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Letter from the Editor

5 September 2025 San José, Costa Rica

Dear Messenger Readers,

I send each of you my warmest greetings. I had the pleasure of being the guest editor for the month of October, and I hope to make you proud. Translations of the texts in Spanish, Korean, and French will be made available further on in October. Typical-ly, I am someone who likes to keep everything exactly the same, really it's a family tradition. I have a temporary freak-out any time I go into a shop and they've changed the layout, so if any reader is automatically bitter about the changes presented here, I can relate. However, sometimes, change can be a good thing. September is a slow month. Coming at the end of the frenzy of the summer and all the associated activities, there just aren't as many events to report on. But this is a blessing. As we go into the month of October and into the autumn, we are invited to consider what one of my spiritual teachers called the "slowing of the world; the return to contemplation."

Though our journal has in recent years been primarily concerned with the happenings within our community, what this edition chooses to add is an assertive take on the power of Swedenborgian thought tailored not only to our community but also with consideration for society at large. In the nineteenth century, the messenger was the arena where some of the most pressing intellectual concerns of the day were discussed, pondered, and even fought over. In a very real way this edition gestures back to that period of intense intellectual debate. I do not, however, see this in opposition to the other work of keeping connected our disparate members throughout the nation and the world, only adding to it. The fact is that we have both the capacity to be interested in our friends and families and their activities as well as the theological implications of the teachings of Swedenborg and his hope for wider social renewal. To use the language of the Gospels, anything less would be "hiding our light under a bushel."

In this edition, with Jim Lawrence's article on the history of the Swedenborgian symbol, Sue Ditmire's discussion about the example of Robert Carter III, and my own article on the most misunderstood Swedenborgian theologian, William Blake, we are showing a profound awareness of our roots. History is fundamentally always concerned with either inspiration or warning, and in enlivening the past we often find the pathways to go forward. In the Renaissance, it was in the imaginative return to the Classical age that poets, painters, and thinkers were given courage to think and dream anew. I hope something similar can happen within our movement today.

Though many harbor negative feelings about the future of our movement, I wish to speak of courage and perseverance. We come from one of the most intellectually dynamic spiritual traditions in the Western world, and in learning to reclaim the radicalism of our thought, we make the way possible for future generations to come to fi nd solace in the teachings we have preserved. The world hungers for a way of going deeper into the heart of compassion, to know the Jesus taught in the Gospels and further elaborated in the works of our teacher, Emanuel Swedenborg.

The Messenger is our tool to express our communal confidence in the appearance of the New Jerusalem, and like the Holy City, it has room both for those previous generations of believers as well as those who shall meet with us in the future. I hope the passion of the editor can be felt in its pages, and I warmly invite any and all of you to share your insights, stories, and visions so that we might advance further along that eternal road to Emmaus and finally recognize the face of our Lord.

I hope each of you enjoys this special, and long :), edition of *The Messenger*.

With my greatest respect,

Dell J. Rose



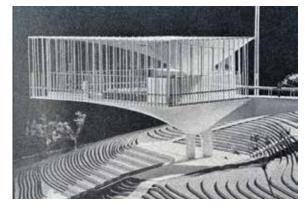
And my thanks to my my Co-editors Mr. Nyx (black and white) and Willie Meowson (tawny). As Freud said, "time spent with cats is never wasted." I heartily agree.

The Story of the

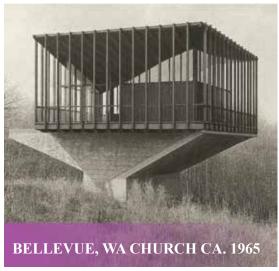
Swedenborgian Cross, Jim Lawrence

A Grassroots Emblem for a Modern Church Denominational emblems became increasingly common among organized religions in the twentieth century. The Swedenborgian Church of North America finally adopted one in the 1980s, but it didn't emerge from a master plan. Instead, it grew organically from a creative project in a local ministry. What they produced is now known as the Swedenborgian Cross.

Denominational emblems (or logos) became increasingly common among organized religions in the twentieth century.



The Swedenborgian Church of North America finally adopted one in the 1980s, but it didn't emerge from a master plan. Instead, it grew organically from a creative project in a local ministry. What they produced is now known as the Swedenborgian Cross.



The innovative approach captured the imagination of the church's seminary, and Project Link and Church of the Good Shepherd became a primary field education site for ministers in training.

The emblem evolved from a New Church ministry started by Rev. Cal Turley (1924-1984) in Bellevue on the east side of Seattle, called The Church of the Good Shepherd. This was his second ministry out of seminary and built upon his innovative neighborhood outreach in Portland, Oregon-work so successful that his congregation there built a striking new modernist building. As the Church of the Good Shepherd gained momentum, Cal wanted to explore fresh ways of engaging contemporary spiritual seekers. Start Here. He recruited Rev. David Johnson (1912-2010) and his brother Rev. Owen Turley (1920-2007) to join him in a team ministry approach, developing a religion and psychology program as a model for church ministry. They eventually secured a major denominational grant to launch a program called Project Link. Project Link: Bridging Religion and Psychology Project Link was conceived as a mid-century response to changing demographics and an emerging spirituality that emphasized psychology. The program featured interactive services and placed a strong emphasis on small group work. As the congregation grew rapidly, they built a Wayfarers-inspired modernist church—a square, clear glass structure raised high on a pedestal so worshippers and program participants could look out at the world as they journeyed in their faith.

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The Cross, the Circle, and the Square

The group finally settled on three timeless symbols to explore and develop into an emblem: the cross, the circle, and the square. They hired a local professional designer who specialized in public relations campaigns to create an emblem incorporating this trinity of meaningful symbols. After several collaborative sessions, he presented the design that would eventually become the denomination's signature emblem. Project Link's archived records reveal the rich symbolism they assigned to each element. The circle represents the radiant divine going forth everywhere throughout heaven and earth. The four interlocking squares symbolize humanity's fullness across the four corners of the world. The cross represents the Divine Human drawing everything together, partly through the Church, in a fusion of upward and inward destiny

The emblem immediately sparked excitement

and inspired many throughout the denomination. There was a powerful sense that they had profoundly captured the essence of Swedenborgian thought. Ministry after ministry began incorporating it into their materials and displaying it on their signboards. The Messenger, the denomination's official publication, featured it on the publication's banner. Through a grassroots, popular movement, the Swedenborgian Church of North America gained an emblem recognized by many in religious and spiritual circles—what some now call the Swedenborgian Cross.

One church small group embarked on a creative project to design a symbol that might capture the essence of Swedenborgian thought. Carl Jung's psychological and spiritual theories about symbols inspired the group as they explored Swedenborgian correspondences. Jung, himself a preacher's kid, had become one of the twentieth century's most compelling theorists, bridging religion and psychology. He believed symbols serve as the primary doorway to the Unconscious, where our impulses for making meaning emerge. Swedenborg, also a preacher's kid, believed spiritual correspondence creates an energy system that intensifies when our living aligns with the power of love and the wisdom of understanding.

Legacies of the Project Link Ministerselt inspired to

pursue a doctorate in psychology and religion at Claremont Theological Seminary, later becoming Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at the Swedenborg School of Religion until his death. Owen Turley retired from ministry after Project Link, while David Johnson earned additional credentials in counseling and psychology and continued ministering even after his official retirement. The glass church was eventually sold, and the congregation gradually dwindled to a house church by the early eighties. That's when newly ordained Rev. Paul Martin decided to attempt a restart in Bellevue, opening a bookstore in the well-known historic Stone House—a building with enough space to also host innovative psychology and religion groups and programs. Rev. Martin brought both a seminary education and a master's degree in psychology to his work. What became known as The Stonehouse grew dramatically over three decades, relocating three times on Seattle's east side as growth demanded more space.

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What became known as The Stonehouse grew dramatically over three decades, relocating three times on Seattle's eastside as growth demanded more space. His concurrent development of a retreat center, Mosswood Hollow, a half-hour north of Seattle's eastside, required new challenges for adequate pastoral leadership of the church community. Eventually, with Paul Martin's retirement and the closure of the Stonehouse, the congregation became a house church again with a small membership recently served by Licensed Pastor Helen Barler, who this past year needed to relocate out of state. At the present time, the congregation's president, business entrepreneur Michael Robbins, is planning a new launch called "Crosshatched" that will emphasize virtual gatherings with a distinctive spiritual approach. And so Cal Turley's original new-start ministry in Seattle continues

As for the Swedenborgian Cross born through Seattle's new-start ministry, perhaps poetically, the designer's actual name never appears in Project Link's many pages of records. What is documented, however, is that his work with Project Link moved him so deeply that he refused any payment for what he created with them.



Cal Turley

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence studied under Rev. Dr. Cal Turley for three years in seminary and currently serves as president of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

If you can live in your dreams while you are awake, you are more than halfway there. Rev. Cal Turley.

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Along the Testimonies from the Swedenborgian Path Spiral Way: Dell J. Rose

Unlike the straight line, which brings us with exactness from point A to point B, the spiral is unconcerned with efficiency. Its motion causes the eye to retrace itself, to reconsider the same movements over and over, and to abruptly dissolve into a central point in an extended, though finite, repetition. It is, in my own estimation, a profound metaphor for the walk of faith.

It is the story of our yearning Repetition may numb us to our spiritual growth, and at times the journey to heaven feels like a mere plodding along a path with no clear goal in sight. In moments like these it is important to keep the testimonies of others in our minds. The story of our redemption is not a momentary dowsing of revelation but a continual baptism in the sweat of doubt and in the tears of joy that come when it seems that the holy city can be seen through the windows of our life. It is the story of our yearning to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to make it, we need one another.



My Walk

This series aims to present the realities of the

of faith in terms of our own stories. Beyond generalisations, a public space to confess openly a living conviction in the truth of the Lord's second coming in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

In the early Church it was the blood of the martyrs that did more for the spread of the Gospel than anything Cyril of Alexandria or Clement of Rome actually wrote or argued. In the face of the human experience, for good or ill, arguments add little. St. Francis realised this when he famously said, 'preach the gospel in everything you do, and only if necessary, use words.' It is from your lives that the power of our unique, if eccentric, message will be believed and understood, and we should always make time to share the power of our personal experiences with others—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Furthermore, with the spiral we are in good company. Human religious culture is stalked by spirals. Newgrange, a Neolithic structure in County Meath, tells its story in terms of psychedelic swirls. In Ancient Greece there was the holy temenos (τέμενος) which marked the space where the gods might be consulted in relative safety. Though nothing divine is without risk, of course. From Sanskrit we have the term mandala, मण्डल, which, aside from its theological implications in the Dharmic faiths, means simply 'circle.' These circular religious formations frame human experience as both cyclical and complete, holding within their form the rise and fall of seasons, the turning of ages, and the flux of individual lives. They suggest that all change unfolds inside a greater, unbroken whole — a totality in which every beginning and ending is already embraced.

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This same impulse winds through the labyrinths of medieval Christianity, where each deliberate step becomes an opening for the mind to wander among the mysteries of faith. The maze confounds, yet in its confusion offers a strange clarity. So too the spiral, its narrowing rings drawing inward toward a concealed axis, becomes a fitting emblem of the life of faith: not a direct march, but a patient circling of an unchanging, unseen point.





Our illuminator, Emanuel Swedenborg, also speaks in the language of spirals in his journeys to the spirit world. In Conjugial Love 8, we find one of the most subtle and powerful images of the labyrinth, and I hope it sets the entire context for this series. After arriving in the spiritual world, and in the midst of all of the splendours of the angelic gardens, some good earthly souls began to despair. After a few days wandering around in the perfection of the garden, they began to wonder if true and lasting joy could be found. It seems that even in the luxurious setting of the angelic promenades, something was missing. In their confusion an angel appears who offers to guide them further.

"This is the labyrinth of paradise," the angel said, "the very entrance to heaven. I know the way through it and I will guide you... In heaven there are gardens of paradise everywhere, and from these the angels also draw their joys. Yet only in the measure that the soul's delight is within them are those joys truly joy to them." (My translation).

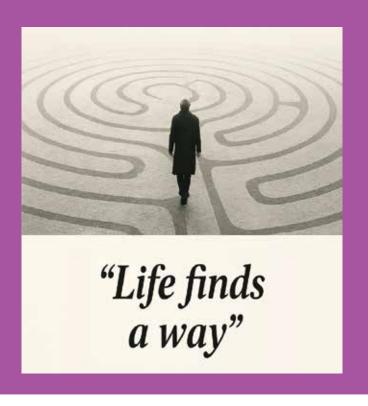
Even in paradise, we are never free from the task of listening to our lives. The Lord speaks to you directly through the medium of your being, and he asks you to reflect on who you really are. There is no other way to proceed further into the kingdom of heaven without self-reflection, and only when you can see heaven through the imperfect realities of the everyday can you expect to see it in the next world.

In this spirit, everyone is invited to share their own thoughts on their road to the Holy City.

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It is very rude for the editor to solicit such a request from others without first providing his own story, and it is why I decided I had to be the first to comment on my own path, my own concentric walk in the steps of our Master. I also want to stress that all our testimonies can only ever be where we are at this moment, in the grace we have sufficiently encountered up to this point. As I do not plan on dying after writing this, I hope it will inevitably change, and perhaps what I found so consequential now at this stage might be brushed over in a later assessment. No one should fear this. Change is a fundamental principle of manifested reality, and those who wish for revelation, insight, or grace to only appear in one format are spiritual taxidermists, content with the skin of the badger but not his bite, or the feathers of the bird without her song.

Life has an insipid way of wriggling out of the boundaries we set for it. To quote from Jeff Goldblum's character in Jurassic Park (1993): "Life finds a way." And did not our Lord tell us that it was indeed life that he wanted to give us? "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)



It is in this spirit that I open my own heart and hope others will do so as well. As I share my little story about how I encountered the Lord's appearing in the works of Swedenborg. As with any story, much remains unsaid or indeed unsayable, but I hope I can gesture towards the profound truths I feel I have discovered in Swedenborg's teachings.

In rereading this essay, I noted that the events of my life follow the course of my engagement with Swedenborg. My attempt to understand the principles he reveals shapes the many places I have gone and the intellectual pursuits I have undertaken. In short, I owe to him not just a great deal of religious confidence, but chasing his thoughts and their impact has guided everything I have ever done. I hope he's not too disappointed.



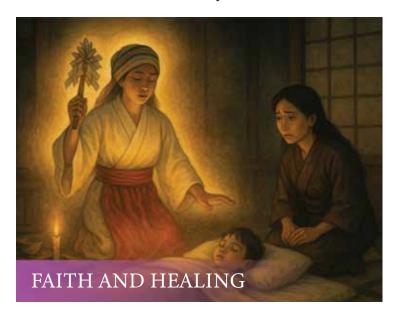
Family Roots

I had the benefit of having many mothers and fathers in my life—or so I called my aunts, uncles, family friends, and my nanny. As a child, I had a different variation of 'mama' for the five most important women in my life: Momall, Mama, Ma, Mamī, Mai-Mai. As I grew older, many of them passed away, so I was raised primarily by my mother and my aunt, my mother's sister-in-law, who was originally from Okinawa, Japan. She was the best person I've ever known, and I miss her desperately. My aunt, whom I would eventually come to call 'Ski-Ski' (Mamī to Ski-Ski), was born in 1937. She, like the vast majority of my family members, was considerably older. I was a surprise, and like Isaac in the Word, the joke was never lost on me.

Along The Spiral Way _______ 130

When I was a boy, I was exceptionally nervous around people under the age of 50, and I had the habit of asking adults what they did 'during the war.' I didn't mean it to be funny; it was just what my family talked about.

At ten, that's when I started listening to the conversation about the Bible between my great-uncle and the neighbours discussing the 'end-of-days.' My Ski-Ski told me a few stories of the Kami, though you shouldn't speak so much about them, and recounted how her mother once visited a nuruu (祝女), or female priestess, when she was younger and very sick. Her mother worried she would die and was terribly frightened by the priestess's cryptic message that she would be better 'when they went home.' Thinking she had died, they rushed home to find my aunt with her fever broken. Some might say healed. This taught me early on that the power of the Lord can be felt everywhere and that the specificities of faith often blind as much as they illuminate.



As with many of the best things in my life, I owe my introduction to Swedenborg to that nearly perfect being, the poet William Blake. I discovered Blake when I was twelve years old, and after reading his masterful poem, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1796), all I could ask myself was 'who was Emanuel Swedenborg?' As I did not have internet access at that time, I had to make due with a set of encyclopedias. In the article it listed almost every significant author or thinker of the nineteenth century as influenced by his work. Blake, Coleridge, and Kant-it was a litany of the greatest minds of the West, and I thought at the very least I should try my best to learn more about what it was that these mighty thinkers found in Swedenborg. At some later date, I came across references to the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, and I cold-called the cathedral and spoke to a gentleman by the name of Don Rose.

We discussed the origins of our names and why it was that I was calling, and this was the beginning of a long friendship where we exchanged letters to one another and scraps of information, and finally books. George Trobridge's *Swedenborg: Life and Teachings* was the first book that I ever read about Swedenborg himself, though for several years in my early teens, I had the habit of opening a book and searching for 'Swedenborg' in the index. In Trobridge's work however, I felt something I couldn't explain, an excitement that I had 'discovered' something in this eighteenth-century thinker that was going to be of exceptional importance to me. I just did not know how much. I went to a Christian university and a Christian high school run by Anabaptists, Mennonites, and Brethren. I loved their message of radical commitment to Jesus, but I could never fully embrace their rigid approach to the Word. The word for them was the realest of the real; it was internally coherent (even when it wasn't), and it was absolutely accurate, even to the point of denying the age of the earth. This all seemed a little thin to me, something that was hiding primordial insecurities. My school's commitment to a certain type of Christian politics was also very off-putting to me as well. This was during the Bush administration, and I was on my own in my prophetic campaign against everything it stood for. The Christianity of President Bush was part of his political brand, and this caused me to froth and spew in ways that I could not really comprehend. Christ stands in opposition to the standard practices of the world, but to my brothers and sisters in the school, he was the final arbiter justifying their own political project. I was raging.

I loved their message of radical commitment to Jesus, But I could never fully embrace their rigid approach to the word.

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With Don's guidance, at 14, I read through Divine Providence, and it was as though I was holding a fire in my hands, a text that offered a way to explain why the world in all its complexity and darkness had to be the way that it is. Theodicy, understanding how the goodness of the Lord can exist in the presence of a world that is fallen and evil, had been a constant topic of consideration for me; however, I also bristled at the way it was depicted. Most of the classical formulations of theodicy in the Western world also seemed to be lifeless, without pathos, and in the worst kind of way, 'dry.' But in Swedenborg's analysis, even the most seemingly incomprehensible acts of terror are an expression of a deeper spiritual dynamic that, while painful, was also essential to the continuation of the world. "The Lord's divine providence works things out so that what is both evil and false promotes balance, evaluation, and purification, which means that it promotes the union of what is good and true in others." I remember sitting all the way back on the leather sofa where I was reading, and saying verbally, 'yes.'

At university, I continued reading Swedenborg but added him to the chorus of other spiritual writers and teachers who so often appear in adolescence, and with my unending curiosity about other faith traditions. In 2009, when Don was already advanced in illness, I was finally able to go to Bryn Athyn. But I would not have the option to visit with him in person, in this world at any rate.

I cannot say when, but sometime in my early twenties, Swedenborg withdrew from the central place he had in my intellectual life, as I began to experiment with other expressions of faith. I had started at 22 to study classical Chinese, and I was particularly drawn to the teachings of Zhiy'i (智顗) (538-597), who was one of the most important thinkers of the T'ien-t'ai school of Buddhism. At the core of the T'ien-t'ai message is the radical importance of both ultimate reality and provisional existence, something that I felt was intimately connected with Swedenborg's message of both correspondence and also how each and every moment becomes a field of universal expression. Something that was also noted by Meiji-era Japanese followers of Zhiy'i, who compared Zhiy'i's teachings with that of Swedenborg, which is the subject of my forthcoming book.

I wavered back and forth throughout the years about what Swedenborg meant for me specifically, but I could never shake him. He was always there, especially during the many losses. It's a wonderful thing to be born into an older family, but the short time you get to spend with them is a serious tax. Ski-Ski died in 2013, and though I feel her with me always, the wound is still fresh. I'll carry it the rest of my life.

I did a master's degree in folklore. I wrote about a Gnostic-adjacent movement in Québec, la Mission de l'Esprit Saint, and they believed that human beings were fallen angels. I found myself instinctively turning to what Swedenborg says about angels, and then one of my collaborators asked me, 'is that what your church believes?' My church?' I thought to myself. In 2015, I moved to Santa Barbara, CA, and when I landed at LAX, my first thought was, 'The Wayfarer's chapel is here.' I messaged the pastor but never made it there for a service, something I will be forever sorry for.

I began my PhD work in Santa Barbara, studying under the immensity of Dr. Elliot Wolfson, a poet and scholar of incredible insight. The first independent study we held together—the first class I truly enjoyed in Santa Barbara—was a reading seminar where we discussed Swedenborg in relation to Jewish mysticism and the theology of Sabbatean theologian and Lutheran convert Johannes Kemper (1670-1716). Originally named Moshe ben Aharon Ha-Kohen of Kraków, he was a dear friend of Swedenborg's brother-in-law Erik Benzelius (1675-1743) and may have served as Swedenborg's Hebrew tutor. After reading through Kemper's 1704 Enlightenment of the Eyes מונים בייניע הריאם a dream where I was staring at the Arcana and after opening one of the volumes, I heard a voice—the late Michael Gambon's—repeating the phrase 'light for the eyes.' What could this mean? I asked myself again.

Along the Spiral Way _______ 132

From 2015 to the spring of 2017, I read through all of the available works of Emanuel Swedenborg, and what might have once been construed as only an intellectual interest soon became much, much more. I went to DC in 2017 and began working for a labor union. In DC, there was the Church of the Holy City, and it was the first time a Swedenborgian congregation was actually available to me. I went, and within moments I became part of a little family. Though Rich Tafel may tell it differently, I enjoyed most of his sermons, offering gentle critiques when needed. I sang for the church, preached a Good Friday service, met one of my dearest friends there, and laughed constantly. I finally felt like I could make the claim: 'Yes, this is my church. I am a Swedenborgian.'



Pictured above was the interior of the Church of the Holy City, DC.

It was also in DC where I met the light of my life, my husband, Quinn. When we first got together, he got to hear more than he bargained for about the writings of the Swedish master, and now I would call him a Swedenborgian by proxy. As for many gay people, the Christian church was not a friend, but as I have tried to stress time and time again, there is an ocean of difference between those who claim to speak for the risen Lord and our Lord himself. I think in many ways Swedenborg helps us to do that.

Covid happened. With my husband, Quinn, and another dear friend, we drove through 42 states during the pandemic. It was one of the best periods in my life—we got to move with

the pulse of this great land. The three of us and my bunny.

In Buffalo, a little community of international people from Singapore, Lebanon, Ethiopia, and the Philippines adopted Quinn and I. Within a few weeks, we'd made lifelong connections. Two of our friends were fleeing persecution, and we shared many long talks about the pains and misfortunes that follow this human path. I started a Sunday meditation mini-talk on Swedenborg and a debate club, all while wearing a robe. We cooked endless meals, and in that shady Airbnb, we tasted a small slice of heaven.

Ouinn and I moved to Mexico, then to the Netherlands. I began writing and speaking more about Swedenborg. At present, I have spoken on Swedenborgian themes on five continents, and I go wherever I'm asked. Most of this work involves academic research, showing the intricate ways that Swedenborg's ideas influenced disparate cultural spheres and became part of social movements working for human improvement. But sometimes it happens in private conversations with wayward drunken souls on the way to the chip shop. I pray in dry history, it seems.

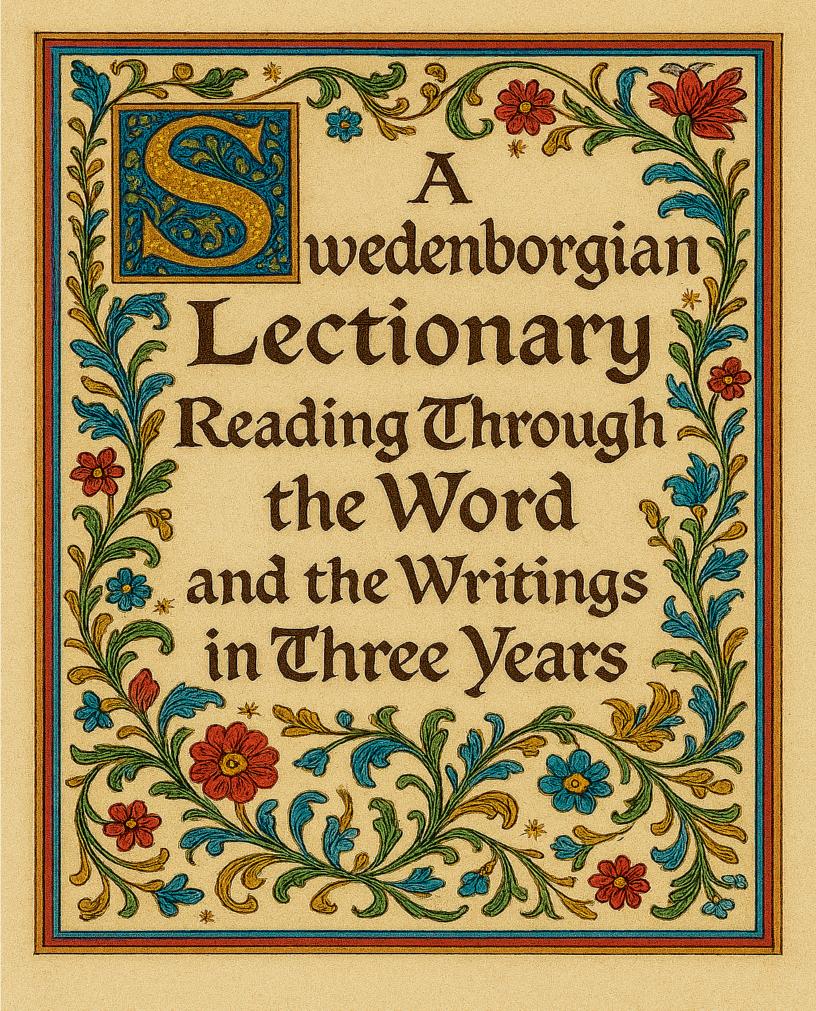


Dell and Quinn in Kentucky.

In 2022, Jim invited me to provide a mini-course for the convention. Speaking from the Galway coast of Ireland, I explored the connection between millenarianism and Swedenborg's early followers. There, without speaking to her directly, I met my dearest Karen Feil. Karen and I share a single missionary vision: Swedenborg's ideas offer a wonderful path forward for many people struggling with faith's claims, and his message can truly change lives. Further, we believe all truth claims deserve critical investigation using our full intellect. After I spoke for the Chicago society at the 130th anniversary of the Parliament of the World's Religions, Quinn and I moved to Chicago in May 2024.

"Karen and I share a single missionary vision: Swedenborg's ideas offer a wonderful path forward for many people struggling with faith's claims, and his message can truly change lives."





Advent Lectionary 2025

Arcana Cælestia · Vol I. (NCE)

Week	Thu, Nov 27 Psalm 122; Daniel 9:15-19 Matthew 1:1–17. AC§1-5. Fri, Nov 28 Psalm 123; Genesis 6:1-10 Matthew 1:18–25. AC§6-13 Sat, Nov 29 Psalm 124; Genesis 6:11-22 Matthew 2:1–12. AC§14-20. + Sun, Nov 30 Psalm 18; Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44. AC§20-25. Mon, Dec 01 Psalm 12; Genesis 8:1-19 Matthew 2:13–23. AC§26-30. Tue, Dec 02 Psalm 134; Genesis 9:1-17 Matthew 3:1–12. AC§31-35. Wed, Dec 03 Psalm 119:1-10; Isaiah 54:1-10 Matthew 3:13–17. AC§36-40.
Week	Thu, Dec 04 Psalm 5; Isaiah 4:2-6 Matthew 4:1-11. AC§41-45. Fri, Dec 05 Psalm 72:1-7, Isaiah 30:19-26 Matthew 4:12-17. AC§46-50. Sat, Dec 06 Psalm 72:10-19; Isaiah 40:1-11 Matthew 4:18-22. AC§51-55. +Sun, Dec 07 Psalm 80; Isaiah 11:1-10 Matthew 4:23-25. AC§56-60. Mon, Dec 08 Psalm 21; Isaiah 24:1-16a Matthew 5:1-12. AC§61-66. Tue, Dec 09 Psalm 27; Isaiah 41:14-20 Matthew 5:13-16. AC§67-73. Wed, Dec 10 Psalm 23; Genesis 15:1-18 Matthew 5:21-26. AC§73-81.

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Week 3

Thu, Dec 11 | Psalm 146:5-10; Exodus 12:1-6 | Matthew 5:27–30. **AC§82-92.**

Fri, Dec 12 | Psalm 11; Exodus 21:1-11 | Matthew 5:33–37. AC§93-104.

Sat, Dec 13 | Psalm 14; I Samuel 2:1-8 | Matthew 5:43-48. AC§105-115.

+Sun, Dec 14 | Psalm 17; Isaiah 35:1-10;; | Matthew 6:1–8. AC§115-120.

Mon, Dec 15 | Psalm 42; Isaiah 29:17-24 | Matthew 6:9-15. AC§121-131.

Tue, Dec 16 | Psalm 48; Ezekiel 47:1-12 | Matthew 6:16–18. AC§132-143.

Wed, Dec 17 | Psalm 53; Isaiah 45:5-8 | Matthew 6:19-24. AC§144-154.

4

Thu, Dec 18 | Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34 | Matthew 6:25-34. AC§ 155-165.

Fri, Dec 19 | Psalm 62; Isaiah 7:10-16 | Matthew 7:1-12. AC§166-176.

Sat, Dec 20 | Psalm 87; Isaiah 42:1-9 | Matthew 7:13-23. AC§177-187.

+Sun, Dec 21 | Psalm 84; Micah 5:2-5a; | Matthew 7:24–29. AC§188-198.

Mon, Dec 22 | Psalm 82; Isaiah 9:2-7 | Matthew 8:1-13. AC§199-207.

Tue, Dec 23 | Psalm 88; Isaiah 11:6-9 | Matthew 8:14-22. AC§208-218.

Wed, Dec 24 (Christmas Eve) | Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Isaiah 52:7-10 | Luke 2:1-20.

AC§219-230.

The Messenger ______ 13

The Path to Emancipation:

Robert Carter III's Religious Journey

Sue Ditmire

Robert Carter III (1728-1804) of Virginia was one of the earliest Swedenborgians in the United States and one of the foremost pioneers of abolition in Colonial America. Widely known as the 'Great Emancipator.' In August 1791, Carter issued a 'Deed of Gift,' which eventually led to the freeing of over five hundred enslaved people. This was the single largest emancipation event in Colonial America and perhaps the largest single emancipation before the end of the Civil War in 1865. In a 1790 letter to the English Baptist Minister John Rippon (1751-1836), Carter wrote, "The toleration of slavery indicates very great depravity of mind."

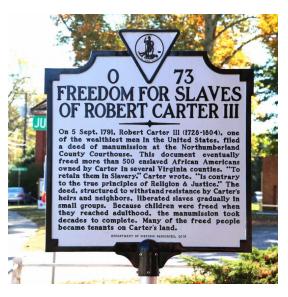




Image of Robert Carter III painted by Thomas Hudson, 1749-1750

Robert Carter III's religious journey in colonial America was marked by a profound transformation from Anglican orthodoxy to radical spiritual independence. Born into Virginia's planter elite, Carter initially upheld the Anglican establishment, but by the mid-18th century, he grew increasingly disillusioned with its moral and theological rigidity. Preceding the American Revolution, Robert Carter III, like many of the other revolutionary

leaders, was a Deist. (They believed in God, as the Great Creator, who formed the world and set it in motion with rationally comprehensible moral and natural laws, but does not intervene in human affairs through miracles or supernatural revelations.) Although he was not the only Deist who, also, for social reasons, maintained a membership in the Anglican Church. However, he was a committed seeker. On October 10, 1776, Robert Carter III resigned his long-held position in the vestry of the Anglican Cople Parish.²

Along with many others in the British colonies during ("The Great



Baptist Minister John Rippon (1751-1836) was a confidant of Carter.

Awakening"), Robert Carter would go through a few decades when his beliefs in religion and society would go through profound mental, spiritual, and religious evolution. The most startling addition to the Baptist faith in all of the eighteenth century was revealed on July 12, 1777, when Robert Carter III announced publicly his conversion experience. The event had taken place on June 12 [1777] while Carter lay in a feverish state of recovery from a smallpox inoculation. At that time, he later related, "the Lord... wrought a mighty work on my soul. As soon as he recovered, Carter began to seek out people "who make mention of Religion as a real thing, and not imaginary. After several months of inquiry, Carter repeated his public confession of faith before the members of the Morattico Baptist Church and was baptized by immersion near a private house on September 6, 1778.3 This pattern of intensive religious experience would also prefigure his later conversion to Swedenborgianism.

Drawn by its emphasis on personal revelation and egalitarianism. Baptists rejected infant baptism, insisting instead on believer's baptism by full

immersion—a practice that symbolized personal conversion and spiritual autonomy. Their congregational model eschewed formal hierarchy, favoring local governance and voluntary association. By the 1750s, Baptist numbers began to swell, fueled by the fervor of the Great Awakening and the rise of Separate Baptists, who embraced revivalism and emotional preaching. This grassroots expansion challenged both religious orthodoxy and political authority, contributing to broader calls for disestablishment and religious liberty. The 1786 Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, influenced in part by Baptist activism, marked a turning point in American religious history. ⁴ Baptists' emphasis on conscience, scripture, and egalitarianism laid foundational stones for the pluralistic religious landscape of the new republic. By the 1770's and 1780's, many Baptist churches in Virginia went on record in opposition to slavery.⁵

For Robert Carter, one of the most interesting African Americans to join the Baptist community was his slave, named Will. He was so dedicated to the

Baptist Community that people began calling him "Baptist Billy." He and Robert had grown up together and Robert always counted on him. They were not just childhood friends, but "Baptist Billy" was actually Robert's half-brother, having been born to a slave woman.

Robert Carter III's conversion to Swedenborgianism in the late 18th century marked a dramatic spiritual pivot that reflected both personal introspection and broader currents of religious experimentation in post-revolutionary America. Through the introduction of a mysterious "Mr. Moyce," Carter began to read and discuss the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg. Around 1790, Carter began actively acquiring and distributing the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, subscribing to editions printed in London and Philadelphia and even funding the first American edition of The Liturgy of the New Church in Baltimore in 1792. His correspondence with figures like George Wythe reveals a

deep commitment to spreading
Swedenborg's mystical doctrines, which
emphasized spiritual regeneration,
divine correspondence, and the inner
meaning of Scripture.

In 1789, Carter believed he had died, having either a significant spiritual experience or some serious illness. However, following the event, Carter began discussing the idea that he would eventually free the enslaved connected to him. This conversion was not merely intellectual—it coincided with Carter's unprecedented decision to emancipate over 500 enslaved people, beginning with a deed of gift in 1791. In 1782, the Virginia Legislature passed a law making it legal for the first time to free a slave. It was called the Manumission Act and gave the legal way to do it. After the new law passed, Carter was not the only slave owner to adjust his thinking about slavery and decide to act on it.6 Swedenborgianism's emphasis on moral accountability and the spiritual equality of all souls likely reinforced Carter's resolve to act against the entrenched institution of slavery. His embrace of Swedenborgian mysticism placed him on the fringes of elite Virginia society,

transforming him from a colonial patriarch into a Christian visionary whose religious convictions reshaped his legacy. Though Carter had already, before his encounter with Swedenborg, begun to doubt the morality of the slave trade, the Swedish seer's insistence on the spiritual grandeur of the African peoples further cemented his opposition to the institution.

In The New Church in the New World, by Maguerite Block, quotes Carter's statement on his conversion experience:

He, Robert Carter, believeth that
Jesus Christ, in his State of
Humiliation possessed a full and
perfect righteousness; that if the
Lord had not assumed human
nature that a total Damnation
was, at that time, at hand, and
threatened every Creature, but
now it is not so, -or the Lord
came into the World to subdue
the Hells that are in us, and to
glorify his manhood.

This is neither the theology nor the phraseology of the Great Awakening, -it is almost a

paraphrase of Swedenborg's exact words in the True Christian Religion, these words were written by Carter before there was English any translation. and only seven years afterthe publication of the Latin edition" she goes to sav he could have read the Latin edition when he was in England before 1789, getting his portrait painted.7

In 1790, a neighbor lent Carter a copy (Swedenborg's) "Treatise on Influx," which had been sent from a friend in Baltimore. Although he pursued his interest in Swedenborg and connections with the Baltimore New Church, he continued his active membership in the Baptist Church.

In 1791, Robert Carter III signed the Deed of Gift, a landmark document that initiated the gradual emancipation of 452 enslaved individuals across his eighteen Virginia estates. Motivated by religious conviction, Carter declared slavery incompatible with "the true principles of Religion & Justice." The deed meticulously listed names, ages, and locations of those to be freed, based on a newly conducted census. Adults were scheduled for staggered manumission between 1792 and 1801, while children would be freed upon reaching adulthood. Elderly individuals over forty-five, though unnamed, were

Despite its moral intent, Carter's plan fractured families and unfolded slowly due to legal constraints and logistical challenges. The manumission act required court appearances and fees, which Carter helped cover, though he rarely collected repayment. He struggled with scheduling and legal ambiguities, such as where court appearances should occur, and whether freedpeople could legally assume guardianship of their

granted land to farm independently

revert to Carter.

until death, after which the land would

still-enslaved relatives. Exceptions were rare, though he did free five women in 1793 to reunite them with their husbands. The process, though imperfect and prolonged, ultimately freed hundreds over more than three decades. While his religious affiliation changed, he did not change his belief or his goal of freeing the enslaved, and he continued working and attending worship with the Baptists until his move to Baltimore in 1793.

Robert Carter III's move to Baltimore on 8 May 1793 marked a decisive turn in both his spiritual and social life. Having alienated much of Virginia's planter elite through his Swedenborgian convictions and sweeping manumission plan, Carter sought a more receptive environment for his religious and philanthropic pursuits. Baltimore, with its growing population of dissenters and Swedenborgian sympathizers, offered fertile ground for Carter's vision of moral reform. He supported the publication of Swedenborgian texts and helped establish the New Church's presence in the city, aligning himself with a small but committed circle of believers. The relocation also allowed

Carter to distance himself from the entrenched slaveholding culture of Tidewater Virginia, reinforcing his identity as a spiritual dissenter and social reformer. In Baltimore, Carter lived out his final years quietly but resolutely.

ENDNOTES

- 1. Letter from Robert Carter III to John Rippon, 27 August 1788. For more on the Baptist world and Rippon's work, see: Benedict, David, A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World, New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1848: 450, 686. Rippon, John, Rippons Register 1796: 123.
 2. John Barder and Dictionary of Virginia Biography, "Robert Carter (1728–1804)," Encyclopedia Virginia, Richmond, Virginia Humanities, 7 Dec. 2020, Web. Accessed 7 Aug. 2025. Timeline entry.
- 3. Barder, John Randolph. "Flashed with Notions of Freedom": The Growth and Emancipation of a Virginia Slave Community. PhD dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1993, p. 280.
- 4. Virginia. *General Assembly*. "An Act for establishing religious Freedom." Enrolled Bills, Record Group 78, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Accessed 27 Sep. 2025.
- 5. Barder, John Randolph. "Flashed with Notions of Freedom": The Growth and Emancipation of a Virginia Slave Community. PhD dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1993, p. 275.

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- 6. Virginia. "An Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves." The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619. Vol. 11, edited by William Waller Hening, 1823, pp. 39–40.
- 7. Block, Marguerite. The New Church in the New World: A Study of Swedenborgianism in America.
 4th ed., Swedenborg Foundation, 2024: 84-87.
 8. In 1782 there were 3,000 free blacks living in Virginnia and by 1790 there were 12,866, that was about the time, Robert Carter made his decision to free his slaves. Although he was not alone, he was by far the single individual freeing the largest number of slaves. See "Deed of Gift (Robert Carter III's)." Encyclopedia Virginia, Virginia Humanities,

https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/deed-of-gift-robert-carter-iiis/.. Accessed 19 Aug. 2025.

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