolutely loved and accepted about her, and the ones I always wanted to change. The many ways in which I felt loved and supported, and the ways I wasn't quite satisfied. It is all ok now, because I can feel that beneath the duality in my relationship with her, there is a love that will never be limited by my attachment to some things or my aversion to others. Everything is equal and everything is laid to rest, as I can accept my beautiful—and fallible—mother for ALL of who she was, I move closer to accepting myself.

In closing, I would like to thank you, Mom, for this wonderful and unique experience of you that has allowed me to see myself. It was so FUN being your daughter. I'll miss you. ☸

Important Church Dates 2006-2007

January 25-27, 2007
Board Meeting at Wayfarers,
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA

March 17, 2007 12:00 p.m. EST
General Council conferene call

April 13-14, 2007
SHS Boarch of Trustees, Berkeley, CA

April 24-26, 2007
Committee on Admission into the
Ministry (CAM), PSR/SHS,
Berkeley, CA

May 5, 2007
Investment Committee.
Central Office, Newton, MA

May 18-20, 2007
Swedenborg Foundation Board
meeting, West Chester, PA

June 24-July 2, 2007
Convention 2007, Hope College,
Holland, Michigan ☸

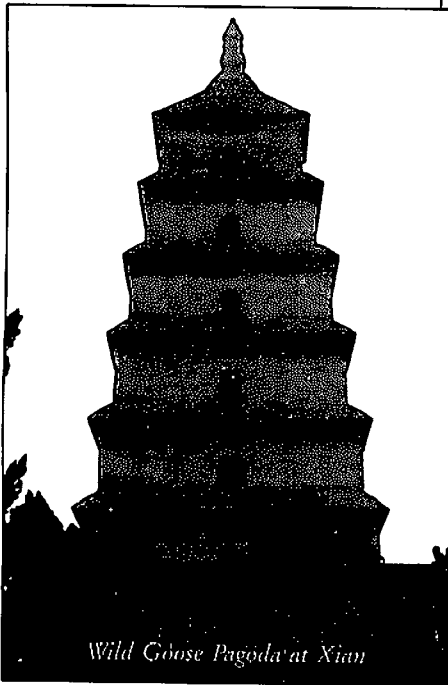
Photos from China



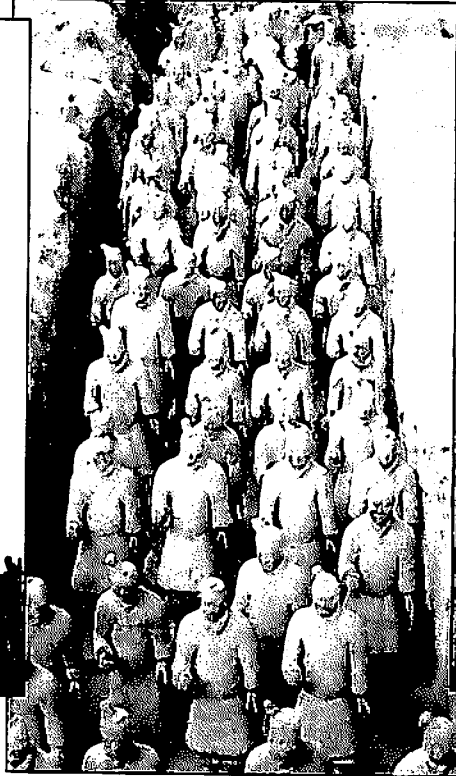
Great Wall with Olympic Slogan



Mao apartment houses built in the 50s and 60s



Wild Goose Pagoda at Xian



A Cast of Thousands at Xian

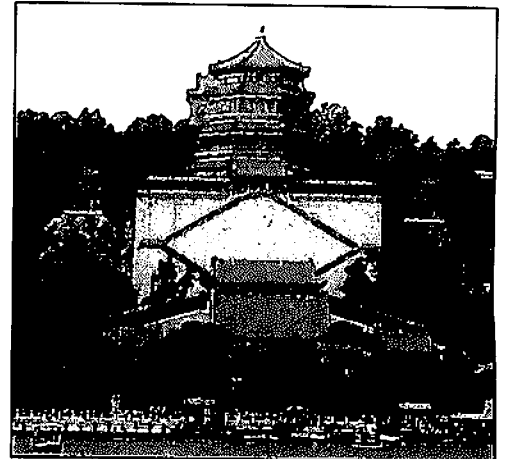


Tortured Soul at Ghost City

Photos by Mareta Tafel

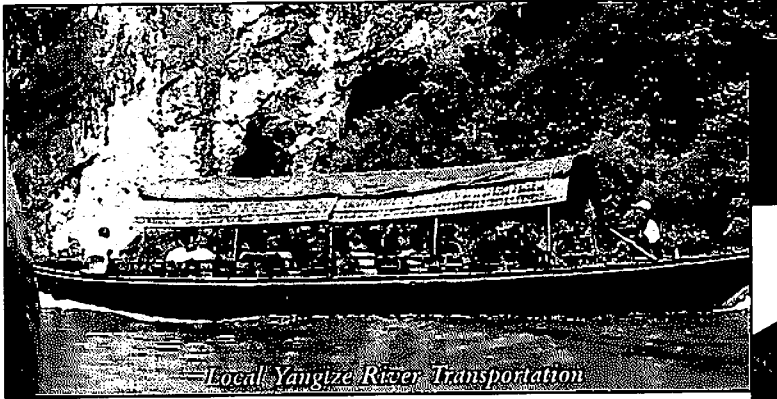


Tang Dynasty Dancers

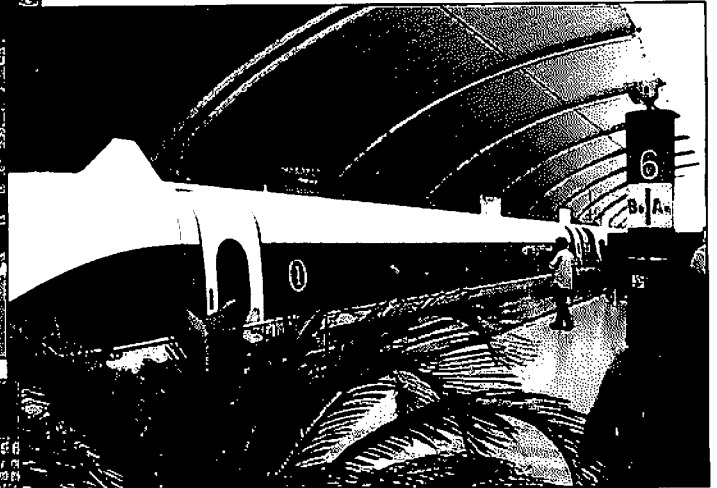


Summer Palace Outside Beijing

Photos from China



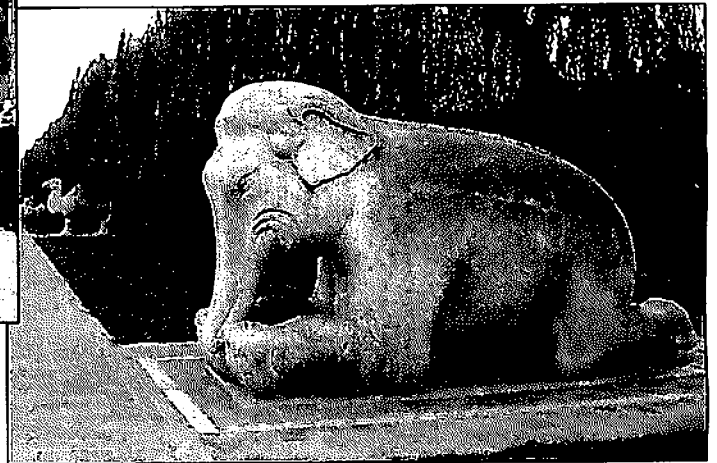
Local Yangtze River Transportation



Maglev Train in the station at Shanghai



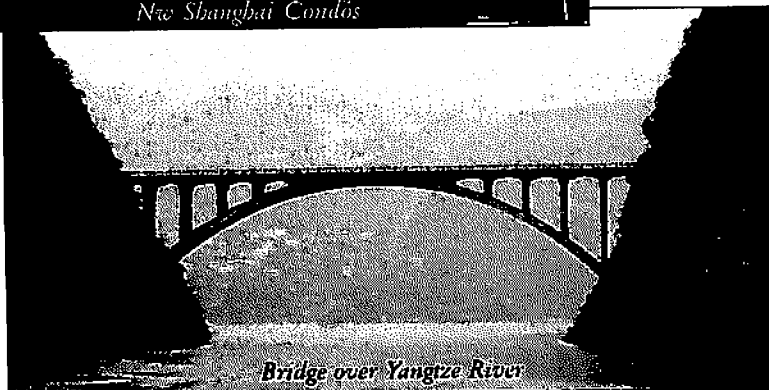
Old Shanghai neighborhood (hutong) to be razed



Parade of Animals near Ming Tomb



New Shanghai Condos



Bridge over Yangtze River



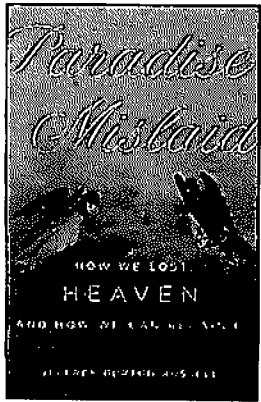
European Shanghai

PARADISE MISLAID

by Jeffrey Burton Russell
Published by Oxford University
Press, 2006

Reviewed by Paul Zacharias

The title of this book, *Paradise Misland*, is drawn from the author's



contention that over the past century or so the whole idea of heaven has been badly misunderstood, compromised and in general avoided. But heaven has

always been a central teaching of the Christian faith, and if there is no heaven, no resurrection of the dead, then the entire Christian system makes no sense. Christians are often referred to as the "Easter people." Heaven is at the core of our Christian belief structure.

In this stimulating book Russell seeks to rehabilitate heaven by addressing the many arguments that have made the concept of heaven difficult to understand or accept for many modern people. He has an especially interesting section of the book where he explores the many arguments that science brings up in regard to heaven, and deals with these issues in a very telling and persuasive manner. Along the way he looks at the views of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, Mark Twain and Alfred Lord Tennyson, Marx and Freud, Jung and Albert Schweitzer, and a host of others. He sheds light not only on the history of Christian thought, but also on the

secularization of the West in recent centuries. Throughout the book Russell invites readers, whatever their beliefs, to examine all the evidence, then make up their own minds regarding their beliefs about heaven.

In the course of the book the author walks through two thousand years of religious history, seeing how the idea of heaven has evolved and changed over the centuries...and what it means for our twenty-first century world. The focus of the book is strictly on heaven, with only passing mention of hell, purgatory, angels and other related subjects.

The idea of heaven goes back to our earliest recorded history, as found in ancient Egypt, and earlier cultures. Many of these concepts have been extremely varied and different, but the common theme persists. In today's world about three billion Christians and Muslims believe in some form of life after death. Hindus, Buddhists and many other religions have beliefs analogous to heaven, so in total, about 85-90% of the world's population believes in some version of heaven. Studies indicate that individuals' concepts of heaven differ greatly, but the characteristics usually attributed to heaven are: peace and tranquility, union with God, reunion with loved ones, and loving intellectual fellowship. The heart of the idea is simple: God pours out the cosmos with and in love...and invites the cosmos to share this love with others and back to God, thus completing the circle of Divine Love.

The classical concept is that heaven is where God is, in love and desire. Where there is love and gratitude, there is God. God is the

center and source of all that is. "Where is God? Where is heaven? Nowhere, in the sense of place within cosmic space; everywhere, in the sense of being present in every place."

As Swedenborg reminds us, there is no place or time or event in which God is not fully present. Heaven is inseparable from God. God is eternal. God exists in time and space and also transcends them, therefore so does heaven. To think in terms of God being outside of physical time and space, it might be better to use the word "subsist" than "exist." The past, present and future are always "there," in God's eternal moment. There is only God. And God created, and creates, the world and the cosmos from himself. This ongoing creation stems from love, a selfless, perfect love aimed only at the creation of more good. And being morally perfect in himself, the only way that God can create more goodness is by creating something/someone other than himself who can make free moral choices. Thus the creation of human beings, gifted with moral purposes and choices, and endowed with reason and free will. We can choose to love God and other fellow beings, or we can choose self love. Both choices have consequences.

Love is the whole point of our existence; it is not sentimental or mushy. Our eternal destination is not a matter of reward and punishment, but rather, it's based on our consistent intentional choices.

And what is the soul that lives after death? Our souls include personality, character, individuality and consciousness. Your soul

(Continued on following page)

PARADISE MISLAID

(Continued from previous page)

is "you"—all of you! What happens when we die? According to Christian belief, we are eternally present in heaven with God. Heaven is what we are made for; it is the complete fulfillment of all our potential in complete joy. Heavenly fulfillment is not static, but dynamic...we become increasingly more perfect and fulfilled. Heaven is the opposite of boredom, because the joys and uses continually increase. Christians believe that heaven is just; no one is there who does not wish to be there, and everyone is as close to God as he or she wishes to be. Each person is continually fulfilled to his or her greatest potential. There are degrees of love, as it is received and expressed...and this love includes desire, friendship, devotion, joy and inner happiness. Individuals never cease to be individuals.

Swedenborg's views of heaven receive about three pages in the book, generally in a positive tone, though it is obvious that Russell doesn't quite understand the finer nuances of this teaching. He writes: "In heaven, you are gradually educated by angels (who are perfected humans who once lived in this world), you learn more and more, and then you pass into the "natural heaven." In the natural heaven you learn even more and become an angel yourself. (Those who because of their dark character refuse instruction by the angels choose the path of hell.) Most become ready eventually for the next stage, the "spiritual" heaven, where you do good works in fellowship and justice, in the direction of the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor...Swedenborg's heavens

had all the attributes of this world, including houses, food, games, cities, friendships, love, marriage, and sexual relations (though not procreation). Such cheerful views allow people to look forward to death and a lovely, welcoming heaven rather than fearing—as in classical Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox theology—Judgment."

Later on Russell writes: "The prestige and power of the scientific establishment intimidated many liberal Christians, preventing them from understanding that scientists' definitions of "reality" are themselves based on metaphysical assumptions. There were exceptions, of course, notably the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), whose elaborate and sensuous views of heaven were drawn from Swedenborgian and similar movements." (Do readers have any further information on this suggested Swedenborgian - Mormon connection?)

In summary, Russell is convinced that heaven is here and now, a spiritual state that is ceaseless, dynamic, restful, harmonious opening up to God and his cosmos in love, gratitude and generosity. And truly believing in heaven really means living a life of love. What we say is important; what we do is more important; and what we are is most important.

Taste and see: heaven is here and now if we only allow ourselves to open up to it.

A very interesting, readable and helpful book, though Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* is much more detailed, insightful and complete.

The Rev. Paul Zacharias is a retired Swedenborgian minister living in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada ☛

The World Behind This One

Some Indians say there is a world behind this one and I believe it's true.
When I meditate I can feel its nature as I transcend the bonds of desire and fame; I feel the nature of divinity as it slips away.

The tug of war between this world and the next means that I suffer. Perhaps I am supposed to know the suffering in order to understand and to empathize with others.
To know both worlds means at one time I'm in bliss and at another time I'm in the soup.

Some Indians say there is a world behind this one and I believe it's true.
Yet today some of us do well with this world and its gambling, its food, its hype—the entertainment world. We become a great big audience.

Our cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments. Young Indians don't give a shit about the old stories.
No oral traditions and no rites of passage. Just my rights and yours.
Don't show me signs of the solstice, Just give me my cell phone and my money.

The Yogi is there if I want him, And the two worlds can be reconciled if I work hard enough.
Breathe deep. Meditate.
Try not to be overwhelmed, Dear Indian soul...

Some Indians say there is a world behind this one and I believe it's true.
Can I live that calmer, quieter world and not be distracted?
Not be competitive?
Not be acquiring?
Not be acquisitive?

The Indian and the yogi in me will now become one For a moment and maybe more.
I will stay quiet. I will pay attention.
I will chop the wood and carry the water.

—Jeff Holt ☛

General Council Summary Report

November 2-4, Framingham, Mass.

The agenda was approved with changes; minutes and votes from all previous meetings were reviewed and re-approved.

Report from the President:

Chris Laitner provided an extensive written report which was provided to all members present. Other topics covered were the need for a job description for the president, the recent cabinet meeting which was held via conference call, five installation services that had been performed and a joyful report on the new Lansing Swedenborgian Church in Michigan. There was also a brief update on the Cyber Ministry and how the upcoming year would indeed be one with a focus on change.

Executive Committee: Reports were also received from the Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. The Treasurer reported on information from the Investment Committee meeting. There was further financial information provided on donations toward the new Swedenborgian Community, a letter from the Wayfarers Chapel Board of Managers, the St. Louis Church deed and the Edmonton Church mortgage.

Central Office: Martha Bauer provided an extensive written report which was provided to all members present. Details were also provided on the serious problems existing in the building where they are located. While the problems were significant and caused problems, it was felt that the presence of the Central office at the Newtonville Church was an important element of support for this small congregation.

SHS Board of Trustees: Herb Ziegler, member of General Council and assistant treasurer of

the SHS board provided the report from the Swedenborgian School of Religion. Topics covered included the PSR Development Office presentation to the SHS Board meeting in October, the increasing number of graduates and the importance of the SHS Library to the Pacific School of Religion.

Council of Ministers: Rev. Eric Allison provided a list of activities undertaken as Chair of the Council of Ministers (COM). The CAM (Committee on Admission to the Ministry) handbook is almost completed and printing is being finalized. An update was provided on the new students wanting to enter the ministry and it was pointed out that many people are entering SHS based upon finding Swedenborgianism while taking classes at PSR. Eric also covered the need for more basic ministerial courses and how there is currently plenty of opportunity for growth.

St. Louis Church: A new deed is in process and an update will be provided by the Treasurer when it becomes available.

National Church: The Vice-President acts as Chair of the National Church (D.C.) Board of Trustees and that entity is currently undergoing a restructuring. The church was praised for its exemplary building usage, and it was noted that Rev. Andy Stinson had started as the new half-time minister.

Denominational Fund Raising: The President appointed Barbara Cullen to act as the General Council representative for having articles placed in *The Messenger* to identify how denominational dollars are at work for the benefit of all.

General Council approved a request for \$1,500 to fund the 2007 Swedenborg Lecture. This annual event brings a visiting scholar to Urbana University to research in the Swedenborg Collection and to present public lectures on Swedenborgian history, etc.

Cabinet Report: It had been suggested by Cabinet to hire a denominational webmaster. The matter was reviewed in depth and was felt to be an important move with the amount of information currently being shared and transmitted electronically. Without more detailed information, the Council felt that the Support Units need to provide further data and the President would appoint a representative from General Council to insure that sufficient information is gathered from the Support Units to allow General Council to make a decision on this important matter at their Spring Conference Call. Cabinet had also asked that there be a denominational fundraising program implemented and suggested that the Sunday closest to January 29th (Swedenborg's birthday) be designated as a time for giving to the denomination.

Salary Policy: In an effort to reduce cost and effort on the part of the Central Office staff, Council approved the paying of honorariums twice a year in lieu of the current monthly manner.

MINSU/AFC: Council reviewed the funding procedures of both the Ministries Support Unit and the Augmentation Fund Committee, which were updated this past year.

Visioning: The General Council spent time in smaller groups to discuss the current financial

(Continued on following page)

Theholycity.net Further Explained

Dear Editor

Can you tell me anything more about "The holycity.net" described on the front page of the November *Messenger*? It looked like a web address or a planned web site, but I found nothing like that on a web search. Maybe it is not set up yet? It is described as "an emergent New Church of the airwaves." So does that imply it will be a radio or television ongoing program? Or something else? Sounds like a good idea, but leaves the reader hanging. I am both curious and interested.

Any light would be appreciated.

Rev. Dr. Bill Woofenden
Bowdoinham, Maine
billwoof@suscom-maine.net

Dear Bill,

Thank you for your interest. The Holy City is a planned website which will feature webcasts and podcasts, more than the written word. It is aimed at the younger generation, who do not care for brand names or long treatises, but care greatly about good and true ways to live their lives in a complex world. They care about making a difference in that world, and having substantial values to teach their children.

Hence the Holy City Church of the Airwaves (theholycity.net) is a new church, which will make use of the new media to engage people in "working for the Lord in bringing in the New Age, the descent of the Holy City, New Jerusalem" (Article

I Section 2, Constitution of General Convention). It will descend from the noosphere, or the realm of thought and spiritual substance whence everything comes. Our name for that engagement is Active Holiness. We are promoting lives of Active Holiness, regardless of what people call themselves.

We are currently in the design phase, with the intention of having a prototype site up by the new year, 2007. We are putting together the funding and infrastructure to move forward, and your interest and support in any form are appreciated.

I will keep you posted, if you like. Again, thanks for your interest.

Rev. W. Hunter Roberts
Napa, California
hunter@trans-arts.com ☩

General Council Summary Report (Continued from previous page)

operations of the denomination and to consider possibilities for creating more efficient and cost-saving methods for operating our church. These ideas are being reviewed and worked on and will be refined during both the Spring Conference Call and at the Pre-Convention meeting.

Cyber Ministry: Susan Wood-Ashton provided an update on the progress that had been made with the new Swedenborgian Community. General Council discharged the current ad hoc committee with a great deal of thanks for all their efforts, and appointed a new ad hoc committee to act as a steering committee to help move the Community to the next level of

growth. This program is being currently funded as a Program of General Council.

Budget for 2007: After considerable study, discussion, and review, the final budget for 2007 was approved by General Council with \$770,760 in unrestricted general funds, and \$909,616 in restricted funds for a total of \$1,680,375.

Future Meetings: The Spring Conference Call was set for Saturday March 17, 2007 at 11:00am Eastern Time. The Kansas Association graciously invited General Council to Kansas for the fall 2007 meeting.

Theme for Convention 2007: Several options were discussed during the meeting and the discus-

sion continued for several weeks after the meeting via the Swedenborgian Community Discussion Forum. To facilitate discussions of General Council, the Community would be establishing a special Forum which would be restricted to General Council members only.

Evaluation: As a final task, Council evaluated the meeting, its content and its efficiency. The president kept a list of all input for review and use at future meetings.

Following the General Council meeting, Council acting as Trustees, held individual business meetings for the Iungerich Fund, the Lehnen Fund and the Frank Fund.

Susan Wood-Ashton
Recording Secretary ☩

Interpretations of Earths in the Universe

Dear Editor,

Steve Koke's article on *Earths in the Universe* (November 2006 *Messenger*) is a welcome stimulation, especially just when the Swedenborg Foundation is selling *Life on Other Planets* with a thought-provoking introduction by Raymond Moody.

The idea that there was life on the planets in the past does not appeal to Mr. Koke. Although I am no expert, I would like to offer a little defense of that idea.

Here are three points for speculation about life on Mars:

1) Swedenborg says he saw life on planets outside our solar system. Yes, actually saw through the eyes of spirits who were with people living on those planets. (See numbers 134 & 135.) But he never reports seeing life on the planets in our solar system. Presumably nobody was home in his day.

2) A notable portion of the material Swedenborg gives about Mars has to do with a vision of a bird that turned to stone. Some people see this as a symbol of life that died out. (See numbers 94-96.)

3) The December issue of *Scientific American* presents a startling new view of Mars as it was in the past. Plentiful water and mild temperatures for thousands and thousands, nay millions, of years. "Mars may have had an Earth-like climate for as much as a third of the planet's history and perhaps longer."

Mr. Koke finds the picture of huge numbers of people dying off "incredible." But stop and think about deaths of large numbers of people. Need this be seen as tragedy? *Heaven and Hell* speaks of thousands dying every single

day. Death is but a transition to eternal life.

Rev. Don Rose

Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Steve Koke Responds

Of course that picture has all of the characteristics of tragedy. Why kill off a population when it can stick around and perpetually grow more people for heaven, far more than the current population could contribute to heaven in a mass extinction? We would, and should, feel badly about it. Such things merely point out the sad and complicating logic of a theory of mass extinction. It is too likely to get us into trouble without a lot more information, which we don't have. The theory that everyone on the other planets died is much more transparently an act of desperation on our part because we cannot find anyone out there now and thus validate Swedenborg more directly. So another thesis has to be brought in with obviously troublesome implications. It's not a good tradeoff.

Swedenborg's *Other Planets* turns out instead to be quite rigorous in its pursuit of good argument. He tells us in n. 47 that no spirit or angel can see the planets. That fact about what *cannot* be seen keeps the angels who advise him about inhabitants without validation of what they say. What the angels must end up with is actually *seeing* the people they talk about on *identifiable* planets. That goal is not achieved, and the planets could not be seen clearly enough in the telescopes of the time to validate anything of the sort. The result is theory, though it had a lot of willing agreement in the high optimism of the 17th and

18th centuries before astronomy could become much more sophisticated. The arguments for life everywhere that Swedenborg presents in his first chapter were not his; they were first advanced a century and a half earlier by other theorists.

As I explained in the article, it is alright to believe a good theory, for a good theory is one which currently accounts for all of the available evidence. No one can blame you for believing a good theory. But one must pause before saying that the theory is a fact. What then challenges us is how to actually validate the theory and turn it into what it here would only hope to be, a *material* fact that would correctly anticipate a scientific discovery. Swedenborg tried instead to tell us just how much we can invest in the statements of angels who can only see what is in the spiritual world: many people of many different kinds, but precisely locatable on our planets? Not quite.

And he tells us as well that doctrine isn't on the table here: Doctrine, he tells us in various places—in a formula we do need to keep in mind because it is such a useful rule—is given only by the Lord and not by any angel. In *Other Planets* (*Earths in the Universe*) we have only the thoughts and explorations of angels, and only in the spiritual world where planets cannot be seen and positively identified as this one or that one. The angels could use correspondences of the sequence of the planets from the sun (n. 45), but only on the current assumption that pervaded educated Europe that all planets are inhabited. Given that, you only have to figure out

(Continued on following page)

Alliance of New Church Women

The 103 Annual Meeting of the Alliance of New Church Women in North America was held at Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio, on June 30, 2006, at their annual luncheon.

The officers elected for 2006-2007 are:

President:	Katie Shelley
1st /vice-President:	Thelma Hawkins
2nd Vice-President:	Beth Harvie
Secretary:	Barbara Tourangeau
Treasurer:	Jeanette Hille
Mite Box Chair:	Barbara Boxwell
Religious Chair:	Sage Currie
Round Robin Chair:	Marilee Phinney
Publication Chair:	Nancy Freestone

Nominating Committee:

2006—Eli Dale, Maine
2007—Polly Baxter, Ohio
2008—Betsy Coffman, Ohio
2009—Nancy Freestone, California
2010—Denyse Daurat, Mass.
2011—Missy Sommer



Rev. Jane Siebert accepted the Mite Box check for \$474.50 for Gathering Leaves. President Katie Shelley (right).

The Women's Alliance Mite Box recipient this year will be Rev. Rita Russell. Rita is a minister in the British Conference who would like to join us at next year's convention in Michigan. The proceeds from the Mite Box will help to defer the cost of travel and transportation for Rita to come here in 2007. ☩

And Looking Forward to Next Year's Convention...

A two-day, guided, scenic, Motor-Coach trip up the shoreline of Lake Michigan is being planned for next year's Convention. This pre-Convention tour is Monday, June 25th and Tuesday, June 26th, 2007 with an overnight stay in Machinaw City. Possible stops on Monday may include Silver Lake State Park near Pentwater, 'Gwen Frostic' Studios in Benzonia, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore near Empire, a visit to a vineyard with wine tasting near Traverse City. Possible stops on

Tuesday to include Machinaw Bridge, 'Cross in the Woods' near Indian River, Hartwick Pines State Park near Grayling, 'Shrine in the Pines' near Baldwin. We will look at what Swedenborg has to say about Michigan's Natural Wonders.

We will let you know more as this trip unfolds.

There's still room! Please contact: Barb Boxwell at 989 835 8963 or bpboxwell@juno.com or Sandy Coveart at 989 636 7674 or scoveart@charter.net ☩

PASSAGES

Marriage

Goodwin-Baxter—Leah Grace Goodwin and Rev. Kevin Keith Baxter, member and pastor respectively of the Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel, were united in marriage October 28, 2006, at the Church of the Holy City in Washington, DC, with the Rev. William L. Fox, long-time friend of both families, officiating. The bride's attendants included fellow Missing Rachel singers Rebecca Kline Esterson, Rebekah Simons, the Rev. Sarah Buteux; the groom's party included Kevin's brother Bill as best man, Jonathan Pults, Missy Sommer, and Beth Harvie. ☩

Interpretations of Earths in the Universe

(Continued from previous page)

what kind of person would live on which planet.

Putting people on every planet is not the only way to make sense of the solar system. Planets can have help from others and are not always self-sufficient. Earth benefits a great deal from the presence of the other planets. That solar systems are large ecological systems is a trend in current research.

So what was Swedenborg trying to do? Evidently he was doing what is recommended in good scholarly procedure—borrowing the knowledge and credibility of currently respected studies in order to add weight, further credibility, to one's own theses, here those about the purpose of the universe: It is the nursery of the human race and therefore of a very large angelic heaven.

There is no need for a theory of planetary extinctions.

Steve Koke ☩

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.

National Church a Site of Building Restoration and Renewed Energy.

Jim Erickson

It is always a pleasant task to report good news to the members of Convention. As a recipient of Convention funds to support its maintenance and security, activities at our National Church Washington, D.C.) in recent years are good news. Church of the Holy City is undergoing a flurry of building restoration, renewal of energy, commitment throughout the congregation, and exciting plans for the future that can benefit all of Convention.

Through obligated funds and some additional funds from Convention, good leadership, and impressive fundraising efforts, the church is transforming from a building badly in need of repairs to one that boasts of dramatic changes. Armed with an architectural evaluation and repair plan, Rich Tafel and others implemented restoration work that includes roof repairs, replacing gutters, stopping leaks, and many other improvements. The building is now on the road to restoration. Resurfaced floors, new carpeting, refurbished rooms, and a lot of cleaning also add much to the renewal of this wonderful building.

Under the watchful eye of Administrator Michael Parrish, rental of building space



produces an impressive income to pay for improvements and cover operating costs. Some neighbors inspired by the efforts of parishioners and love of the building have helped by doing yard work and donating iron work window coverings for the meeting room.

Other changes taking place include plans to establish a national board of trustees that will fulfill the original intent of the founders. Currently, General Council serves as the board.

Church members also began an exciting new action plan which will increase its national presence in service to General Convention. This will make it possible for Convention members to use CHOC members as representatives to bring concerns to elected officials on Capitol Hill.

By their excellent leadership, plans for the future, hard work in protecting a valuable property of General Convention, our National Church members provide a model of church stewardship. They deserve the support of everyone.

Jim Erickson is the vice-president of the denomination, and a member of the Virginia St. Swedenborgian Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. ☩

The Swedenborgian Church
of North America
The Messenger
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460

Address Service
Requested

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Plymouth, IN
Permit No. 105