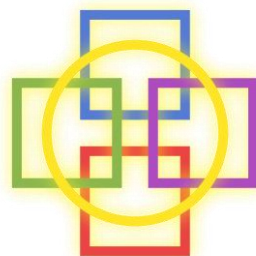




SERMON ARCHIVE 2017

Swedenborgian Community Online



Our New Creation

January 1, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1: 1-5 (New International Version) The Beginning

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven: 16-17

"The beginning" includes the first period of regeneration too, as that is when people are being born anew and receiving life. Because of this, regeneration itself is called our new creation.

We need to know, too, that the Lord is Goodness itself, or life, and truth itself, or light, and consequently that nothing good or true exists that does not come from him.

Our new creation



I decided that this year, I'd like to send New Year's cards instead of Christmas cards. I've never sent New Year's cards, so didn't know what options were available. I went to Amazon.com to see what they had. One card really struck me. It had two happy dogs running through the snow. It said:

If we are ever to enjoy life, now is the time, not tomorrow or next year ... today should always be our most wonderful day. By Thomas Dreier.

I loved that quote, but had never heard of Thomas Dreier so I Googled him, and found that he was a writer and editor who lived 1884 to 1996. He was a prolific writer throughout his lifetime and is often quoted. I found a more complete version of the one on the New Year card that I like even better *If we are ever to enjoy life, now is the time—not tomorrow, nor next year, nor in some future life after we have died. The best preparation for a better life next year is a full, complete, harmonious, joyous life this year. Our beliefs in a rich future life are of little importance unless we coin them into a rich present life. Today should always be our most wonderful day.*

It made me think that the quote could be a great resolution for the New Year – a resolution to find some joy in each day. I've been thinking this week about the sudden heart attack that took Carrie Fisher's life at 60, and then, the next day, her 84-year-old Mother joining her after a stroke. I've wondered what they would have done the day before if they had known it was to be their last day. What would you do in that situation?

I remember when I was in college – many years ago! – I took a philosophy course in Existentialism. The professor would ask us: "What if you knew you had 6 months to live; what would you do in those 6 months?" He gave us a few minutes to think about how we would spend that time. Then he'd say: "Why aren't you doing that now?"

Swedenborg talks about "regeneration" as our spiritual journey in life and encourages to find our "ruling loves" that give us the deepest satisfactions.

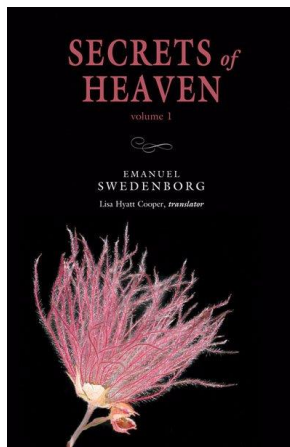
In our physical, material world, most of us need to spend a lot of time earning a living, cleaning, shopping, etc. – even if they are not our "ruling love." It can sometimes be hard to find some joy in a day. But we can focus on our spiritual journey – our regeneration – and find peace in knowing we are living in the light of God's love.

This is a great day to start this new plan -- New Year's Day!

For many of us, a new year is a chance for a fresh start in our lives. Making a fresh start is a form of regeneration. Swedenborg calls regeneration "our new creation." Each new year can be a deepest journey into "our new creation."

The first day of creation was when God created light, and separated it from darkness.

Swedenborg says that there are deeper, spiritual truths in the Bible than are expressed in the story itself. The early verses of Genesis are about opening our inner, spiritual eyes to God's light.



That first day is described this way in *Heavenly Secrets*:
Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived. [S.H. #18]

We often think of the end of a year as a chance to let go of old parts of our selves; and the New Year as a chance to claim new ones. For Swedenborg, the way to begin a spiritual journey – or a new year – is to let die old things about yourself that get in the way of your growth. And embrace that heavenly Light.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

We can think of the New Year as an opportunity to renew commitment to our regeneration. Or think of two dogs running joyfully in the snow – and look to find ways to feel God's joyful love in us.

Let us pray: Thank you, Lord, for giving us your love and your light. Help us each day to experience your love, and to let your light shine through us.

Swedenborg & Music

January 8, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Exodus 15: 19-21

When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them:

*"Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea."*

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 8336. Verses 20, 21

And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam responded to them, Sing to Jehovah, for He has highly exalted [Himself]; the horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea. 'And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand' means ascribing glory to the Lord from the good of faith. 'And all the women went out after her' means every good of truth. 'With timbrels and with dances' means praise from joy and gladness. 'And responded to them' means a reciprocation. 'Sing to Jehovah' means that glory belongs to the Lord alone. 'For He has highly exalted [Himself]' means that He has displayed His Divinity within His Humanity. 'The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea' means that as a result simply of His presence falsities in faith and evils in life cast themselves into hell.

Music & Swedenborg

Do you view music as a way to connect with God, to inspire, to renew.

This month's theme is Swedenborg and music. Let's consider how music can awaken your soul -- into singing and dancing with God!

Dancing has always been a form of worship in some religious traditions. In today's reading from the Bible, we are reminded that after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Miriam spontaneously took a tambourine; singing and dancing as the women followed.

Swedenborg talked of the life in heaven as filled with music, concerts, and singing. He said that music originated in the heavens before coming to the natural world. Music can be an experience of wholeness and connection: with each other and with God. When we share music, we may be

singing [sharing sacred breath together], listening [using our ears and hearing to connect with our emotions], and moving our whole body with the music. Our body itself becomes an instrument to connect with the Divine.

We can experience God and share Divine Love in many ways through the use of music. Consider all of these forms of worship through music:

- Listening to music
- Writing music
- Playing music
- Incorporating music into other arts
- Singing
- Dancing
- Moving to music
- Moving without music

When you write music, play an instrument, sing or dance for others -- you are helping others experience the Divine.

When you sing or dance with others, you are sharing the Divine together. Playing instruments, singing, and dancing together all involve ways of finding a common wholeness in God.

You can have private time with God through your dancing and singing. Dance with God!

Below, you will see some additional passages from Scripture and writings from Swedenborg on dance and music. In between, there are some YouTube videos that celebrate dance and music as ways of connecting with God.

Feel free to enjoy any or all of these videos. Or, if you prefer, go for a walk or do some exercises or sing a song or play an instrument. Allow your soul to be refreshed in music and movement.

Sometimes traditional music is written in modern ways. Here is a new version of Jacob's Ladder from Jacob Springsteen's album, "We shall overcome"

II Samuel 6:14-15 NIV

David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might.

While he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

Many Black churches have brought great depth to music in worship. Here is Rock-a-My Soul in a gospel tradition, with liturgical dance included.

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 276

Having every one of them harps, signifies confession of the Lord's Divine Human from spiritual truths. It is known that confessions of Jehovah were made in the temple at Jerusalem by singing, and at the same time by instruments of music which corresponded; the instruments were principally trumpets and timbrels, and psalteries and harps; the trumpets and timbrels corresponded to celestial goods and truths, and the psalteries and harps to spiritual goods and truths; the correspondences

were with their sounds. What celestial good and truth is, and what spiritual good and truth, may be seen in the work concerning Heaven and Hell (n. 13-19, and 20-28). That "harps" signify confessions of the Lord from spiritual truths, may appear from these passages:

Confess to Jehovah with the harp, sing unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings (Ps. 33:2).

I will confess to Thee on the harp, O God, my God (Ps. 43:4).

I will confess to Thee on the instrument of the psaltery, I will sing unto Thee with the harp, O Thou Holy One of Israel (Ps. 71:22).

Arouse me psaltery and harp, I will confess Thee among the nations, O Lord (Ps. 57:8, 9; 108:2-4).

Answer to Jehovah by confession, play on the harp to our God (Ps. 147:7).

I came of age when "Rock Opera" became a way to express themes of the Bible. Here's a song from Jesus Christ Superstar, the crucifixion told from the viewpoint of Judas. Godspell was a musical based on Matthew that opened in 1971.

Psalm 98:1-9

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.
The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

The Psalms have been put to music for centuries.

During this month we'll look at some musicians of the past who were influenced by Swedenborg, and end the month with our artist of the month, Rev. Dr. David Fekete, who will share his approach to music and other arts.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, help us use music and dance to express our love for You, each other, and the world around us. Open our hearts to the deep expressions of feeling in music and dance, that are often beyond words.

Amen.

William Mason: Swedenborgian Composer & Pianist

January 15, 2017

READINGS From the Bible

Psalm 100, New International Version (NIV)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;

give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained (Whitehead) n. 1185, Verse 22

And the voice of harpers and musicians and pipers and trumpeters shall not be heard in thee any more, signifies no more any interior or exterior joys. This is evident from the signification of the "voice or sound" of various instruments of music, as being joys from internal and external affections. They signify affections because of their harmony, for musical sounds express affections and produce them with joy. Stringed instruments signify spiritual things, and wind instruments celestial things, and that they correspond to affections may be seen (n. 323, 326). But what "the voice of the harp, the voice of the pipe, and the voice of the trumpet" signify in particular, can be seen only from the affections, which are of two kinds, spiritual and celestial; spiritual affections are from truths and celestial from goods; but they are of three degrees, inmost, middle, and ultimate; the inmost are such as are in the inmost heaven, the middle such as are in the middle heaven, and the ultimate such as are in the lowest heavens.

We have been exploring musicians who were influenced by Swedenborg – esp. those of the past this month. I learned some incredibly delightful things from Val Brugler.

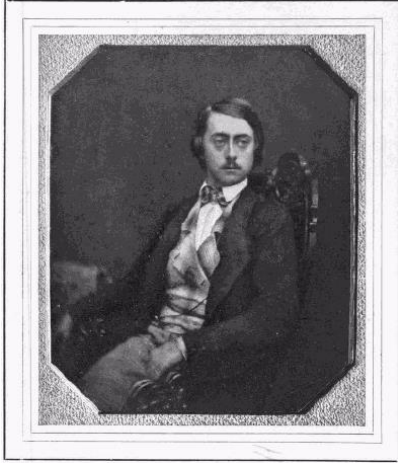
Val is the Technical Support person for the on-line community. You don't often "see" her as she is working behind the scenes. But you always see her work – which is the amazing graphics, color, and form of our on-line presence.

She is also the chair of the Information Management Support Unit or IMSU and is on the Digital Presence Working Group, which is responsible for developing the Swedenborgian on-line presence. She has also done historical research on people and events in the Swedenborgian Church – including some of our musicians of the past!

She introduced me to William Mason and his father Lowell Mason. Below is some of Val's research into these men and their music.

William Mason: Swedenborgian Composer & Pianist

Compiled and written by Val Brugler



The American composer, pianist and Swedenborgian, William Mason (1829-1908), was a member of a musical family...some today might call it a dynasty. His father was the composer and music pedagogue Lowell Mason, a leading figure in American church music. William's younger brother, Henry Mason (1831-1890), was a co-founder of the piano manufacturers Mason and Hamlin. His nephew, Daniel Gregory Mason (1873-1953), achieved distinction as a composer, author, and professor of music at Columbia University.

Born in Boston to Lowell and Abigail Mason, William showed an early proclivity towards music. Around 1845, while studying at the Boston Academy of Music, he was composing and publishing his first pieces for the piano, *Deux Romances sans paroles, Op. 1*. His professional debut came in 1846 at the Boston Academy of Music.

In 1849, William traveled to Germany and Europe, and remained there for 5 years while studying under many famous composers and in Weimar under Franz Liszt

He returned to the USA in 1854 and began a career as a concert pianist, built a reputation through recital tours but within a year decided that he preferred to settle down in New York City and work on composing, performing and teaching. At about this time, his brother Henry, founded the piano and organ company Mason and Hamlin in Boston.

In 1857 Mason married Mary Isabella Webb, daughter of George Webb. They were married in Boston at the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) by Rev. Thomas Worcester.



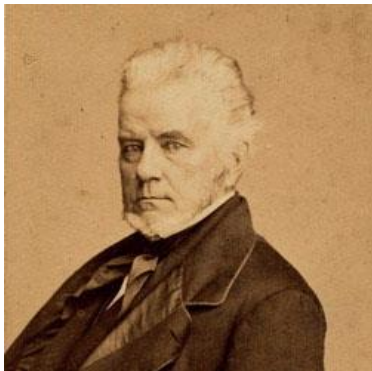
Diaguerra type of George James Webb, Mary, Carolyn and Mrs. Webb



Another important musician who became involved with the Swedenborgian church was George Webb (1803-1887). He was born in England and immigrated to Boston where he played the organ in many churches, including the Boston Church of the New Jerusalem [Swedenborgian] where he became a member in 1835. The Bowdoin Street church was built in 1845 and Webb was influential in moving the organ from the left of the chancel to the choir loft. F. A. Dowson wrote that:

Miss Jenny Lind, who once attended the church in the best days of its choir, was affected to tears by the fullness of its expression of religious feeling.

George Webb and Lowell Mason founded the Boston Academy of Music and collaborated with on their *Musical Library*. Rev. Samuel Seward wrote that George Webb was later the organist and musical director for the New York Society and questioned the "peculiar style of singing that he introduced among us".



Lowell Mason, along with founding the Boston Academy of Music, being superintendent of music in the Boston School system and as a staff member of the teachers' institutes of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, was organist and choirmaster of the General Church, where he led a choir of about 100. Both the Webb and the Mason families vacationed and fished together in the Isle of Shoales, a group of islands off the coast of Maine and New Hampshire.

As a side note, the poet and writer, Celia Thaxter became the hostess of her father's hotel, the Appledore House in the Isle of Shoales, where the Masons and Webbs and many Swedenborgians of the era vacationed. She welcomed many New England literary and artistic notables to the island and to her parlor, including writers [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#), [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), [Henry Wadsworth](#)

[Longfellow](#), [John Whittier](#), [Sarah Orne Jewett](#), and the artists [William Morris Hunt](#) and [Childe Hassam](#), who painted several pictures of her and other guests. The watercolorist [Ellen Robbins](#) also painted the flowers in her garden. Celia was present at the time of the infamous murders on Smuttynose Island, about which she wrote the essay, *A Memorable Murder*. In 2008, [The Library of America](#) selected "A Memorable Murder" for inclusion in its two-century retrospective of American True Crime. A 2000 movie, *The Weight of Water*, was made based another novel about this murder. Celia Thaxter's poetry appeared in the Messenger.

For 13 years in the New York area, William performed with the Mason-Thomas Quartette and introduced many works of Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms and other famous Europeans to Americans during the Civil War era and beyond.

During this time he also played the organ in the New York New Church and held many musical programs there.



Most noteworthy were the books he wrote on music and piano technique: most notably, *Touch and Technic*, Op. 44 (1891-1892) which was endorsed by Liszt himself.

He wrote about forty pieces for the piano among them *Silver Spring* (the name of the Mason family home in Orange, N.J.) and *Capriccio Fantastico*.

He was president of both the National Musical Congress and the American Vocal Music Association and was on the board of piano examiners for the American College of Musicians.

The families of George James Webb and William Mason moved to Orange, New Jersey in 1871, where their homes adjoined. In 1879, Mary's mother, Caroline Webb, died in their home in New York. In 1880, Mary Webb Mason, died while on a family vacation in Paris. In 1885, George Webb and William Mason moved back to Orange, N.J., to live together. George Webb died in 1887. In 1891, Marion Otis Mason, William and Mary's son, died at sea on a voyage to Australia at the age of 30. In his obituary in the Messenger, Mann wrote:

From our natural thought of it, this young man's removal comes with peculiar severity to his family on account of the great losses which they have already sustained.

In 1901, he published an autobiography, *Memories of a Musical Life*, which contains, especially for the music aficionados, fascinating accounts of the Weimar circle of which Liszt was a member in 1853 and his encounters with famous composers includes their autographs.

He maintained an active schedule as a teacher, working from a studio in Steinway Hall from 1866.

After a brief illness, he died in 1908 at the age of 79.

From the obituary in the *Boston Transcript* of August 5, 1908:

His art and his character endeared him to all with whom he came to contact, and his death closes one of the most interesting careers in the annals of American music...

For many years he gave his services to the Valley Church [Swedenborgian] in Orange, N. J. He was a Swedenborgian and possessed of a strong and simple faith. For his church in New York he did much, both financially and otherwise...

He was honored by Yale in 1872 with a doctor's degree (the first of its kind had been conferred on his father by Columbia).

Of Lowell Mason, from the same article:

He (Lowell Mason) has been justly called the father of music in America. He it was who introduced music into the schools of Boston when music had been considered an emanation from the evil spirit. He was the first to conduct those musical conventions or choir meetings, so popular at a time when the crudity of musical art in this country can scarcely be imagined. It was as accompanist to his father on these occasions that William Mason made his debut, while still a mere boy. He was fond of relating an episode of this period which occurred in a small Vermont town in 1840. He and his father were met and escorted to the hall where the exercises were to be held by a throng of people headed by a fife and drum, the only music that the village had to offer. The importance of the work of Dr. Lowell Mason, especially in building up congregational singing, can scarcely be exaggerated.

Rev. Charles Mann, editor of the *Messenger* and minister in both Orange, N.J. and New York City, wrote in the July 29th, 1908 issue:

I was deeply moved when I read in the New York morning paper of July 15th an announcement of the death of William Mason, who passed away the day before. I first met Mr. Mason at the time of my going to Orange, some forty-two years ago, and was associated with him in a New-Church way for some twenty-five years, or until after his removal to New York. From the first he cooperated with our movement in Orange and contributed to its support. His wife, a woman of remarkable administrative ability, shortly after my arrival, gave a musical and theatrical entertainment for our benefit, from which sufficient money was realized to purchase an organ and a set of church furniture...

For domestic reasons, Mr. Mason did not for some time attend the morning services of the Orange Society; but he made a public profession of his faith in the doctrines of the New Church in 1867, and during these early years Mrs. Mason taught in our Sunday school and their children attended its sessions. After the death of his father and brother, Mr. Mason became a regular attendant upon our services, identifying himself fully with the New-Church society, and accepting office in it. He even volunteered to take the position of "assistant organist," which meant that he would play voluntaries for us whenever he could conveniently...

In the realization of the New-Church doctrines in their application to assuaging the sorrows of life, Mr. Mason held himself to a high standard like those which he applied to the expressions of his art. In the loss of his wife under distressing circumstances, and in the deaths of his two sons he found full consolation and support in the teachings of his New-Church faith; and did not allow himself to dwell on the natural sorrows of his bereavements. This was particularly illustrated in the way in which he bore the loss of his second son, who died on shipboard, far from home or friends, and was

buried at sea. In a letter which he wrote to Mrs. Mann and me on the death of this son, he dwelt so fully on the grounds for gratitude which he felt that he had on account of having possessed such a son, and upon the glory of our teachings concerning the eternal life, that his letter ended in a glorification of praise to God.

Let us pray: Dear Divine Musician:

We thank you for the blessings of music that open our hearts to You. We thank you especially for the lives of Lowell Mason and William Mason, whose time on this earth so enhanced our appreciation of music – esp. in worship. Guide us this week in allowing music to sooth our souls.

Artist of the Month: David Fekete

January 22, 2017

READINGS
From the Bible

Psalm 19: 1-14

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.
The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.
May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

From Swedenborg



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Apocalypse Revealed (Rogers) n. 792: 18:22

"The sound of harpists and musicians, flutists and trumpeters, shall not be heard in you anymore." This symbolically means that they will not have in them any affection for spiritual truth and goodness, nor any affection for celestial truth and goodness.

A sound means tone, and every tone corresponds to some affection relating to love, since it originates from love. For this reason, the sounds of harps, music, flutes and trumpets, because of their correspondence, symbolize affections.

Affections, however, are of two types: spiritual and celestial. Spiritual affections are affections connected with wisdom, while celestial affections are affections connected with love. They differ from each other in the same way as the heavens, which have been distinguished into two kingdoms, celestial and spiritual, as we have said several times before.

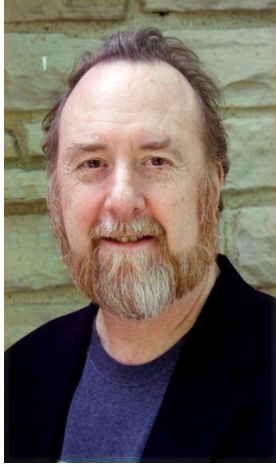
The sounds of some musical instruments, therefore, relate to spiritual affections, and the sounds of others to celestial affections--the sound or tone of harpists and musicians relating to spiritual affections, and the sound or tone of flutists and trumpeters relating to celestial affections. For instruments whose tones sound in distinct intervals, like stringed instruments, belong to the spiritual class of affections, while instruments whose tones are continuous, like wind instruments, belong to the celestial class of affections. Thus the sound or tone of harpists and musicians symbolizes an affection for spiritual truth and goodness, while the sound or tone of flutists and trumpeters symbolizes an affection for celestial truth and goodness.

That the sound of a harp, owing to its correspondence, symbolizes confession from an affection for spiritual truth, may be seen in nos. 276, 661.

Walking with Rev. David

Our Artist of the Month for January 2017

"This booklet ... contains my struggle and my ecstasy in living spiritually. It brings up issues that strike me as important as I walk what I know of living spiritually. I invite the reader to walk with me, and to reflect on the various issues that come up in these pages."



In his book, [The Struggle and Ecstasy of Living Spiritually](#), Rev. David Fekete invites us to walk with him on a journey to reflect on how God works with us in our daily lives. His book is not a ponderous theological treatise, but rather a warm and readable adventure that also has deep theological wisdom. He makes his points through sharing stories from his own life, and intertwining them with quotations from Swedenborg.

This is an important aspect of January's Artist of the Month: Rev. David Fekete. His writing, like his personality, is warm and friendly as he invites the reader on a spiritual journey with him. His writing and music are steeped in his life-long Swedenborgianism.

Dave's mother is a Swedenborgian who raised him in the Detroit Swedenborgian Church. She had become Swedenborgian through her father, who found Swedenborg in the Mason's. David grew up active in the church and enjoying summer camp at Almont from age 5 until well into adulthood. He says:

I still remember in 6th grade that my classmates were always running up asking, "Are you Catholic or Protestant?" I was told that I am neither Catholic nor Protestant; I am the New Church described in Revelation 21, and that is what I told my classmates.

Needless to say, that did not become a great conversation starter with other kids, and David felt rather isolated outside of the church.

He continues:

I grew up very lonely, as almost my whole world was limited to Swedenborg's 30 volumes. I viewed the world through the lens of Swedenborg's doctrines. I was in the New Church and the whole rest of the world was in the Old Church. Accordingly, I went to Urbana College, then a Swedenborgian College, with the intention of becoming an ordained Swedenborgian minister.

Young David Fekete found himself quite angry at the Church and at God and had a "falling out" with the church in his late 20's. He now calls that a "Gift of Providence," and goes on to say:

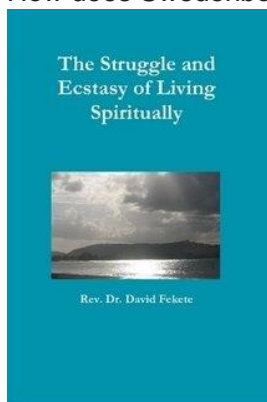
It led me to a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard and a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. These degrees and the social environment of ecumenical religious studies departments opened my mind. I learned that Swedenborg had influences from the culture he grew up in. I learned about the greater Christian world and history. I learned about Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and many other religions. I learned that there are similarities and

distinct differences between religions. And I learned to understand, respect, and appreciate the differences between religions. They added to the palate of my own religious beliefs.

His anger at the Swedenborgian Church faded away, as he sought for his own theology. He felt called to ordained ministry and explored a variety of pathways. None of them fit right, and he found himself led back to the Swedenborgian Church.

Rev. David describes himself now as a "happy Swedenborgian minister."

How does Swedenborg impact his art? There are many dimensions to that answer!



In terms of his book, *The Struggle and Ecstasy of Living Spiritually*, as mentioned above, his themes are drawn from his everyday life and then explored through Swedenborgian concepts.

He says this about poetry:

Poetry begins with strong feeling, but the poems that I like most also have word play—echoes of vowel sounds, assonance, words repeated at the right time, rhyme, rhythm, meter and structure. I write very formal poems like sonnets that require strict meter and rhyme. But I also write unstructured forms, loose and free verse. But free verse isn't free. It needs artistry, too.

The Swedenborgian influence is strong in his poetry:

I MISSED THE STARS

*I missed the stars, for a while I did.
Peaceful pinpoints of light against the deep,
When evening's quiet dark I lived.
Their splendor subtle, awesome, before sleep
and more dark.*

*But city lights took my peace.
I missed my starlight for a while at first.
Then day took day and months of weeks--
Frustrated, I stopped looking, cursed,
and then forgot.*

Morning's nascent flush, in a town I once knew

*As I stood looking out the window watching traffic pass
Brought back to mind the feelings and the vision.
I stood looking up, in my past.
I see it now.*

In this piece of poetry, Rev. David uses "morning" as metaphor for "rebirth." He addressed this theme in his book, [*The Struggle and Ecstasy of Living Spiritually*](#), where his stories reflect Swedenborg's theme of regeneration, or rebirth, in the story of the 6 days of creation [followed by a 7th day of rest.]

AUTUMN

*I awake, and get up, and look out, through the door.
And the still of the autumn lingers on the air.
I don't like the still, the quiet, the silence--
And the cool, the wan light, the slight breeze breathes
despair.*

*The uncertain months and the prospects of fortune
Hover like the leaves in the dry Fall air, circling around.
Fortune and seasons circle before me--
Time and eternity and myself, disparate, all are bound.*

*And the days grow more pointless, and longer, more drear;
My conceptions of virtue, or value, less sound--
A passing season, a passing age, a goal, a career,
An ambition, aspiration, a hope--anything held dear,
All circle before me: my being, my ground.*

Rev. David says: *in Autumn I assert that time and eternity are bound in the human soul.*

Dr. Fekete's artistic expression is also in his music. He both writes and performs music. He has given permission to swedenborgiancommunity.org to use much of his music in our worship which we do regularly. His music is very reverent and peaceful – perfect for meditation and prayer. He says this about his music:

Miles Davis said of music composition and improvisation, "Learn all the rules, then forget them." Raw feeling isn't enough. Art requires art. In music, there are laws of harmony, scales, altered scales, altered chords. Feeling drives these laws into musical forms. You'll play a sequence of chords and say, no, that doesn't feel right. So you tinker with the chords, altering the colors, creating new sequences until the mood fits the sound. For me, my favorite songs do not begin with musical laws—but with feeling that flows through the laws. Then there are surprises that happen when you discover harmonies and melodies you like, but you weren't necessarily going for. For me, a lot of composition is discovery.

Where does Rev. David get his inspiration? He says this:

Beethoven said, "You will ask me where my ideas come from. That I cannot say with certainty. They come unbidden—while I am walking in the woods . . . then the tones storm and whirl in me until I have set them down on paper." He also had these things his loved ones called his

"Rhaptus." These were intense moods that would come over him and transport him into reveries. He could refuse to teach a piano lesson he was scheduled to while in one of his rhaptus. He was known to burst into tears stepping from his home out into bright sunlight. Inspiration literally means "filled with spirit, breath." In religious terms, we think of the Holy Spirit. And Swedenborgians believe that Spirit relates to life. For me, this sanctifies all of life—love, passion, peace, enthusiasm. The experiences I experience, and the feelings that arise from them can all be considered manifestations of the Spirit.

We have been exploring how Spirit guides Rev. Dave in his art. Now the question is: how does his art impact you?

Give yourself the opportunity to experience his art for yourself, and see whether it touches your own spirituality.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, thank you for the artistic gifts of Rev. David Fekete that are so freely shared with the world. Help us to find You through his art – and many other arts through which You connect with us. Amen.

Mary Lathbury

January 29, 2017

READINGS
From the Bible

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15, King James Version

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?
I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.
He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.
I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.
I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.
That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 994: 2

Pleasures are of two kinds, those of the will, and those of the understanding. In general there are the pleasures of possession of land and wealth, the pleasures of honor and office in the state, the pleasures of conjugal love and of love for infants and children, the pleasures of friendship and of converse with companions, the pleasures of reading, of writing, of knowing, of being wise; and many others. There are also the pleasures of the senses: as the pleasure of hearing, which is in general that from the sweetness of music and song; and that of seeing, which is in general that of various and manifold beauties; and of smelling, which is from the sweetness of odors; and of tasting, which is from the agreeableness and wholesomeness of foods and drinks; and of touch, from many pleasing sensations. These kinds of pleasures, being felt in the body, are called pleasures of the body. But no pleasure ever exists in the body unless it exists and subsists from an interior affection, and no interior affection exists except from one more interior, in which is the use and the end.

MARY LATHBURY
1841-1913



Mary was born in 1841 in Manchester, N.Y. Her father was a minister in the Episcopal Methodist church.

When she was 12, she heard a voice saying to her:

Remember, my child, that you have a gift of weaving fancies into verse and a gift with the pencil of producing visions that come to your heart; consecrate these to Me as thoroughly as you do your inmost spirit.

She always remembered that, and did become a writer of hymns, poems, and books.

She was writing poetry and drawing as a child.

At age 18 she went to the School of Design in Worcester, MA. She then taught French and art at Newbury Vermont Seminary. After that, she took a position at Drew Ladies' Seminary in Carmel, NY.

In 1874, she was hired by the Methodist Sunday School Union in the editorial department. This gave her much understanding of children and it brought her into close touch with the Chautauqua movement. It was dedicated to adult education, using art and recreation.

The Chautauqua idea appealed to her a great deal and she was enthusiastic in this work. She continued writing poetry and hymns. She became known as the poet laureate of Chautauqua. She became drawn to the writings of Swedenborg and shared this interest with her brother, Clarence. He had been ordained in the Methodist Church in 1887, but after his conversations with Mary, transferred his ordination to the New Church in 1892. He became the New Church minister in Cleveland. He said he had become inspired when Mary sent him a copy of the creed of the Swedenborgian church, and he was especially inspired by: *divinity of Christ; inspiration of the Word and living life accordingly.*

Mary co-authored *Woman and Temperance; or, the Work and Workers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union* with Frances Elizabeth Willard in 1883. She wrote many pieces for periodicals such as St. Nicholas, Harper's Young People, and Wide Awake.

Her poems often had a focus on love and unity and had an ecumenical leaning.

She is probably best known for her hymns, including "Break Thou the Bread of Life" and "Day is Dying in the West."

She wrote a hymn for U.S. Centennial celebration in 1876, with the chorus:

"Arise and shine in youth immortal,

*Thy light is come, thy King appears!
Beyond the Century's swinging portal,*

Breaks a new dawn—the thousand years!"—

It remained one of her own favorites.

Chautauqua had started as a Methodist project, but it came to take on a more ecumenical focus. Mary wrote this hymn in 1881 to honor the new focus:

"O Shepherd of the Nameless Fold—

*The blessed church to be—
Our hearts with love and longing turn
To find their rest in thee!*

" 'Thy Kingdom come'—its heavenly walls

*Unseen around us rise,
And deep in loving human hearts
Its broad foundation lies."*

What inspired you in her hymns? Where do you see a Swedenborgian influence shining forth?

Let us pray. "Dear Divine, thank you for the blessed life of Mary Lathbury, which has left us with beautiful hymns, poetry, and writings. Please help each of us find the music in our own soul that sings with the angels. And guide us in taking Your "living music" into the world to bring more love and peace. Amen.

Mary Lathbury's Poetry

February 5, 2017

READINGS From the Bible

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

From Swedenborg

Spiritual Experiences (Odhner) n. 1996

About music, and its effect on spirits

It has happened twice that I heard the music of stringed instruments, viol och hakbrade,* on the street, which so soothed the spirits that they could hardly tell they were not in heaven. It cheered them so that they were swept almost beyond themselves with joy. I felt their joy, and it was great, and now even as I am writing these words, there is music of fiddles, and the plucking of strings continues, and because of it they are so changed that they are hardly the same spirits.

* Swedish for "violin and harp."

Mary Lathbury's Poetry



[Last week's service](#) on Swedenborgian musician Mary Lathbury [1841-1913] was of interest to a number of people, and some of you helped locate additional resources about Ms. Lathbury. So we are continuing our exploration of her this week, with some fascinating new information and additional opportunities to be touched by her life.

We enjoyed some of her music last week, and now we have a whole book of her poetry! You can explore it for yourself [HERE](#). It was published in 1915; two years after her death.

Introductions to the book were written by [Bishop John H. Vincent](#), who helped to found the Chautauqua Institute and [William Garrett Horder](#) a British Congregationalist minister who was a well-known writer of hymns. Some words were given on her life by Suffragist [Francis Caroline Willard](#).

Vincent said about her that she:

had with closed eyes looked into the very face of the invisible God. She was both poetess and saint. Hers was a rare spirit. Some things she wrote will last for ages. Chautauqua on its broadest, deepest spiritual side appealed to Mary Lathbury.

Horder wrote:

One day a parcel of books reached me wrapped in old sheets of printed matter. Among these was an order of first lines of some hymnal issues in America. My eye lighted on the first line of the hymn to which I have referred. I said to myself, "Surely this must be a fine hymn," but whose it was, or where it could be found I did not know. Not long after Miss Willard sent me some recently published hymnals, and in one of them I found the hymn I desired to see, [Day is Dying in the West] and found that it was all and more than all I expected. Indeed in my judgment it is one of the finest and most distinctive hymns of modern times



Willard said:

A group of missionaries was standing at sunset on a beautiful mountain in Japan looking down upon the city of Kyoto and as their hearts rejoiced in the delightful landscape and soft evening air they broke forth into singing that matchless evening hymn which Edward Everett

Hale told a Chautauqua audience would be loved and sung "as long as Chautauqua shall endure" — "Day is Dying in the West." Of its author he added, "She has marvelous lyric force which not five people in a century show, and her chance of having a name two hundred years hence is better than that of any writer in America today."

Let's enjoy some of her poetry in this volume:

CHAUTAUQUA CAROLS

May 19th, 1897

Along all ways, within, without,
All paths through earth and sea,
Our song divine o'er masters doubt:
"The best is yet to be."
Beside the roar of restless feet,
The clamor and the strife,
A voice is crying, clear and sweet:
"The only wealth is Life."

SONGS OF LABOR AND OTHER POEMS

THE GOLDEN AGE IS COMING.

O the Golden Age is coming,
It's dawning everywhere;
Its light is on the hill-tops,
Its breath is in the air.
The hopes of men in bondage,
The promises of God,
Are written in the rainbow
That's springing from the sod.
O, the Golden Age is coming,
When each shall live for all,
The workman in the cottage,
The statesman in the hall.
"Am I my brother's keeper?"
Shall never then be said,
But, "I'm my brother's brother,"
Shall all men say instead,
O, the Golden Age is coming
When men and women, wed
In heavenly love and wisdom,
Shall bruise the dragon's head;

When parents to their children
A noble name shall give;
When all that's base shall perish,
When all that's good shall live

HYMNS AND SACRED SONGS

ARISE, ALL SOULS, ARISE

A rise, all souls, arise!
The watch is past;
A glory breaks above
The cloud at last.
There comes a rushing, mighty wind again!
The breath of God is still the life of men;
The day ascending fills the waiting skies,
All souls, arise!

It comes—the breath of God
Through all the skies!
To live—to breathe with Him,
All souls, arise!
Open the windows toward the shining East;
Call in the guests, and spread a wider feast,
The Lord pours forth as sacramental wine
His breath divine!

It comes—a larger life,
A deeper breath;
Arise, all souls, arise,
And conquer death!
Spread forth the feast—the dew and manna fall
And angels whisper, "Drink ye of it, all;
Drink of His truth, and feed upon His love,
With saints above!"

Arise, all souls, arise
To meet your guest!
His light flames from the East
Unto the West.
The Lord of earth and heaven is at the door,
He comes to break His bread to all His poor;
Arise and serve with Him,—His moment flies;
All souls, arise!

That is but a small selection from this delightful book!

Something else about Ms. Lathbury's life should be noted is her involvement with the Chautauqua

Movement [and Chautauqua Institution.](#)

"Chautauqua" is a word from the Iroquois. It refers to two moccasins that are tied together or a bag that is tied in the middle. It is a reference to the shape of Chautauqua Lake, which is in Southwest New York. This is where the first gathering of Sunday School teachers met on the lake.

It was founded in 1874 by inventor [Lewis Miller](#) [Lewis Miller's daughter, Mina, was married to Thomas Edison] and Methodist Bishop [John Heyl Vincent](#) as a teaching camp for Sunday-school teachers. The teachers would disembark at [Palestine Park](#) and begin a course of Bible study that used the Park to teach of the geography of the [Holy Land](#).

This is an incredible institution with an amazing history, and our Swedenborgian sister, Mary Lathbury, played an important role in its development and mission.

Mary was also a speaker at the first Parliament of World Religions in 1893.

There is so much to share about this amazing woman! Please explore her poetry and songs, and ponder how her Swedenborgian background may have influenced her life and work.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, thank you for the artistic richness of the life of Mary Lathbury. Give us the strength and wisdom to open ourselves to your inspiration and encouragement that is always with us.

Rev. Ken Turley: Music Ministry, pt. 1

February 12, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 19

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.
The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.
May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.



From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 276

Having everyone of them harps, signifies confession of the Lord's Divine Human from spiritual truths. It is known that confessions of Jehovah were made in the temple at Jerusalem by singing, and at the same time by instruments of music which corresponded; the instruments were principally trumpets and timbrels, and psalteries and harps; the trumpets and timbrels corresponded to celestial goods and truths, and the psalteries and harps to spiritual goods and truths; the correspondences were with their sounds. What celestial good and truth is, and what spiritual good and truth, may be seen in the work concerning Heaven and Hell (n. 13-19, and 20-28). That "harps" signify confessions of the Lord from spiritual truths, may appear from these passages:

Confess to Jehovah with the harp, sing unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings (Ps. 33:2).
I will confess to Thee on the harp, O God, my God (Ps. 43:4).
I will confess to Thee on the instrument of the psaltery, I will sing unto Thee with the harp, O Thou Holy One of Israel (Ps. 71:22).
Arouse me psaltery and harp, I will confess Thee among the nations, O Lord (Ps. 57:8, 9; 108:2-4).
Answer to Jehovah by confession, play on the harp to our God (Ps. 147:7).

The Music Ministry of Rev. Ken Turley

We've been exploring Swedenborgian musicians. Today, we'll learn more about Rev. Ken Turley, our former denominational President.

Swedenborg talked of the life in heaven as filled with music, concerts, and singing. He said that music originated in the heavens before coming to the natural world. In a 1914 New Church Life article, "Was Swedenborg a Music Lover?" The author concludes that he was, and cites a story by a contemporary of Swedenborg enjoying music.

Rev. Ken Turley, has an active music ministry. He composes music and performs it in churches and many other locations. I asked Rev. Ken how music has impacted him, both for personal healing and for the healing his music has brought to so many.

He has said that when he was in the first and second grade, his music teacher taught his class folk songs. Rev. Ken writes:

I remember "Eating Goober Peas", an old Civil War Song, which I still sing to myself when I am or want to feel silly and happy, but my favorites were the spirituals like "Wade in the Water", "Climbing Jacob's Ladder" and "Go Down Moses". Those melodies are even today the reason I have a love for the Blues and the Spirituals that make up the foundation of modern Gospel music.

Ken's parents were the late Rev. Cal and Marilyn Turley. Ken has fond memories of his father's love of music.



*A Portrait of Rev. Ken Turley
commissioned by the Fryeburg New
Church when he retired from parish
ministry*

He [Cal Turley] loved music and purchased and played many records around the house. His tastes were very eclectic, ranging from Big Band Swing to the Folk Music of the early 60's. I listened to the Limelighters, Peter, Paul and Mary, Judy Collins, Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte and Odetta. What was most notable was that my dad, using his reel to reel tape recorder and a foot pedal that he used to start and stop songs while remaining seated (cutting edge technology of the day!?!), played many of the songs with spiritual messages in church services on Sunday mornings. I was at an age where I was required to attend church and while I didn't much like the service, I loved the music and remember the experience of hearing Odetta in church even today.

As a young adult, Ken Turley continued to explore the world of music:

During the late 60's and early 70's I was doing Alternative Service to the draft as a Conscientious Objector to the Vietnam War and living in San Francisco. I was an early member of a group called Mother Goose, Inc. which took the arts to kids confined in institutions. We performed as a band and then worked with kids on our individual instruments. Within a relatively short time we were able to bring the kids together and they were able to perform as a band for their peers in the institution. Until that time music was a very personal experience, it was during these years that I truly understood music's power to change one's inner experience and outer life's circumstances as well.

At this point, **music became a healing presence in Ken Turley's life.**

Later in the 70's while I was back in college earning a degree in music I was fortunate enough to be involved in two different productions of Godspell. One was a production put on by the University of Puget Sound where I was enrolled which eventually took second place in a regional competition of university dramatic productions. The other was a semi-professional production that travelled around the Seattle area doing three shows over a weekend at local churches. I played guitar in both productions and was music director of the second. After a hundred or so performances, it dawned on me that popular music, i.e. rock'n'roll, could actually convey a spiritual message that young people would actually listen to and enjoy! Some of us are slow learners.

This was a dramatic perspective in the 1970's; that *popular music can bring spiritual messages to young people [and many older ones as well!]*

It was shortly after graduation while searching for a way to earn a living as a musician that I committed myself to be a church musician and devote my musical talents to serving God.

This was another pivotal moment in Turley's life as he recognized a call to service God with a ministry of music

Unfortunately at that time, no one would even consider my application because I did not play the organ, even though musicals like Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar were so successful and the popularity of the Folk Mass was growing rapidly. Moved by this and the need for theological studies, I enrolled at the Swedenborgian seminary and that has resulted in my serving as a minister in which music has been such an important part.



It's hard to imagine Ken Turley not being considered for music ministry because he didn't play an organ! His guitar and other instruments have brought energy to numerous churches and denominational events, like our annual convention.

Throughout my life, music has been an essential means for keeping me focused and spiritually healthy and growing. It has been a cathartic expression of my sorrows and loneliness and my joys and happiness as well. It has been an expression of my love and gratitude for God's guidance and blessings in my life and an essential tool in leading others in worship and a wide variety of spiritually focused activities and events. To this day, whether I am playing in a church or in a bar I see music as a means for lifting the spirits and influencing people's attention and inner state to the good things of life, which of course, whether stated and/or acknowledged or not, come directly from God. While I take great joy from my musical creations and the act of playing, at the end of my life here on earth, what I hope for is that the music that has come through me will have helped others in their spiritual journey and ultimately brought them closer to God, as it certainly has for me.



Enjoy our opening song written and played by Rev. Ken. Our closing song is written by Laurie Turley, Ken's wife and another talented musician in our denomination.

Let us pray: "Dear Lord, Thank you for Rev. Ken's music ministry, which helps us all use music as part of our relationship with the Divine. Help us to take the inspiration of this music into our lives to work towards creating a better world.

Rev. Ken Turley: Music Ministry, pt. 2

February 19, 2017

**READINGS
From the Bible**

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15, King James Version

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?
I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.
He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.
I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.
I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.
That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 994: 2

Pleasures are of two kinds, those of the will, and those of the understanding. In general there are the pleasures of possession of land and wealth, the pleasures of honor and office in the state, the pleasures of conjugal love and of love for infants and children, the pleasures of friendship and of converse with companions, the pleasures of reading, of writing, of knowing, of being wise; and many others. There are also the pleasures of the senses: as the pleasure of hearing, which is in general that from the sweetness of music and song; and that of seeing, which is in general that of various and manifold beauties; and of smelling, which is from the sweetness of odors; and of tasting, which is from the agreeableness and wholesomeness of foods and drinks; and of touch, from many pleasing sensations. These kinds of pleasures, being felt in the body, are called pleasures of the body. But no pleasure ever exists in the body unless it exists and subsists from an interior affection, and no interior affection exists except from one more interior, in which is the use and the end.

The Music Ministry of Ken Turley, Part 2

Ken Turley is the son of Rev. Cal and Marilyn Turley. He came to love music at an early age, and often heard it in church services. He received a bachelor's degree in music, and then decided that he wanted to go into ministry; a music ministry. He applied to seminaries. He writes:

Unfortunately at that time, no one would even consider my application because I did not play the organ, even though musicals like Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar were so successful and the

popularity of the Folk Mass was growing rapidly. Moved by this and the need for theological studies, I enrolled at the Swedenborgian seminary and that has resulted in my serving as a minister in which music has been such an important part.

Rev. Ken has spent many years in parish ministries of our church and as President of the Denomination. Through all of these years, he has had a special interest in using music as part of worship.

I asked Rev. Ken how he sees music connected to worship and to our spirituality. Here are some of the points he made:

MUSIC AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

In church, we sing hymns, and it usually enhances our worship. However, most of us have not explored the range of music that can be a form of worship; in church and outside of it. There are many other ways and other settings in which music can bring us closer to God.



One powerful spiritual experience can come from playing a musical instrument. The discipline to learn an instrument can be a spiritual discipline. One must practice "religiously" to be able to share spirituality through a musical instrument. Just as one might pray or meditate or read the Bible on a regular basis to enhance spirituality, one can practice a musical instrument for the same experience.

MUSIC AS CONNECTION WITH THE DIVINE

Music can be an experience of wholeness and connection: with each other and with God. When we share music, we may be singing [sharing sacred breath together], listening [using our ears and hearing to connect with our emotions], and moving our whole body with the music. Our body itself becomes an instrument to connect with the Divine.

MUSIC AS EXPERIENCE OF THE INTUITIVE

We can experience God and share Divine Love in many ways through the use of music. Consider all of these forms of "uses" through music:

- Listening to music
- Writing music

- Playing music
- Incorporating music into other arts
- Singing
- Dancing



When you write music, play an instrument, sing or dance for others -- you are helping others experience the Divine.

When you sing or dance with others, you are sharing the Divine together. Playing instruments, singing, and dancing together all involve ways of finding a common wholeness in God. We can worship God in many ways through music. Sometimes we perform in public for others. Sometimes we sing, play, or dance together in church. Sometimes we are just alone with God, and we can pray to God through our breath, our ears, our voice, and our body movements. What's important is that it be a spiritual experience.



Do you do any of the following in your life? If so, in what ways are they a spiritual experience for you?

Play an instrument -- alone or in a group? What is it like to practice? To perform? ... Or just to play?

Write music for others to sing/ play? What is that like for you?

Dance -- alone? In groups? In church? In prayer?

Sing -- alone? With others? In church? In prayer?

Rev. Ken says that he does not want to teach us facts about music. He wants to invite us into the experience of all forms of music as part of our spiritual life.

Let us pray: "Dear Lord, Thank you for Rev .Ken's music ministry, and help us each find ways to make music a part of our spiritual lives.

Paul Deming: Music Ministry

February 26, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 19: 1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

Psalm 24: 1-2

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.

Luke 19:39-40

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"
"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Ager) n. 780

In order that the Lord might be continuously present with me He has unfolded to me the spiritual sense of His Word, wherein is Divine truth in its very light, and it is in this light that He is continually present. For His presence in the Word is by means of the spiritual sense and in no other way; through the light of this sense He passes into the obscurity of the literal sense, which is like what takes place when the light of the sun in day-time is passing through an interposing cloud. That the sense of the letter of the Word is like a cloud, and the spiritual sense is the glory, the Lord Himself being the sun from which the light comes, and that thus the Lord is the Word, has been shown above. That "the glory" in which He is to come (Matt. 24:30), signifies Divine truth in its light, in which light the spiritual sense of the Word is, can be clearly seen from the following passages:

The voice of one crying in the desert, prepare ye the way of Jehovah; the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it (Isa. 40:3, 5).
Shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee (Isa. 40:1 to the end).

I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, and My glory will I not give to another (Isa. 42:6, 8; 48:11).

Thy light shall break forth as the morning; the glory of Jehovah shall gather thee up (Isa. 48:8).

All the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah (Num. 14:21; Isa. 6:1-3; 46:18).

In the beginning was the Word; in Him was life, and the life was the light of men. That was the true Light. And the Word was made flesh, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father (John 1:1, 4, 9, 14).

The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1).

The glory of God will lighten the Holy Jerusalem, and the Lamb is the light thereof, and the nations that are saved shall walk in the light of it (Apoc. 21:23, 24).

Besides in many other places. "Glory" signifies Divine truth its fullness, because all that is magnificent in heaven is from the light that goes forth from the Lord, and the light going forth from Him as the sun there, is in its essence Divine truth.

Paul Deming, Artist of the Month

Paul Deming was installed as the pastor of the Church of the Open Word in St. Louis, MO this past summer. Paul is one of the first Licensed Pastors in our denomination! He has started serving his church, and is also continuing to take courses towards completing the Licensed Pastor program.

Paul gives us a good idea of his pastoring style in last month's Messenger. In this article: ["The Starbuck's Encounter"](#) [Messenger, Jan. 2017]

He is having coffee with friends and they get into a theological discussion. He says:

"Our theology teaches that heaven welcomes and accepts those who welcome and accept heaven into themselves." ...

I paused for a moment then added,

"I suppose that sounds preachy, but I have a lot a passion for letting people know how loved they are."

"I don't mind it when it comes from you," she stated. "It's a lot easier to swallow when you put the message that way."

"That, pretty much, is the message."

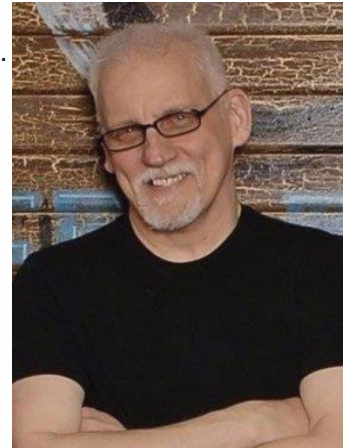
Paul was born in upstate New York, and has been playing and writing music since he was 9 years old. By the time he was 12, he was playing in bands.

Now, in addition to serving as Licensed Pastor at a Swedenborgian Church, he is also lead guitarist for the [Ralph Butler Band](#), a popular group in St. Louis.

He works as a music teacher at Rohan Woods School and gives private guitar lessons.

His music has long entranced the people of his church and Convention, but his national and world-wide reputation show that he is well-regarded around the globe.

His song, ***From the Rising of the Sun***, was published by Integrity Music in several languages and countries including France, Germany, Africa, and China. He has written songs for Operation Liftoff,



United Way and other charities.

Paul Deming's 2005 praise and worship CD is titled **Wise Men Still Seek Him**.

Paul has been attending our summer conventions since 2005 in Berkeley, where the theme was *Spirituality and the Arts*.

He says:

Discovering the New Church meant so much for me. Having been an active participant in fundamentalist churches in my earlier life, I was aware that some things simply didn't feel right, particularly the exclusive nature of most religions and denominations. Swedenborg's writings have helped resolve a lot of questions in a way that resonates with my soul. God is truly a God of Love.

Paul's Personal Statement:

I am a blessed man. It's not about financial stature or however many talents we can profess. What we are is about our choices and what we choose each day to give of ourselves to our loved ones; family, community, and our world. What we choose to believe about ourselves and what is possible in our lives affects what we believe about others and what is possible for all. If we are peaceful and happy in our own lives we will spread peace and happiness to the world.

Whatever your passion, I hope you can See a Bigger Picture. We are here for a purpose. Musically speaking, we are here to Create Harmony, not discord. When someone takes an occasional solo, we celebrate them as heroes in our lives. Real beauty occurs when we each do our part, raise our voices and join in a glorious choral anthem that celebrates, honors and protects all life on this blue planet.

Here is an opportunity to experience some of Paul's personal favorites among his compositions. How do you experience this music? How does it touch your heart and soul? How does it help connect you with the Divine?

Covenant Love:

Paul says of this piece:

Covenant Love was written during a time when there was significant church division. It was needful to remind brothers, sisters, moms and dads that we are connected in spirit and have been commissioned, as it were, to be the hands of God to each other. "Even as you've done to the least of these my brothers," our Lord said, "you've done it unto me."

Awake, Ye Who Sleep

I remember when I released this track I wasn't totally satisfied with how it turned out. Now as I look back, I was able to grasp the essence of what I wanted to express. It was that same sentiment the apostle Paul said in Ephesians, "Awake ye who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." The electric guitar tracks I recorded were my way of saying "Wake everybody up! To the extent we are able to receive Him, He will give us light!"

The Heavens are Telling:

The Heavens are telling is song about our inner compulsion to share the good news about God's love with those we know and care for.

It is loosely based on:

Psalm 19: The Heaven's Are Telling the Glories of God

Psalm 24: The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

And Luke 19:40: If these remain silent, the rocks will cry out.

Where I came from those who followed Jesus were considered saints in training, (sort of like angels in training). Saints were soldiers of the king.

The fallacy of course was any teaching that suggested we had achieved salvation rather than aspiring to it. Even the apostle Paul said, "Work out your own salvation." This song however celebrates the choice to serve the king and the desire to praise him with all of our being!

Let us pray. "Dear Divine Creator: Thank you for the blessing of Paul Deming in our lives. We so appreciate all that he gives of himself in his ministry at the Church of the Open Word. We are very grateful that his ministry with us and with the world includes his music, inspired by Your guidance. Please touch each of our hearts as we listen to his music, so that we may experience Your grace." Amen.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Ellen Spencer Mussey

March 5, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

From Swedenborg

Heavenly Secrets, #39

After the great lights are kindled and placed in the inner self, and the outer self is receiving light from them, the time arrives when we first start to live. Earlier, we can hardly be said to have been alive, thinking as we did that the good we perform and the truth we speak originate in ourselves. On our own we are dead and have nothing but evil and falsity inside, with the result that nothing we produce from ourselves has life. So true is this that by our own power we cannot do anything good—at least not anything inherently good. ...

Now, when love and faith have brought us to life and we believe that the Lord brings about all the good we do and the truth we speak, we are compared *initially to creeping animals of the water and birds flitting over the land and later to beasts. All these are animate and are called living souls.*

Ellen Spencer Mussey

In October of 2015, a very exciting event took place: The Parliament of World Religions. Swedenborgian Charles Bonney had suggested and planned a Parliament of World

Religions as part of the Chicago World's Fair [largely planned and built by Swedenborgian architect Daniel Burnham.]



One of the delegates to the Parliament was Swedenborgian Ellen Spencer Mussey.

She lived from 1850 to 1936. She was born in Ohio as Ellen Spencer. Both of her parents died young. In 1869 she went to the District of Columbia to live with her brother Henry and sister-in-law Sarah Andrews Spencer, who was an active and well-known suffragist. After moving, Ellen happened to meet General Reuben Delavan Mussey, Superintendent of the Sunday school at our Washington, D.C. Swedenborgian Church. She, too, became a Sunday school teacher, helping to teach Mussey's children. Mussey's wife died, and he married Ellen in 1871.

The Mussey's became well-known in the social circles of Washington. They personally knew many Presidents. They developed a law practice together, but Ellen was not allowed to enter law school. Why? She was a woman. There were no women lawyers at that time.

Not to be deterred, she studied law on her own, and joined her husband in a joint law practice. General Mussey died in 1892, and Ellen now needed to practice law on her own. She easily passed the bar exam in Washington, and was admitted to the bar in 1893.

Shortly after this, she was appointed to be a Swedenborgian delegate to the Parliament of Word Religions. She presumably knew Charles Bonney, the Swedenborgian who inspired and organized it as part of Chicago's World Fair.

Ellen's talk at the Parliament specifically addressed women:

Dear Sisters,

Let us fit ourselves and our daughters for a life of active use. Let us not be led astray by personal ambition or love of ease. Let us remember that every soul is accountable to God, and that we must form our opinions, even though they differ from those we love best. Let us not be disputatious, but rather help our brothers to see that when they shut themselves away from the womanly influence, they are in fact closing the higher or celestial plane of their minds, and so preventing the doctrines of the church from passing into life.

There was also a women's congress held alongside the World's Fair where Susan Anthony was speaking. Many thousands of women – and many men – were there to attend those meetings.

Ellen came to see how essential organization was for the advancement of women. She returned to DC determined to become active in the women's movement.

Her law practice flourished, and she took on controversial cases. She campaigned to change laws that discriminated against women.

She wrote a strong letter to the *New Church Messenger* in 1898,

What a loss it would have been to humanity if Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, and Frances Willard had been afraid of overstepping the bounds of womanly decorum. ... God made the bird to sing. He has made women to think and feel, and given them voices with which to be heard.

Mussey was a woman whose Swedenborgian faith guided her into an active life of working towards justice.

What things from her life are inspiring for your life?

Let us pray: Dear God, inspire each of us to live each day as a special gift from You, and an opportunity to live our faith in the actions of each day.

Lois Wilson, Co-Founder of Al-Anon

March 12, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5 The Beatitudes

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 6819

But not only is man in the singular the neighbor, but also man in the plural. For a society, smaller or greater, is the neighbor; our country is the neighbor; the church is the neighbor; the Lord's kingdom is the neighbor; and so above all is the Lord. All these are the neighbor who is to be benefited from

charity. These also are ascending degrees of the neighbor; for a society of many is the neighbor in a higher degree than is an individual man; our country in a higher degree than a society; in a still higher degree the church; and in a still higher degree the Lord's kingdom; but in the highest degree the Lord is the neighbor. These ascending degrees are like the steps of a ladder, at the top of which is the Lord.

Lois Burnham Wilson

This is Women's History Month! We're focusing on Swedenborgian women who made a difference in the world. [Last week](#), we looked at Ellen Spencer Mussey who spoke at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893.



That same year, 1893, Lois Burnham was a two year old girl, living in a wealthy section of Brooklyn Heights in New York City. She was a first child of an up and coming young physician; Clark Burnham, and his wife Matilda. Dr. Clark Burnham was a devout Swedenborgian who took his family every Sunday to the New York Swedenborgian Church. Clark's father – Lois' grandfather, was Nathan Clark Burnham, a Swedenborgian minister in PA.

Little Lois would have been oblivious to the excitement in Chicago—where the World's Fair was taking place. Lois' older cousin, Swedenborgian Daniel Burnham, was a forty-seven year-old architect in Chicago. [his father was the older brother of Lois' father]. Another Swedenborgian, Charles Bonney, had proposed that the World's Fair include a Parliament of World Religions. A number of prominent Swedenborgian women spoke at that conference, including Ellen Spencer Mussey, who was the focus of last week's service.

Lois had a loving and full childhood experience. She was one of the first U.S. kids to attend a new type of school called "kindergarten," a progressive concept from Germany. She was almost nine years old when her father had sufficient wealth and leisure to purchase a cottage on Emerald Lake in Vermont. Dr. Burnham took his family there every summer.

It was at Emerald Lake cabin in May of 1914 that young Lois answered the door to see one of the young "natives" selling kerosene lanterns. She knew that the young man was a friend of her brother's, but had never met him. His name was Bill Wilson. He was four years younger than Lois, and in a different social class. He was not a likely suitor for Lois. She had, in fact, recently started dating a young man named Norman Schneider. He was a Swedenborgian from Kitchener, Ontario, and she had met him at a church convention. Her parents were quite taken with Norman and had invited him to spend a week with them at their cottage. Lois liked him, but was not drawn to him the way her parents were. After he left, Rogers persuaded his sister to join some friends at a dance in town. She reluctantly agreed, only to find that waiting at the dance was Bill Wilson!

They danced together, and a courtship was begun. Bill was in college, and Lois – having graduated college – was working. They didn't see much of each other until the following summer at the lake.

Norman proposed to Lois, and she turned him down. Then Bill proposed, and she accepted. They kept it a secret for a while, knowing that her parents would be disappointed. Her parents did, however, reluctantly accept her choice.

They put on a grand wedding in the New York Swedenborgian Church on Jan. 24, 1918. Bill was in the army and they wanted to get married before he was shipped to France. It was a beautiful wedding. However, Dr. Burnham was concerned to see his new son in law at the reception guzzle down a glass of scotch. Lois had become concerned about Bill's drinking, but felt certain that once married he would stop.

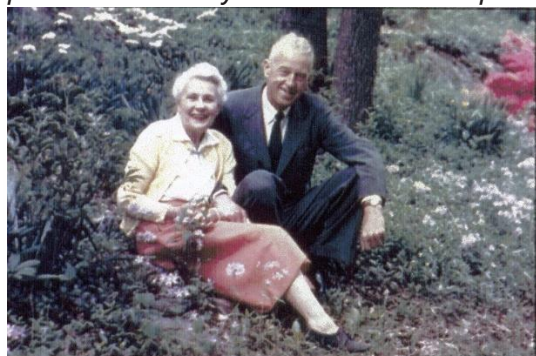
While her new husband was overseas, Lois worked with the YWCA and applied for a program that sent women overseas to help tend the wounded. She was shocked that the YW turned her down, as they felt that Swedenborgians and Unitarians were not Christians!



After the war, Bill and Lois continued to attend church there, although it seems that Lois was more active as a member. Their married life deteriorated as Bill's drinking grew worse. He tried many times to stop drinking, but kept returning. He finally stopped when, in detox, he reached total despair, and called out, "If there be a God, let him show himself!" He saw the room bathed in white light, and knew that God was with him. He never drank again. A friend dropped off a copy of a new book, "Varieties of Religious Experience" by psychologist William James [who had been raised as a Swedenborgian.] Bill's friend Ebby, also alcoholic, went to Switzerland to work with Dr. Jung, who told him that sobriety required a religious experience.

Eventually Bill and his fellow-alcoholic Dr. Bob founded Alcoholics Anonymous. Lois, frustrated by the life of a spouse of an alcoholic, founded Al-Anon.

There were many ways that Swedenborgian influences were with Bill as he became sober: the religion of his wife and her family; the book by William James, and Ebby's words from Dr. Jung. When the twelve steps were developed, Bill and Lois said it was primarily the 6 principles of the Oxford Group that influenced them. But through the years, many Swedenborgians have found a profound similarity between the 12 steps and Swedenborg's regeneration.



Rev. Jim Lawrence wrote to Lois [Burnham] Wilson in 1987 asking whether her Swedenborgian roots had influenced the development of the 12 steps. She wrote back: "I don't believe being a Swedenborgian had a direct influence, but it did much to make me ready for the message of the 12 steps which based on the 6 principles of the Oxford Group." One of the New Church ministers [I think it was Grant Schnarr] also wrote with a similar question and got back a similar answer, with her adding that even if it were true, she wouldn't tell anyone because of the importance of AA being separate from any religion.

Val Brugler has done considerable research on Lois' life. She said:

Her marriage to Bill W. began to degrade due to a combination of miscarriages and his drinking problem. Because of his drinking they were unable to adopt. Lois began to work on efforts for families of alcoholics after Bill had gone through rehabilitation and founded AA. These efforts led to the founding of Al-Anon. It now has over 29,000 groups worldwide and a membership of over 387,000.

Bill W. died in 1971 of emphysema. Lois died on October 5, 1988 at 97 years old..



Researcher Val Brugler further writes:

Lois Wilson was one of the 20th century's most important women through her useful service to humanity. It is through her tireless efforts and vision that Al-Anon is the strong organization it is today and why it continues to attract members through its message of hope and renewal. In the 1970's, the Swedenborg Church declared Lois Wilson a honorary life-long member of the church. More about the Al-Anon Family Groups can be seen on their website at www.al-anon.alateen.org.

She quotes Lois as saying:

"I believe that people are good if you give them half a chance and that good is more powerful than evil. The world seems to me excruciatingly, almost painfully beautiful at times, and the goodness and kindness of people often exceed that which even I expect."

- Lois Burnham Wilson

Kristine Mann

March 19, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5: 13-16

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

From Swedenborg

Doctrine of Life (Dick) n. 1

ALL RELIGION HAS RELATION TO LIFE, AND THE LIFE OF RELIGION IS TO DO GOOD

Everyone who has any religion knows and acknowledges that he who lives well will be saved, and that he who lives wickedly will be condemned; for he knows and acknowledges that he who lives well thinks well, not only concerning God but also concerning the neighbor; but not so he who lives wickedly. The life of man is his love; and what a man loves he not only does willingly but also thinks willingly. The reason, therefore, why it is said that the life [of religion] is to do good is, because the doing of good unites with the thinking of good; and unless they act in unison in a man, they do not form part of his life. But these things will be demonstrated in what follows.

Kristine Mann



This month we've been focusing on women who were influenced by Swedenborg – and considering what in Swedenborg inspired them – and can inspire us today.

We're going to look today about an amazing Swedenborgian woman, named Kristine Mann. To understand her story, we need to start with her parents.

Rev. Charles H. Mann, Kristine's father, was a Swedenborgian minister. He was born in 1838 in

Syracuse, NY., and graduated from Beloit University in Wisconsin, in 1860. After college, he fought in the Civil War, where he began reading books by Swedenborg. Before long he became a Swedenborgian, and went into training to become a minister. He began his pastorate in 1865 in Orange, N.J. He was there for 30 years. During those years, he was active in community affairs, as well as in his denomination – editing the Messenger. Later in life, he devoted himself to writing books on theology. He had been especially influenced by Swedenborgian Henry James, Sr.

Kristine's mother was Clausine Borschenius, who had moved to U.S. from Denmark at age 14. She learned about Swedenborg while she was in college.

Clausine' and Charles' child, Kristine, was born in 1873 while her father was pastor of the Orange church. When she was 11, the family started vacationing on Bailey Island in Maine.

She attended Smith College and earned an A.B., after which she worked with her father on the Messenger. She then taught in Orange for a year, after which she went to Berlin to teach English.



In the meantime, Rev. Mann ran into conflict with the Swedenborgian Church when he challenged "ecclesiasticism", arguing that Swedenborg wrote "the life of religion is to do good." He was fired from the Messenger and quit his Orange pastorate.

In 1900, Kristine returned to the States and got an M.A. in English at the Univ. of Michigan. She continued teaching and going to school, until receiving an M.D. in 1913. She went to Wellesley to help with training in physical education. She worked in a variety of positions where she was working on public health issues—esp. for women.

In 1919, at a conference, she became fascinated with Jungian analysis, and in 1921 she went to Zurich to work with Jung. She connected with an important theme in her father's life – to connect Swedenborgian writings with the psychological and healing.

Dr. Kristine Mann wrote on the subject, and saw Swedenborg as a forerunner of Jung. Dr. Mann then became an analyst in New York and on Bailey Island in Maine.

In 1936, Jung came to the states to receive an honorary doctorate from Harvard, and was invited to Bailey Island to lecture. He stayed with the Mann's at their family retreat in Maine, and his lectures have become known as the Baily Island Lectures.

So Kristine Mann had an incredible impact on the world – through her teaching, her medical work, and her years as a Jungian analyst and Swedenborgian.

To fully appreciate her life – and that of her father's – it's important to remember that "the life of religion is to do good."

Kristine and her parents were all extremely educated people and spiritual people. But what was important in their lives was not attending worship services or studying for its own sake. Their focus was to bring change to the world.

The change that was especially important to them was bringing forth deeper appreciation of Jung's work, which they saw as on a parallel path to Swedenborg.

Their lives reflected their beliefs – religion is about doing good; not just visiting in a church building. Where do you find that you worship? Swedenborg honors wherever we can connect with the Divine. It can be through a walk in the woods or listening to a piece of music.

I remember providing spiritual direction to a woman who couldn't find a way to connect with God. She tried many different forms of prayers, but none of them left her fulfilled. She only felt close to God when she was riding her bike or doing art work. I asked her if biking riding and drawing might be her forms of prayers. She was delighted by that thought! She had seen prayer as something rigid and pre-defined. When she saw prayer as connected with the events of her life, she realized she already prays regularly, and is greatly fulfilled by it.

When do you find yourself most connected with the Divine? When you do good works in the world, can you see them as forms of worship?

Expanding concepts of prayers and worship brings us closer to Swedenborg's writings.

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom,

Thank you for the blessings of the lives of Kristine Mann and Charles Mann, and for all they taught us from how they lived their lives. Help us seek You in the moments and events of ordinary days.

Selma Ware Paine

March 26, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Love

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

From Swedenborg

The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 56

Whatever you love the most becomes your goal, and you look to it in everything you do. This is present in your motivation like the imperceptible current of a river which carries you along even when you are thinking of other things, for it is this that gives life.

Selma Ware Paine



This month we are exploring the question: Where can we find personal spiritual inspiration in the lives of Swedenborgian women of the past?

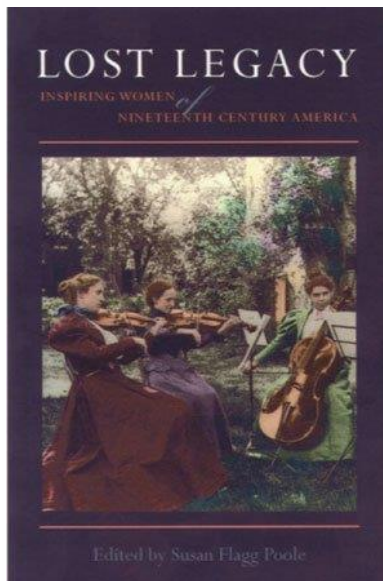
One inspirational woman is Selma Ware Paine; a woman who was born in Maine in 1847. She passed away in 1917, and as her family were clearing out her house, they found many of her writings. Her sister started writing the family history, including much of Selma's writings. The resulting book is *The Discovery of a Grandmother: Glimpses into the Homes and Lives of Eight Generations of an Ipswich-Paine Family Gathered Together by One of the Ninth for the Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Generations*. It was published in 1920. You can download it in a number of ways, including through Kindle.

Her father was a successful attorney and her mother was an artist and musician.

Selma's story is also told in Susan Poole's book, [Lost Legacy: Inspiring Women of Nineteenth Century America](#). Poole points out that Selma had a great desire to fulfill her own inner calling and that motherhood could get in the way; although she was very supportive of mothers.

She was active in the women's rights movement, often quoting Swedenborg on uses. She was one of the Swedenborgian speakers at the Parliament of World Religions. There she said:

...there are women to whom their evident use says: 'You cannot walk in the common highway. ... You must pass alone, through the forest. You must climb this mountain. You must descend into that dark and hidden valley.'



She loved her experiences at the Parliament, of which she said it was "the most enlightening soul event of the century." Afterwards, she began making speeches to women's groups.

It was her father who inspired her Swedenborgian interests. One item from his diary of Oct. 1835 is about the various religious groups in his area. He wrote:

Among these are found a few devoted followers of the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg. They are as yet few and scarcely noticed as such. This doctrine I believe is destined to become extensively adopted and believed, not so much perhaps by sudden changes and departures from the other societies and creeds, but by a silent change undeserved as it advances in it progresses towards

universal reception.

Selma was especially inspired by Swedenborg's concepts of uses and his support for both men and women to follow their true path in life. A small volume of her poems, *Fugitive Verses*, was published in 1907 and is a treasured reminder of a woman who was able to follow her own path, in spite of the personal and social challenges of the times.

Here is one of her poems:

Oh, gentle prophet of the year's decline,
Why mark so soon the shortening of the days?
The blooming summer yet has maiden ways
And, see her cheek is roseleaf, fair, and fine,
Her breath is fragrant with the withering vine
Her voice is full and firm with chorused lays.
Why then your sweet untimely warning raise,
Your autumn strain with summer song combine?
And yet an added harmony you bring
And yet an added harmony you bring.
There is a message in your music laid.
Could summer song its full perfection reach
Without a tone from autumn and from spring?
Of present, past, and future life is made,
And what is perfect has a touch of each.

We can be inspired by her commitment to following the path that she believed God had set for her. She felt that anyone's true fulfillment comes from following the deep inspiration from within. She did not hesitate to follow her heart's promptings, even when they brought her criticism.

What are the ways that you believe you are following God's calling? Are there any ways you are uncertain about the path you are on?

As we move towards Easter, this is a good time to bring our questions and confusions to our prayer life, and ask for clarity on the inner guidance. Then, follow the nudges that emerge. Everyone has doubts about whether or not one's path is God's will. Swedenborg reminds us that God is within, inspiring and guiding – but not commanding. Swedenborg reminds us to seek for the deepest loves inside of us to light our path.

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom:

Please help us to feel your ever-present guidance deep within. Let us always remember to reflect Your light outwards, so that every day we bring something of ourselves into the world – allowing the sun a little brighter.

Amen.

Swedenborgians at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions

April 2, 2017

READINGS From the Bible

Mark 11: 23-26

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell 4054

The brain, like heaven, belongs to the realm of ends which are uses, for whatever flows in from the Lord is an end looking towards the salvation of the human race. This is the end which reigns in heaven, and also which as a result reigns in the brain, for the brain, where man's mind is seated, looks to ends in the body, that is to say, so that the body may serve the soul and that the soul may be eternally happy.

Swedenborgians at the Fair

What if there were a time machine that allowed you to visit events of the past. Where would you like to go? I would choose Chicago in 1893. The Chicago World's Fair.

The excitement began on February 24, 1890, when Chicago received the electrifying news that their city was selected – over New York – to host the 1892 World's Fair. [Which was delayed until 1893.]



Even before then, a flurry of plans and proposals had proliferated through the city. One enthusiastic proposal was different from all the others. It was put forth by Swedenborgian lawyer Charles C. Bonney. He wrote:

"The crowning glory of the 1892 World's Fair should not be the exhibits then to be made of material triumphs, industrial achievements and mechanical victories of man, however magnificent that display

may be. *Something higher and nobler is demanded by the enlightened spirit of the present age.*

"Statesmen, jurists, financiers, scientists, literati, teachers, and theologians" would meet in conjunction with the proposed world's fair to discuss everything from religion to international law to "the practicability of a common language."

Bonney advocated that the fair be more than just the exhibits; it would also have "Congresses" or "parliaments" – including anthropology, labor, medicine, commerce and finance, literature, history, art, philosophy, and science. And religion. He was put in charge of all of the World Congresses. He was especially committed to the Parliament of World Religions. He said its purpose was:

"To unite all religion against all irreligion; to make the Golden Rule the basis of this union; to present to the world in the Religious Congresses, to be held in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, the substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of the Religious Life; to provide for a World's Parliament of Religions, in which their common aims and common grounds of union may be set forth, and the marvelous Religious Progress of the Nineteenth Century be reviewed; and to facilitate separate and Independent Congresses of different Religious Denominations and Organizations, under their own officers, in which their business may be transacted, their achievements presented, and their work for the future considered."

This was the first time in history that an attempt had been made to bring together religions of the world in "absolute respect" for each other. [See George Dole's [With Absolute Respect: The Swedenborgian Theology of Charles Carroll Bonney \(Swedenborg Studies\)](#)]

Just who was this Charles Bonney?

Charles C. Bonney was born in Hamilton, New York on September 4, 1831. He attended Colgate University, and got a law degree. He taught for a while, and then moved to Peoria, IL where he founded a school. In 1852, he became a lecturer in education at Peoria College, and he played an important role in setting up the Illinois state school system.

While living in Peoria, he attended a New Church service. He was impressed, and continued to attend while reading the works of Swedenborg. The theology confirmed his own conviction that the religions of the world should all be respected and honored. He wrote:

"In this church I was taught the fundamental truths which made a Parliament of World Religions possible, upon which rested the whole plan of the religious congresses of 1893, and which guided the execution of that plan to a success so great and far-reaching that only the coming generations can fully comprehend and estimate its influence. ... [Genesis by Bonney]

Bonney moved to Chicago in 1860. In 1866, he became a judge of the Supreme Court of Illinois. Bonney was president of the Illinois State Bar Association in 1882. He was also active in the American Bar Association, serving as Vice President in 1887, and became a candidate for the Supreme Court of the United States.

He is especially remembered for his role in establishing the first [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), at the [World's Columbian Exposition](#) of 1893, where over 200 "World's Congresses" or "World's Parliaments" were held. Bonney was president and oversaw all of them.

The Parliament, which ran from September 11 to the 27th. Today it is recognized as the birth of the interfaith movement.



In addition to the large Parliament of World Religions, there were smaller congresses for various religious faiths and denominations. There was a meeting of the Church of the New Jerusalem. One delegate was Sarah Hibbard, daughter of Richard De Charms. *New Church Life* in 1893 quoted the start of her remarks:

We are assembled here as an integral part of this Congress of Religions. From all parts of the world, representatives of creeds, both ancient and modern, have come together to exchange thoughts on the various ideas concerning God, and the relation of His creatures to Him. The papers which will be presented will draw their inspiration from the source of Divine Truth as it may appear to each writer, whether he be Hindoo, or Chinese, Mahometan or Christian. Our thoughts as expressed must likewise be drawn from the source of our religious inspiration.



Another Swedenborgian delegate was Ellen Spencer Mussey. She practiced law before women could be lawyers. She was active in suffrage before women could vote.

..there are women to whom their evident use says: 'You cannot walk in the common highway. ... You must pass alone, through the forest. You must climb this mountain. You must descend into that dark and hidden valley.

She loved her experiences at the Parliament, of which she said it was "the most enlightening soul event of the century."

Selma Ware Paine also loved being a speaker at the Parliament.



There she said:

...there are women to whom their evident use says: 'You cannot walk in the common highway. ... You must pass alone, through the forest. You must climb this mountain. You must descend into that dark and hidden valley.'

Afterward attending the Parliament, she began making speeches to women's groups.

Other Swedenborgians were involved in the fair itself. It was largely planned and developed by Swedenborgian architect Daniel Burnham and became known as the White City. It was an opportunity for famous painters of the time to display their art, including Swedenborgian George Inness. One of the exhibits at the fair was for a machine that could write Braille. Young Helen Keller was a visitor at that exhibit.

Visitors at the fair include Theodore Dreiser, Helen Keller, Houdini, Tesla, Edison, Joplin, Darrow, a Princeton professor named Woodrow Wilson, Teddy Roosevelt, Lillian Russell, and an elderly lady named Susan B. Anthony.



In so many ways, this fair was the door-way into the Twentieth Century. The U.S. wanted to host a World's Fair in 1892 to honor the 400th anniversary of the Columbus discovering America. Chicago, striving to overcome its association with stockyards and the great fire, put its heart into getting the commission over New York. They wanted to show how much the U.S. had achieved since 1492. Achievements at the fair included:

- Westinghouse's first large demonstration of alternation current to illuminate the fair grounds.
- A guy named "Ferris" invented a huge wheel of steel cars to let people ride up high, round and round.
- Foods introduced at the fair included: Cracker Jacks, Cream of Wheat, Hershey's Chocolate, Juicy Fruit Gum, Aunt Jemima's Pancake Mix, Shredded Wheat, and Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer named for the award it won.

The fair was such a transition into the 20th Century in so many ways. The Parliament of World Religions was such an opening of interfaith understanding in the West.

I would especially love to have heard the talks given at the Parliament, and appreciate the sense of "oneness" that was felt as so many religions came together for the first time.

I find thinking about the Fair and Parliament is an affirmation of my faith. I feel the sense of so many Swedenborgians before me who have been involved in creating a better world and reaching out to share with other faith traditions.

These are aspects of our faith that I find especially enriching – knowing that we today are part of a long and useful tradition.

What things do you value about being part of or learning about the Swedenborgian tradition? How does it speak to your life of faith today?

Dear Lord, thank you for the many people of faith who have gone before us and created greater oneness in our world. Guide us to find the common spirit in humanity as we continue today to build a world of love.

Palm Sunday – Waving the Palms!

April 9, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

John 12:12-16

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

Luke 22: 39-46

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 104

When the Lord was being emptied out he was in a state of progress toward union; when he was being glorified he was in a state of union itself. The church recognizes that the Lord had two states while he was in the world; one called being emptied out; the other called glorification.

Waving the palms

It can be difficult to select a theme for a Palm Sunday message. If one goes to the Common Lectionary "Texts for this Week," one has a choice of the Liturgy of the Palms or the Liturgy of the Passion. You can focus on the joy of the journey into Jerusalem or on the pain and agony of Jesus on the cross. In our readings today, I have included one passage from each liturgy.



I'd like to focus on the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; a pivotal point that turned the week starting with palms into one ending with pain and passion.

Holy Week is a long journey through many stages. Swedenborg's process of regeneration is a long road, with much struggle, before one reaches "union." In many ways, Holy Week is a condensed version of that journey. When you make the decision that you want to walk a spiritual path, then you are also deciding to walk through all of the bumps and pot holes in the road.

Often, our first sense of God is a glimpse of something beautiful and peaceful calling to us. To respond to the call feels joyous and liberating. At the beginning, there is excitement about beginning a new journey. There are so many hopes and dreams that lie ahead. Following God's will is easy on Palm Sunday; riding a donkey into a cheering crowd! It's like romantic love early in a relationship. It's easy to make a commitment in the midst of romance. It's harder to maintain the commitment through the years ahead filled with conflicts and compromises. Yet, it is in working through the conflicts that a much deeper mature love can blossom many years later.



By following the road into Jerusalem, Jesus has an intense week. He attends a Passover supper with his disciples, at which one of them betrays him. He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, where he is arrested and crucified.

Let's look at the difference between the ride into Jerusalem and the time spent in prayer in the garden. It was easy to follow God's will while palms were waving.

Now it is hard, and Jesus goes into deep prayer:

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

The path strewn with palms led into the Garden of Gethsemane. How many times have you prayed for God to rescue you from something you know you have to do? That part of the prayer is easy. It is

very difficult to end it the way Jesus does:

"Not my will, but thine be done."

This is the most important part of the prayer. We live in an era when many people try to "create their own reality" by focusing on the things they want, and trying to bring them into their lives. However, this is often done by focusing on what the ego wants – not on checking out God's will.

We often pray for something specific: a new job, a satisfying relationship, good health. How often do we ask God what God's will is for us? So often today, our prayers are telling God what we want God to do for us.

In the garden, Jesus asks for what he wants, but he emphasizes that he wants God will to be done.

This is a very difficult thing to ask; for sometimes God's will can be hard.

When the Lord was being emptied out he was in a state of progress toward union; when he was being glorified he was in a state of union itself. The church recognizes that the Lord had two states while he was in the world; one called being emptied out; the other called glorification....TC 104

Swedenborg is using his own words to describe a spiritual process that is found in many world traditions. Our spiritual path is leading us to recognize our union with the Divine. To get to this partnership, we must be tempted and challenged to the point where our old ego dies; making room for God's complete oneness with us.

Swedenborg tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was letting go of his old ego needs and desires. On the cross, Jesus completed the emptying of the ego, and came into union with God. Swedenborg calls this the glorification of Jesus. This is a process each of us must undergo on our soul's journey to God.

What barriers stand between you and God? Where do you need to empty yourself so that God's inflow can fill you?

During this Holy Week, think of yourself as letting go of all inner barriers, so that on Easter Sunday you can be completely open to receiving God's joyful gift of love.

During this week, be open to any of the feelings that are present for you. It is a week of celebration, of fellowship, of betrayal, and of painful ego death. Our Thursday chat will be an opportunity to share the experience of Maundy Thursday and preparing for Easter.

Let yourself have all of those feelings during the week. But don't forget to come back next Sunday, when we will celebrate the glorious union with God that awaits us all.

Easter-Happy Holistic, Holographic Easter!

April 16, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 28: 1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 114: 6

Suffering on the cross was the final trial the Lord underwent as the greatest prophet. It was a means of glorifying his human nature, that is, of uniting that to his Father's divine nature. It was not redemption

happy holistic, holographic easter!



Happy Easter!

This is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus!

Swedenborg sees Easter as a celebration of Jesus and the Divine being one. Jesus experienced "glorification" – or union with the divine. The cross was the final emptying of his ego state when he felt abandoned by God. If you are abandoned by someone, then there are two of you – one does

the abandoning of the other. When you become one, there can be no abandonment; only union.

What meaning does that have for us today? The modern concept of the hologram can help see the meaning for our lives.

The late Rev. Dr. Bob Kirven said that Swedenborg had a unique understanding of how the divine and human nature intersected. Swedenborg said that spirit and matter were both real, both different, and both the same! They are "distinguishably one."

Physicist Michael Talbot wrote: "If Emanuel Swedenborg were alive today, it is likely that he would find many aspects of the new physics compatible with his own thought." And he wrote: "perhaps the most astonishing foreshadowing of new-physics ideas in Swedenborg's writings are the similarities between his world view and a revolutionary new way of looking at nature known as the 'holographic paradigm.'"

In an older, Newtonian model, we might take apart things in the world to see all their different parts. But from a holographic perspective, if we take things apart and get down to the smallest elements, we find the whole existing in the every part. Or we find the divine in everything.

Every part of a hologram contains the whole.

George Dole says, "I see the holographic model as implicit in his [Swedenborg's] Christology. In his view, it is intrinsic to the divine nature to be wholly present in every part of creation, and especially clearly in human beings."

Swedenborg says that the resurrection shows that we live in partnership with God. What is this partnership? If we ask our partner: "What is Your will for me?", our partner might respond: "What are your deepest loves? Those are my will for you."

This partnership is relational.

Do you invite God into everyday relationship with you? The joy of Easter is remembering that God exists within us –and in all parts of creation.

So often, we either put God out by the side to be ignored, or we pray for God to tell us what to do. If we really believe there is a partnership, how would our prayer life change? How would our concept of God change? How do we bring God into the smallest, everyday acts of our day?

Easter reminds us that we live in a holographic universe in which the divine is in the smallest of things. Everything we do impacts everyone else.

Daniel Burnham & Earth Day, pt. 1

April 23, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 24

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?

The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.

They will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from God their Savior.

Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3063 3063.

And do mercy. That this signifies an influx of love is evident from the essence of mercy, as being



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

love. Love is itself turned to mercy and becomes mercy when anyone who is in need of help is regarded from love or charity; hence mercy is the effect of love toward the needy and miserable. But here by "mercy" in the internal sense is meant love; and by "doing mercy" is meant an influx of love, because it is from the Lord's Divine Itself into His Divine Human; for it was the Lord's Divine love through which He made His Human Divine; for love is the very being of life, and no one has Divine love but the Lord.

The Architecture of Daniel Burnham & Earth Day

This is Earth Day week, and the theme this year from the World Council of Churches is: [Environmental Justice with Indigenous Peoples](#). They write:

As people of faith, we have a moral call to pursue environmental justice: the sustainable and equitable sharing of the gifts of God's creation among all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or class. Yet, inequities abound. To take steps toward healing our relationship with God's creation and each other, we need to understand the roots of the injustice.

A root cause of environmental injustice is the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery originated with the Christian church and was based on Christian scripture. For more than five centuries, the Doctrine of Discovery and the laws based upon it have legalized the theft of land, labor and resources from Indigenous Peoples, and systematically denied their human rights. Source: "Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery" exhibit, Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Working Group, dofmenno.org.



Photo by Rev. Mary Frances Schjonberg, Episcopal News Service

The World Council of Churches adds:

The "Doctrine of Discovery" is a philosophical and legal framework dating to the 15th century that gave Christian governments moral and legal rights to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous Peoples. The patterns of oppression that continue to dispossess Indigenous Peoples of their lands today are found in numerous historical documents such as Papal Bulls, Royal Charters and U.S. Supreme Court rulings as recent as 2005. ...

Because the Doctrine of Discovery did not consider Indigenous Peoples to be human if they were not Christian, conquering nations rationalized enslavement of the people they encountered. For example, the 1452 Papal Bull (pronouncement) Dum Diversas issued by Pope Nicholas V said that Christian sovereigns were empowered by the Church to "invade, capture, vanquish and subdue... all Saracens (Muslims) and Pagans and all enemies of Christ... to reduce their persons to perpetual

*slavery... and to take away all of their possessions and property.
The Papal Bull Romanus Pontifex issued in 1455 reinforced these principles. "*

To read more about this year's topic on environmental justice by the WCC, [see this link](#).

There is much in our Swedenborgian doctrine of inflow and of uses that helps us to sustain the environment. Daniel Burnham helped to preserve this concept through architecture.



Daniel Burnham was an architect, living in Chicago. His father was the older brother of Nathan Clark Burnham [Lois Burnham Wilson's father]. Lois and Daniel were first cousins, grandchildren of Rev. Nathan Clark Burnham. [See the genealogy in graphic by clicking here on [Burnham Family Tree](#) for a pdf version]

Daniel's family had moved to Chicago when he was seven. He had hopes of going to Harvard or Yale, but failed both entrance exams. While doing assorted jobs, he discovered a passion for architecture.

Daniel had fallen in love with a lovely young woman whose father, Holland Weeks, was a Congregational minister. However, Rev. Weeks found himself increasingly drawn to the Swedenborgians, and ended up starting a society of the Church of the New Jerusalem in Henderson, N.Y., in 1825.

Like his cousin Lois Wilson, Daniel was raised as a Swedenborgian. He had become a successful architect, and was commissioned to be the Director of Works for the Columbian Exposition; The Chicago World's Fair. It opened on May 1st, 1893, and people gasped in amazement at the 640 acre fair. An entire city had been created in Jackson Park! It was a city filled with the scents of flowers instead of the stench of the stock yard. The streets were clear; not filled with garbage. The buildings were aesthetically pleasing, in matching white, and they all served useful purposes. The water was clean; the food was plentiful.

It was called "The White City" after the color of the buildings. The White City offered a new vision of what kind of community could exist in a city. It became the start of city planning and landscaping, it was a statement about the integration of the environment and social justice. It made Daniel Burnham into a world-famous architect.



About 15 years later, Burnham was commissioned to develop a plan for Chicago. He put together a breath-taking vision of a city that was for the use of its citizens. He presented his plan in 1909, and much of the plan was put into effect after his death in 1912.

Burnham said that his plan for Chicago was inspired by Swedenborg's concept of "uses." He believed that a city or a building should exist for improving the quality of life of people. In Chicago, he saw that the property along the shore of Lake Michigan was being purchased for private enjoyment or by business for industrial gain. He believed that the water and the land belonged to everyone. He fought tirelessly to get the shores into the hands of a commission that made it all into beautiful parks for the enjoyment of all. One can now drive for miles along Lake Shore drive with an unobstructed view of the water, and enjoy beautiful public parks. Burnham knew that many people experienced the divine in nature, and he believed that a city -- and a building -- should have a lot of open space and light. He put many parks in the cities that he developed plans for. Most of the work he did for cities was done without a fee.

This week is an opportunity for us to remind ourselves about the beauty of the earth around us. Admire the nature of our earth, and all the creatures that exist upon it. Reflect on the Divine that has created all that is, and is the essence of all existence.

Next week we'll explore more about the Swedenborgian concepts in the work of architect Daniel Burnham.

Let us pray.

Dear Divine, help us to appreciate the beauty of the earth that You have created. Help us in honoring all that lives upon Your earth. Help us to be especially mindful of the indigenous peoples of many nations who have lost sacred lands from the mis-application of Christian concepts. May we become part of the solution to environmental justice.

Daniel Burnham: Finding God in Buildings, Pt. 2

April 30, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Mark 11: 23-26

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

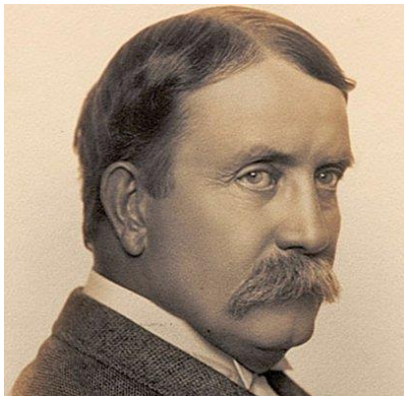
But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 4054

The brain, like heaven, belongs to the realm of ends which are uses, for whatever flows in from the Lord is an end looking towards the salvation of the human race. This is the end which reigns in heaven, and also which as a result reigns in the brain, for the brain, where man's mind is seated, looks to ends in the body, that is to say, so that the body may serve the soul and that the soul may be eternally happy.

The Architecture of Daniel Burnham, Part 2



May is our month to look at Swedenborgian architects, and we're focusing on Daniel Burnham. As we said [LAST WEEK](#)

Daniel Burnham was an architect, living in Chicago. His father was the older brother of Nathan Clark Burnham [Lois Burnham Wilson's father]. Lois and Daniel were first cousins, grandchildren of Rev. Nathan Clark Burnham. [See the genealogy in graphic by clicking here on [Burnham Family Tree](#) for a pdf version]

Daniel's family had moved to Chicago when he was seven. He had hopes of going to Harvard or Yale, but failed both entrance exams. While doing assorted jobs, he discovered a passion for architecture.

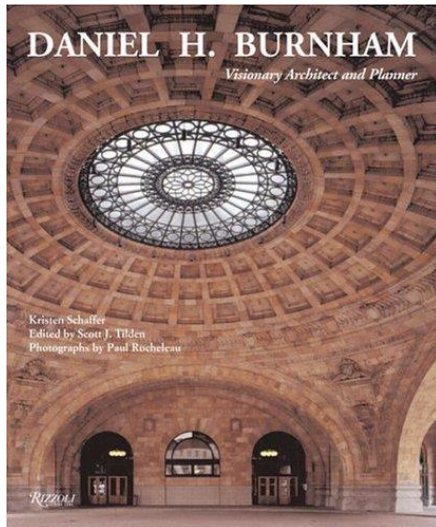
Like his cousin Lois Burnham Wilson, Daniel was raised as a Swedenborgian. He had become a successful architect, and was commissioned to be the Director of Works for the Columbian Exposition; the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. It opened on May 1st, and people gasped in amazement at the 640 acre fair. An entire city had been created in Jackson Park! It was a city filled with the scents of flowers instead of the stench of the stock yard. The streets were clear; not filled with garbage. The buildings were aesthetically pleasing, in matching white, and they all served useful purposes. The water was clean; the food was plentiful.



It was called "The White City" because of the color of the buildings. The White City offered a new vision of what kind of community could exist in a city. It became the start of city planning and landscaping, it was a statement about the integration of the environment and social justice. It made Daniel Burnham into a world-famous architect.

About 15 years later, Burnham was commissioned to develop a plan for Chicago. He put together a breath-taking vision of a city that was for the use of its citizens. He presented his plan in 1909, and much of the plan was put into effect after his death in 1912.

Burnham said that his plan for Chicago was inspired by Swedenborg's concept of "uses." He believed that a city or a building should exist for improving the quality of life of people. In Chicago, he saw that the property along the shore of Lake Michigan was being purchased for private enjoyment or by business for industrial gain. He believed that the water and the land belonged to everyone. He fought tirelessly to get the shores into the hands of a commission that made it all into beautiful parks for the enjoyment of all. One can now drive for miles along Lake Shore drive with an unobstructed view of the water, and enjoy beautiful public parks. Burnham knew that many people experienced the divine in nature, and he believed that a city -- and a building -- should have a lot of open space and light. He incorporated numerous parks in the plans for cities. Most of the work he did for city planning was done without a fee.



One researcher on Daniel Burnham's, Dr. Kristen Schaffer, in her book, *Daniel H Burnham*, has discovered that Burnham's original draft of the Chicago Plan contained a radical social agenda in addition to a physical lay-out of the city. Burnham had wanted a city filled with social services to alleviate hunger and homelessness – and even to provide day care for the children of working parents. What happened to that part of the plan? It somehow disappeared from the final version of the Chicago Plan. It has yet to be implemented. This is part of what he wrote, that was eliminated:

It is only within comparatively recent times that people have begun to realize the imperative need of organizing the forces of honesty and decency, for better physical conditions, for broader charities, for the prevention as well as the cure of evils. Slowly it is beginning to dawn on the American mind that the rights of the individual must be subordinated to the general good, that the price of civilization is provision for the health and happiness of all the people, and that the really prosperous city is one that education and morality, by inculcating high ideals, unite all the people in the common endeavor to make their city preeminent.

In this newly-awakened civic consciousness lies the hope of the regeneration of the American city. The merely animal growth will no longer suffice. Pride in mere numbers or area is seen to be unworthy. The newer ideals comprehend good order and convenience and even beauty. In short, the city is developing within itself a soul.

In such a spirit, this report is conceived.

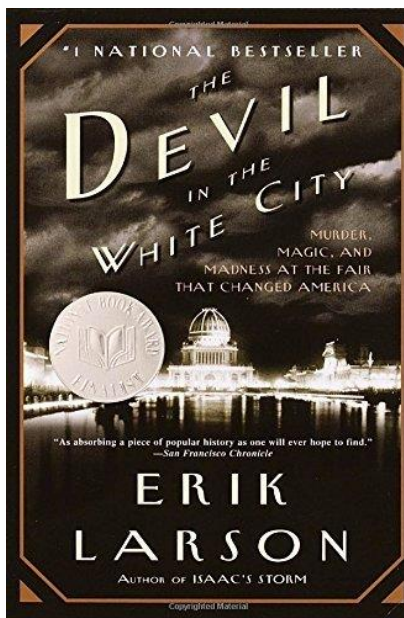
Burnham knew that God's plan for us was not just heaven after we die, but heaven right here and now.

The White City & the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, was a mysterious event that has changed the world. The vision of the purity in its design and the cutting-edge innovations and concepts it introduced to the public sparked change. People's lives were woven together in ways that only God can understand.

Daniel Burnham's role in the fair changed Chicago and architecture forever. It led to his being commissioned to develop the Plan of Chicago years later. Seeds from this plan spread across the country and are visible in the style of many of the city buildings, courts and banks inspired by his designs.



Interior of Burnham's Washington D.C. Union Station



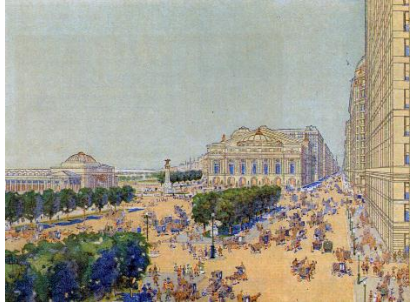
The fair was also a time that serial killer, H. H. Holmes, found victims for his horrible crimes. Next week, we'll look at the non-fiction book, *Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* by Erik Larson. It contrasts Daniel Burnham's brilliant experience in the Columbian Exposition with the evil deeds of H.H. Holmes.

Another aspect of the 1893 World's Fair was The Parliament of World Religions. It was the first attempt to bring together all of the world's religions, and it was instrumental in starting the interfaith movement in the U.S. Its designer was Chicago Swedenborgian Charles Bonney.

Daniel Burnham took the concepts of Swedenborg and used them to develop architectural design. For Lois Burnham, Swedenborg was her childhood grounding, out of which she came to terms with Bill's alcoholism and helped to found Al-Anon.

Surprisingly, Burnham never did well in school, and flunked his college entrance exams. Yet, he radically changed the lives of countless generations of people in Chicago, D.C., the Philippines, and many other places. He has given many of us an opportunity to experience the Divine in even a grain of sand along the shore of Lake Michigan. He found his deepest passion in life, and he followed it.

Burnham knew that God's plan for us was not just heaven after we die, but heaven right here and now in our cities. The health and happiness of all people – and all of nature – is in that plan.



How can Burnham's approach to architecture inspire us in our lives today, to seek for God's plan for each of our lives? How can we work towards creating heaven on earth?

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Creator, Thank you for the blessings in the life of Daniel Burnham. Help us to be inspired by his courage and commitment to Swedenborgian values. Help us to take these values into the world day by day. Amen.

Finding New Life

May 7, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Mark 16: 1-6.

"And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the (mother) of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early in the morning the first (day) of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?

"And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away; for it was very great. And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid him."

From Swedenborg

Glorification , Pendleton, Nathaniel D.,1941: p. 31

When Jesus rose from the grave, a dying age revived, a new church came into being. The news of His resurrection spread far and wide. Men question, saying, What think ye? Do we rise from the grave to new life? This question is at the heart of all men in every age. Their hope, their faith, their doubt, their denial rises and falls. They never quite give up all hope. They are never altogether free from doubt and its temptation. The veil between the two worlds varies in density; sometimes little or no light passes through; and again, it becomes all but transparent. This with the varying influence of religion, the decrease or increase of faith.

A fallen religion encourages doubt and increases pessimism. A new church brightens the light from heaven, and faith strengthens until it imparts a realizing sense of certainty and security. In the beginning of a new church heaven draws near, and men become spiritually minded. Their hearts turn to the life beyond as to a future home. Their interest is engaged with the new truth that is revealed. A new revelation and church are companion parts; one is not given without the other. A new church is a new religion which brings with it a new age. A new church is not a mere reformation nor a schismatic development. This last divides the church, and at last brings it to an end. The Lord came to establish a new church. The old had fallen through successive ages, until it became a denial of that which brought it into being. The circle of its life was completed. Its morning had passed into a lasting night, a Sadducean night, in which there is denial of a resurrection -no hope of a new spiritual day. In this night our Lord was buried; yet He came forth from the darkness of death in the early morning, at the rising of the sun to signify the commencing of a new church-the dawning of a new spiritual age and the rising of a new spiritual sun.

Message

Finding New Life in the Easter Journey

This week we had the opportunity to appreciate May Day ---a joyous celebration that takes place around Easter each year. This is a season for new growth and rebirth on all levels.

Easter is not just a day, but a season that we celebrate for a number of weeks.



It's important to understand that Easter – like Christmas – is honored for a weeks in the Christian calendar. There is a lot of excitement about Easter morning – special church services, Easter bunny gifts for children, family time. But then the next morning, we tend to put Easter behind us and move on with every-day life.

Yet, the weeks after Easter are a great time to reflect on the new growth in your spiritual life that often comes with Easter.

Easter is about entering the state of "regeneration." Easter is about BEING different; not just ACTING in ways we think we should. It is doing good things that are loving -- because that is who we are and what makes us happy.

The crucifixion and resurrection are about Jesus entering complete regeneration. Swedenborg called the process Jesus went through *glorification*, which is the human journey of regeneration. It was achieving complete oneness between the Divine and the human -- the Divine Human.

Suffering on the cross was the final trial the Lord underwent. It was a means of glorifying his human nature; that is, of uniting that nature to his Father's divine nature. ... TC 114

Some traditions believe that Jesus had to die because humanity was so evil. They believe that we were born into evil, and Jesus had to save us. To Swedenborg, we are not born into evil. We are born with free will, but we have a tendency to do evil because we grow up seeing adults doing it. We do not need to be saved from the evil that we do; we need to learn to change ourselves through our own process of regeneration. We need to learn to *behave* differently, and then to *become* different.

When we do that, Swedenborg says we come into a state of union with God. This is what happened for Jesus on the cross:

The state of glorification is also the state of union.

The resurrection is an affirmation that humanity and Divinity are one. One is not evil and the other good. Rather we are mixture of love and wisdom. Divinity is pure love, flowing into us. Our humanity is "wisdom" with knowledge of life on the earth. When we do good works, we are performing "uses" with both our love and our wisdom. Love-wisdom-uses. Divine-human-action. We are one.

The resurrection is an affirmation that we and God are in union. We have always been in union and always will be. But sometimes we forget that. The resurrection reminds us that we are never separated.

Easter is about our relationship with the Divine. Within that relationship, even the most miserable day – or period of one's life, can be transformed into a step towards regeneration. Even a horrible time of suffering and dying on a cross can be transformed into a deeper relationship with God.

The April Messenger has an article by Rev. Jenny Caughman called "Spiritual Consequences of the Political Election." In it she says

Throughout our lives, we are faced with choices that are grounded in what is most important to us. We protect and care for our earthly selves—be that our physical well-being, our reputations, our pride, etc.—but we can also act in a way that is based on a love of God, choosing to strive to care for others, which is an expression of our spiritual selves. If we are motivated strictly out of love for our earthly selves, we close off to our spiritual selves and to God's influence. In the process, we open ourselves up for misery, for this can be a hellish experience.

This movement toward love of self is, I believe, what we are predominantly seeing in the political arena right now, and it is dragging most of us along. We are in the midst of a political climate that is unabashedly mean-spirited and self-serving, one that has lost sight of the bigger picture: the importance of morality, integrity, and civic duty—of the greater good



In this difficult political time, it is essential that we focus on our spiritual growth in connection with the Divine.

Merging our humanity with Divinity is an important Swedenborgian element of Easter. In difficult times, it is more important than ever that we allow the spiritual growth of Easter to continue in our hearts and lives.

Easter is a time to celebrate our union with God. It is a time to arise and to allow the light of Love to shine through us as we share that light with the world.

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Thank you for this season that helps us reflect on our spiritual journey with You. Help us to keep a focus on our spiritual journey in the midst of a world filled with fear and violence. Help us each to reflect your Love and Wisdom every day. Amen.

Mother Earth & Mother God

May 14, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Judges 5:7, New Revised Standard Version

The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew fat on plunder, because you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.

From Swedenborg

True Religion #308

It must be kept in mind that a Divine-heavenly sphere of love continually goes forth from the Lord toward all who embrace the doctrine of his church, who are obedient to the Lord, as children are to their father and mother in the world, who devote themselves to the Lord, and who wish to be fed, that is, instructed by the Lord. From this heavenly sphere a natural sphere arises, which is one of love towards infants and children. This is a most universal sphere, affecting not only humans, but also birds and beasts and even serpents; nor animate things only, but also things inanimate. But that the Lord might operate upon these even as upon spiritual things, He created a sun to be in the natural world like a father, the earth being like a mother. For the sun is like a common father and the earth like a common mother from the marriage of which all the vegetation that adorns the surface of the earth is produced. From the influx of the heavenly sphere into the natural world, come the marvelous developments of vegetation from seed to fruit, and again to new seed. It is from this also that many kinds of plants turn, as it were, their faces to the sun during the day, and turn them away when the sun sets. It is from this also that there are flowers that open at the rising of the sun and close at his setting. It is from this also that the song-birds sing sweetly at the early dawn, and likewise after they have been fed by their mother earth. Thus do all these honor their father and mother? They all bear testimony that in the natural world the Lord provides through the sun and the earth all necessities both for animate and inanimate things.

Message Mother Earth & Mother God



Happy Mothers' Day! What does this day mean for you? Perhaps it is a time to honor all the ways you have been motherly to others. Or perhaps today you celebrate those who have mothered you. This can be a sad day, missing mothers who have passed on, or grieving mothering you never got. Let's also think about Mother Earth, who nurtures us throughout our lives. And the mothering part of the Divine. For many people, the divine is sometimes a



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nurturing, mothering God. Today, we'll look at some people who image God as a Mother --primarily through painting, poetry, and music. Enjoy this time to experience divine love in whatever way is best for you today.

An article about Elizabeth Johnson says:

Johnson has been fascinated by how believers view God. "This might sound a little archaic," she told Fordham Online, "but I take my cue from Thomas Aquinas-the study of God and all things in the light of God. That articulates for me what theology is about."

A sister in the Congregation of St. Joseph who hails from Brooklyn, Johnson has been president of both the Catholic Theological Society of America and the American Theological Society. Winner of the U.S. Catholic Award in 1994, she served as a member of the national Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, a consultant to the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Women in Church and Society, a theologian on the Vatican-sponsored dialogue between science and religion, and on the Vatican-sponsored study of Christ and the world religions.

She says that "stale images of God aren't working for today's seekers. ... New ones are emerging from the experience of all God's people -- male and female."

Her ground-breaking book ***She Who Is***, written in 1995, has become a classic. She wrote this about her title:

In the end this exploration points toward God with the coinage SHE WHO IS, a divine title signifying the creative, relational power of a being who enlivens, suffers with, sustains, and enfolds the universe. SHE WHO IS points to holy mystery beyond all imagining who creates women as well as men to be imago Dei, the grammar of God's self-utterance and participates in her liberating care for this conflictual world and all its cares. [p. 13]

Although Swedenborg doesn't say a lot directly about the characteristics of God, he is clear that God is 'the essential person.' DLW 11.... *"It is because God is a person that all angels and spirits are perfectly formed people."*

We all have within us the potential for the union of opposites.

From Heaven & Hell 372

"When the good and the true are united in an angel or in one of us, they are not two entities but one, since the good then follows from the true and true from the good. This union is like the one that occurs when we think what we intend and intend what we think. Then our thought and our intention form a unity; the thought forms or presents in a form what our volition intends, and our volition gives it its appeal."

From Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 725

That by "male and female" are signified truths and goods, is evident from what has been said and shown before, namely, that "man" and "male" signify truth, and "wife" and "female" good. But "male and female" are predicated of things of the understanding, and "man and wife" of things of the will, for the reason that marriage is represented by man and wife, and not so much by male and female. For truth can never of itself enter into marriage with good, but good can with truth; because there is no truth which is not produced from good and thus coupled with good. If you withdraw good from

truth, nothing whatever remains but words.

Swedenborg wrote a lot about the union of opposites, including that of male and female. Both qualities exist in all of us, and need to work in harmony.

Hymn-writer, Brian Wren wrote a song about the Mother in God. Here are the lyrics:

Who is She, neither male nor female, maker of all things, only glimpsed or hinted, source of life and gender?

She is God

Mother, sister, lover; in her love we wake, move, grow,
Are daunted, triumph and surrender.

Who is She, mothering her people, teaching them to walk,
Lifting weary toddlers, bending down to feed them?

She is Love,

Crying in a stable, teaching from a boat,
Friendly with the lepers, bound for crucifixion.

Who Is She, sparkle in the rapids, coolness of the well,
Living power of Jesus flowing from the Scriptures?

She is Life,

Water, wind and laughter, calm, yet never still,
Swiftly moving spirit, singing in the changes.

Hymn, *Who Is She*, by Brian Wren, from *What Language Shall I Borrow*.

There is also poetry about God as a mother.

I saw that night, for the first time, a Mother in the Deity. This indeed was a new scene, a new doctrine to me. But I knowed when I got it, and I was obedient to the heavenly vision. ... And was I not glad when I found that I had a Mother! And that night She gave me a tongue to tell it! The spirit of weeping was upon me, and it fell on all the assembly. And though they never heard it before, I was made able by He Holy Spirit of Wisdom to make it so plain that a child could understand it.

Rebecca Jackson 19th century preacher in Reuther, Womanguides

Creator God most beautiful

by Dina Cormick

In the beginning

The earth was dark and without sound.

And God arose and began to dance

Creator God most beautiful –

And in the music of her song

She called forth all life into being.

What are the ways you feel nurtured by the mother in God ... and the mother in all of nature?

Let us pray: The Divine, who is both Mother and Father, help us to honor Your presence in our Mother Earth, as well as in all of our earthly Mothers

Carolyn Judson & the Torus

May 21, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

BIBLE: Genesis I

27. And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. 28. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heavens, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.

From Swedenborg

SWEDENBORG

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n.77)

So long as man is spiritual, his dominion proceeds from the external man to the internal .. But when he becomes celestial, and does good from love, then his dominion proceeds from the internal man to the external... [*Heavenly Secrets*, #2]

The Divine fills all space of the universe w/o being bound by space. [*Divine Love and Wisdom*, #69]

Message

Dorothy Hudson & the Torus: The Spirituality of Sculpture

CAROLYN JUDSON AND THE TORUS

"Who is Carolyn Judson?" you might ask. "And what is a *torus*?"

I'll do my best to introduce you to Carolyn Judson, and then rely on her words and sculptures to explain the torus.

Our focus in the arts for this month is sculpture – Swedenborgian sculptors. For me, that brings to mind Carolyn Judson. She is an amazing sculptor and painter in our Bath, Maine, church. She writes on [her website](#):

The work I do in whatever medium has become, over time, less a response to the environment and more a defining of my priorities. Occasionally I am influenced by other people's ideas or other artists' work. I am particularly interested in the writings of Buckminster Fuller, impressed with his global philosophy and how he bases his thought in geometry. Exploring further, I have discovered the beauties and mysteries of math and physics. Symmetries from ancient times to modern theories seem to translate readily for me into sculptural forms.

I had never heard of a torus until exploring Carolyn Judson's [web site](#). I don't have a clue about what they mean mathematically. But I do know that I found the pictures of her sculptures to be absolutely

incredible, exhibiting a kind of spiritual energy I would call "Swedenborgian."

I think it's important to understand Carolyn's perspective on her work. This is from her web site. Artist Carolyn Judson says:

"Occasionally I am influenced by other people's ideas or other artists' work. I am particularly interested in the writings of Buckminster Fuller, impressed with his global philosophy and how he bases his thought in geometry. Exploring further, I have discovered the beauties and mysteries of math and physics. Symmetries from ancient times to modern theories seem to translate readily for me into sculptural forms.

Since we can now look into space to the distance of 40 million light years, the idea of endlessness overwhelms me. My solution to portraying this concept is in the torus form. It is similar to the eternal twisting edge of a Mobius strip forever turning back on itself.

This shape, the torus, has a most satisfying perfection of form. One visually travels in, out and around it in a spiral movement which is more tantalizing than traveling over a sphere or plane which are more common relational shapes.

The torus crops up in math and molecular biology. In our everyday world it's the wheel, the doughnut, the rainbow's arc. But to me this common form implies the ineffable, the fleeting consciousness of mysterious uncharted realms.



Orderly Universe



Sea Torus

What do you experience when you look at these photos of her sculptures? How do you think her art may have been influenced by Swedenborg? Join us on Thursday evening at 9 PM Eastern to talk with her on BlogTalkRadio!

Memorial Day

May 28, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

From the Bible:

John 14:1, 16-31

1: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.

16: And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, 17: even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. 18: I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. 19: Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. 20: In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21: He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." 22: Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23: Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24: He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. 25: These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. 26: But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. 28: You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. 29: And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe. 30: I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; 31: but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence."

From Swedenborg

"He who loves his country and from good will benefits it, in the other life loves the Lord's kingdom; for there the Lord's kingdom is his country."*

* AC 6821.

Wars which have as an end the protection of our country and our Church are not contrary to charity; the end for which they are waged declares whether there is charity in them or not." (T. C. R. 407.)

"He who loves his country and from good will benefits it, in the other life loves the Lord's kingdom; for there the Lord's kingdom is his country."*

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Message

The Many memories of Memorial Day

What are your memories of Memorial Day? Parades in your town? Gatherings of friends or family grilling hot dogs and hamburgers? Perhaps a camping trip to start the summer holidays?

Memorial Day contains many memories for those of us in the U.S.



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It has played an important part in our history.

According to historian David W. Blight: in Charleston, SC on May 1st, 1865, there was an act of former slaves that may have started the tradition of Memorial Day: *The Charleston Daily Courier* reported that former slaves — African Americans — honored 257 dead Union soldiers who had been buried in a mass grave in a Confederate prison camp.

They reburied the bodies and gave them each a proper burial as gratitude for giving their lives for freedom. A parade, led by several thousand African American children followed. Thousands of people marched, sang, and celebrated. Although the fact of this extraordinary event is undisputed, there is no agreement that this event led to today's Memorial Day.

After World War I the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars.

We now have a tradition of a moment of silence on Memorial Day:

*Introduced in Senate (11/05/2013) **S.1648 - Memorial Day Moment of Silence Act***

Memorial Day Moment of Silence Act - Directs the President to issue an annual proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe two minutes of silence on Memorial Day, beginning at 3:00 p.m. Atlantic standard time, in honor of the service and sacrifice of members of the Armed Forces throughout the history of the United States. [Congress.gov]

This day has many meanings to Americans in 2017.

An Episcopal priest in CA writes in Huff Post about her thoughts, titled [Memorial Day of Patriotic Resistance.](#)"

We honor them [fallen soldiers] in our work for peace through justice. We honor them in the flags we fly and in the prayers we pray. And we honor them with the #Resist bumper stickers on our cars and hashtags in our tweets — outward and visible signs of our commitment to resist the forces working to dismantle the democracy they died to defend.

What are we resisting? Nobody explains it with more devastating clarity than author, theologian and thought leader Diana Butler Bass who writes:

"Politics seems confusing right now, but it really isn't. There is one simple, constant truth at the center of it all: The goal is to take everything away from our democratic inheritance — wealth, services, parks and museums, education, social care, clean air and water, checks and balances, a free media, voting rights and voice, our relationships with global democratic societies — to pay for massive tax cuts for the super wealthy and transfer even more resources to enrich the few and give them overt political control of the planet. None of us, none of our lives, none of our loves or loved ones, none of our hopes or dreams matter in this quest. That's the whole story. Tell yourself this each day. And tell it to everyone you know in any way you can."

Many of us this year are more conscious than ever about the importance of preserving our Constitution and our democracy, defended through battles of many wars.

It's important this week-end to remember the many who died to preserve these freedoms. One such soldier was the son of our minister, Rev. Susan Turley.

Her only child, Army Pfc. Keith Moore, committed suicide just two months after deploying to Iraq in 2006. The Army now calculates that for the first time since the Vietnam War, its rate of suicide exceeds that of the general population.



Rev. Turley turns to her Swedenborgian faith to cope with the loss. She is committed to preventing suicide among other military, and tells her story frequently. The military is starting to have more material and training available on suicide prevention. Rev. Turley has done a great deal to bring this issue to public consciousness.

What does Memorial Day mean to you? How will you celebrate it this year? How does it become a part of your spiritual life?

Let us pray. "Dear Lord, thanks for the sacrifices of so many who deaths have helped preserve the freedoms we hold so dear in the U.S. Guide us each in doing our part to continue protecting our nation's liberties."

The Ecological Samaritan

June 4, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 10:25-37, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 410: 2-3

2] Everyone is our neighbor, and people come in an infinite variety. Since we need to love them all as our neighbor for the type of goodness they possess, clearly there are genera and species of loving our neighbor, as well as higher and lower degrees of that love.

Since the Lord is to be loved above all else, it follows that the degrees of our love for our neighbors depend on their love for the Lord, that is, on the amount of the Lord or the amount from the Lord that our neighbors possess in themselves. That is also the amount of goodness they possess, since all goodness comes from the Lord.

[3] Nevertheless, since these degrees are within people's inner selves and these are rarely obvious to the world, it is enough to love our neighbor by the degree of goodness that we are aware of.

Now, these degrees are clearly perceived after death, since there the feelings in our will and the thoughts in our intellect form a spiritual sphere around us that others can sense in various ways. In this world, however, this spiritual sphere is absorbed by our physical body and is contained in the physical sphere that pours out around us.

The Lord's parable about the Samaritan shows that there are degrees of love for our neighbor. The Samaritan had mercy on the person who had been wounded by robbers - a person whom both the

priest and the Levite had seen and yet passed by. When the Lord asked which of the three seemed to have been a neighbor, the reply was "the one who had mercy" (Luke 10:30-37).

Message The Ecological Samaritan

by Colin Amato



Recently I attended the Ecology and Religion summit at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. I was in the presence of important scientists, mystics, theologians, and members of native tribes. The main theme of the summit was what can spiritual people do to help raise awareness of and help solve the ecological crisis that faces our planet today. However, I did not share with you what happened to me prior to reaching CIIS and the summit. I attended the summit with some of my classmates and professor of my Ecology and Liturgy class. We got off of BART at Civic Center Station and began to make our way to the escalator that would bring us to the surface of Downtown San Francisco. As I turned the corner to head towards the stairs, I noticed a young man, probably a few years my junior, holding a syringe and heading back to take his seat among his companions, all young men sitting on the dirty ground of the station. Another young man was just rolling up his sock on his left foot; obviously he had just administered the drug to his foot.

I was shocked. I had different emotional reactions. I felt like I needed to do something for these young men. But I also felt fear. Why fear? Well, I have a fear of needles. But it was their appearance; their nomadic appearance intimidated me. I felt also very sad for them. But I did nothing. My school group and I walked right past them and headed for the stairs. As we walked to CIIS we didn't say a word about their situation, even though I was sure we all noticed them and their situation. As we walked through downtown San Francisco we saw many homeless folks begging for money and again, we did nothing, nor discussed the situation.

CIIS is a multiple story building in the heart of Downtown SF. When you enter, it is like night and day. You go from the dirty and homeless filled streets to a beautifully furnished plaza and the classrooms and lecture halls are amazing. You feel like you are in a well-established, very well financed location. Our lunch during the break at the summit was well provided vegetarian Greek food, way more than what was needed for the crowd of people attending the summit. Would the leftovers be given to the people outside on the street? I don't know. But you have to understand after my earlier experience in the BART station it was hard for me to not feel like I was Alice, and this was Wonderland.

This feeling of Wonderland did not leave me the weeks that followed my attendance of the summit. The information provided by the speakers, the lectures in my ecology class, the documentaries I was watching, all made me feel like I had been living in total darkness with regards to the ecological crisis, and that I was in Wonderland, where the majority of the citizens were totally unaware of reality, or worse, totally insane.

Plato has his allegory of the cave, which tries to highlight the problem of limiting our vision and what happens when our awareness is expanded. You really can't go back to the old limited way of doing things; you have to continue on, seeking more light, more understanding. I felt like the person in Plato's cave, my awareness was being expanded, and I had to deal with the newfound level of awareness. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Before having this feeling of awareness expansion and having to get used to it, I went back to the image of the young man-pounding heroine. I recalled the parable of Jesus and The Good Samaritan. We heard it read earlier. In my experience hearing this parable preached on, the focus is typically on the Samaritan. He is the hero of the story. He is the only one that helps the man who was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. We are usually encouraged to be like the Samaritan; in fact that is what Jesus encourages to focus on. But if I may, I would like to turn your attention to the other elements of the story. As Swedenborgians we pay attention to all elements of a narrative in sacred text. We look for the different symbols to clue us in to the deeper meaning behind the literal sense of the text. I began to meditate on the story in its entirety and began to think about the different characters and how they show up for myself in my life.

There are times when I have tried to be the Good Samaritan and help others. I feel like I do this in my role as psychotherapist. There have been times when I felt like the man beaten on the side of the road, unable to help myself, ignored by others, and very much in need of aid. However, I think I have spent more time in my life being the Levite and the Priest, the ones that see the situation and do nothing. I felt that way that day at the BART station. And as I continued to have my awareness expanded by the topic of ecology, I felt I had been living as the Levite and priest for most of my life.

This brought me to the realization that I needed to accept the reality that I have this habit of intellectualizing things, not that research or reading is bad, but that there is more than just trying to understand something. Swedenborg teaches us that Use is such an important part of our spiritual growth. Yet, as Jim has pointed out, Use fell out of style in our denomination. Hardly anyone was talking about. There has been this focus on Regeneration and Correspondences, and yet Uses, practical application, fell to the wayside. Why is that? In my opinion, because actually doing is very hard. I know it is hard for me personally. You might be able to understand something intellectually, but what about your emotional reaction to the situation, what about your behavior that allows you to apply what you believe in the real world. That is something I personally struggle with and perhaps some of you do as well.

That is why I am so happy to hear that we are going to have a Bible Garden at Hillside. If there is one major theme from my ecology class it is this: The global crisis is overwhelming, and yet hope can be found with individuals and communities who take steps to change their habits and help improve the ecological situation around them. One of those steps is planting a garden. But should we stop there? I certainly hope not. I am not sure what the future holds for us, and I am not going to stand up here and tell you what to do. I need to figure out what I am going to do to not only better my ecological surroundings, but own being in relationship to nature. Once I feel like I have a handle on

my own role as an ecologically conscious spiritual being, I'll feel like I can start to have SOME form of a discussion with the rest of you, not as expert, but fellow concerned traveler.

If we are to become Ecological Samaritans, we need to understand that we contain within us the different characters of the story. The ones that saw the situation and did nothing, and also the Samaritan who wanted to help the man who was left for dead. I think it would also be helpful to look at the man who was left for dead as The Earth. We have a choice, will we be helpful to the earth, or will we ignore it?



We talk a lot about correspondences. I think our tradition is very important and our theology can be helpful for those who wish to have an ecologically friendly spiritual life. We need to keep in mind that the process of Regeneration begins with contemplation and ends in physical action. It begins with an expansion of awareness and consciousness; changes the way we see things. When our awareness expands it comes with a price, the curse of knowing the situation and having to decide what to do about it. We talk about correspondences, the birds and trees and animals.

What would correspondences be if all of those things were dead and gone? What then? I pray that with our increase of awareness we can continue as a community to figure out how we all might contribute to helping our mother earth and be the Ecological Samaritans we are called to be.

Amen.

About the Author: Colin Amato is a current student at Pacific School of Religion and the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Colin has previously earned a Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy, and seeks to integrate the spiritual insights of Emanuel Swedenborg with Depth Psychology and the Western mystical tradition, and is preparing for ordained ministry in the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Swedenborg, Hologram & the Torus

June 11, 2017

READINGS

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 8

There is an inflow from God into us. ... This inflow comes into our souls because the soul is the inmost and highest part of us. The inflow from God reaches that part first and then comes down into the things below and enlivens them, depending on our openness to what flows in.

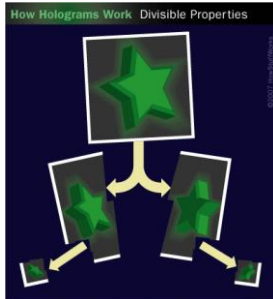
Heavenly Secrets 6190

What is meant by spiritual influx cannot be better seen than by means of the natural influxes which take place and appear in this world-as by the influx of heat from the sun into all things of the earth.

Message Swedenborg, Hologram & The Torus

When I was a student at Swedenborg School of Religion, I looked forward to the days when George Dole brought his hologram to class. He would put six ordinary-looking blocks together so that they seemed to be one large block. He invited each of us to peer at it carefully. From just the right angle of light, a shimmering 3-D starfish appeared. Then he would take out one block. Lo and behold – the removed block showed the entire starfish; not just the piece of starfish that it had seemed to reflect when placed with the other blocks.

Every time I saw this demonstration, I grasped a bit more concretely the point Dole kept hammering home to us: *the Divine is the same in the largest and smallest things.*



This is an astounding connection for today's Swedenborgians. Our writings present principles that are now being demonstrated in laboratories. Dole introduced Swedenborgians and quantum physicists to each other.

Dole's hologram took students yet one step further: what it meant to live day by day in the awareness that all of us are in each of us. Dole introduced Swedenborgians and transpersonal psychologists to each other.

The result of all this is that I am coming to see Swedenborg's theology different than I did before. I am coming to see it composed of a central holographic concept ...

[Sorting Things Out, 77]

What does that mean for my life and your life? Dole writes:

Perhaps the central ethical import of the Swedenborgian of the holographic model is to point to the possibility of moving beyond the need to define ourselves by excluding others, which for me gives a particular clarity to the injunction that I love my neighbor as myself.

Michael Talbot is a quantum physicist who was raised in a Swedenborgian household. He has written about the connection between Swedenborg and the new physics:

"If Emanuel Swedenborg were alive today, it is very likely that he would consider many of findings of the 'new physics' compatible with his own thought. This is surprising, for many of the concepts arrived at by contemporary physics are so foreign to everyday ways of thinking that it is difficult for modern sensibilities to grasp them." That a man born three centuries ago should articulate them in his writings is nothing short of remarkable. [A Continuing Vision, p. 443]

Talbot said:

...perhaps the most astonishing fore-shadowing of new physics concepts in Swedenborg's writings are the similarities between his world view and a revolutionary new way of looking at nature known as the 'holographic paradigm. [444]

We've been talking about the work of sculptor Carolyn Judson. She'll join us for our chat on June 15th. We've quoted before these words from her website:

Occasionally I am influenced by other people's ideas or other artists' work. I am particularly interested in the writings of Buckminster Fuller, impressed with his global philosophy and how he bases his thought in geometry. Exploring further, I have discovered the beauties and mysteries of math and physics. Symmetries from ancient times to modern theories seem to translate readily for me into sculptural forms.

Since we can now look into space to the distance of 40 million light years, the idea of endlessness overwhelms me. My solution to portraying this concept is in the torus form. It is similar to the eternal twisting edge of a Mobius strip forever turning back on itself.

This shape, the torus, has a most satisfying perfection of form. One visually travels in, out and around it in a spiral movement which is more tantalizing than traveling over a sphere or plane which are more common relational shapes.

The concepts of shape and space are quite modern. Yet, they are also timeless. Our Emanuel Swedenborg captured a spiritual essence of these concepts many years ago.

How do you understand Swedenborg through the hologram, the torus, and the geodesic dome? How can each of them contribute to your spiritual connection to the Divine?

Let us pray:

Dear Divine, Help us to experience your Divine Essence throughout the world around us. Help us to find You in the shapes and forces in Your universe, and to take this Divine energy into the world as we work towards the New Jerusalem.

Father's Day & New Church Day

June 18, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Revelation 21:1-2

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband

From Swedenborg

True Christianity, #772

That this second coming of the Lord does not take place for the purpose of destroying the visible heaven and habitable earth, has been shown in the preceding section. That it is not for the purpose of destroying anything, but to build up, consequently not to condemn but to save those who since His first coming have believed in Him and also those who may hereafter believe in Him, is evident from these words of the Lord.

Message Father's Day & New Church Day



HAPPY FATHER'S DAY! HAPPY NEW CHURCH DAY!

This is a day to celebrate our fathers; and also the "father" of our denomination, Emanuel Swedenborg, who told us that June 19th is a special day.

Many consider June 19th to be the birthday of the New Church. Why?

True Christianity ends with these words:

791. Note: After this work was finished the Lord called together his twelve disciples who followed him in the world; and the next day he sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages ... This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord:

He shall send his angels and they shall gather together his elect, from the end of the heavens to the end thereof

-Matt. 24:31



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

That date has taken on an important day in our church calendar. Here is part of a New Church Day children's talk from General Church:

That story begins a long time ago and in a place across the sea. The time is one hundred and ninety-one years ago - the month of June in the year 1770; the place is a summerhouse in Emanuel Swedenborg's garden in Stockholm. On the eighteenth day of that long past June, Swedenborg was sitting quietly in that summerhouse before his writing table, the sounds and scents and warmth of early summer coming in through the open windows. But he was not thinking about these things. On the table before him lay a neat pile of sheets filled with closely written Latin, the pages of a great book called True Christian Religion which he had just finished writing, and his mind was filled with the wonderful things that were written in it. Swedenborg was an old man now. He had been eighty-two on his last birthday, and for many years - the Lord guiding his thought and his pen - he had been writing down in the books of a new Word all that the Lord had told him to say. But when the True Christian Religion was finished, his work on earth was nearly ended.

When the disciples understood and believed these new things they became angels and were given homes in heaven, and for hundreds of years of our time they lived in their heavenly homes. But on that eighteenth day of June, 1770, because the True Christian Religion had been finished, the Lord called them to Him in heaven, as once before He had called them in Galilee. They came at once, leaving their homes in heaven as they had left their earthly homes at His call. All that day they were with the Lord; and on the next day, the Nineteenth of June, the Lord again sent them out as apostles. When they were men, the Lord had sent them to preach the gospel in many lands; now as angels, they were sent to preach a new gospel throughout the world of spirits - to teach that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ever and ever.

New Church Life, "New Church Day" Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961, talk to children

The event of Jesus returning to the earth is often called in Christianity, "The Second Coming." For many, it's a belief about Jesus coming back to earth for the faithful.

Swedenborg believes that the events of June 19, 1770, affirm that Jesus is "coming again" every day in our hearts. Swedenborgians are not theologically awaiting the return of Christ to earth. Rather, we experience the renewal of a "second coming" every day in our hearts.

It is a message about the on-going regeneration that takes place in our lives daily, if we are open to it.

I find this a refreshing way to approach life. Rather than thinking about something that's going to happen in the future [2nd coming of Christ], we are embracing Christ's love in our hearts every day.



And this is an especially grand day to celebrate Christ's love, as we honor and remember fathers. Many of our fathers have passed into the next world, and this is a chance for a quiet remembrance. For others, their father is still among them and a part of their lives. In a chance to celebrate with Dad [and perhaps Grand Dad and Great Grand Dad].

For some, it's a day of grief for a Father who's left the earth; or perhaps anger about a Father who never was around or was abusive. For others, it's a day of celebration. It's a day to honor all of our many feelings about the fathers in our lives.

And a day to have a birthday party for our church!

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: We thank you for the love that is in our hearts every day, offering us a renewal of spirit. Help us to take this renewal into a world filled with conflict; and let us be part of the healing on earth. Amen.

Johnny Appleseed: He Lived for Others

June 25, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Mark 10:35-45, New Revised Standard Version

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 406

We are not born for our own sake; we are born for the sake of others. That is, we are not born to live for ourselves alone; we are born to live for others. Otherwise society would not be cohesive and there would be no good in it.

Message **Johnny Appleseed: He Lived for others**

by Rev. Kit Billings

Service originally appeared in Our Daily Bread

March 2017



In his address to the West Virginia Historical Association on April 20, 1967, Frank O. Chapman, the great-great-grandson of Nathaniel Chapman (who was the half-brother of Johnny "Appleseed" Chapman), had much to say about the "missing pieces" in Johnny's story. His words help us decipher more of the real, historical truth about the legendary pioneer whose legacy we honor during this annual festival.

For example, Frank Chapman gives us insight into Johnny's early years in Longmeadow. He said that even in his childhood Johnny, "loved nature and spent much time along the streams and in the woods.... Pet squirrels, rabbits, and birds fearlessly came to him at his whistle or call." ¹

Information like this, handed down through shared stories within the immediate family, seems closer to the truth than fantastic accounts about rescuing mosquitoes, taming wolves, and slumbering with bears. It also helps us get a fuller portrait of who Johnny Appleseed really was—the real man behind the fiction.

Frank Chapman also spoke about how the Native Americans of Johnny's time appreciated the character and quality of his famous relative. He said that during the time of the violent conflicts between the settlers and Native Americans, Johnny earned the respect of both the settlers and natives alike. "Johnny knew many Indian chiefs and spoke at least three of the tribal languages," said Chapman.

In her book, *The True Story of Johnny Appleseed*, Ophia Smith shares that this altruistic American orchard man was so esteemed by the American Indians that they "looked upon him with a sort of superstitious awe and considered him a great medicine man."² They referred to him as a white man "touched by the Great Spirit."

Other unforgettable accounts about how Johnny treated both the American soldiers and the Indians in the middle of their battles reveal the true spirituality of this man, whose compassion for all shows us that Johnny chose authentically to live out the spirit of Christianity as revealed in the way that Christ loved everyone as family. Or as our New Testament lesson puts it this morning, that our Lord taught His disciples saying, "whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many..." (Mark 10:43-45)

One of my favorite examples of eye-witnesses who observed John Chapman's real character in the midst of the battles between Indians and Colonial soldiers says that rather than running for cover when a deadly battle unfolded where Johnny was living, he chose instead to act as a pioneer medic, and give medical attention to the men on both sides, living out the spirit of the Good Samaritan, which Christ instilled into the heart of our world long ago, when the Lord spoke His parables to those willing to listen.

For me as a modern-day Swedenborgian Christian, the core reason I enjoy participating in this annual festival honoring John Chapman's life and legacy is simply because he is much more to me than a folk hero. The real man who eventually became known as Johnny Appleseed, is one of my real spiritual heroes. He shows me, just like St. Francis of Assisi or Florence Nightingale did in their places and times, that the living, moving, life-empowering Spirit of God, who is Divine Love and Wisdom Itself, is fully capable of flowing into MY OWN HEART AND MIND, RIGHT NOW TODAY, just as God did back then when Johnny was brilliantly and lovingly doing his own ministry when our pioneer ancestors worked so hard to survive and live during years of great struggle and challenge.

You see, Johnny "Appleseed" Chapman was among many back in the late 1700s in America who providentially came across the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and who studied them and applied them to his life. His efforts as an evangelist, though, were extraordinary, as he gave chapters of this fine theology out to the pioneer families whom he often visited.

Swedenborg was an 18th century Swedish scientist, inventor and Christian whose special way of reading and interpreting the Bible helped people to discover the truth about the eternal nature of God. Rather than only reading the Scriptures in a literalistic way, Swedenborg learned that underneath the surface level of God's Word, which in places depicts God as being angry and wrathful, there is revealed the constant, unchanging nature of a Divine Being who is pure Love, goodness, mercy and wisdom. And this is why in the life and person of Jesus Christ, who was the incarnation of God-living-among-us 2016 years ago, in Him we see visibly the warmth, truth and goodness of God who calls us all to live out the literal and inner meaning of the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai.



In Swedenborg's writings, and how they help us to unlock the sacred, inner meaning of God's Holy Word, Johnny Appleseed heard a message of love, mercy and compassion for all living things that resonated with his universal love of all people, which led him to strategize his business of planting huge apple orchards, which served as nutrition for many malnourished American pioneers when the colonial settlers traveled west through Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana as our ancestors spread westward in the early 1800s long ago.

I myself have been reading the books that Emanuel Swedenborg wrote since I was a teenager, as well as the many divinely inspired books of God's Holy Word, and in this great pairing of spiritual resources, just like Johnny Appleseed did in his lifetime, I have found a great inheritance of peaceful wisdom from the Lord, which calls me to live a life of peaceful, humble servanthood, yet which also leaves me totally free to turn away from God if I desire, living selfishly only for myself. One of the many enlightening passages out of Swedenborg's writings that illustrate what I mean is found in a chapter within one of his books titled True Christianity, that has the chapter heading called "All Individual Members of Humankind Are The Neighbor We Are To Love," has this to say: "We are not born for our own sake; we are born for the sake of others. That is, we are not born to live for ourselves alone; we are born to live for others." (n. 406)

We can easily hear this echoing the eternal wisdom given to us by the Lord who said, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."

I love the many books and stories about John Chapman because they tell us of a real-life man who chose to live very simply off the land, who especially loved the company of families and children,

who was not concerned about wearing the latest fashions, but who instead discovered that love and faith in action bring us joys overflowing as we grow in God's Spirit. John Chapman learned that deep pleasure and fullness of life was his "treasure hidden in a field" by figuring out how he could carefully stay three steps ahead of the poor yet adventurous pioneer families moving westward. Using sacks of apple seeds he procured from cider mills and other means, he planted apple orchards that would provide the settlers a nutritious food source to get them through the cold winters of Midwest America.

It does my heart good to read biographies and stories about Johnny, who not only went out of his way to help wounded horses get nursed back to health, but who also worked very intelligently and prudently to earn a living off of his apple orchard sales and bartering the lands he cultivated, to help God provide those pioneer families who needed encouragement, to discover and read and learn about a form of Christianity known as the Lord's New Christian faith. This wonderful vision of Christianity teaches that God is not angry, punishing and wrathful, but is indeed an eternal being abounding in steadfast love and wisdom, Who loves giving us the inspiration and empowerment we need to live primarily for God, "born to live for others," rather than for ourselves alone.

Indeed, part of what we inherit within the natural degree of our will and thinking, are tempting and seemingly pleasurable ways of living, that run counter to what the Lord tries diligently to help us receive as His finite children. It is easy to look within ourselves and see and feel the baggage of self-centeredness and hard-heartedness passed down from very ancient times when people living before recorded history began choosing self-alone rather than serving a God of pure goodness. We see this illustrated in many stories about Christ's own disciples, who in our story for worship this morning were asking Jesus to grant them the favor of putting them at the right and left hand of God after death.

Jesus responds and reminds them that in order for anyone to have the joy of living so close with the Lord in life-eternal in the Kingdom of Heaven, it takes much more than simply saying with my lips that I believe in Jesus as my Savior. As with many passages in the Bible we learn that this inheritance requires me to be baptized with the living fire of God's Love in my heart, by choosing to serve others more than myself, and to drink the cup of willing sacrifice and servanthood over being mostly concerned with my own status, wealth and prosperity. Jesus said, "These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

True greatness, we hear, is attained by not wanting to lord our own status and power over others, wanting others to serve my every whim. But instead wanting more to follow in the footsteps of our spiritual heroes like Jesus, St. Francis, Johnny Appleseed or perhaps people of your own family, who gave you real examples of what it means to put love first in life, rather than serving self-alone instead.

As our Savior and Redeemer said so wonderfully, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Johnny Appleseed lived a genuine life of caring for all people, for mother Earth and for creatures big and small. No wonder those who knew and loved him wanted to remember his legacy by putting on his mock gravestone up on that hill, "He lived for others." Shall we try to do the same with the blessings God gives to us every day? My answer is, yes.

Dear Lord, Help us remember that we are here to serve others with the guidance of Your Divine Love and Wisdom. Guide us each day as to where we can best be of service for You. Amen.

1 Chapman, Frank. John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed). Presentation given to the West Virginia Historical Association, Brooke County, April 20, 1967.

2 Smith, Ophia D. The True Story of Johnny Appleseed. West Chester: Chrysalis Books, 2007.

Freedom!

July 2, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 145: 1-9

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 2870 2870. HUMAN FREEDOM

Few know what freedom is and what non-freedom is. Freedom seems to entail everything that is in keeping with any love and associated delight, and non-freedom to entail everything that is at variance with these. That which is in keeping with self-love and love of the world, and with the desires belonging to those loves, seems to man to be freedom; but that is the freedom of hell. That however which is in keeping with love to the Lord and love towards the neighbour, consequently with the love of what is good and true, is true freedom, being the freedom that exists in heaven.

Message Freedom!



In the summer of 1970, I was visiting London. I saw an ad for **1776: A New Musical from the Colonies**. I was intrigued, and had to see it. It was the account of the events leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th. I was amazed at how entertaining and thought-provoking these debates became when depicted as a musical comedy. I laughed throughout the production, and loved that I was watching it with a British audience.

When the movie version came out in 1972, I saw it eagerly, and again laughed and cried with the characters struggling to create freedom in their lives. This week, I downloaded the movie to watch it again.

The issues being debated in 1776 have particular significance today as we in the U.S. have impassioned debates about what democracy meant in 1776, and what it means for us now in 2017.



The movie brings these issues to life through the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence. We can see the human beings who debated and struggled with the concept of a revolution. After Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration, there was intense debate that changed many words. Jefferson consented to the changes until one man wanted to remove the word "tyrant" about King George. Jefferson finally said "no;" he would not accept the change. The King was a tyrant. John Adams, the central figure of the play, said with dry humor: *Look, this is a revolution. We're going to offend somebody.*

I was struck by how God works through human beings. In 1776, the issues were confusing and muddled. Decisions were often made through personal egos. Older men wrestled with the reality of young men dying on the battlefield, and the deeply contentious question of slavery in the midst of a fight for freedom.

The representatives got irritated with each other in the heat, and got discouraged by the letters arriving from George Washington about the deplorable conditions on the battlefield. Click to following link to view a video clip from YouTube of the song, [Is Anybody There?](#) . In it a letter has just arrived from George Washington. After hearing it, John Adams sings about the loneliness of his position in "Is Anybody there? Does Anybody Care?" The words to the song are below.
[lyrics to "Is Anybody There"]

*Adams:
Is anybody there?
Does anybody care?
Does anybody see what I see?*

*They want to me to quit; they say
John, give up the fight
Still to England I say
Good night, forever, good night!
For I have crossed the Rubicon
Let the bridge be burned behind me*

*Come what may, come what may
Commitment!
The croakers all say we'll rue the day
There'll be hell to pay in fiery purgatory
Through all the gloom, through all the gloom
I see the rays of ravishing light and glory!*

*Is anybody there? Does anybody care?
Does anybody see what I see?*

*I see fireworks! I see the pagaent and
Pomp and parade
I hear the bells ringing out
I hear the cannons roar
I see Americans - all Americans
Free forever more
How quiet, how quiet the chamber is
How silent, how silent the chamber is*

*Is anybody there? Does anybody care?
Does anybody see what I see?]*

In this song, I think about the many times someone has a vision for a different future, but isn't sure anyone else sees that vision or even cares about it.

Swedenborg tells us that God gives free will to humanity. Without it, we could not learn from our experiences. The decision for independence was filled with people wrestling with their free will. Is independence worth a terrible death for so many? Can freedom be real if some are enslaved? Does a representative to a congress vote the wishes of the people or his/her own perspective?

Swedenborg provides us a different perspective on spiritual freedom. We may think we are free inside, but actually be in bondage to influence from inner demons. When we turn our will over to Divine guidance, we may feel we are giving up our free will, but will actually be living in ultimate freedom. When we make our decisions from a place of love, we are living in freedom.

From this perspective, there are ways that a person in prison can live with freedom, and ways that a person able to do and go as he/she chooses can be in a state of bondage.

In 2017, it is easy to take for granted the decisions made in 1776 to become an independent nation. But human beings wrestled with every aspect of the debate back then and many of those debate are being revisited today. The war could have ended very differently if France and other nations hadn't come to join us in the battle. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington could have been written into history as traitors to the king with Benedict Arnold being a true hero. History could see the Declaration of Independence as a foolish mistake instead of a courageous act.

Our struggles in the present are filled with fear and uncertainty, just as the decisions were in 1776. We don't know the consequences of our free will decisions. We make our choices with a

mixture of courage and fear; lofty ideals and ego desires. It is our connection with the Divine that brings meaning to the chaotic events in the present moment. The signers of the Declaration had the same uncertainty, fear, and ego desires that we struggle with today. We have the same kind of vision and ideals that guided them in 1776.

In what ways do you live in freedom, and in what ways do you live in bondage? How can you live in greater freedom in your spiritual life and in your physical life?

We will have a special opportunity to feel a kinship with the authors of the Declaration of Independence, as well as those who came to Philadelphia 200 years ago to establish the New Church convention. Our 2017 Convention is in Philadelphia. We hope you can join us there. If not, enjoy the events in our live chats and on our Facebook page.

Let us pray.

Divine Love and Wisdom: We give thanks today for the freedom in the United States that we fought hard to achieve. Guide us in continuing to preserve our democracy for ourselves and the generations yet to come. Be with those who live in repressive countries and help us help them to find liberty. Thank you for the blessings of our own church, established 200 years ago. Give us the courage to move forward with Your guidance. Amen.

The Practice of the Presence of God

July 16, 2017

READINGS **From the Bible**

Psalm 139:1-16 (NKJV)

O Lord, You have searched me and known me
You know my sitting down and my rising up
You understand my thought afar off
You comprehend my path and my lying down
And are acquainted with all my ways
For there is not a word on my tongue
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether
You have hedged me behind and before
And laid Your hand upon me
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me
It is high, I cannot attain it
Where can I go from Your Spirit
Or where can I flee from Your presence
If I ascend into heaven, You are there
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there
If I take the wings of the morning
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea
Even there Your hand shall lead me
And Your right hand shall hold me
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,
Even the night shall be light about me;
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to You
For You formed my inward parts
You covered me in my mother's womb
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made
Marvelous are Your works
And that my soul knows very well
My frame was not hidden from You
When I was made in secret
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed
And in Your book they all were written
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.

From Swedenborg

True Christianity §774

The Lord's constant presence is what makes us rational, and what gives us the capacity to become spiritual. The light that emanates from the Lord as the sun of the spiritual world is what has this effect. We receive this light in our intellect; this light is the truth, and the truth is the source of our rationality. When we add heat to this light, that is, when we add love to this truth, then the Lord comes in to us. The heat in question emanates from the same sun in the spiritual world; it takes the form of love for God and for our neighbor. The situation in which the Lord is merely present with us, enlightening our intellect, is like the presence of the sun's light in the world. Unless heat is added to



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

this light, everything on earth remains desolate. When, however, the Lord actually comes in to us, it is like the heat that comes into everything in the spring. Since heat and light work together at that time of year, the ground becomes workable, and the seeds sprout and grow up to bear fruit.

Laughter Came from Every Brick
a poem by St. Teresa of Avila

Just these two words He spoke
changed my life,
"Enjoy Me."
What a burden I thought I was to carry -
a crucifix, as did He.
Love once said to me, "I know a song,
would you like to hear it?"
And laughter came from every brick in the street
and from every pore in the sky.
After a night of prayer, He
changed my life when He sang,
"Enjoy Me."

Message

The practice of the Presence of God

by Rev. Thom Muller



Do you enjoy doing dishes?

Most people I know don't. And most people would not associate a mundane, dirty sometimes tedious chore like this with spiritual practice. Just like you naturally wouldn't associate spiritual practice with sitting at your office doing paperwork, or going grocery shopping, When we think about spiritual practice, we tend to have the image of meditation, or prayer, in front of an altar or in some kind of specially designated place. Something like this.

And in our high demand, high-performance 21st century American society, it seems that places like this (and I mean the word place to include states of mind) are a rare sanctuary compared with all of the mundane stuff that piles up all around us.

One of my favorite things to do when being in a big busy city is finding churches and temples

that offer this refuge from the storm of human business, so to speak. St. Patrick's cathedral in New York City is a good example of this. And I find that this is a pretty powerful illustration of how our spiritual life, our inner life, as Swedenborg would say, can sometimes seem. Every once in a while, we enter our internal cathedral space to take a load off, to re-connect with our true, un-conditioned self, and make ourselves aware of the presence of God and our interconnectedness with the divine and others as spiritual entities.

But do we need churches, temples, meditation rooms, etc. to be fully aware of the presence of the Divine? Swedenborg, as you can imagine, would argue NO. These things might help us, be tools in breaking away from some of the conditioning of every-day life, but in essence, that's all they are. God is present everywhere, in all things, and the highest form of relationship with God is in a life of usefulness. But this, at least intuitively, seems hard to swallow. And I think it's partly because our Ego, our Proprium does not want it to be true. Our natural, or earthly self is constantly looking for some kind of experience to pursue and then drop. To schedule our own inner lives based on our desires and our conditioned drive to be productive, and quite explicitly, to prioritize caring about temporary, external things first.

But is our spirituality, our relation with the numinous, with the divine, and with our angelic self really something that should be a refuge?



Another person who had a natural inclination towards NOT liking to do the dishes was the 17th century french Carmelite monk Lawrence of the Resurrection. In fact, he was pretty bad at doing it, so he says. In fact, he claims he was pretty bad at most things he did. He was clumsy, lame on one of his legs, and didn't think he was particularly "bright". (although "brightness" does not necessarily correlate with intelligence, as we just heard in the Swedenborg reading).

And out of his very human experience of flaws and problems emerged a kind of living mysticism a living and engaged spirituality, that I believe is a pretty beautiful illustration, even if just in theory, of the process of regeneration that Swedenborg talks about. It's one of those many beautiful examples of spiritual teachings from different backgrounds losing their external differences and opening up a gateway to the divine which transcends all outward differences.

Brother Lawrence is best known for what is now published as a small book called "The Practice of the Presence of God", which has become a classic of mystical spirituality. Perhaps the most favorite quotes of his is "The Lord walks among the pots and pans".

He describes a kind of devotion to God in which all things become illuminated with divine reality, and the presence of God becomes obvious and tangible, and not confined to particular

exercises, prayers, devotions or meditations.

One of the things that's always struck me is that both Brother Lawrence and Swedenborg describe the experience of meditating on the changing seasons in nature, specifically in trees, as playing a huge role in their mystical awakening. For Lawrence, it happened when he was around 18 years old. He was observing a tree and the meticulous and stunning ways in which it moves with the natural seasons, completely in-tune with divine reality and providence. To him, this was a transformative mystical experience which he seems to have understood as an opening of his spiritual sight as to the reality of the indiscriminate presence of God.

Swedenborg describes a similar experience, also at a time that could be considered a mystical break-through. There's this period in the 1740's where he undergoes his transformation from natural scientist to mystic, and it's a time in which his sensual and poetic side really came out. One of the records of this period in Swedenborg's life that we have is his dream journal, another work, which I find is very under-appreciated among readers of Swedenborg (and arguably by Swedenborg himself) is his book "The Worship and Love of God". And at the very beginning of this book, which I personally believe is a manifestation of his inner transformation, he recounts basically the same experience. He's walking through nature and has this intense spiritual experience when looking at the trees. He begins contemplating about correspondence, and how the trees relate to our own inner growth.

And of course, these two are not the only ones who have been profoundly moved by this.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read these words of Christ:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' [...] Indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Now, all of this stuff may sound profound. But isn't this just another form of escaping the complex reality of earthly life? Should we just retire into a grove and be radical stoics, and spend our lives meditating on the correspondential nature of plants? How does this have anything to do with living, active spirituality?

And that's where I believe both Swedenborg and Brother Lawrence get it right. It is actually the exact opposite. It is bringing that unitive experience of Divine connection into our mundane life, realizing that the difference is only in our head. God's presence does not depend on our conscious awareness of it, because it is at the very source of awareness, the very source of being-ness.

Swedenborg describes three levels of love, you could also call them three levels of being, or three spiritual states: There is love for the self, love for the neighbor, and Love of God. And

while he argues that they all have their healthy place, it is the aim, or the nature, of regeneration to ground ourselves in the Love of God. And this is really central to Brother Lawrence's practice. It is a practice in which the "small I" is observed and acknowledged, and put into a useful place, but in which the core driving force is a deep and burning love for God. And just like Swedenborg, he emphasizes that this love itself is not something that comes from ourselves, but from the Divine. It is love loving love, so to speak. And in attuning himself to that love, cultivating it, surrendering to it, becoming one with it, that Brother Lawrence believes this shift in perspective happens. There is no longer a distinction between the sacred and the mundane. There is only love and the manifestation of love in a life of use.

For many of us, this concept of a love for God trumping all other vantage points might be opening up a whole other can of worms: If key to spiritual transformation is a life of useful service, of being a force of good among other beings, of playing a productive role, then shouldn't THAT be at the center? Shouldn't it be love for the neighbor, maybe love for whatever you call God can come along with that, and then love for the self? Otherwise, don't we fall into the danger of becoming "religious people", who put their devotional practices, and their religious beliefs before other beings?

A few of us have been reading through Heaven and Hell recently, and this very question was raised in a conversation this past week. We talked about this apparent contradiction in Swedenborg:

The reason the Divine in [...] is love is that love is spiritual union. It unites angels to the Lord and unites them with each other. It does this so thoroughly that in the Lord's sight they are like a single being. Further, love is the essential reality of every individual life. It is therefore the source of the life of angels and the life of people here. Love is our vital core. We grow warm because of its presence and cold because of its absence, and when it is completely gone, we die. We need to realize, though, that it is the quality of our love that determines the quality of this life.

There are two quite distinguishable loves in heaven—love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. Both come from the Lord, and each one makes a heaven.

In heaven's light, it is easy to see how these two loves differ and how they unite, but this can be seen only dimly in our world. **In heaven, "loving the Lord" does not mean loving him for the image he projects but loving the good that comes from him.**

When our "spirituality" our "love of God" manifests in a devotion to an image, a projection, a religious concept, it is no longer a "love of God". What Swedenborg means by the term is a love of love itself and the source of that love, which is love. And that love is not something we produce, it is something we receive. Not from the perspective of the interaction between two neighboring egos. Or of reward or punishment or personal salvation.

Another way to look at this concept of loves is to see them as motivators. We can ask ourselves the question "What realm is my motivation coming from"? What is the source of my perspective on myself, others and the divine? Which "self" is speaking/thinking/looking here?

Both of these mystics state that at the beginning, it may seem that it is our effort that opens us up to the presence of God. And that's ok, it can be a useful appearance. Prayers and meditation and practices have their use. But they also state that as we gradually become accustomed to this opening up, we become re-conditioned, so to speak, and the boundary of prayer and non-prayer, again, becomes not a matter of external form, but internal state.

Brother Lawrence writes:

"The time of business does not differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen...I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

If I had to put the message of Brother Lawrence in bumper-sticker-format, I think it would be "Stop confining God to your own constructs." Stop telling God where he (she, it) is and isn't present.

I remember, when I was a child, my family and I went to see this beautiful medieval cathedral, I believe it was in the city of Trier. And I remember that inside of this gorgeous cathedral was a miniature model of that same Cathedral, for people to look at.

Sometimes I think this is exactly what we do in our spiritual lives. We build a little sanctuary, an inner cathedral. And then we begin seeing this little model cathedral, this work of our own hands, as our sanctuary, as the place where we can connect with the presence of God. And we forget that the actual cathedral is inescapably around us.

So, today, I invite all of us to stop seeking the presence of God. And instead, to see if we can simply be in the presence of God.

On a practical level, I invite us to simply observe how conditioned we are by our natural, earthly self, to distinguish God's presence and non-presence. To question our own spiritual vantage point from that of the body-mind complex to that of spirit, and of source.

What if our whole being became a sanctuary of the Divine?

Our body a temple of God, as the Word says.

And next time you're doing dishes, think of Brother Lawrence.

Amen

St. John the Forerunner

July 23, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

John 1: 19-34 (NRSV)

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." *

from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names (6th century), third Chapter

"Even as our sun -not by calculating or choosing, but by its very being, enlightens all things able to partake of its light in their own degree- so too Goodness -as superior to a sun, as the ultimate archetype, is above an obscure image- by Its very existence sends to all things that be, the rays of Its whole being, according to their capacity. By reason of these rays subsist all the intelligible and intelligent essences and powers and energies. By reason of these they are, and have their life, continuous and undiminished, purified from all corruption and death and matter, and generation; and separated from mutability, and are conceived of as incorporeal and immaterial, and as minds they are illuminated as to the reasons of things, in a manner peculiar to themselves; and they again convey to their kindred spirits things appropriate to them; and have their life from Goodness." **

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven §4727

"We can see in the Gospels that John the Baptist prepared the way, and made a pathway for the Lord, and further, in his own words, that the Lord was one with the Father, and that the Father was in Him, and He in the Father; also that to Him was given all power in heaven and on earth, and that judgment belonged to Him. One who knows even a little about power in heaven and on earth, and about judgment, can know that they would be nothing unless He were Divine as to the Human also. When we are in faith alone, we cannot know what makes us new or sanctifies us, still less what made the Lord's Human Divine; for in the state of faith alone, we know nothing of love and charity, and it is love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor that make us new and sanctify us, while Divine love itself made the Lord Divine. For love is our very being, and our whole life,; and it forms us according to an image of itself, just as our soul, which is our interior essence, as it were, creates or fashions the body into an image, of itself; and indeed in such a way that by means of the body it acts and has sensation just as it wills and thinks. Thus the body is as the effect, and the soul as the cause in which is the end; consequently the soul is the all in the body, as the cause of the end is the all in the effect." ***

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**Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. *The Classics of Western Spirituality Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

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Message St. John the forrunner

by Rev. Thom Muller



Today, I'd like to talk about a biblical character who has always fascinated and kind of mystified me.

He's this eccentric character, a desert ascetic, he wears camel hair and eats honey and locusts (which, if you ask me, sounds pretty delicious actually, but that's beside the point).

He's generally portrayed as the forerunner of Christ. He's out in the desert, preaching and baptizing. We're never told the specifics of his teachings, although some scholars have linked him to the Essenes, who were this mystical monastic Jewish sect of renunciates that Jesus is also often linked to. In the gospels he's portrayed as preaching a pretty simple message of repentance and purification, preparing the way for the expected Messiah. And the different gospel stories differ in their accounts of John.

And there is so much rich correspondence, and some beautiful sacred symbolism in these different narratives.

There are these three major episodes in the narrative of John the Baptist. It's his miraculous birth, his ministry in the desert, including his baptism of Christ, and his imprisonment and execution (Sound familiar?).

If we were to compile the different renditions of the life of John from the Gospels, as well as the Qur'an, he is born miraculously to this couple Elizabeth and Zechariah, who is a temple priest. It was miraculous because Elizabeth was past the age of being biologically able to bear children. In several accounts, the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah, and prophesies about the miracle birth that's about to happen. The Gospel of Luke points out that Elizabeth was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Which would have made Jesus and John the baptist cousins of sorts.

So, there's not a lot about John's developmental years that we hear about (kind of like with Jesus) all we're told is he ends up being this kind of radical hobo-ascetic out in the desert, and he has this really kind of harsh message of repentance. In Luke 3 we can read one of his angry rants:

"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of

repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

So he's calling people out on their complacency. Telling themselves that their identity as "Children of Abraham" somehow is a spiritual merit in and of itself. He rebukes them in kind of a jerk-ish way, and tells them about the tree that doesn't bear fruit being cut down, meaning religion without lived love and kindness. He then gives the practical advice to tax collectors and Roman soldiers, telling them to share their possessions, and to stop extorting and oppressing the people they interact with.

And of course, he performs the rite of baptism. And baptism is this really universal ritual. It involves one of the most elemental substances, water, and usually represents initiation or transition, a spiritual cleansing, and a re-birth. Re-generation, you could say. And then there's the famous scene where he baptizes Jesus. And again, the different accounts vary from John being confused and having no clue who Jesus is at first, to him instantly acknowledging him as "The Lamb".

And then, pretty quickly after that, he is detained and imprisoned by Herod, who is basically a provincial governor. And again, there's conflicting accounts of this stuff, but supposedly John the Baptist had called out Herod for marrying his brother's wife. And Salome, her daughter ends up hanging out at the court, and Herod is being a dirty creep and asks her to dance for him, and offers her anything she asks in return. So she dances for him and he enjoys it, and she asks her mom what to request. And she tells her to request the head of John the Baptist. And just like Pontius Pilate, Herod is reluctant, but gives in to the request.

It's a weird story right? And as with all sacred stories, the question is what's the point? I mean, the historicity of any of this is dubious, as is much of the Gospels and other biblical narratives, although the Jewish historian Josephus does mention the execution of John, who is called the Baptist. (another parallel to Jesus here).

Obviously, it's no surprise that since we're at a Swedenborgian church, we're about to explore some of the inner, esoteric meanings of this narrative. Swedenborg argues that these sacred narratives are correspondential to spiritual dynamics that are playing out in our inner life, and on different metaphysical levels. So just like Christ represents a state of consciousness, so does John the Baptist.

And the idea that there are layers upon layers of symbolism in this story is not really even controversial. It's full of these meaningful similarities to other scenarios, as we've already pointed out. Another one is that John's sayings and actions resemble those of the prophet Elijah, and it was a common belief that he was, in fact, a re-incarnation of Elijah, although he denies this in the Gospel of John. And when he is asked who he is he recites a culmination of old prophecies from scripture, and in Mark he makes clear references to the book of Exodus, and the messianic prophecies in Isaiah and Malachi.

He quotes scripture, saying:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way — a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'", which is actually a combination of statements in Isaiah and Malachi.

So, John the Baptist seems to have this function of preparation, of "making straight the paths" for the one who is about to come.

Now, how does this relate to our own spiritual life, our own spiritual growth?

Swedenborg, in his mystical interpretation of scripture, emphasizes his role as a preparatory messenger. He represents a formative stage in the coming of the Lord. Now, we've talked a lot about the inner meaning of Christ's coming. We've talked about the notion that the virgin birth, the development, the temptations, the passion and crucifixion, and the second coming of the Christ are all correspondential to our own spiritual growth and self-realization. And the idea that both the first and second coming of Christ represent the process of collective and individual regeneration. The cataclysmic opening of consciousness and spiritual awareness.

But to Swedenborg, these things don't come instantly. There's this continuous narrative in his writings about these cycles of growth and development that everything goes through. From nature to human society, to our individual spiritual development. And one of the common threads in these cycles, a kind of elemental part of this design, is that foundations are laid. And this is the spiritual dynamic that John the Baptist plays. He represents a kind of pure devotion, bhakti yoga, in the eastern context.

He's the patron saint of ascetics and monastics and hermits and renunciates. And he preaches this very plain and simple, kind of harsh message, with very passionate and very clear ideas of right and wrong. He has some idea of a broader, deeper, purer message, but is, in a way, limited in his understanding.

I love the way that Niko's Kazanzachis portrays John the Baptist in his novel "The Last Temptation of Christ", which is a fictional reimagining of the Christ narrative. He's this wild kinda crazy dude assembling this weird following, and he's really into having stuff figured out right now, and violently over throwing the Roman empire, and Jesus has to kind of calm him down, because he's so passionate that he's not seeing straight.

And there are two concepts that Swedenborg relates to this state that John the Baptist is a reflection of. Most clearly, it is the "literal meaning of the Word", and in a more abstract way, a developing relationship with the divine which is rooted in the natural and the earthly, and in a kind of faith that is simplistic and somewhat dogmatic.

John the Baptist is an image of the literal meaning of the word, which prepares the way for our understanding of its internal meaning, which, of course, is at the center of our spiritual tradition. One seems harsh and abstract and moralizing, but it is the catalyst, the messenger of spiritual principles which are full of peace and absolute goodness. The state called John the Baptist is a necessary one. And it is a cyclical dynamic. As we travel up the spiral of spiritual development, there is always a step further we can go. It's a state of growth and transition. From the old image of God represented by Zacharias, to the new image represented in Christ. From the stubborn and dogmatic state of "faith alone" of what Swedenborg calls the "old church", both collectively and individually, to the union of faith and understanding in the New Church, represented by the image of the Second Coming of Christ.

And the imagery continues to John's death. Rather than Christ, who rises with his whole body, John the Baptist is decapitated, another common image in world mythology. This is both an image of

sacrifice, or martyrdom, as well as representing the almost ironic cutting off of the natural mind, the natural understanding of things. The body is transcended, and the first thing to go are those intellectual and ideological concepts and beliefs which we had previously relied on so dearly. And it comes from an egoic and selfish indulgence in the sensual, represented by Salome and Herod.

Because we realize that, after all, it was the gratification of our natural, primitive senses that we were after, an ego-driven spirituality.

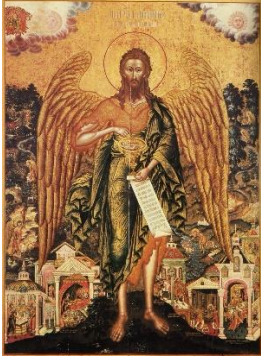
Does this state seem familiar? Have you been in a state of total devotion to something? Something you really cared about, but didn't quite understand? Have you been in a state where you thought you had things figured out?

When things looked black and white, and there was a straight and narrow path to follow? Have you then gone through the experience of expanding your viewpoint, realizing that your state of almost blind devotion to an idea or a lifestyle was limited and maybe even a bit superficial, but it laid the groundwork for who you are today?

I can't answer this question for you, but to me it seems, both from my own experience, and from that of others, that this is, in fact, a universal state that keeps repeating. I associate it with a kind of sincere, but dogmatic outlook. A kind of simple faith, that reminds me of the "first naive", that the philosopher Paul Ricoeur talks about in his concepts of human spiritual development. It's kind of simplistic and literalist, but it opens us up to the second naive, when the harshness of idealism and passionate devotion is confronted with the Lamb, so to speak, representing a loving-kindness that restores the balance of love and wisdom and enables us to be truly rational, in the Swedenborgian sense of the word.

But if there's one thing to always keep in mind when speaking about correspondences, it's that they are not just chronological dynamics that happen once. It's a lot more like a spiral, if that makes any sense. So, when we contemplate on the inner meaning of John the Baptist, let's not automatically look at our lives retrospectively. That's exactly the trap. I think the idea is that to some degree, we are always in the state of John the Baptist. I think of my own life. As a teenager, I was super religious, and really into the literal sense of scripture. And I thought I had it all figured out. Then I gradually realized some of the logical and practical problems that come with a literal, kind of fundamentalist understanding of scripture and reality. And I found Swedenborg and others, who were able to look deeper, and open up a whole other realm of understanding. And a part of me figured "Yes, Score! I got it all figured out again, screw those old fundamentalists, here's the way to go", and then I realized some of the issues with reading Swedenborg too literally, and not taking his teachings, as progressive and holistic as they may be, too literally. And that part of the whole point of the New Church is progress, and we are much further on that collective spiritual timeline than Swedenborg was. And at each of these stages, there was this feeling of "I've got it figured out". I've arrived. The feeling that this state of understanding or awareness or consciousness that I discovered is IT. That this John the Baptist is in fact the Messiah. And he looks a lot like him. But there is always further to go, or deeper, or higher, depending on your perspective.

There is always a part of our spiritual consciousness that is complacent, that thinks it's seeing the light, when it's only seeing a reflection. We can apply this to our image of the Divine. We might have the image of Christ, or another avatar, or the Buddha, or the spiritual sun. And part of us will think that "now we've got it all figured out". "Now we know how things work spiritually".



The State of John the Baptist is a state of growth and transition. If you look at the top of the page, you see this icon of John the Baptist. And you may have noticed that he has wings. And there are different reasons why in iconography he is often depicted with wings. He's considered an angelic being, a messenger, often referred to as "the Angel of the Desert". Someone, or something that is in movement. That acts as a mediator between higher and lower realms. He is also holding a chalice with the baby Jesus inside it, resembling Mary, about to birth the divine into the world.

I invite you to print and keep this image. Maybe put the image in a little frame, or hang it up on your fridge or in your house altar or whatever works for you. And when you see him, allow yourself to remember that he represents a part of you. A transition. And I hope that this image will remind you to both question and appreciate the state that you are in spiritually. To never be complacent or prideful or self-righteous in your particular understanding, but to live in the acknowledgement that that you can always go deeper, and you always need to be open towards that innocence, that loving-kindness, that is represented by the lamb. And that there is an understanding, a reality, that is much greater than ourselves.

Let us bear in mind that this does not just apply to what we may label "spirituality". How, for example does this dynamic play into contemporary issues, such as climate change and social justice, and our individual and collective approach to these, and our willingness to learn and change?

May we all be aware of our role as vessels and distributors of the divine, in its love and wisdom, manifested in Christ consciousness and the presence of his second coming within us. Amen.

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Be a Blessing: Joy Barnitz

July 30, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 12:2

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

From Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell §360

The only way we can be formed for heaven is through the world. That is the ultimate goal by which every affection must be defined. Unless affection manifests itself or flows into action, which happens in sizeable communities, it is stifled, ultimately to the point that we no longer focus on our neighbor at all, but only on ourselves. We can see from this that the life of thoughtfulness toward our neighbor—behaving fairly and uprightly in all our deeds and in all our responsibilities—leads to heaven, but not a life of piety apart from this active life.

**Message
Be a Blessing**

by Joy Barnitz



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



"Be a Blessing!"

That's how Everett Fox's translation of Genesis 12:2 ends. (Fox, Everett. In the beginning: a new English rendition of the Book of Genesis. New York: Schocken , 1983. Print.)

"Be a Blessing!"

Not a suggestion, a command. With an exclamation point!

Except for the punctuation, Fox's translation of the Hebrew is not significantly different from the New Revised Standard Version. Fox's version is:

"I will make a great nation of you and will give-you-blessing and will make your name great. (PERIOD) Be a blessing! (EXCLAMATION POINT)"

God is sending Abram out from his homeland at age 75. Abram takes his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot and all their possessions, including the animals and the people of their households, on a pilgrimage of faith. The original immigrant pilgrimage story. What trust Abram, and his extended family, must have had to pack everything up and move to an unknown place! I marvel at Abram's trust and that of his family. And God charged Abram: BE A BLESSING!!

Let's put some context around our Gospel reading for today which is among the best known passages in the Bible and comes from the Sermon on the Mount. There is a parallel sermon in the Gospel of Luke called the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6: 20-49). One significant difference between the two is that Matthew addressed the Sermon on the Mount to the disciples AND the crowds (Matt. 5:1) whereas Luke's Sermon on the Plain is addressed solely to the disciples. Both begin with the beatitudes, but Matthew's sermon has numerous sayings related specifically to Jewish Christians, the intended audience, and is quite a bit longer; Luke's Gospel was aimed predominantly at Gentile Christians and, since the references were less meaningful to that audience, they were not included. By setting the sermon on a mountain Jesus becomes a Moses-like figure; at the beginning of the sermon, Jesus sits down, the position of a teacher or a ruler.

The Beatitudes are beloved in part because they capture the essential lessons Jesus taught us. As the Kurt Vonnegut passage puts it:

"For some reason, the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). But, often with tears in their eyes, they demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. And of course, that's Moses, not Jesus. I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. 'Blessed are the merciful' in a

courtroom? 'Blessed are the peacemakers' in the Pentagon? Give me a break!"
[[Kurt Vonnegut , "A Man Without a Country," The Guardian \(20 January 2016\)](#)]

Since mid-November, I've been meditating on peacemaking; particularly on engaged "living room conversations" as a method of peacemaking. In particular, the article "[Why I Left White Nationalism](#)" in the New York Times Magazine by R. Derek Black shortly after the election caught my attention. Black, the son of the founder of Stormfront, the first major white nationalist website, is also the godson of David Duke, former Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Black grew up in West Palm Beach near Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate and "was once considered the bright future of the movement." After community college, Black decided to study medieval history at one of the most liberal colleges around: New College in Sarasota, Florida; which happens to be my alma mater and where I met my husband! Black attributes his change in attitude toward white nationalism to the "many talks with devoted and diverse people ... who chose to invite (him) into their dorms and conversations rather than ostracize (him)." In particular, Black cites the impact of being invited to and attending a weekly Sabbath dinner given by a fellow student, the only Jewish student on campus. Black notes in his New York Times article that, since his renouncing of white nationalism:

People have approached me looking for a way to change the minds of Trump voters, but I can't offer any magic technique. That kind of persuasion happens in person-to-person interactions and it requires a lot of honest listening on both sides. For me, the conversations that led me to change my views started because I couldn't understand why anyone would fear me. I thought I was only doing what was right and defending those I loved. Let me emphasize that last part: "... I couldn't understand why anyone would fear me. I thought I was only doing what was right and defending those I loved." [From [The White Flight of Derek Black](#)]

My first action after the election was to join the Tri-Cities Interfaith Council (Fremont – Union City – Newark, California). On Saturday, January 21st , I marched with Sr. Annette, a nun of 60 years and a contingent of young women from Notre Dame de Namur University (NDMU) in Belmont, California. Sr. Annette and I had traveled to Oakland with one of the speakers, the Chair of the Tri-Cities Interfaith Council a Muslim woman named Moina Shaiq who wears a hijab and is very active in the Fremont area. Fremont is a community where over 150 languages and dialects are spoken. In addition to many Christian churches, it has a Jewish temple, a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara, a Thai Buddhist temple, an Islamic Center. Fremont is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the Bay Area; the ending of Khaled Hosseini's 2003 book *The Kite Runner* is set in Fremont's Central Park. Sr. Annette, Moina Shaiq and I rode together on a packed Bay Area Rapid Transition (BART) train from Fremont to Lake Merritt station, then Sr. Annette and I spent some time chatting with people as we waited to link up with the NDMU contingent; together we made our way to the Civic Center just in time to hear our friend Moina speak. I was very grateful that the march was peaceful, that the Oakland police were very much in the background, it sprinkled but didn't rain and there were enough porta-potties, still with toilet paper and seat covers, at the end of the march! WOW!

Before I decided to march, I had to decide what I was marching for. My actions needed to be connected with my reason AND my heart. Yes, I was marching to support my friend, Moina. Yes, I was marching side-by-side with Sr. Annette. And also, I was marching because I remember the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, Watergate. I was marching because I believe deeply that "all persons are created equal" and are here on earth living their lives "to form themselves for heaven through their life in this world" and, by doing so, serve God's great purpose. And, yet ... marching is NOT enough.

We are children of God ... and we are called to be peacemakers for we are charged to BE A BLESSING! When things appear upside down, Jesus turns everything right-side up: we are to be a blessing, we are to bring peace. WOW again! That's an awesome charge, and an awesome responsibility. Rather too much for me, I'd rather stay home and watch TV ... wouldn't you?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran theologian, whose grandmother was a Swedenborgian ([more on Bonhoeffer](#)), who was executed in Germany shortly before Hitler died, made a distinction between cheap grace and costly grace in his book [The Cost of Discipleship](#).

"... **cheap grace** is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."

By contrast,

"... **costly grace** confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

So Vonnegut's comparison of the beatitudes to the Ten Commandments makes sense in a deep way: as believers, as those who follow Jesus, we are asked to become as the disciples were, to live our lives in accordance with Jesus' teachings because those are our deep, internal beliefs. We must turn this beatitude around and ask: how we are to be peacemakers, oh Lord, in a world turned upside down? How can we see and honor and respect the Divine spark in those who differ from us? Those who are doing what they think is right and defending their loved ones, just as we are doing.

This year is the Chinese Year of the Rooster, the lunar New Year began on January 28th. There are two other important "days" that occurred that week. January 27th was [International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#) designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and to honor the victims and survivors of the holocaust. In 2010, California designated January 30th as [Fred Korematsu Day](#) which is the first day named for an Asian – American in U.S. history. Fred Korematsu challenged the federal government's right to incarcerate U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry. In *Korematsu vs. the United States*, the Supreme Court of the U.S. ruled against him in 1944, stating that "incarceration was justified due to military necessity." That conviction was overturned on November 10, 1983 after evidence surfaced that government intelligence agencies had hidden evidence during the original case; these documents indicated that the Japanese had committed no crimes justifying mass incarceration. Fred Korematsu Day is, at present, observed in perpetuity only in California, Virginia and Florida.

We are living in dangerous times. Perhaps we can take comfort from Jesus' words:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are the children of God, for they shall be called peacemakers. I take heart from a kid in a stroller accompanying the Oakland marchers. Munching thoughtfully on popcorn in the tray in front of him and ignoring the big sign on his stroller: "peacemaker in training." As we move into a moment of reflective silent prayer,

you may want to think about how you are called to be a peacemaker. It seems a large task, and it is. I find comfort in [Margaret Mead's words](#): "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."

BE a Blessing!

This sermon was presented at Covenant Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, California on 29 January 2017. As an introduction to the sermon, I pointed out that January 27th is [International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#), January 28th was the [Lunar New Year 2017](#) and January 30th is [Fred Korematsu Day](#). More information may be found at the highlighted links.

Joy Barnitz earned a Master of Divinity and a Certificate of Swedenborgian Theology, both from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. She is a certified Veriditas labyrinth facilitator. In addition, Joy earned a Ph.D. in molecular biology and consults in the area of product development in the biopharmaceutical, medical device and diagnostics industries.

Finding God on Summer Vacation

August 6, 2017

READINGS From the Bible

1 Corinthians 13 (New International Version)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

From Swedenborg

Divine Love and Wisdom, NCE #424

...earthly love is love for ourselves and love for the world, and spiritual love is love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. Love for ourselves and for the world looks downward and outward, and love for the Lord looks upward and inward. So when an earthly love is separated from spiritual love, it cannot be raised away from our self-absorption. It remains immersed in it and even mired in it, to the extent that it loves it. If our discernment does rise up and see elements of wisdom in heaven's light, then our love drags it back down and unites it to itself in its self-absorption. There it either discards the elements of wisdom or distorts them or arranges them outside itself so that it can mouth them for the sake of reputation.

Just as an earthly love can rise up by levels and become spiritual and heavenly, it can also go down by levels and become sensory and physical. It goes down to the extent that it loves being in control with no love of service, simply for love of ourselves. This is the love that we call demonic.

Message finding god on vacation



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



Tilden Edwards, Episcopal priest who was a co-founder of Shalem Institute wrote *Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians*. He writes about the importance of us finding time in our busy lives to live within the peace of our relationship with God. I was privileged, many years ago, to take a course on spiritual direction through the Shalem Institute. Much of it took place in our own lives and on-line. But, there were times when we all gathered at Shalem in Maryland to practice what we were learning. We spent a week together in retreat, and honoring a day of Sabbath in our own ways. It was a silent retreat, and we had opportunities to find God through art, through nature, music – and dance. I'll never forget Tilden Edwards leading us in spiritual dance as part of our Sabbath time. It was, indeed, a time of renewal and I always returned feeling refreshed on a very deep level.

I realized that I needed to be more intentional about finding time with God in my everyday life. I needed vacation time that was spiritually renewing. So how does one vacation with God?

There are many ways to make God part of one's vacation. Here's one option:

Below are some love poems to and about God written by mystics throughout history. You are invited to print out the poems, and take them along to the beach, or sit in the sun, or in the cool shade, and give yourself some time to enjoy love poetry about God.

One of the most famous love poems is by John of the Cross. He found time alone at night to feel God's presence.

STANZAS OF THE SOUL

On a dark night, kindled in love with yearnings—oh, happy chance!—

I went forth without being observed, my house being now at rest.

In darkness and secure, by the secret ladder, disguised—oh, happy chance!—

In darkness and in concealment, my house being now at rest.

*In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,
nor I beheld aught, without light or guide, save that which burned
in my heart.*

*This light guided me more surely than the light of noontday
to the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me— a
place where none appeared.*

*Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,
Oh, night that joined beloved with lover, lover transformed in the
beloved!*

*Upon my flowery breast, kept wholly for himself alone,
there he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, and the fanning of
the cedars made a breeze.*

*The breeze blew from the turret as I parted his locks;
with his gentle hand he wounded my neck and caused all my senses
to be suspended.*

*I remained, lost in oblivion; my face I reclined on the Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself, Leaving my cares forgotten
among the lilies.*

In the Sufi tradition, God is the "Beloved," for whom one has the deepest of feelings.

Here is a poem to the Beloved from the Sufi Rumi:

My God and My Love:

*Eyes are at rest, the stars are setting.
Hushed are the movement of birds in their nests,
of monsters in the sea, and
You are the just who knows no change;
the Equity that does not swerve, the everlasting that never passes away.
The doors of kings are locked now and guarded by their henchmen, but Your door is open to all who
call upon You.
My Lord, each lover is now alone with his beloved.
And I am alone with Thee.*

Another one of Rumi's poems:

*Since I have heard of the world of Love,
I've spent my life, my heart
And my eyes this way.
I used to think that love
And beloved are different.
I know they are the same.*

To Swedenborg, we could not fully experience earthly love without Divine Love being at its core.

"An earthly love separated from spiritual love is opposed to spiritual love. This is because earthly love is love for ourselves and love for the world, and spiritual love is love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. ... So when an earthly love is separated from spiritual love, it cannot be raised away from self-absorption."

To Swedenborg, God is love itself. God IS love.

Swedenborg is clear that our love of the Lord is the center of all loves and of our lives. Swedenborg helps us remember that the God's Love is the center of our being, and reminds to live every moment expressing that love through our uses in life.

Poetry about love and longing for God is also found in many Christian traditions. Many of the Christian mystics saw themselves as brides of Christ, a tradition that was adopted in the monastic tradition for both men and women. One of the best know Christian mystical writers is St. Teresa of Avila.

MY BELOVED ONE IS MINE

*I gave myself to Love Divine,
And lo! My lot so changed is
That my Beloved One is mine
And I at last am surely His.*



One of my favorite mystics of this era is Mechthild of Magdeburg. She wrote that she heard God say to her soul:

*You are like a new bride,
whose only love has left her sleeping
I await you in the orchard of love
And pick for you the flower of sweet reunion
And make ready there your bed.*

Her soul responds:

*Ah my beloved, I am hoarse in the throat of my chastity
But the sweetness of your kindness
Has cleared my throat so that now I can sing.*

Both Christian and Sufi love mysticism express abandonment as well as joy. To love a human deeply is to feel loss when you are separated and grief if they should die. If one feels great joy when sensing God's presence, then one also feels great loss when unable to feel it. Opening our hearts to the depth of Divine Love means also opening to deep grief during those periods when we can't feel God's presence.

Here is a poem from a Sufi missing the feeling of God's love:

*The source of my grief and loneliness is deep in my breast
This is a disease no doctor can cure.
Only union with the Friend can cure it.*

Here is another one by Rumi:

The Agony and Ecstasy of Divine Discontent:

*I long to see your face.
In the taste of Sweetness
I long to kiss your lips.
In the shadows of passion
I long for your love.*

*Oh! Supreme Lover!
Let me leave aside my worries.
The flowers are blooming
with the exultation of your Spirit.*

*By Allah!
I long to escape the prison of my ego
and lose myself
in the mountains and the desert.*

*These sad and lonely people tire me.
I long to revel in the drunken frenzy of your love
and feel the strength of Rustam in my hands.*

*I'm sick of mortal kings.
I long to see your light.
With lamps in hand
the sheiks and mullahs roam
the dark alleys of these towns
not finding what they seek.*

*You are the Essence of the Essence,
The intoxication of Love.*

*I long to sing your praises
but stand mute
with the agony of wishing in my heart.*

I love this little Sufi poem:

I laugh when I hear that the fish in the sea is thirsty.

We are fish swimming in the sea of God's Divine Love for us. The fish may feel thirsty and could forget that it need only open its mouths to be nourished! Like the fish, we live in a sea of Divine Love, yet sometimes we forget to open our hearts to God's Love that is all around us.

When you plan your vacation, remember to include God. You can build in some time for quiet and reflection, or bring along inspiring material to read. One of the best things about vacationing with God is that we don't have to go anywhere to have a vacation together. Like the fish, you can just open your mouth, and drink in God's vibrant love!

Spiritual Issues of Climate Change

August 13, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

John 1:3

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Psalm 19:1, A Psalm of David.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Colossians 1:16-17

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed (Rogers) n. 290290

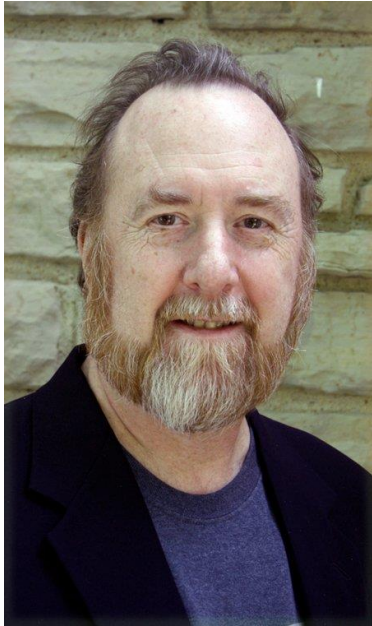
And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying. (5:13) This symbolizes a confession and glorification of the Lord by angels of the lowest heavens.

Message **Spiritual Issues of Climate Change**

Climate change has become an increasingly vital issue. For many years, it has been considered a scientific issue, and many papers and publication – including the movies prepared by former Vice President Al Gore-- show scientific perspectives. Of late, the scientific findings have been questioned, and climate issues are becoming part of political debates. In addition to scientific and political issues, are there also spiritual perspectives on the climate?



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Love, Spirit, Life



Rev. Dr. David Fekete says "yes" to that question in the May issue of the Messenger where he has an article titled: "[A Swedenborgian View on Climate Change.](#)" It is the text of a presentation he gave at the May Climate and Change study group of the National Council of Churches. He tells us it was received enthusiastically and lively discussion followed.

Rev. Fekete says there are some reasons why we Swedenborgians might see religious issues in the climate conversations.

World View and Cosmology

Fekete says that Swedenborg is seen as looking at nature as symbolic of God. An example is Emerson:

There is one man of genius who has done much for this philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly estimated;—I mean Emanuel Swedenborg. . . . He saw and showed the connection between nature and the affections of the human soul.

[Quoted by David Fekete from: An Oration delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, MA, August 31, 1837]

The Bible

In Dr. Fekete's environmentally-oriented perspective, he also sees the Bible as another factor in how Swedenborgians understand the environment. Swedenborg was raised Lutheran and embraced "Sola Scriptura" – that all of theology is grounded in scripture. Fekete says:

For Swedenborg, both Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament are God's Word. Thus scripture passages that support eco-justice can be used as bases for a Swedenborgian theology of the planet.

He continues this fascinating paper/talk by indicating that he is involved in a project to identify Biblical passages that support eco-justice issues. The passages lead to the inevitable conclusion: harming the environment is harming God.

So doing injustice to creation is an affront to God's order; it is violence, a disruption of peace, of shalom.

Ethics is another important issue for Swedenborgians.

A quote central to the Swedenborgian faith is, "All religion relates to life, and the religious life is doing good" (Doctrine of Life §1). I believe that climate change can be understood in terms of personal morality.

Climate Issues and Sin

Dr. Fekete believes that pollution comes from consumption and production beyond what we need in our lives. Our Western culture is becoming increasingly oriented towards greed and fulfilling ego desires. Making a change involves individuals as well as societies.

Swedenborg tells us to take care of our neighbor, and Rev. Dave points to a quotation from James A. Nash: [one of the first Christian eco-theologians]

Another way of viewing the issue is in the light of love for the neighbor. Polluting harms others (obviously). We do violence to near or distant neighbors by polluting the environment. Making air unfit to breathe or water unpotable or food inedible is doing violence to the neighbor

OTHER TRADITIONS

Looking at other traditions gives us even deeper understanding of how to see the environment as a religious issue. He adds:

From the very little I know about Indigenous ways of life, I have found a profound veneration of nature among Indigenous articulations of spirituality.

Fekete recommends two particular books to us:

As I continue to learn about Indigenous spiritualities, I have encountered two works that have been instructive and which I commend to the general bibliography we are compiling:

Randy S. Woodley. Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision—creation care from an Indigenous perspective by a Bible scholar.

David Young, Grant Ingram, and Lise Swartz. Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer—Study of an individual Cree healer describing a non-Cartesian world-view.

Remember that this is our denominational topic for the year:

THE YEAR OF THE NEW JERUSALEM -- 2017-18

Year 7: The emergence of a New World:

- the Second Coming in the Spirit now
- the new world & new consciousness emerging now

- building the future: the unity of the human family in justice and peace

For August, we are looking at climate change.

If you find Rev. Fekete's article fascinating – as I do – then there is good news for you!

1. This coming Thursday, Rev. David will join us for the Thursday chat to discuss his article with us.
2. I have purchased the 2 books Rev. Dave recommended for us on indigenous spiritual issues, and am going through them to prepare some thoughts for our message on Aug. 27th about indigenous issues in climate change.

Let us pray:

Dear Creator:

We thank you for the incredible beauty in the universe You have created. Please guide us in understanding how we can love and preserve this precious gift. Amen.

How We Can Be Peacemakers

August 20, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5:1-11, New Revised Standard

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Rose) n. 304

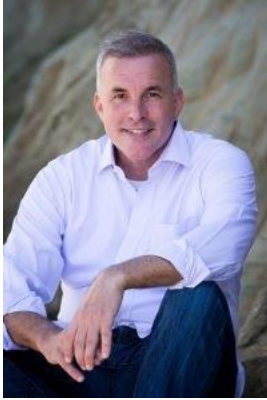
Heavenly peace is peace in relation to the hells - a peace because evils and falsities will not rise up from there and break in. Heavenly peace can be compared in many ways to earthly peace. For example, it can be compared to the peace after wars when all are living in safety from their enemies, protected in their own city, in their house, with their own land and garden. It is as the prophet says, who speaks of heavenly peace in earthly language:

They will each sit under their own vine and their own fig tree; no one will frighten them. (Micah 4:4; Isaiah 65:21, 22, 23)

Heavenly peace can be compared to rest and recreation for the mind after working extremely hard, or to a mother's consolation after giving birth, when her instinctive parental love unveils its pleasures. It can be compared to the serenity after storms, black clouds, and thunder; or to the spring that follows a severe winter, with the uplifting effect of seedlings in the fields and blossoms in the gardens, meadows, and woods; or to the state of mind felt by survivors of storms or hostilities at sea who reach port and set their feet on longed-for solid ground.

Message How we can be peacemakers

by Rev. Rich Tafel



The Gospel this week is taken from Matthew 5 and it's famously known as 'the Beatitudes/the Sermon on the Mount.' And 'Beatitudes' means blessings; these are the blessings. And this is Jesus' sermon for us. We have the Lord's Prayer, this is the Lord's sermon. Now over the past few weeks in sermons I can't help as I'm preaching, to think about the strife and the chaos and the crisis that our country is in right now. And I looked at this text and thought "What can we learn from the Beatitudes? What can we learn from the Sermon on the Mount that applies to what's going on in our country today? What can we as Christians learn that we could respond?"

And yet with the recent executive order banning refugees, the battle lines in our country seemed to have only gotten more intense. I know I'm not here to talk to you about what I think politically and in fact a recent survey showed that people in church don't really care what their pastor thinks so I will share my opinion on politics. But I am curious to find out: what could we learn from scripture? Is there guidance from the Lord for us in these really difficult times and what is the role for us as Christians and what is the role of the church and this church in this town at this time?

I do believe Jesus is giving us the road map to what it means to be a Christian disciple in this text. And most importantly, what jumped out at me this week was the phrase "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God." This last week I spent time at something called the Civic Collabatory. It is people that meet from around the country who are involved in how to improve American Civil Society and civil life: how can we make it better? What can we do to improve it? And as you can imagine for people who that is their business and they are gathered from all over the country and we are meeting for dinner in the Holocaust Museum, you can imagine that we had a lot of thinking to do. What is our role? Because when Civil Society falls down, when those battles increase, we know what follows.

When there aren't peacemakers, warriors replace them and win. In looking at the Gospel today I realized how counter-culture it is to our society today, particularly our Washington DC Society.

What Jesus said then was as radical today as it was two thousand years ago. For the fun of it I thought "What would be the blessings or the Beatitudes for the Sermon on the Mount if it was written for Christians in Washington today who want to put forth their career. I've got a short version. Are

you ready?

This is the Beatitudes for politics today:

"Blessed are those who win for there's is the kingdom

. Blessed are those who get their way for they will be happy.

Blessed are those who speak over others for they will gain sound bites.

Blessed are those who know they are right, for they don't need to hear. Blessed are the snarky for they will gain twitter followers

. Blessed are the attack dogs for they will get great book deals.

Blessed are the people who rave about your brilliance for you shall be called a thought leader. "

That's the prevailing attitude, the beatitude, the blessing of our culture right now. And Jesus turns this completely upside down. It runs counter to everything that we're thought about being successful, particularly here in Washington.

When Jesus says "Blessed are the pure in spirit...", I believe he's saying that the more you know, the less you know; the more you grow spiritually, the more you are aware of your own thoughts. You become humble then you realize that you are in fact poor in spirit.



"Blessed are those who mourn..." Those who care about the suffering in the world are sad. The sadness in the world at times makes us want to cry. I noticed the great mystics often talked about the ministry of crying and said that as they grew spiritually everything was more intense and they cried more often but for shorter periods of time then they moved on. They felt the pain for the world.

"Blessed are the meek...", means the person who is willing to speak last if at all, waiting to let others say what's needed. It means no longer having to win the debate. It means facilitating the debate.

"Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness..." means seeking a better world. To be a Christian means to be seeking a better world; this world, to bring greater Justice, not in our spare t

ime but it means with our life. It requires us to be constantly curious, calm and purposeful.

"Blessed are the merciful...", means operating from a position of mercy knowing that by the grace of God go I. It recognizes that there are no borders to God's love. Merciful people have done their own inventory. They forgive because they've been forgiven.

"Blessed are the pure in heart," means operating from a place of authenticity, compassion and truth. It seeks to find God in everyone, especially those we want to hate.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted...", means not conforming and not conforming to your tribe, to your team or to your side. It often means standing alone. Bridge builders get walked on as bridges. When we think of the great spiritual teachers and great political leaders: Ghandi, King, Rabin, Bonhoeffer, we remember they were not killed by other nations; they were killed by their own team for betraying the team. Anyone who steps out of the Partisan March in our country right now risks standing alone. I think that's important for peacemakers.

"Blessed are those who are reviled and denounced for my sake," means that when we truly follow Jesus, chances are we will be demonized at times and misrepresented. We have to stop wanting to be liked, we must be willing to be misunderstood, even by those closest to us to follow Jesus Christ.

At the end Jesus says "Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you..." One prophet of the modern age that I'd like to quote from is the Reverend Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I quote him for a number of reasons: he's an inspiration to me, this is Holocaust Memorial week, we remember the people who were killed in the Holocaust. He led the Christian Church in opposition to Hitler and he's also my cousin so I have a familial connection. In his book 'The Cost of Discipleship,' he reminds us that the Christian life doesn't make sense. It doesn't fit in. We don't have to understand it; we have to follow it. I love this quote:

"Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend. It must transcend all comprehension. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension and I will help you to comprehend even as I do. Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you're going is true knowledge. God says my comprehension transcends yours." [Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2015]

Today in the gospel Jesus has given us a radical sermon about what it is to be a Christian. Let us not comprehend it, let us follow it and let us each accept our role and the role as a community to be peacemaker at this very critical time in the world. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven." Amen.

Prayer:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom:

Help me to be a channel of Your peace. We are living in difficult times, when sharing Your peace is so important. Guide me in knowing where, when, and how I can best share Your peace with the world.

Indigenous People & Climate Change

August 27, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1:

Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule of the fish in the sea and the birds of the sky, over livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

From Swedenborg

Divine Love and Wisdom, nos. 324-325:

Because of correspondence, there is nothing in the created universe that does not answer to something in us, not only to our feelings and consequent thoughts, but also to our physical organs and viscera...There is a human image to everything in the universe. Thus Adam's wisdom and intelligence are described by the Garden of Eden, where there were trees of every kind, as well as rivers, precious stones, and gold, along with animals he names. All of these things meant things that were in him and that made him what we call "Human".

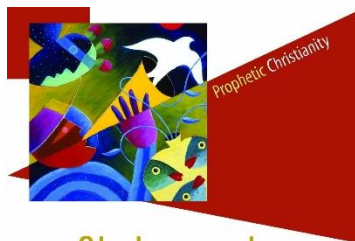
Message Indigenous people & climate change

This month we have been exploring the role of climate change in our journey towards the New Jerusalem.

Rev. David Fekete wrote in [his Messenger article](#) about concepts of climate change within the Christian tradition – and especially in the writings of Swedenborg. Our message two weeks ago explored further issues of [Spirituality, Climate Change and Swedenborg](#).



Swedenborgian
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Shalom and the Community of Creation

An Indigenous Vision

Randy S. Woodley

Rev. David Fekete mentioned that the indigenous approach to creation has a depth to it that we don't always find in our Christian traditions. One of the books he recommended on the topic is: *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision (Prophetic Christianity Series)* by Randy Woodley

Randy Woodley became fascinated with this topic when he did his Ph.D. dissertation at George Fox University on "[The Harmony Way: Integrating Indigenous Values within Native North American Theology and Mission.](#)" He wanted to explore whether there is a concept common to all Native Americans that has to do with living in harmony and balance.

Randy was born and raised in a Native community, where connection with creation was a given.

Because I was at rest in creation, I often received signs from the Creator early in my life, confirming his presence and his concern for my well-being.

Randy Woodley. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision (Prophetic Christianity Series (PC))* (Kindle Locations 112-113). Kindle Edition.

The first time he realized that some people felt alienated from creation was in 1980 when he took a group of city kids hiking in the mountains. He was amazed that they found nature to be harsh, rather than protective.



For [his dissertation](#) he wanted to explore "Shalom theology" -- the concept of creation within indigenous communities.

What is "Shalom theology"? Wikipedia says:

Shalom is a [Hebrew](#) word meaning *peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility* and can be used idiomatically to mean both *hello* and *goodbye*.

As it does in [English](#), it can refer to either [peace](#) between two entities (especially between man and God or between two countries), or to the well-being, welfare or safety of an individual or a group of individuals.

In the introduction to his book Randy says:

Shalom theology and the Harmony Way suggest what the world should be, reflecting the fullness and wholeness of God's creation. This book offers the great possibility as never - that the North American church could reflect the reality of God's shalom, a shalom that is fully embodied rather than merely referenced or abstracted. The book offers an important challenge to western cultural captivity, revealing its deficiency.

Randy Woodley. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Prophetic Christianity Series (PC)) (Kindle Locations 39-41). Kindle Edition.

He writes about what he found in his research:

The ancient Semitic construct of shalom, particularly as it is understood by theologian Walter Brueggemann, seemed very similar to the Harmony Way. I discovered that in many ways, shalom and the Native American Harmony Way are interchangeable constructs. In my discovery, I found that only a broad-based, yet concrete theological construct would be able to compare with the Native American Harmony Way. For instance, one could argue that love is broad based but love can be interpreted ambiguously. Shalom is broad based but is not ambiguous.

Randy Woodley. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Prophetic Christianity Series (PC)) (Kindle Locations 66-70). Kindle Edition.

He further explains this concept:

Not only does shalom express much more than "peace;" but the kind of peace shalom represents is active and engaged, going far beyond the mere absence of conflict. A fuller understanding of shalom is the key to the door that can lead us to a whole new way of living in our world.

Randy Woodley. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Prophetic Christianity Series (PC)) (Kindle Locations 268-270). Kindle Edition.

Today, Randy has a Shalom ministry of the land in Oregon. This is the [website of the community](#). Here is an [article](#) about the community, Eagle Wings Ministries, Inc. They say this about their ministry on their website:

For Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples of the world, the colonial restraints that were present for so many hundreds of years are now disappearing. Native people are free to be who they were created to be - not in the image of Western European cultures and values but in the same values Jesus himself taught, the values that have been with our Indigenous peoples for thousands of

years. While we are unashamed followers of Jesus, in our own Indigenous ways, we do NOT proselytize, brainwash, or indoctrinate. This walk of ours is different than many others. People notice that about us, if interested, we share our experience. If not, we continue to love and serve without hesitation.

So, they find that the teachings of Jesus integrate with Indigenous ways, through the concept of "Shalom."

Putting this concept with what Rev. David wrote about in the Messenger, we can say that there is a profound theology of creation that transcends culture or religion. It takes us to creation as Divine; to the Divine living in creation.

It takes us back to Swedenborg. If God is in all things, the creation IS God. If we trash our planet, we are trashing God.

We cannot both be faithful to God and live with abandon on the earth. Being faithful to God is all about conserving the resources and climates of the earth. For our earth IS God.



Native Americans grasp this with their being; they are raised to be at one with the sacred earth. Many of us from predominantly white, Christian cultures maintain a dualism in our minds: *God is separate from me. I am separate from the earth.* If I see myself as the dominant being on earth; if I see my role to use and abuse the earth's resources for my ego needs, then I will destroy the earth.

On one level, this brings us back to basic concepts of environmental preservation. But, it is also deeper. We are bringing our core being – where our humanity is at one with God's divinity – into our every-day life. It is beyond what scientists tell us about climate change. It is not just our science; it is also our religion. They are one.

How can we live as faithful Christians? As wise and loving Swedenborgians? By living as the Native Americans do – at one with our earth.

Let us pray: Dear Divine Creator: We know that You live within Your Creation. You ARE Creation. Help us to live as one with Your Sacred Creation; striving to live in harmony with other cultures, other religions, and with Your earth. Amen.

Swedenborgian Spirituality

September 3, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 6:5-8

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion 539

There are two obligations incumbent on one after self-examination: prayer and confession. Prayer should be that the Lord may have pity, grant the power to resist the evils of which one has repented, and supply the inclination and affection for doing good, since man without Him cannot do anything (John 15:5). Confession should be that one sees, recognizes and acknowledges one's evils, and reveals oneself as a wretched sinner. There is no need to list one's sins before the Lord, nor to pray that they may be forgiven. There is no need to list one's sins, because one has examined them and seen them in oneself; consequently they are present to the Lord, because they are to oneself. The Lord has also guided the person in self-examination, disclosed the sins, and inspired sadness and together with this an effort to desist from them and begin a new life.

Message Swedenborgian Spirituality



Have you ever wondered if there a form of spiritual practice common to Swedenborgians? When asked that question, I usually say that Swedenborg didn't teach or advocate a particular practice,

and today's Swedenborgians engage in a broad range. In his life, however, he did use meditation and prayer, as well as keeping a dream journal and spiritual journals.

Some Swedenborgians believe that he provided some spiritual rules in margins of his manuscripts. Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence addresses that question in his article in the June Messenger called: *Building A Daily Spiritual Practice Based on Swedenborg's "Rules of Life."* Dr. Lawrence looks historically at how there came to be rumors about "Rules of Life" from Swedenborg. He suggests that the man who gave the eulogy at Swedenborg's funeral wanted to introduce an idea of how his friend lived a spiritual life and described the "rules."

Here is one common version of the rules:

1. Often to read and meditate on the Word of God
2. To submit everything to the will of Divine Providence
3. To observe in everything a propriety of behavior, and to keep the conscience clear
4. To discharge with fidelity the functions of my employments, and to make myself in all things useful to society

Lawrence has come to realize that the rules incorporate two of most famous practices of the Christian tradition. He writes:

A couple of years ago, for the first time I noticed that Swedenborg's Rules of Life incorporate the essence of two of the most popular Christian spirituality practices from a far back history:

Lectio Divina and the Ignatian Examen. The first rule is a version of Lectio Divina or Lectio Spiritualis which are structured ways of "praying the Word" (or possibly even Swedenborg's writings). The rest of the rules are easily shaped into performing a daily Examen. In my interest in shaping a practice that is doable on a daily basis, I prefer the option in the rules that says "often" for praying the Word, which is not necessarily daily. The first rule might be done a few times a week, whereas "praying" the rest of the rules should be done daily.



[Following this service](#) is what Lawrence likes to use himself for a combination of Swedenborg, Lectina Divina, and Ignatian Examen.

Are there spiritual practices that are important to you?

During the next two weeks, we'll be exploring spiritual practices. We are not attempting to determine the best practice or the right or best one. Rather, we'd like to hear from you about what is meaningful in your life. Consider some of these experiences of spirit: worship services, reading spiritual material, meditation, chanting, prayer, walking, drumming, painting, playing/listening to music, singing, dancing

Join the conversation!

Share your experiences with spiritual practices in [our forum](#)
Join our chat in Chatzy on Sept. 7th to discuss the article by Lawrence in the June Messenger
Email your ideas to include in next week's message [revwilma@swedenborgiancommunity.org]

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom, thank you for creating a world that is filled with so many ways of connecting with You. Guide us each to find the best pathway to You. Guide us each in taking our love of You into the world, striving to create the New Jerusalem.

Please be with all of those in Texas and Louisiana who have been impacted by torrential rain and floods. Bless those who are helping others. Amen.

A Daily Swedenborgian Practice Based on Swedenborg's Rules of Life

Find a comfortable spot where you are not likely to be disturbed.

- I. **Recall that you are in the presence of God:** As you quiet yourself, become aware that God is present with you, that God is always present in the creation that surrounds you, in your body, in those around you. The One who brought you forth into being unwaveringly loves you and is present working with you to reach your fullest potential. "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth" (Psalm 145:8).
- II. **Swedenborgian Lectio Divina:** If this is a day that you will do *Lectio*, spend fifteen minutes or more reflecting in a journal on a small amount of text from the Bible or from Swedenborg's writings. Read the text as if it is being spoken to you personally, and let yourself be in dialog with it. The main objective is to feed the heart, soul, and will through the mind. Each session's passage should be brief enough that the scope will not overwhelm you. The goal is to go deeply, not widely. After you have taken a few minutes to quiet your mind, turn your attention to the passage you have selected.
- III. **Swedenborgian Examen:**
 - A. Spend a moment looking over the past day or recent experience first with a spirit of gratitude for the gift of life that you are here with the opportunity to co-create your life with God.
 - B. Petition for the Light of Insight. Ask God to help you examine what is important in recent experience, to notice in recall your actions, attitudes, and motives with honesty and patience. Ask God for inner light that you may see what God would have you see.
 - C. Let events and experiences of your day come forth in your memory. Sense what comes forth as most important, whether big or small. Let come to the heart's mind experiences that seem most significant, whether "negatively" or "positively." That is, let experiences come to mind that seemed to bring you closer to a conjunction with God or that seemed to separate you from a feeling of conjunction with God.
 - D. Swedenborg's three foci: Once you have brought the recent framework of life experience into consciousness with a noticing both of joys and concerns, ask yourself in the presence of God each of the following three questions:
 1. What do I need to submit to Divine Providence? What is too big to handle or solve or resolve? Hold it up to God and hand it over. Allow yourself to trust in God to manage the unfolding process and receive the peace in releasing this concern to God. Allow yourself to receive the blessing of spiritual contentment that comes with trust in Divine Providence.
 2. Is anything troubling my conscience? In recent experience or newly recalled experience is there something I need to amend? Is my conscience sending a message for attention to something needing repentance? Are there new actions to undertake or recommitments to take to clear my conscience?

3. With what is upcoming in the day or the morrow, how can I be most useful? Of the many possible matters to which I can attend, which situations come to the fore as most important for creating a use for others? What do I need to prioritize to effect maximum usefulness for the next day?
- E. Response: Review for a moment what has arisen in your Swedenborgian *Examen*. Give thanks for the connections experienced with God in bringing to light your experience. Identify the one, two, or three matters that came to you as responses to live out. Ask God for help in moving forward and return full circle to the spirit of gratitude for the gift of life.

Spiritual Practices: St. Theresa

September 10, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Corinthians 3: 5-9

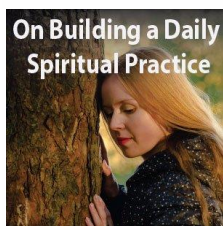
What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coestia 10238

'And put water in it' means the truths of faith by means of which purification in the natural is accomplished. This is clear from the meaning of 'water' as the truths of faith, dealt with in 28, 739, 2702, 3058, 3424, 4976, 5668, 8568, 9323; and from the meaning of 'the laver' as the natural, dealt with above in 10235. Anyone who does not know that 'water' means the truths of faith will fail to grasp the meaning of very many statements in the Word, such as unless a person is born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God, John 3:5. Those who take water here to mean nothing other than water think that the water of baptism is the means by which a person is regenerated. But in fact the water does nothing towards regeneration, only the truth of faith and the good of love do so; for water washes away solely dirt that is on the body and by no means evils present in the heart.

Message **Spiritual Practices: St. Theresa**



Last week we looked at a Swedenborgian concept of a daily spiritual practice from the "Rules of Life" [that some attribute to Swedenborg] and that include versions of *Lectio Divina* and the *Ignatian Examen*. Rev. Dr. James Lawrence wrote [an article](#) for the *Messenger* about how he uses these guides in his own spiritual practices.

We have [a podcast](#) from *Blog Talk Radio* that takes you on a journey through this practice.

Now, let's turn our attention to a different model of spiritual practice, from the prayer life of St. Teresa of Avila. She wrote from her own experience about how to use prayer in our lives.

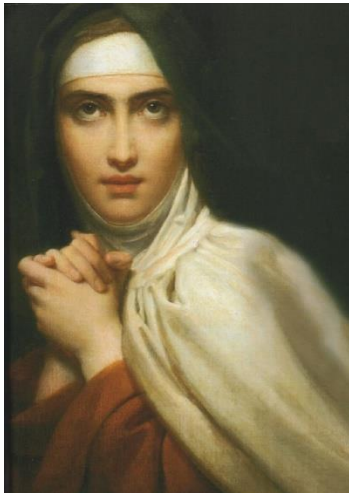
St. Teresa was 47 when she finished her first detailed description of prayer, contained in Chapters 11-20 of her *Book of her Life*. Although this portrayal is less precise than she would give fifteen years later in the *Interior Castle*, it is simpler and better known. I want to share my sense of it here.

In the book of her Life, Teresa likens the human soul to a garden. She says it is natural for us to want this garden to be a delight for the Divinity Who dwells there. Our role in tending our soul-garden is to water it, and the water is prayer.

Teresa says that there are 4 forms of prayer, just as there are 4 basic ways to water the garden.

WELL AND BUCKET: CENTERING PRAYER

The first way to water the garden is using a well and a bucket. You have to raise up the water from the well, and then carry the bucket of water to the garden. It is a lot of work, and produces a minimal amount of water.



Teresa saw the soul as part of our inner being; just as Swedenborg did later. So prayer is a way of coming to know this deepest part of the self.

Imagine that God has presented you with a lovely plot of land in an arid area. The soil is tilled; God has planted the seeds. God has even removed all of the weeds.

There is only one thing you need to do: water the garden, through prayer.

So, one begins. One might purchase books, and read the prayers that are in the books. Or one might attend church and listen to the prayers being offered. One might try a disciplined form of meditation, and learn to sit and focus and chant a mantra.

These can go on for years. Eventually, however, they lose of attractiveness. They are empty. The prayer takes more energy than we have.

How about a water wheel and an aqueduct?

THE PRAYER OF QUIET: AQUEDUCT

This is watering the garden with a water wheel and an aqueduct. It requires less work, and produces more water.

The person's will is quieter and more absorbed in God's grace. One has no desire to move.

Here are some of the things she says about the Prayer of Quiet:

The gardener obtains more water with less labor.

The soul begins to be reconnected and comes upon something supernatural. In no way can the soul acquire this prayer through any efforts it may make.

This prayer is a little spark of the Lord's true love which He begins to enkindle in the soul.

If this quietude and recollection and little spark are from God's spirit and not a delight given by the devil or procured by ourselves, it will be noticed no matter how small it is.

This little spark is the sign or the pledge God gives to this soul that He now chooses it for great things if it will prepare itself to receive them.

This spark is a great gift, much more so than I can express.

The following is from the website of [Inner Explorations](#) .

THE PRAYER OF INFUSION: THE STREAM

The third way to water the garden is to use flowing water from a near-by stream.

This way is a deeper contemplation; where the faculties are more deeply asleep. The flowers are blooming in the garden. It is "infused" in that one is not doing anything to be in this state of prayer; it just happens. In the prayer of quiet, one just wanted to sit quietly and be with God; like Mary. Now one is energized to be out in the world and do good deeds – uses – for others. One combines Martha with Mary, so that one is engaged in both the active and contemplative life together.

There is an apparent union with God, but it is not yet complete.

THE PRAYER OF UNION: THE RAIN

In the fourth form of prayer, the gardener does nothing to water the ground. God sends the rains. It is "heavenly water" in great abundance; soaking the ground and saturating entire garden.

The soul is now in union with God.

Now how this prayer they call union comes about, and what it is, I don't know how to explain. ...what I'm attempting to explain is what the soul feels when it is in Divine union. What union is we already know since it is two separate things becoming one?

Teresa really cannot explain it. Has anyone ever been able to explain it? She does say the state is very brief; a half an hour is a long time.

LIVING LIFE

Teresa seems to say that, in our real world, we are not meant to ignore our gardens and just wait for rain.

If there were no winter and the weather were always mild, there would be no lack of flowers and fruit. But this is impossible while we are living on the earth. Individuals must always take care so that when one kind of water is lacking they might strive for another. The water from heaven often comes when the gardener is least expecting it.

I take this to mean that our prayer lives are not a neat hierarchy. We need different forms of prayers at different times, and need to be open to whatever is right for us at a given time.

SWEDENBORG'S COMMENTS ON WATER

It makes sense that Teresa would use "water" as a way to help us understand prayer. Swedenborg, too, often talked about water.

2702. 'And she saw a well of water' means the Lord's Word from which truths are drawn. This is clear from the meaning of 'a well of water' and of 'a spring' as the Word, also as doctrine drawn from the Word, and consequently as truth itself, dealt with in what follows immediately below; and from the meaning of 'water' as truth. That 'a well' which has water in it, and 'a spring', mean the Word of the Lord, also doctrine drawn from the Word, and so consequently truth itself, may become clear from very many places.

Water, for Swedenborg, was about truth and clarity.



He also had some comments on the importance of gardens:

Since gardens correspond to our religion, throughout heaven there are gardens that produce leaves, flowers, and fruit according to the spiritual state of the angels. I have been told that in some of these gardens, there are trees of life at the center and trees of the knowledge of good and evil around the edges--a sign that the angels have free will in spiritual matters. In the Bible, our religion is often pictured as a garden, a field, and a sheepfold. It is pictured as a garden because of the trees there;

as a field because of the crops that nourish people; and as a sheepfold because of the sheep, which stand for people who are faithful and useful. (Coronis 27.3)

Explore this model of prayer in your life. What is it like for you? You're encouraged to share your experiences in [our discussion forums](#).

We'd like to hear your experiences with other forms of spiritual disciples as well. What is your daily walk with God like for you?

The Meaning of Peace by Rev. Thom Muller

September 17, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 31:1-5 (NRSV)

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

John 14:23-27 (NRSV)

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

From Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell §286

Divine peace is within the Lord, arising from the oneness of his divine nature and the divine human nature within him. The divine quality of peace in heaven comes from the Lord, arising from his union with heaven's angels, and specifically from the union of the good and the true within each angel.

These are the sources of peace.

We may therefore conclude that peace in the heavens is the divine nature intimately affecting everything good there with blessedness. So it is the source of all the joy of heaven. In its essence, it is the divine joy of the Lord's divine love, arising from his union with heaven and with every individual there. This joy, perceived by the Lord in the angels and by the angels from the Lord, is peace. It flows down from there to provide angels with everything that is blessed and delightful and happy—what is called "heavenly joy."

In the highest sense, peace means the Lord, because he is the source of peace: and in the inner sense it means heaven, because people there are in a state of peace: Peace in the heavens is the divine nature profoundly touching everything good and true there with a blessedness that is beyond our comprehension. Divine peace occurs in what is good, but not in what is true apart from what is good.

Message
The Meaning of Peace

by Rev. Thom Muller



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



Recently, I haven't been feeling at peace. There are so many things that are really upsetting that are going on right now, and there's so much tension in the air. And it's not about nothing, there are some very troubling things going on in our culture right now.

When I think of peace, I usually think of quietness. And sometimes I catch myself thinking "wouldn't it be nice to just never speak again, to be an ascetic living in the wilderness, only focused on God, meditating all day". To "Just be at peace.", "Just be quiet". The idea of seclusion has long appealed to spiritual people throughout the ages. And a lot of beautiful stuff has come out of monastic and ascetic movements. But what a privilege it is to sit and pray and meditate while others are working for slave wages, and being systematically oppressed.

At the sight of terrible things going on, it is tempting to just tune out. Turn off the TV and the internet, and just practice some "self-care". And of course, this is important in the right dosage, but is quietness really always the right game-plan for peace?

Today's reading from Swedenborg's writings talks about this notion of the Lord being peace. It may sound abstract but from a Swedenborgian point of view, I think it kind of becomes concrete.

Like I said, Swedenborg believed that union with God was the purpose of our life, and that we accomplish that union by means of a process he calls re-generation. And I figured it's worth looking at those "three r's" as some Swedenborgians call them, from the angle of this dynamic between stillness and action. And I think it will serve to illustrate how important that balance is. He identifies three major aspects in this process: Repentance, Reformation, and Regeneration.

In our modern cultural vernacular, the word repentance justifiably often evokes negative feelings. We are tired of people identifying behaviors, ideas and lifestyles as improper and then judging us based on their own, often deeply inaccurate assessment of our reality. Too often we simply become automatons of somebody else's flawed standards.

I see this first step in the regenerative process as one that begins with quietness. It's taking a step back from our constant obsession with our ego-mind, with what's immediately satisfying, desirable to us, towards a more objective, nuanced, and honest review of our inner life.

When we "repent", we identify the falsity that encircles us. The ideas around us and within us that attempt to fool us into believing that we are anything but extensions, receptacles and promoters of divine love and wisdom. We acknowledge that in order to truly overcome these fallacies, in mind and consequently in action, we need to surrender to the power and influx of the divine, in which all truth

and peace lies, to help us identify, and then combat the hells in our lives. Again, we have a combination of stillness and action.

In this process, as I understand it, we commit to doing that which is in our power to attune ourselves with the will of God, to dive into the open stream of divine providence, which is, I believe, exactly what we are designed as humans to do. To discover our true nature by peeling off (with divine aid) those crusts of falsity and realize the heaven within. As we identify and transcend those things separating us from God-consciousness, we also tend to embrace that which feeds our soul, that which resonates with us, not on a purely intellectual, nor a purely religious or philosophical way. We identify things we perceive as manifesting that path towards the light.

The steps that follow, once again, are a combination of stillness and action. Reformation is the process by which our inner life is re-shaped. It comes after having identified the things in our lives that seem to move us away from each other, the divine, and our true angelic selves.

It's a process of action. Actively engaging in thoughts and behaviors that manifest divine love and wisdom in our lives. But even here, we can't do without stillness. If we become so absorbed in our earthly life and actions no matter how nice and useful they are, and begin taking credit for what we are doing, there's a great danger for the ego-mind to take over. To become self-righteous and self-absorbed. We have to continue the process of quieting down, centering ourselves, questioning ourselves. And most importantly, let something greater than just our mind-body complex take over. Swedenborg sees this process, all processes, really, as a motion carried out by the divine, our role being the vessel and distributor of the divine love and wisdom flowing into us. One great illustration of this dynamic, I believe, can be seen in the incredible spiritual satisfaction we feel when "putting aside our disagreements" for a united cause for a universally identified good cause.

The next step, regeneration, is partly theoretical. To be completely regenerated would mean to be in an angelic state of enlightenment, in union with Heaven and with God. It encapsulates this whole process of stillness and action, something many mystical traditions have called a "dance with God". And those of you who like dancing know that when you're dancing with a partner it's all about being proactive on one side, and giving in to the guidance of the other. And there's yet another level to this. There's Swedenborg's image of a "grand human" that encapsulates all the heavens in it in the shape of a human body. And the idea that we all have a particular part in it. I'd like to share this passage from Divine Providence §164:



Each of us is assigned a place in the Lord—that is, in heaven—according to the quality of that union or acceptance of him. Each of us has a specific state in that place, a state different from that of anyone else, and from the commonwealth we are granted a livelihood appropriate to our place, our responsibilities, and our needs, just the way it happens in the human body. Each of us is led into our place by the Lord, in keeping with our lives. Each of us is introduced at infancy into that divine-human being whose soul and life is the Lord; and we are led and taught out of divine love itself

according to divine wisdom itself, within the Lord and not outside him. However, since we are not deprived of our freedom, the only way we can be led and taught is within the limits of our apparently autonomous acceptance. People who do accept [divine love and wisdom] are brought to their places by countless winding and roundabout ways.

[Swedenborg, Emanuel. Divine Providence. Translated by George F. Dole, West Chester, PA, Swedenborg Foundation, 2010]

So what if we view this image of the Grand Human as a person, in a sense, that needs to go through this same regenerative process, which we all have a role to play in? Sometimes we need to let the other organs do their job. But sometimes toxins come in. Like Racism, Islamophobia, Sexism and Homophobia. And sometimes we need to be the kidneys that flush those things out. By naming them. In ourselves, and in our culture.

As we engage our own "longing for peace", let's bear in mind that there is a time to be still, and a time to be active. The second coming is still underway, and it depends on us in a very real way. Amen.

Collective Evolution by Rev. Thom Muller

September 24, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 24:1 (NRSV)

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

John 13: 13-17 (NRSV)

You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

From Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell §360

The only way we can be formed for heaven is through the world. That is the ultimate goal by which every affection must be defined. Unless affection manifests itself or flows into action, which happens in sizeable communities, it is stifled, ultimately to the point that we no longer focus on our neighbor at all, but only on ourselves. We can see from this that the life of thoughtfulness toward our neighbor—behaving fairly and uprightly in all our deeds and in all our responsibilities—leads to heaven, but not a life of piety apart from this active life.

**Message
Collection Evolution**

by Rev. Thom Muller



Perhaps the one unifying Swedenborgian liturgical practice is the opening of the Word before a service.. We read from this text in reverence, and are deeply inspired by its narratives. The "Holy Bible". But what makes this collection of middle-eastern folk mythology "holy"?

In our community, and in our tradition, we value genuine critical exploration. Both spirituality and

rationality. Swedenborgian theology invites us to question everything, to balance love and wisdom, spirituality and rationality, and generally, I find that we're pretty nuanced and open minded folks.

And there are big problems with the Bible, and as we all know, it's not exactly always used to expand people's spiritual perspective. Because it isn't like the stories and ideas contained in this book are all rosy and affirming of such a kind of a liberated, nuanced way of thinking. We all know this. I assume that most of have read this text we call "holy" before and been repulsed by its violence, judgment, and its all-too-human qualities. Scrambled to find something uplifting and non-gruesome or judgmental.

The literal text of the Bible condones all kinds of atrocities.

Samuel 15:

"Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."
But at least there's the Psalms ;)

Psalms 137:

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, "Tear it down!
Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"

O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us!

Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

So, there are obvious problems here. Viewing the Bible as a moral compass seems irreconcilable, for the most part, with a mature and nuanced understanding of morals and ethics. And more and more, our culture is distancing itself from these texts. And honestly, why not?

Perhaps one of the most provocative manifestations of increasing skepticism on this we see can see in the famous statement by New Atheist philosopher Richard Dawkins, in his best-seller *The God Delusion*:

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

[Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008. p. 51. Print.]

And the ugly truth is, he's not really wrong. These are all accurate statements, if one were to apply modern ethics, even the most simple idea of ethics, to the literal sense of the Bible. The God described in these texts is, for the most part, a complete jerk, reflective of the lowest of human expressions.

And this is by no means a problem limited to the "Old Testament" and its bloody and gruesome narratives. The History of Christianity, while there have been many wonderful and beautiful individuals and communities who truly internalized Christ consciousness, the history of Christianity is

one of violence, crusades, conquest, colonialism, oppression and sexism. Not too long ago devout Christians in this country were using the New Testament to justify, and even demand the institution of slavery, one of humanity's most vile and objectively evil phenomena, which is condoned in both the old and new testaments:

1 Peter 2:18:

"Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel."

In fact, much of Christianity explicitly or implicitly still teaches an image of God as an angry father who somehow loved or needed blood sacrifice so much that just like he had commanded Abraham, he slaughtered his own son on the cross to pay for our inherent "sinfulness".

Now Swedenborg very strongly rejected the idea of God presented in the Christianity of his time. He presents a view of the divine that seems irreconcilable with the image of divinity painted throughout this text. Swedenborgian theology views God as the source and essence of everything. The closest we can come to identify the Divine is in the qualities of love and wisdom. Concerning a wrathful, judgmental, angry or punishing God, he is very clear in his assessments:

"God [cannot] condemn anyone, curse anyone, throw anyone into hell, predestine anyone's soul to eternal death, avenge wrongs, or rage against creation or punish anyone [...] God cannot turn away from us or even look at us with a frown. To do any such thing would be against his essence, and what is against his essence is against himself"

[Swedenborg, Emanuel, and Jonathan Rose (transl.). True Christianity. New Century Edition ed. Vol. I. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010. Print.]

-Divine Love and Wisdom §56

Swedenborg reconciles the image of an angry God presented in the Bible with his belief in the absolute goodness of the divine by viewing the Bible as reflecting in its inner core, under its fantastical and gory shell of symbolic, imagery, our own spiritual makeup as humans relating to the divine within and around ourselves.

Just like he sees the narrative of Christ as a narrative of process, of inner struggle between the humanity and divinity, so the Bible is a story of struggle, pain, and often, ignorance. It's a story of evolution.



The Human image of what God is has always been constantly changing. It's been in constant process. Constant evolution. Swedenborg addresses this in his notion of spiritual aeons, or churches, which, in Near Eastern culture, were manifested by the internal meaning of what we know today as the Bible. The actual "Word", in a Swedenborgian context, transcends the Bible, he mentions that the Word exists throughout the world in different forms, and even claimed that large chunks of the common canonical Bible did not qualify as being the Word.

From the standpoint of cultural anthropology, the notion of collective spiritual evolution is all very fascinating to me. Scholars agree that the first forms of religion, in the "hunter gatherer" period of human history tended to be animistic in nature. Everything was seen as being animated by spirits. People had rituals that were designed to engage, and often appease the streams, the plants and the animals.

While this may sound awfully pagan to many traditional Christians, Swedenborg actually had a quite romanticized view of the earliest people, believing they were more deeply in touch with the divine, until they began worshipping materials, instead of the underlying natural divine unity symbolized by them. He calls this the "fall" from the most ancient to the ancient "church" [ecclesia] or aeon.

When agriculture became a thing, the predominant view of Divinity, in a religious sense, changed drastically once again. People started viewing God in relation to the soil and fertility their culture began depending on. God became predominantly associated with the feminine "Mother Earth". Then, as communities became more and more settled and diverse, tribalism became huge. The predominant image of God shifted towards the masculine, identified with the chief of a tribe or clan, and a military leader. God is represented, both literally and figuratively, by strong, male, authoritarian military leaders and chiefs, who brought a sense of order to the community.

Another part of this tribalism is that different tribes and ethnic or cultural groups had their individual deity, which, of course, viewed its people as superior to other tribes. The Bible is full of this. There is constant talk of competing peoples and their Gods. And of course the Hebrew version of God hates everyone that his "chosen people" hate. Egyptians, Canaanites, Babylonians, Philistines, and THEIR gods are all seen as fundamentally inferior. Of course, the competing tribes all had their own, more or less similar mythologies and rites...

At some point monotheism became prevalent, and there's different arguments on where the first examples are. But the basic tribal element of our God is right and your God is wrong is still, to this day, the norm in many regards.

Our concepts of the divine change constantly. They are in constant process. And so is our reading of the Bible.

Now, if there is this constant process, this constant movement, where does this put us today?

I believe that in Judeo Christian western culture, we are conditioned to look to the past for answers. "If only we could all be like the original Christians. They must have had it figured out.

If only we could go back to 'biblical' times and ideas. And we all know that there are actually people promoting this notion. With spiritually devastating consequences.

If we, as Swedenborg suggests, view the Bible, and religious texts in general, as an archetypal reflection of both our inner and our outer journey, where does this put us on the timeline of this psycho-spiritual evolution?

One of the many things which immediately rang the heresy bells in the eyes of established Christian church of the time is Swedenborg's claim that what Bible imagery depicts as the Second coming of Christ, the New Jerusalem, a new age of spiritual evolution, was already there and now, and all we have to do is realize it, live into it, and receive it into our hearts.

Part of this "new church", this new state of consciousness, is that we are no longer bound to superstition or scriptural literalism. We are able to live the seeming paradox of rational spirituality. Swedenborg presents an image of the Divine that is our very essence, and the essence of everything good and true. Rather than looking back at previous ideas of God, we can live into the process of union with the divine, by embracing it where ever we see it. Being vessels and distributors of divine love and wisdom, and partaking in the new consciousness of the second Coming of Christ, the New Jerusalem.

The growing rejection of a "biblical" view of the Divine seems, to me, to be a consequence of something that is overall a positive and regenerative development: People are rejecting tribalist and patriarchal images of god, and this is part of this wonderful collective spiritual evolution we are experiencing. Obsolete and regressive ideas about how the world works are becoming exposed for what they are. Swedenborg talks in detail about how he conceptualized this process of radical collective and individual regeneration. Part of it is what he calls "vastation", a breaking down of the old to make way for the new.

Yet, sometimes it seems like folks are throwing the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. In rejection of the literal, we sometimes forget to double-check for a deeper level of significance. We lose sight of the profound psycho-spiritual meaning that underlies these archetypal mythological narratives.

The non-dualist spiritual teacher Adyashanti, in his book *Resurrecting Jesus: Embodying the Spirit of a Revolutionary Mystic*, he writes:

"In Western culture, we have for the most part forgotten the power of story, the power of myth to carry and transmit truth. Myth is that which speaks to our souls. Myth is the language that connects with our unconscious and brings forth the sense of eternity, of radiance peering through the world of time and space. Myth, ultimately, is a way of talking about what can't be said, of conveying what can't be written about."

[Adyashanti. *Resurrecting Jesus: Embodying the Spirit of a Revolutionary Mystic*. Boulder: Sounds True, 2014. xiii. Print]

Swedenborg believed that what made the Word sacred is that it is a story about us as humans, on a universal psycho-spiritual level. Let's appreciate it not as a set of rules and guidelines, but as a mirror of our own inner evolution. Our journey towards gnosis, towards union with that divine mystery. Eternal principles expressed in human words. Let's participate in this epic story, not by looking back, and becoming automatons of people and ideas which are in the past, but by living in the NOW, in an embrace of love and wisdom.

There is this beautiful story about D. T. Suzuki, the great Zen Buddhist teacher and scholar who fell in love with Swedenborg and wrote what is now published as *"Swedenborg: Buddha of the North"*, when he had a meeting with other thinkers in 1954. When asked about what drew him to Swedenborg, he picked up a spoon from the table and said;

"This spoon exists NOW in paradise... we are NOW in heaven."

[Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Swedenborg: Buddha of the North*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996. Print.]

Amen.

Johnny's Apples

October 1, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1: 1-8 NIV, The Beginning

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

From Swedenborg

To understand what divine providence is—that it is the way the Lord's divine love and wisdom govern us—it is important to be aware of the following things, which were presented in my book on the subject. In the Lord, divine love is a property of divine wisdom and divine wisdom is a property of divine love (Divine Love and Wisdom 34–39). Divine love and wisdom cannot fail to be and to be manifested in others that it has created (§§47–51). Everything in the universe was created by divine love and wisdom (§§52, 53, 151–156). Everything in the created universe is a vessel of divine love and wisdom (§§54–60 [55–60]).

Message Johnny Appleseed's Apples



Was Johnny Appleseed a real man or made-up myth? How about Daniel Boone? Paul Bunyan? Davy Crockett? Howard Means did a survey on those questions for his book: *Johnny Appleseed: The Man, The Myth, the American Story*. 2500 adult Americans were surveyed, and this is the result:

Of Boone and Crockett, there was little doubt: Roughly 92 percent of those surveyed were sure both men were real figures. Paul Bunyan of the blue ox and mighty ax caused more confusion: 80 percent thought he never existed, 10 percent said he did, and another 10 percent were unsure. Johnny Appleseed, though, walked a middle line: 58 percent said he was an actual historical figure, while 42 percent said either he never existed (29 percent) or they weren't sure if he had (13 percent). [Means, Howard (2011-04-12). Johnny Appleseed (p. 6). Simon & Schuster, Inc. Kindle Edition.]

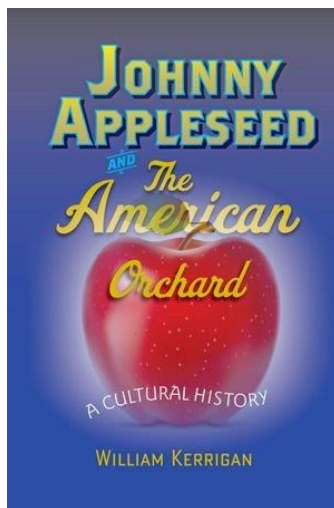
Johnny was, of course, an actual historical figure. [Boone and Crockett were, too. It doesn't seem that Bunyan was.] Survey respondents, however, did not know much about Johnny – including when he lived, that his work was primarily in Ohio, and that he was a Swedenborgian. But he was a real person – with extraordinary gifts for the world.

Johnny lived his life during important periods of history. He was born two years before the Revolutionary War [two years after the death of Emanuel Swedenborg.]

Kerrigan writes:

He died in Fort Wayne, Indiana, less than a year after Samuel Morse transmitted the biblical query "What hath God wrought?" along a telegraph line, signaling the birth of modern communications. [Kerrigan, William (2012-10-10). Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard (Kindle Locations 152-154). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.]

CHILDHOOD



Johnny Chapman was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774, to Elizabeth and Nathaniel Chapman. He had an older sister named "Elizabeth" and they named their son "John." Less than a year later, he was baptized in the local Congregational Church. His father had joined the local Minutemen militia, and he was called to the revolutionary war months after John's birth. When John was two, his mother died, so John and his sister were raised by relatives until the summer of 1780, when their father was discharged from the Army.

The story in the family is that they were cared for by their maternal grandparents. Nathaniel's parents

had passed away, and he had no other family in town. However, Elizabeth's parents were located near-by. Johnny probably spent his early years on their farms and orchards.

After leaving the army, Nathaniel married Lucy Cooley of Longmeadow, Massachusetts. She was only eighteen and belonged to a local prominent family. She had inherited some property from her father, which became Nathaniel's after marriage. They had 34 acres and a small house a few blocks off the Longmeadow main street. It included 7 tilled acres, 3 meadow acres, and 10 of woodland; plus 14 considered not able to be improved.

A year after their marriage, John had a new brother: Nathaniel. Lucy had 9 more children over the next 22 years. John and Nathaniel were very close, and stayed so throughout their lives.

Howard Means suggests that Elizabeth and John, the children of Elizabeth, may have had a difficult time adjusting to life in a small house with their step-mother and ten new siblings.

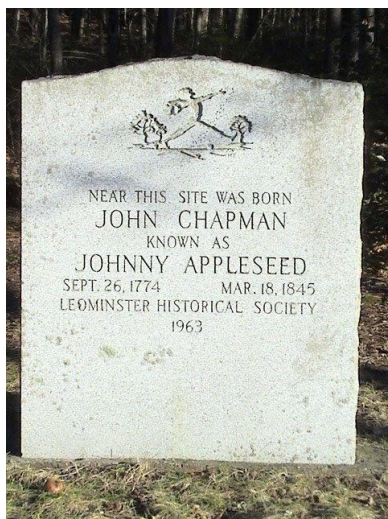
If local lore is right, they moved into a small, plain, rectangular frame home that dates back to at least 1695. For the four of them— two children, then ten and not quite six, freshly reacquired father, and new stepmother— the house certainly would have been satisfactory, and clearly there were opportunities for schooling in Longmeadow, quite possibly for Elizabeth to continue hers and for John to start his. But one guesses that what Elizabeth and John were most likely to have recalled in later life about their growing years in Longmeadow were the agonies of childbirth, the constant bawling of children, and the ever-diminishing personal space in their living quarters.

[Means, Howard (2011-04-12). Johnny Appleseed (Kindle Locations 481-483). Simon & Schuster, Inc... Kindle Edition.]

CHILDHOOD RELIGION

John and his family were members of the local Congregational Church. The church was rather conservative, and did not tolerate dissent. Social hierarchy was considered part of God's plan. The minister, Rev. Stephen Williams, was conservative and was not a supporter of the Revolution.

LEAVING HOME



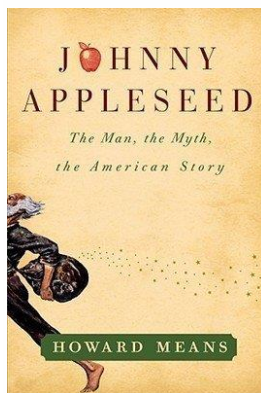
Times were difficult financially, and eventually John's father and step-mother lost ownership of their property. They couldn't afford the taxes, so sold the farm to a wealthy neighbor, Nathaniel Ely, Jr., in 1785 for thirty dollars. Ely allowed the Chapman's to stay, but as renters. John turned 11 that year, and probably shared in the sense of shame his father must have felt about losing his farm. John would not inherit land, and would probably have to move elsewhere to find his place in the post-revolutionary America.

By 1790, the year John turned sixteen, he was no longer living with his father and step-mother. It is possible that this father apprenticed him in a skill. Or, he could have been sent back to live with and work for Leominster relatives. Elizabeth, just turning 18, was also not listed with the household that year. A few years later she married a man from Leominster.

It seems that John was living on his own at a young age. He may have felt the need to move west to find better opportunity. Kerrigan says:

By the end of the eighteenth century, the valley offered few opportunities for the eldest son of a poor family. Land was scarce and expensive, and John could not expect to inherit a farm from his landless father.

When John was 18 [in 1792], he felt a strong yearning to "go west", and persuaded his half-brother Nathaniel to join him in the adventure. Johnny and his little brother Nathaniel set out in mid to late November. It was risky to leave so close to winter, and perhaps his was waiting for the end of the cider-making season. He used the cider mills to get the apple seeds he carried.



He took on the profession of "nurseryman." Howard Means says:

It was a good time for nurserymen, too. One strain of the many folk traditions that fill in Chapman's early years has him working as a boy in Longmeadow for a local apple grower. In truth, no one knows for certain where Chapman learned the orchard skills that would eventually ripen into the name and myth of Johnny Appleseed, but however he came about his learning, the Ohio frontier at the start of the new century was an ideal place to exercise it. Apples were a vital diet supplement—whether dried for winter or pressed and fermented into applejack and hard cider, the essential beverages of early American life, just as cider vinegar was the essential medicine. Almost as important, fruit trees were also a frequent legal stipulation of land ownership.
[Means, Howard (2011-04-12). *Johnny Appleseed* (p. 8). Simon & Schuster, Inc. Kindle Edition.]

It was a good time to be a nurseryman.

Beginning in 1792, the Ohio Company of Associates (formed, despite its name, in Massachusetts) offered one hundred acres free to anyone willing to settle in the "Donation Tract," a hundred thousand acres of wilderness beyond Ohio's first permanent white settlement, at Marietta, that Congress had given the company to create a buffer zone with still-warring Indian tribes. The only requirement: Settlers had three years to plant fifty apple trees and twenty peach trees.

Johnny was able to get apple seeds for free every fall behind the cider mills. There

...One can find a pile of discarded pomace, the pressed, seed-filled pulp that constituted the waste product of cider-making. This offal had little value, beyond as hog feed, but John understood that the seeds it contained would have more value in new settlements across the mountains. It is hard to imagine a cider mill owner turning down a request from a poor young man seeking to recover seeds from this waste pile.

SEEDS VS GRAFTS

Kerrigan explains why Johnny's apple seeds were so important and unique. He says that the origins of the apple tree are in central Asia, perhaps in the mountains of Kazakhstan.

Gather one hundred seeds from a favorite apple variety and plant them, and the trees that grow will produce fruit with dramatically varied characteristics, most quite different from the parent apple tree and most unpalatable for fresh eating. Planting apple trees from seed is entering a genetic lottery, but every so often this lottery produces a winner, a fruit of exceptional qualities worth propagating. Many popular apple varieties today were the happy accidents of seedling trees. The simplest way to propagate a specific apple variety is through grafting— attaching a twig or branch of the favored variety to the rootstock or a branch of another apple tree. The fruit that grows beyond that graft is essentially a clone of the fruit on the tree from which it came.

Grafting had been used for years in Europe, producing a great variety of many types of apples. The Native Americans, however, were known for gathering wild fruit. When they did grow apples, they did it from seeds; not from grafting.

When white settlers came to the New World, they couldn't afford grafted apple trees.

Shipping grafted fruit stock of favorite English varieties took up valuable cargo space, and keeping that stock alive on a long sea journey was difficult. As a result, any grafted stock arriving from England would fetch a high price.

Also, the settlers didn't have the time to graft expensive apple trees. When they did use grafts from England, those trees often did not survive the harsher New World climate. Planting seeds was a chance to see which seeds were hardy enough to survive the climate. The survival of the trees was more important than the number of apples they yielded.

Kerrigan points out that our hero was known as "Johnny Apple SEED"; not "Johnny Apple TREE." The fact that he brought apple seeds – not graftings – was highly significant. He was spreading the poor person's way of growing apples – not the fancy and expensive methods of Europe. Additionally he was teaching white people the way the Native Americans grew their apples; a way designed for survival in the harsh New World.

Poor settlers grew seed apples to feed their families. Later, as some became more prosperous, they grew grafted trees for selling trees in the market as a way of producing income.

Johnny was a hero for the poor settler, who was just striving to survive in the New World. He taught white people the ways of Native Americans. Understanding the cultural meaning of seedling and grafted apple trees in the early nineteenth century is critical to understanding who John Chapman was and how he was received in the communities in which he lived. John Chapman provided seedling trees to the poor. Kerrigan writes:

While the missionaries were trying to persuade the Seneca to live like white people, John Chapman and many of the other whites in the vicinity of Burnt House were surviving by living like Seneca... An environmental transformation, which would be ushered in by deforestation, needed to occur before the lifestyle of the self-provisioning farmer was possible. Even then, given the limits of the land, the profits would fall only to a few.

Author William Kerrigan came to our 2013 annual Swedenborgian convention in July to speak about Johnny from his research for the book. He pointed out that Johnny was a radical figure of his time, who championed a way of growing apples that ensured survival. He stood against those who strove to make a profit off the New World – a profit that involved the environmental destruction of acres of forest land.



We don't know whether Johnny thought in terms of the environmental, economic, cultural, and social implications of growing apples from seed rather than grafts. However, we know that Johnny had unique gifts, and he shared them with the world.

What special gifts do you have within yourself? How do you share them with others?

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,
Thank You for the many gifts You have given to each of us. Please help us to let these gifts shine through us and out to the world.

The Psychologist & the Mystic

October 8, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 4: 23-25, NIV, Jesus Heals the Sick

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

From Swedenborg

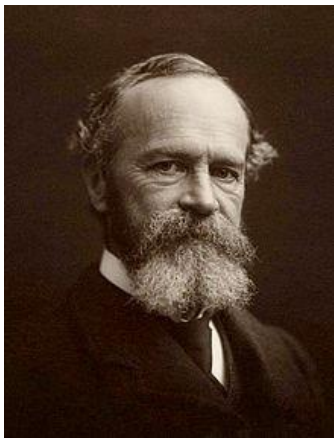
Arcana Coelestia: 4054

The brain, like heaven, belongs to the realm of ends which are uses, for whatever flows in from the Lord is an end looking towards the salvation of the human race. This is the end which reigns in heaven, and also which as a result reigns in the brain, for the brain, where man's mind is seated, looks to ends in the body, that is to say, so that the body may serve the soul and that the soul may be eternally happy.

Message

The Psychologist and the Mystic: William James and His Use of Swedenborgian Doctrine

by Rev. Hannah R. Hill



The life and works of William James laid the foundation for modern concepts of psychology and application of psychological concepts. From his ideas in *Psychology: A Briefer Course* to the ideas of philosophy in *Pragmatism*, his ideas were brilliant new concepts in the field. This all from the man who "would flounder for twelve years in search of vocation"¹ that finally found his footing in the science of psychological world. In short, "William James was a gifted young man, and the length of

time required before he found his direction could be considered natural for a youth with multiple talents and a family with ample financial resources to support his wanderings."² Only after rebelling against his father and childhood religion, a time in medical school, struggles with depression and vacations that ranged from painting in Europe to sketching in Brazil did he finally find his footing in philosophy, psychology and religion. This personal need to flounder empowered James' later profession with the imagination he would need in these realms to develop new ideas.

Late in his career James wrote a series of lectures entitled *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, which was the fruition of these new ideas. This work, despite his earlier rebellion and more than any other, draws on his childhood religious experiences in Swedenborgian philosophy espoused by his father. Even so, there is a conspicuous absence of Emanuel Swedenborg's name throughout the vast majority of the work. James' reliance on Swedenborgian teachings provided complexity for his arguments in most chapters of the *Varieties*. Nevertheless, it was Swedenborg's own mystical experiences and concepts that shaped the *entire* lecture on Mysticism; additionally, Swedenborg's own visions would set the boundaries of what James would call the mystical experience.

To understand how James came to his realizations in his lecture on *Mysticism* and *The Varieties* as a whole one must first understand his family history. Henry James Sr. the "father of two famous sons"³ was a man who believed that his Swedenborgian faith was life-giving while Calvinism was a death-dealing falsehood of a religion.⁴ Henry's whole life seemed to revolve around his religion as Feinstein states,

"Henry finally found his vocation as a publicist of a unique version of Swedenborgian theology... In letter after letter, lecture after lecture, book after book, the mystery of a God who would inflict evil on his own son goaded him on."⁵

Henry was one of the foremost Swedenborgian philosophers of his day though somewhat ostracized by what was called the New Church community. His insistence that a new denomination or church be avoided set him apart from those in his day; he was abhorrently against ecclesiastical development. Many in the Swedenborgian, or "New Church" movement longed for their own congregation but Henry vehemently argued against it in the pamphlet, *The Church of Christ is not an Ecclesiasticism*. In it he states, "When we look for a new church in the earth which is to be the crown and consummation of all past churches, we are not to look for a mere second edition of the existing ecclesiasticism."⁶ This evasion as well the consistent philosophical stance his father took against an ecclesiastical development would set the tone for James' desire to focus on the individual in nearly all of his works. With this knowledge one can see that William James was surrounded by peculiar philosophy as a child and that this philosophy also revolved around a peculiar type of God. The image of God that William grew up with was one where "a Heavenly Father like Swedenborg's, loved all his creatures generously and unconditionally. Such a God promised forgiveness."⁷ The God that William knew was not one of hard condemnation or brimstone so common in that era. Instead, this God was universal for all religions and accepting of many paths to heaven. Swedenborg writes,

"Those who are outside the Church but nevertheless acknowledge one God, and in keeping with their religion lead a life of some kind of charity towards the neighbor, are in communion with those who belong to the Church."⁸

There was no mistaking; from early on in his youth James would have been taught about the good in all who attempted charity to the neighbor; not just those saved by grace. Since being kind and loving your community is the heartbeat of nearly every religion James would have grown up respecting all of them in one way or another. It was Swedenborg's teachings and his father's adherence to that of a non-ecclesiastical body that had its underpinnings in universal thought that formed William's comprehension around religion and its application.

William's emphasis within his writings focused on the individual experience rather than a communal one. This is no surprise given his childhood cultural experience and his father's apprehension of all things ecclesiastical. This focus is especially true for many of his work *including Psychology, Pragmatism* and *The Varieties*. Childhood teachings die-hard and this sentiment reigned supreme in nearly every piece of literature that James published. In *Psychology The Briefer Course* there is not a single chapter nor section devoted to the community and how it may or may not effect the psychological standing of a person; instead, each chapter focuses on the individual and how they may change, relate or grow with that which is around them. James focuses a person going from the inside out rather than the outside in. One might see this as a coincidence rather than a true application of childhood culture if it were for the fact that this happens over and over again in his other works.

His philosophical work, *Pragmatism*, is much the same and he sets the stage in lecture one stating, "For the philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos."⁹ His entire model for the development of pragmatism and the application of new truths is always based on the individual archetype. To James, it seems as if these concepts could not be developed within a group and only from a complete absence of any communal concepts does one see that James views pragmatism as an individual philosophical approach. It makes one wonder why he even lectured on the topic within in a communal setting! Again, a second example could also be written off as coincidence philosophy, after all, is often seen as an individual undertaking; yet, the model continues. James' disdain for the ecclesiastical and communal ideal of religion plainly demonstrates itself in *The Varieties* as well, where he states,

"On the lowest possible plane, one sees how the expedience of obedience in a firm ecclesiastical organization must have led to its being viewed as meritorious."¹⁰ Additionally, in his lecture on *the Value of Saintliness*, he states,

"When groups get strong enough to 'organize' themselves, they become ecclesiastical institutions with corporate ambitions of their own. The spirit of politics and the lust of dogmatic rules are then apt to enter and contaminate the originally innocent thing."¹¹

It is the communal structure where James sees the corruption of religion or the religious experience this is because of direct teachings from his father. Henry writes,

"You never find Swedenborg discussing any questions of ecclesiastical polity, or urging any measures of ecclesiastical reform."¹²



Instead, the focus was always on the spiritual nature of the individual and that was something that William applied in nearly every chapter of every piece he published. He took his childhood upbringing in Swedenborgian philosophy beyond just the individual model he also pursued it in his application of respect towards other religions.

It is true that Universalist ideas were popular among academics in William's day, the length to which he goes within his writing in the *Varieties* leads one to suspect that his childhood upbringing aided his ability to be bluntly open about applying universalist principles to the religious experience. Further, he applies an existential point of view at the religious experience and goes so far as make a statement in his first lecture lest he offend. He states:

"There are many religious person- some of you now present, possible, are among them- who do not yet make a working use of the distinction and who may therefore feel at first a little startled at the purely existential point of view from which in the following lectures the phenomena of religious experience must be considered. When I handle them biologically and psychologically as if they were mere curious facts of individual history, some of you may think it degradations of so sublime a subjects."¹³

Even for the academics in the lecture hall, William James knew that his handling of the religious experience either universally or existentially might offend those hearing them. In short, this was not a normal academic insight or position; it was profound and it was different or the statement would not have been needed. He could not avoid such an application; the concept of universalism was ingrained in him from childhood. When your father studies a man who would later become know as the Buddha of the North¹⁴ it is of no surprise that such a staunch resistance to mere Christian application of religious concepts would take place.

William James' childhood culture initiated his perspectives on faith and religion. As one sees in the previous paragraphs this was true for his universal and existential approach to religion and the focus on the individual experience as opposed to ecclesiastical models in his lectures within the *Varieties* as a whole. As opposed to many of his previous works this lecture series moves from the realm of psychology into one of religious experience. Without previous instruction from his childhood religion, his father's insistence on a scientific career or his ability to wander all those years, James' formation of what would and would not constitute a mystical experience (let alone any other of the religious experiences in *The Varieties*) would not have come to fruition.

In true Jamesian form the presence of boundaries is clear but there is an absence of the literal

boundary in context. When it comes to the individual versus the communal or ecclesiastical model James never states why, it simply is the way he does it. This happens repeatedly, for example in the *Varieties*, while the foundation of many of the lectures are formed in Swedenborg's thought and the chapter on mysticism is completely based on his model—there are only two mentions of Swedenborg within the entire lecture series and these mentions are buried in the footnotes. First, found in the lecture on *Conversion* is one such example, "One night I was seized on entering bed with a rigor, such as Swedenborg describes."¹⁵ Swedenborg is not even quoted; rather, it is one man's experience *with* a Swedenborgian-like experience that is heralded.

Secondly, this is the case again near the end of the lecture series in *Other Characteristics* where a person's experience is quoted and their attachment to Swedenborg is noted in the footnotes, it is explained, "Mr. Clissold is a Swedenborgian. Swedenborg's case is of course the palmary one of *audita et visa*, serving as a basis of religious revelation."¹⁶ This is a short statement with a lot of oomph. William makes note that Swedenborg's case is one of religious revelations, which are seen and heard (in a chapter that has little to do with religious revelations!). Still, this citation does little in the way of addressing why anything about Swedenborg, his visions, revelations or how they apply.

It is interesting to note that Swedenborg believed that, "the bible contained what he called 'The Word,' teachings which could only be properly understood through a system of spiritual correspondences."¹⁷ Meaning, what is said is rarely exactly what is meant. For example, the color red in the Word corresponds to what is good while the color white in the Word corresponds to what is true.¹⁸ In short, nearly every written statement within "The Word" corresponds to something on a spiritual level and what is stated rarely is what is meant. The Bible itself should rarely be taken literally but always be taken seriously because it consistently corresponds to the spiritual world. It seems that James followed suit in this particular writing style. He routinely uses his childhood culture and religious understanding of Swedenborg but rarely, if ever, references any of these in one of his works.

James routinely states his beliefs but never directly; instead, he allows them to correspond to this ideological system rather than saying them straightforwardly. His childhood religion, barely mentioned, carries the weight of his belief in mysticism and yet this too is not mentioned. Additionally, there is not one mention of Swedenborg in the lecture of *Mysticism* whatsoever; yet, the lecture borrows most heavily from his father's chosen religion. While this absence may seem conspicuous to some, the culture of correspondence or, saying things without saying them, follows the same model and culture of James' childhood religious mystic.

While the entirety of the *Varieties* focuses on religion and has hints of his Swedenborgian roots, it is the chapter on *Mysticism* that most closely follows the mystical experiences of Swedenborg. Instead of believing that James came to a conclusion about mysticism that *happened* to mirror Swedenborg it would seem more realistic that James based his concepts on mysticism on the mystic whose teachings dominated his childhood. First, there are several areas where James and Swedenborg are similar in general. These include an appreciation for the mystical experience, meditation techniques practiced by both and the use of alcohol in regards to the mystical experience. James states early in the lecture on mysticism that,

"Whether my treatment of mystical states will shed more light or darkness, I do not know, for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand."¹⁹

The most important words in this quote are "almost entirely" as James' own experience with mental illness and being restored to a sort of sanity is well documented. James himself may not have considered this a mystical experience; yet, it fits into his own definition of what a mystical experience might be. Whether this was a seemingly lack of self-awareness on William's part or he simply resisted the idea of putting himself in the same camps as his father and Swedenborg we will never know. Secondly, James valued ideas relating to the practice of mediation in his work *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* he references it saying,

"We forget that every good that is worth possessing must be paid for in strokes of daily effort... Whereas ten minutes a day of poetry, of spiritual reading or meditation, and an hour or two a week at music, pictures, or philosophy, provided we began *now* and suffered no remission, would infallibly give us in due time the fullness of all we desire."²⁰

It was one of Swedenborg's most valuable assets as well. His meditation practice was well known. For example, in a 2012 Huffington Post article, Gary Lachman, author of *Swedenborg: An Introduction to his Life and Ideas*, states

"Through the Kabbalah, meditation, and a system of erotic exercises, Swedenborg trained himself to enter extended periods of altered consciousness. One result of this is his fascinating Dream Diary, whose analysis of dream symbolism predates Freud and Jung by more than a century."²¹

These two men, over a hundred years apart, realized the benefits of meditative practice; furthermore, they both acknowledged how this practice would be beneficial in general but also within the mystical experience. Swedenborg states in his work, *Spiritual Experiences* that breathing on earth is much like the breath of heaven. He writes:

"A general waving of heaven was felt, and I was told that it was the breathing of heaven, through which comes the breathing of a person on earth, and of many. It matched my breathing about 3 to 2, for that breaking passes over into effort, due to which all things breathe."²²

Swedenborg really loved his breathing and it was these incredible states that brought him closer to the divine. In comparison James states,

"In the condition called raptus or rapture by theologians, breathing and circulation are so depressed that it is a question among the doctors where the soul be or be not temporarily dissevered from the body."²³

James realized the condition but used Saint Teresa as the example rather than Swedenborg. Regardless, it is the focus on meditation that demonstrates yet another similarity in Swedenborgian and Jamesian thought; and it is not by accident.

Lastly, there is a striking resemblance to the emphasis on mind-altering substances and the mystic for both James and Swedenborg. James refers to the state of consciousness produced by alcohol:

"The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober

hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites and says yes."24

It is this "yes" mentality that opens the doors to the mystical experience and without one can easily shut down the experience before it ever really begins. In comparison, Swedenborg never specifically states that he used mind-altering substances in order to meditate or enter the mystical state but he did use it regularly in life to cope and to be social. By way of his theology on correspondences he does mention what alcohol represents. He states,

"We may liken wisdom purified to alcohol, which is highly rectified spirits."25

For Swedenborg, wisdom was as good as purified alcohol! There are few sources that demonstrate his use of alcohol and there is a myriad of conjectures that he consumed alcohol as well as other drugs in order to sustain his mystical experiences. Many of these though are uncorroborated conjectures from those that saw Swedenborg as a quack.

To fully understand how close Swedenborg's mystical experience mirrors James' lecture on mysticism it is important to look at each factor that James says *must* be present in order for a mystical experience to be valid. Firstly, the person having the mystical experience but be noetic. He states, "[...] mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge."26

In addition to this, the person having a mystical experience must be ineffable:

"It defies expression that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words... more like states of feeling than like states of intellect."27

These two *musts* mirror Swedenborg's experience exactly. There was not a mystical experience for Swedenborg that did not include lessons from the Lord, angels and spirits that he saw as Divine Revelation and as authoritative. In his work *Divine Providence* he states,

"It has been given me to see [the light of heaven], and from it to perceive distinctly what has come from the Lord, and what from the angels. What has come from the Lord has been written, and what has come from angels has not been written."28

In short, his wisdom and teachings were not even from the angels he often spoke with but instead directly from God and therefore true. While his experiences with angels and spirits are well documented these lessons are not held up in the same regard as those lessons he received directly from the Lord.

While it is accurate to state that Swedenborg was prolific in his writings it is also true that he had a difficult time expressing his dreams and visions in the real world; in fact, this was the reason being prolific was so necessary. In order to make any point Swedenborg will often go through a process. This process includes telling a story of a conversation he had with angels, spirits or the Lord. Then he explains what the story means to him and what it should mean to those reading it and then goes on to say how it corresponds in the world and why it matters. He will then go into detail about what it means for the New Church (both collectively and individually). This lesson will then again show up in other works and be explained in other ways with other stories told by different spirits or angels. One such example of this process is the opening to his work *Conjugial Love* in which the first 28 pages is

one story on his experience in heaven followed by dozens of pages that attempt to explain the experience and its importance to those reading the work.²⁹ This process occurs over and over again. Swedenborg's writings are a clear example of the frantic need to explain the unexplainable and ineffable experiences he was having to a world that could not fully understand.

James believed that "These two characters [ineffability and noetic quality] will entitle any state to be called mystical, in the sense in which I used the word."³⁰ With these qualities in mind it is quite easy to see the similarity between what James thought was a mystical experience and the experiences that Swedenborg himself had. It would be strange, that upon hearing and reading Swedenborg's experiences his whole childhood that James would somehow manage to come up with these parameters outside of this knowledge. Yet, it does not stop there. James continues to add on several other qualities that he notes some mystics have; however, he does not believe these qualities are absolutely necessary in order for a mystical experience to be real. It is either an extreme coincidence that neither of these "possibilities" have any correlation to Swedenborg or it is completely understandable that James realizes some mystics have these qualities but Swedenborg does not; thus, they are optional.

In the same manner, James lists two qualities that a person having a mystical experience *may* but not necessarily *must* have. These qualities are that of the transient and passive experience. Of transiency James states, "Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day."³¹ Where as James states that the passive experiences is one in which, "The mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power."³² While these qualities do appear in many examples in the lecture on mysticism it is important to note that they are not present in the Swedenborgian experience whatsoever.

Swedenborg's dreams would often last hours or even all through the night and "the visions were to become Swedenborg's characteristic mark as a writer and theosopher. He filled book after book with their content. He emphasized that they were often especially clear just before going to sleep, or in the morning just before he awoke"³³ These visions would last all through the night and into the next day, sometimes even when he was waking. While there are instances of Swedenborg talking about short visions, these were the exception to the rule. In most cases he was in the visions for hours at a time. Additionally, there are several indicators that these abilities were completely contingent on his willingness to join them. For example, "Swedenborg often declared that his spiritual state depended on his will. He also maintained that concentration and the ability to think presume the regulations of breathing."³⁴ The mystic's ability to control his breathing and meditation meant that his ability to enter the spirit world and have his visions were completely voluntary. Again, this could happen right before sleeping, right before waking or throughout the day depending on the experience and vision he hoped to see. There is little evidence to believe that these ever happened without his consent.

The fact that Swedenborg falls in the line with James' two musts when it comes to mystical experiences and conveniently does not fit the mold when it comes to his maybes gives insight into how James formulated his ideas in his lecture on Mysticism. Beyond this the shared belief in the meditative state, an appreciation for all religious experiences and an avoidance of all things ecclesiastical demonstrates James' leanings towards his father's religion when it came to the development of his lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. It also demonstrates a cultural application to his need to only address the individual rather than communal ideals within psychology,

philosophy and religion. The entire model of his psychological and religious works relied on his childhood upbringing in the Swedenborgian faith inspired by his father despite William's best attempt at rebellion.

1 Feinstein, Howard M. *Becoming William James* . Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999. 89.

2 Ibid .

3 Ibid ., 39.

4 Ibid ., 40 .

5 Ibid ., 62.

6 James, Henry. "The Church of Christ Not an Ecclesiasticism : A Letter to a Sectarian." Published 1854. Accessed April 27, 2015.

<https://archive.org/stream/churchofchristno00jame#page/n0/mode/2up., p.i>

7 Ibid ., 77.

8 Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia* . [London, England: John Lewis, 1749-1756] Translated by John E. Elliott. London, England: Swedenborg

Society, 1983-1999. Retrieved from: newchristianbiblestudy.org. #10765

9 James, William. *Pragmatism* . Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1991., 5.

10 James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* . Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002. 313.

11 Ibid ., 335 .

12 James, Henry, *The Church of Christ is not an Ecclesiasticism*, P 14

13 Ibid ., 5-6.

14 Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, and Andrew Bernstein. *Swedenborg Buddha of the North* . West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996., Title page

15 Ibid ., 198.

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Rev. Hannah R. Hill is an ordained Baptist minister through a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. She has been an active wedding officiant in the Atlanta area for four years; marrying the straight, the queer and all those who love each other.

Hannah completed her undergraduate studies at Bryn Athyn College, where she fell in love with Swedenborgian theology. She graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary in May of 2017, and has been a student at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies in Berkeley.

She has several blogs, has served as a research assistant on a published paper and in general likes talking about books. She has a two-year old named Steven.

Dear Lord, We thank you for the blessings of the lives of William James and his father Henry James, Sr. We thank you for the insight they shared with us about Swedenborg's wisdom on mental health. Help us to bring caring and compassion to those around us who contend with mental illness. Guide us in working for more resources in our world for those who need help. Amen

Peace of God in Violent World

October 15, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 91, 1-16

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.
"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation. "

From Swedenborg

234. Laws of Permission Are Also Laws of Divine Providence

There are no "laws of permission" that are simply that, or that are separate from the laws of divine providence. They are the same thing; so saying that God allows something to happen does not mean that he wants it to happen but that he cannot prevent it because of his goal, which is our salvation. Whatever happens for the sake of this goal, our salvation, is in accord with the laws of



divine providence, since as already noted [183, 211], divine providence is always moving away from and contrary to our own intentions. It is constantly focused on its goal; so at every moment of its work, at every single step of its course, when it notices that we are straying from that goal it leads and turns and adapts us in accord with its laws, leading us away from evil and toward good. We will see shortly that this cannot be accomplished without allowing bad things to happen.

Message

Where is the Peace of God in a Violent World?

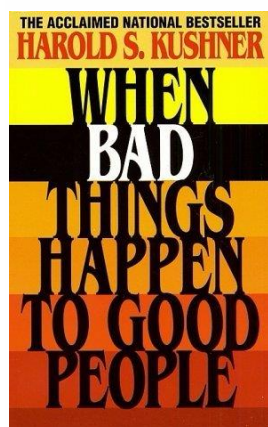
It has been a grim time of late in the United States. We are overwhelmed with hurricanes, floods, and fires – that we often call "acts of God." At the same time we are beset with violent shootings; often acts by people with mental disorders who can obtain guns legally and then massacre children [like at Sandy hook] or shoot randomly in a crowd that is enjoying music, like in Las Vegas.

How do we come to grips with such events? Swedenborg tells us that the Divine is in all of creation. So how does that Divine bring tornadoes, hurricanes, and fires that kill so many innocent people and destroy the security of their lives?

How does God allow mentally disordered people to get away with atrocious acts that impact so many innocent lives? We debate the issues amongst us – how do we get more mental health treatment? Should we have more restrictions on access to guns? How do we miss "red flags" where a mass killer is preparing for a horrendous deed?

There are, of course, theological answers to the questions. I've given some of those explanations in sermons through the years. Yet, when faced with carnage in Las Vegas, much of Puerto Rico devastated by a hurricane – and now so many people in CA fleeing fires that threaten homes and lives – I feel outraged and grief-stricken. My prayers become: "So, God, where ARE YOU in this? Why can't You just make these things stop?"

This week has been a valuable time to go back and take another look at those theological answers.



Through the years, I've valued the little book by Rabbi Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It came out in 1981; Kushner sharing the tragedy of his three-year-old son dying of a degenerative disease. People tried to reassure him that "it was God's will." But the Rabbi found that to be an appalling theology. He could not accept a God who would take a young life for some Divine

purpose. He came to see God as suffering with us in the realities of earthly life – not choosing to send us suffering.

I was in seminary when the book was first out; I remember thinking that honest emotional approach to God made more sense than a lot of things we were learning in "pastoral care" about comforting the grieving.

Later I found Swedenborg, and felt that he had a theology to help us understand God's role in terms of "free will." I wished for a book like Kushner's but within Swedenborgian theology. My wish was granted! In 2010 the Swedenborg Foundation released a book, *Why Does God Let It Happen?* by Bruce Henderson. This award-winning book incorporates many of the insights of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Henderson's book, however, is written from a specifically Swedenborgian perspective.

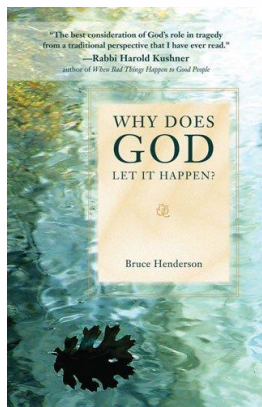
It is hard to understand why God allows tragedy. Henderson writes:

Without the freedom to make mistakes that may lead to suffering in our own lives and the lives of others, we would be reduced to automatons. The same principle works on a spiritual level. If God were to meddle in our lives and change the course of history to preserve our own narrow sense of order and justice, where would he stop? God cannot pick and choose. His laws—and his love—must be absolute and consistent. When I was a student at the Swedenborg School of Religion, one of my professors was the Swedenborgian scholar Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven. He wrote:

Evil includes everything that flows from the hells, or comes about under hellish influences. Murder is evil, but the desire for murder; the intention to commit murder ... is sin.

So, Swedenborg would see the shooting of people watching a concert as more than evil; it was intentional sin. Kirven goes on to say:

Swedenborg sees the basic, minimal freedom of choice as absolute, irreducible, and unbridgeable. [Kirven, *A Concise Overview of Swedenborg's Theology*, p. 9]



Understanding Swedenborg's concept of free will can help us cope with tragedy. Henderson writes:

We can wonder, with Rabbi Kushner, why "the wrong people" get sick or hurt, or die young. We can agonize with him over the "deep, aching sense of unfairness" over his son's terminal disease. As people who are trying to do what is right in God's sight—living a religiously committed life—we would be tempted to ask the same question: If God truly is loving and fair, "How could he do this to me?"

And not only how could he do this to "good parents," but how could he do this to an innocent, three-year-old child? ...

Rabbi Kushner has articulated the questions so well for so many people. He understands that God does not cause the bad things that happen to us, and that God does not sit on his throne, determining which of us will suffer misfortunes and which will be spared. But he does stand always ready to help, comfort, and lead. "The God I believe in," Kushner wrote, "does not send us the problem; he gives us the strength to cope with the problem."

So, what can we take from Swedenborg in times of great tragedy-- personally or in our society? When we suffer, God suffers with us. Evil is not God's will; freedom of choice is God's will, since that is the only way we can grow into union with the Divine. In times of tragedy, it does not help to blame God for causing it. But it does help to support others in their suffering. It helps to reach out for others in our own pain. We were created to be social beings, in relationships with others.

I see God not in the actions of a deranged shooter, but in the compassionate actions of those in the crowd. Some gave their lives to save another life – by standing between a person and the bullet. Others focused on helping people find their way to a safe place. Hospitals moved into trauma mode and brought in extra staff. When the hospitals needed blood, the lines to give became 6 hours long. In Puerto Rico, many small towns were unable to get supplies, so neighbors helped each other, sharing their homes, their food, and their water.

THAT is God.

That is God guiding us through Love and Wisdom to take action in the world, to help us towards the New Jerusalem.

Ultimately, the healing journey for all of us is through our loving actions and caring relationships

To Swedenborg, faith could not exist apart from the good deeds we do for others:

There cannot exist a grain of spiritual faith apart from charity, since charity is the life, soul, and essence of faith; 2. Such as the charity is, such is the faith; and the faith that precedes charity is a faith of cognitions, which is historical faith.

Swedenborg tells us that tragedy is never God's will. But we are not helpless victims in a world of random violence. Ultimately, the healing journey of love and justice is through our actions and relationships.

Central to Swedenborg is that we can experience the Divine through our relationships with each other. Every loving action moves us closer to the New Jerusalem where we live in peace guided by God's will. God does have a will for all of us, that we love each other as God loves us and that we support each other through life's journey. Anything else is NOT God's will.

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom, Guide our steps into the world so that we can strive every day to make a difference and to bring us closer to the New Jerusalem on earth.

Conflict Resolution for the New Jerusalem

October 22, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 1:78-80, New International Version (NIV)

because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven, §8112

When any small division of opinion occurs among those spirits they see a thin bright flash like a streak of lightning, or else they see a belt of sparkling stars. These are signs indicating division; but the division among them is quickly healed. Sparkling stars which wander are not a good sign, whereas stars sparkling but motionless are a good sign.

Message Conflict Resolution for the New Jerusalem

I was at the pre-convention Council of Ministers meeting, eating lunch in the cafeteria. The U.S. Presidential campaign was gearing up and took up much of the U.S. news coverage. I hadn't noticed any political conversation at Convention, but this lunch was different. My roommate, sitting across from me gave an impassioned defense of the candidate she preferred. I felt compelled to show her how she was wrong. Her candidate would not be a good choice for President, and I needed her to understand my perspective. She didn't agree with me and gave an even more impassioned explanation about how I was wrong. She clearly wasn't listening to me explaining to her why I was right.

You can guess how lunch ended. We were each feeling that we weren't being heard. And we were both right.

The afternoon program for the ministers' meeting was a workshop with Dr. Soni Werner.



Soni Soneson Werner is Associate Professor Emerita of Psychology at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and trainer in conflict resolution skills. I first met her at Gathering Leaves where I remember some delightful conversations about her psychological teaching.

That afternoon she had us divide into small groups to practice a range of conflict management skills; esp. listening carefully to each other. We practiced a number of skills:

1. Agreeing to disagree
2. Presenting the tough issue
3. Discovering other viewpoints
4. Remaining "firm, fair, and friendly"
5. Encouraging initial actions¹

I noticed that a key element in all the techniques was **listening** -- simply striving to understand each person's perspective.

I "knew" this. But I so often forget to use what I know.



My roommate and I headed back to our room before dinner, and we listened to each other with open hearts. I learned more about my roommate and how she saw the world. I shared with her what things were important to me. Instead of trying to convince her that she was wrong, I just listened to her and shared with her what things were important to me.

I thought about my favorite Rumi quotation that is used by Marshall Rosenberg in [Nonviolent Communication](#):

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.²

I love the image of two people in a field together where there is only listening and being together; no efforts to prove who is right and who is wrong.

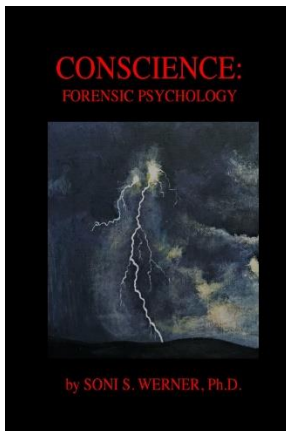
Recently the on-line community talked with Rev. Rich Tafel of the D.C. church and he told of us of the work he is doing internationally [and nationally] to help foster communication in areas of conflict. He, too, focuses on people listening to each other.

Of course, listening to other viewpoints doesn't mean we should give up our efforts to speak and work for values that are important to us. It doesn't mean we tolerate any behavior in our society and only try to understand the views of people who are violent or oppressive without standing up to their actions and enforcing our law.

But, perhaps, both are possible. We can speak and act for our values and laws **and** we can listen to other viewpoints, striving to understand those who have different perspectives.

Let us pray.

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Guide us in listening to each other. Help us not only speak out about our own values, but also listen with love to those who differ from us.



1

More detail in **Conscience: Forensic Psychology**

by Soni S. Werner, Ph.D.

Published by Soni S. Werner at Smashwords

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Werner's e-book entitled Conscience: Forensic Psychology is available for download at <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/590834>. To see all nine conflict resolution skills, read Chapter 1.B. For a summary of a Swedenborgian perspective on preventing, intervening, and rehabilitating people who have been in serious conflicts, read Chapters 1.C., 2.C., and 3.C.

² from **Rumi: The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing**

by **Jalal al-Din Rumi**

translated by **Coleman Barks**

The Meaning of Halloween

October 29, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Dick) n. 824

Many of the Roman Catholic persuasion, especially monks, when they enter the spiritual world search for the saints, particularly for the saint of their own order; but they do not find them. They are surprised at this; but they afterwards learn that the saints are either in heaven or in the earth beneath. ... The worship of saints is held in such abomination in heaven that when the angels merely hear it mentioned they shudder; for when worship is paid to any man, it is to that extent denied to the Lord; and in that case He cannot be the sole object of worship. If, then, the Lord is not the sole object of worship, worship is divided; and this destroys communion and the life of blessedness which flows from communion ...

Message **The Meaning of Halloween**



I remember Halloween "back in the day" of my childhood. It was the big social event of the fall. Discussions about costumes started weeks ahead of time. For me, the time frame was especially important as Mom would always make my costume, so we needed time for measurements and buying material. It was an innocent time. Kids ran around the neighborhood

freely. We'd stop and compare goodies, and share where the best stuff was being given out. We took our stashes home where parents let us dig into them. It was before the time when some parents took their kids' candy to an x-ray machine to scan for dangerous objects inside.

Despite the changes in society, the childhood celebration of Halloween continues largely unabated. The fascination with being someone else for a night will probably never go away. The intrigue of contemplating whether one will be a villain, or a hero draws us even as adults. The idea of going about in the world with your identity concealed is always fascinating.

But many of us know that there are religious roots to our secular celebration. If you're like me, you get confused differentiating "All Saints Day" and "All Souls Day" and "the Day of the Dead."

This year let's take some time to look at the religious and pagan traditions that converge on "All Hallowed Eve" – and look at how Swedenborg's thoughts add more understanding of these issues.

Here are some cogent statements from [Catholic Online](#): for All Saints Day:

Halloween is a secular holiday that comes the night before All Saints' Day.

All Saints' Day is on November 1, and it is a Holy Day of Obligation.

All Souls' Day is on November 2, and it is NOT a Holy Day of Obligation.

The Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday that has spread in popularity into parts of the United States and across Latin America. It is celebrated from October 31 through November 2, to coincide with both the American tradition and the Catholic holy days. Those three days are dedicated to all the dead.



In the Catholic tradition, All Saint's Day honors the official saints of the church. Other traditions, such as Anglican and Lutheran also honor All Saint's Day. It's considered a "Holy Day of Obligation" meaning that Catholics are expected to go to Mass that day.

All Soul's Day is for honoring anyone who has passed over. It's based on the Catholic belief that most souls go to purgatory, where they must atone for their sins to get into heaven. The prayers of those on earth help, so it is a time to pray for one's friends and relatives in purgatory.

[History.com](#) tells us that Halloween originated with the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, when people would light bonfires and put on costumes. The Celtic New Year began on Nov. 1st, so Oct. 31st was their New Year's Eve. It was a transition from a summer of warmth, light, and crops to a winter of cold, dark, and dwindling food supplies. That night came to be call "All Hallows Eve", which later became Halloween. All Saints Day followed All Hallows Eve, and it was followed by All Soul's Day.

Swedenborg, of course, gives us some understanding of life and death. If we spend time on All Soul's Day remembering loved ones who have passed away, we can think of them in a Swedenborgian context. They are in spirit bodies and live in busy, active worlds just as we do. They are our future, since we all eventually are in spirit. We honor our mourning and sadness that we aren't sharing our earthly life with loved ones, but we also remember that we will join them in time.

Swedenborg, however, was not fond of the concept of "saints" as we see in the reading above.

Swedenborg talked about the angels he found in Heaven. Like "saints," angels had been ordinary human beings on the earth who were now in spirit, developing their Love and Wisdom. We all are angels in the making.

We can live each day honoring our budding angelhood!

Much of what we do to celebrate this is simply to open our hearts to the Divine.

Wilson Van Dusen wrote a great deal about how we all find mysticism in everyday life. He wrote:

A mystic is simply one who has had the direct experience of God. ... The experience [of God] can vary from small incidents to life changing visions ...



We, too, are part of the oneness of life and death.

Recognize yourself as an everyday saint ... creating heaven everyday ... allowing your "inner angel self" to grow and flourish.

The "trick" is to realize that we are all angels in the making; and the "treat" is to celebrate that within ourselves.

Let us pray: Dear Divine Spirit, instill in our hearts a love and respect for all traditions of love. Help us find Your presence in each day of the coming week and to live each day as you call us to live. Amen

Doubt & Grow Spiritually / Odhner

November 5, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 24:1-11, NRSV

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

John 20:3-16

Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

From Swedenborg

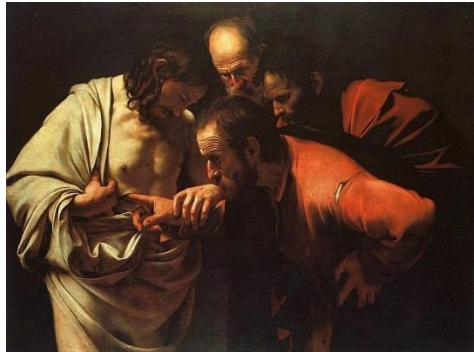
Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven §7298, Arcana Coelestia*. London: Swedenborg Society., 1983.

"[...] it is in accordance with the laws of order that no one should become convinced of a truth in a moment, that is, that no truth should instantaneously be made so sure that a person is left in no doubt at all about it. The reason for this is that when truth is impressed on a person in that way, he becomes so fully convinced of it that it cannot be broadened in any way, and also he is incapable of yielding. This goes to explain why in the next life as soon as some truth is presented through plain experience to good spirits, some opposing idea giving rise to doubt is presented. In this way they are led to think and ponder over whether it is indeed a truth, gather reasons in support of it, and so introduce that truth into their minds rationally. This enables their spiritual vision in respect to that truth to be broadened, seeing even into the ideas that are opposed to it.

They therefore see and perceive with their understanding every characteristic of a truth, and from this are able to let in the influences coming from heaven as the situation demands; for truths take varying forms according to circumstances."

Message Doubt and Grow Spiritually

by Rev. Hugh Odhner



This is a sermon about doubt. It takes for its text the doubt expressed by the apostle Thomas. It is perhaps appropriate that we speak about Thomas the doubting apostle today, because the Lord appeared to him exactly one week later than he appeared to the other apostles, that is one week later than that first Easter.

But let us begin with that first Easter Morning -- what was it like? It was NOT one of jubilant expectation of seeing the risen Lord.

In regard to expectations, the women came to the tomb expecting to find the Lord's body. As we read from the gospel of Luke: *"(the women) came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ... they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ... they were greatly perplexed."*

That first Easter morning was one of disbelief and doubt. When the women told the 11 apostles what they had found -- or not found -- and what they had heard from the two men in shining garments, what was the reaction of the apostles? We read that: *"(the women's) words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them."*

However, Peter and John ran to the tomb, entered it, found no body -- so what did they do? They went away again to their own homes.

And Mary Magdalene (remember, she had been at the tomb earlier with the group of women), she now was standing outside by the tomb weeping. Why? *"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."* She still thought that the Lord's body had been moved, and she asked the man who she thought was the gardener, *"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."* It was only when the Lord, the gardener as she supposed, spoke her name that she then recognized the risen Lord.

Later, when the risen Lord first appeared to the apostles saying *"Peace be to you,"* it is said in Luke, *"... they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a ghost. And He said to them, why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"* Only when He showed them his hands

and his feet, did they begin to believe.

This doubt is all summed up by the apostle Thomas, who was not with them when Jesus appeared to the other 10 apostles. Even after the other 10 disciples told him *"We have seen the Lord!"* He said to them, *"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."*

Just like the other apostles he could not truly believe that the Lord had risen until he had seen Him with his own eyes and seen the wounds on his feet, hands, and side.

Why did they all doubt and have such disbelief?

-- The Lord had told them on *four different occasions* that he would be crucified and would rise again on the third day. Even the priests and Pharisees knew this. As the gospel of Matthew tells us, *"The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone."* (Matthew 27:62-66)

-- The apostles had witnessed probably hundreds of miracles, including his raising Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus from the dead.

Yet it appeared that they had forgotten his prophecies and now doubted His power. Perhaps it was precisely because they had witnessed his doing so many miracles, even calming storms, that when he did not save himself from the crucifixion and come down from the cross -- even they began to doubt His power. After all it is one thing to raise others from the dead; it is quite another thing to raise yourself from the dead after you're dead.

Perhaps also their faith and belief were tested and came into doubt when they heard the people, the soldiers, and the priests mocking him and saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

We can best understand this if we put ourselves in the place of his disciples, those who had most closely followed him and heard him, had witnessed his miracles and power, and then wondered why He did not save Himself? If we had been there, would our faith have been tested and our beliefs tempted? After all it is difficult to maintain a belief which is unpopular and contrary to the beliefs of a majority, a belief which others will condemn you for if you should speak about it. Isn't it much easier and much safer just to keep quiet and go along with the crowd? Indeed such thoughts may cause us to doubt the truth of what we believe.

The New Church has several teachings on the subject of doubt which may shed some light on what was going through the minds of the apostles and also why they had such a difficult time accepting that the Lord had risen from the dead, as he had told them he would, until they had seen him with their eyes.

Secrets of Heaven §1820. *Anyone who is undergoing temptation experiences doubt ... And the*

greater a person's love is, the more it is in doubt. Unless that which a person loves is placed in doubt, and even in despair, there would be no temptation.

It was the apostles' love for the Lord and belief in his teachings that was now being placed in doubt and tested.

Secrets of Heaven §2334. *All temptation entails feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, regarding salvation, and other things such as these; for people who experience temptation suffer mental distress, even to the point of despair, in which state they are kept for the most part so that at length they may be confirmed in the conviction that all things are subject to the Lord's mercy, that they are saved through Him alone, and that with themselves there is nothing but evil - convictions in which they are strengthened through conflicts in which they are victorious.*

Seen in the light of this teaching, we can see that the faith of the apostles was brought into despair and temptation in order that it could become stronger. We can see an image of this with the apostle Peter, usually regarded as the headstrong apostle, who said before the Lord's trial and crucifixion, that he would never deny the Lord, and yet went on to deny him three times. He, like the rest of the apostles, at first doubted that the Lord had risen from the dead as we read in the gospel of John. But after seeing the risen Lord, he never again swayed from his faith in the Lord even enduring persecution and death for his faith. So also with the rest of the apostles. Their faith was tempted and brought into doubt, and then strengthened so firmly that they spread the Lord's teachings, beginning at Jerusalem, throughout the Roman world and then throughout the world.

And here is a third teaching concerning doubt that has application to us and our doubts, perhaps even doubts we may have concerning the teachings of the Word.

Secrets of Heaven §7298. *It is in accordance with the laws of order that no one should become convinced of a truth in a moment, that is, that no truth should instantaneously be made so sure that a person is left in no doubt at all about it. The reason for this is that when truth is impressed on a person in that way, he becomes so fully convinced of it that it cannot be broadened in any way, and also he is incapable of yielding.*

(Have you ever met someone who is so convinced of his beliefs that he will never yield at all and also narrow-minded in respect to those beliefs?)

Secrets of Heaven §7298 (continued). *This goes to explain why in the next life as soon as some truth is presented through plain experience to good spirits, some opposing idea giving rise to doubt is presented. In this way they are led to think and ponder over whether it is indeed a truth, gather reasons in support of it, and so introduce that truth into their minds rationally. This enables their spiritual vision in respect to that truth to be broadened, seeing even into the ideas that are opposed to it. They therefore see and perceive with their understanding every characteristic of a truth, and from this are able to let in the influences coming from heaven as the situation demands; for truths take varying forms according to circumstances.*

But let us go back to Thomas, who became most famous for his doubt, even though all the other apostles had been just as doubting.

The Lord said to Thomas, *"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."*

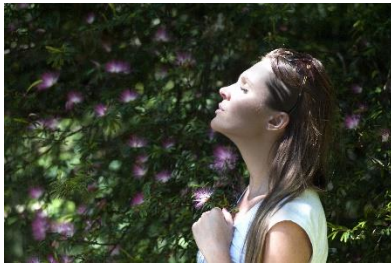
Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

And Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those

who have not seen and yet have believed."

That last sentence is addressed to us living today. Unlike the apostles, we may not have directly seen the Lord with our eyes, but do we believe in the Lord? Perhaps we also, like the apostles were, are in doubt. Many in the world around us are. But as we saw with the apostles, and as we read in the teachings of the New Church, doubt is not bad. It may be the means by which our faith and belief is strengthened. The question we need to ask ourselves is, what are we doing with our doubt? Are we honestly looking for answers? Are we actively investigating and pondering over whether the Lord's teachings are true? And then if we come to the conclusion that they are true, are we introducing that truth into our minds and lives?

Let us look again at the words that the Lord spoke to Thomas: *"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Thomas, like the rest of the apostles, was convinced that the Lord had risen from the dead only because he had seen with his own eyes the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. But the Lord said that those who believe without seeing Him were blessed. How then do we believe without seeing? We are first introduced to truths by means of the Word, and then by considering their teachings in the light of reason. The teachings of the New Church actually encourage us to do this. The Lord wants us to use our understanding and reason in determining what we believe so that we may then live according to what is true by our own choice.



So when the Lord said that those are blessed who believe without seeing, He was referring to our coming to believe in Him and his teachings not only because we understand them, but because we have experienced their truth by actually living them. Our belief and faith are first based upon our understanding of the teachings of the Lord's Word. When we study His Word, praying for and seeking enlightenment from the Lord, and come to have a faith that is based upon enlightened reason -- a faith that makes sense to us -- it is not enough to stop there; we need to do something with that faith. We need to start living according to it. When we have a faith in the Lord based upon his Word, and have put that faith into practice in our lives, then we are blessed.

Amen.

E Pluribus Unum: Pluralism, Not Sameness

November 12, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31, Unity and Diversity in the Body

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

From Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg, Divine Providence n. 4

"A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united"

Heavenly Secrets n. 8152

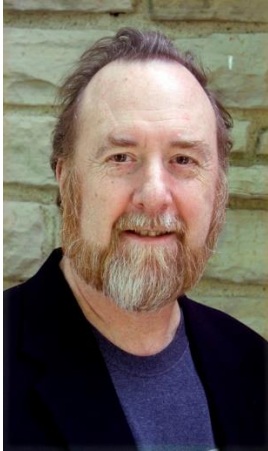
"It is plain that the church of the Lord is not here, nor there, but that it is everywhere, both within those kingdoms where the [Christian] church is, and out of them, where people live according to the precepts of love."

Message **E Pluribus Unum: Pluralism, not sameness**

by Rev. Dr. David Fekete

A talk delivered on August 8, 2017 at the North American Interfaith Network Convention in San

Diego, California



I got to thinking about the theme for this year's NAIN conference, "Harmony, the Journey to One Heart." I thought about just what harmony meant. And especially, I thought about what kind of "one" one heart means. I reflected on these issues in the current political climate in the US today. So it seemed to me that I might discuss the journey to one heart in the light of the motto of the US, "E Pluribus Unum"—out of many, one. The kind of one I will be talking about is not a one made up of sameness. Rather it is a one made up of variety and difference. Pluralism, not sameness. I would like to introduce my approach to the journey to one heart with some citations from my own faith tradition, the Swedenborgian Church:

"A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united" (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence* n. 4)

"In the Christian world, doctrines are what distinguish the churches; and from them people call themselves Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, or the Reformed and the Evangelical, and by other names also. It is from doctrine alone that they are so called; which would not be at all, if they would make love the Lord and charity toward the neighbor the principal things of faith. The doctrines would then be only varieties of opinion respecting the mysteries of faith, which truly Christian people would leave to everyone according to his [or her] conscience, and would say in their heart that one is truly a Christian when he [or she] lives as a Christian, or as the Lord teaches. Thus from all the differing churches there would become one Church; and all the dissensions which exist from doctrine alone would vanish; yea, the hatreds against one another would be dissipated in a moment, and the Lord's kingdom would come upon the earth." (*Heavenly Secrets* n. 1799)

"It is plain that the church of the Lord is not here, nor there, but that it is everywhere, both within those kingdoms where the [Christian] church is, and out of them, where people live according to the precepts of love." (*Heavenly Secrets* n. 8152)

"God flows into every human being with all God's divine love, all God's divine wisdom, and all God's divine life." (*True Christianity* n. 364)

Often in interfaith organizations we look for things we all share in common, and, indeed, sometimes even try to force harmony. But why try to find things we can all agree on? Isn't it better to

recognize our differences, and to affirm one another in our differences? Isn't it better than forcing commonalities we may not share? It is one thing to **say** that there are differences among different religions. It is another to **tolerate** differences. I want to **affirm** differences. As Emanuel Swedenborg says, "A form makes a unity **more perfectly** as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united" (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence* n. 4). In interfaith relations, our "constituents" are indeed "distinguishably different." The constituents would be our various religions, and the way we believe and practice is "distinguishably different." But Swedenborg's important claim is that a form makes a unity **more perfectly** when the constituents are distinguishably different.

In this talk, I will be affirming differences, rather than commonalities. Moving beyond mere toleration, I will be celebrating and honoring differences as a best practice in interfaith relations. In celebrating one another's faiths, I affirm each individual's belief system and practice. You can't have interfaith without distinct faiths. Interfaith is more perfect when individuals feel free to bring their own distinguishably different religious practices and beliefs to the whole.

Spiritually:

How often have I heard, "All religions say the same thing." "All religions are the same." "There are so many commonalities we share." "We believe that, too." I think back to my days in divinity school. When I was in divinity school, we tried to come up with a prayer that everyone could participate in. In order to do so, particularities were eroded. For instance, Jesus' name was taken out of the prayer, in order to include non-Christians in the interfaith prayer. Given the goal of the prayer, this is understandable. But why make something we can all agree with? Isn't it better to recognize our differences, and to affirm one another in our differences? True listening, in an I-Thou relationship, will hear and honor the other with all the differences between self and other, will not be actively waiting for something they can both agree on. As I will show below, diversity in religion is a good thing. E Pluribus Unum—even in religion, out of many we can be one.

Socially:

"Why don't they adopt our ways?" "They all stay in their own communities." "It is in their own best interests for minorities to adopt the ways of the majority race and culture." I spent most of my life in my birth Country, the United States of America. When I was growing up, I was taught that the US is a "melting pot." Differences will meld into a lukewarm kind of sameness. Words I heard were, "assimilation," "enculturation," "adjusting."

I now live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The catch-word in Canada is "pluralism." The social ideal in Edmonton is affirmation of the different cultures that have immigrated to the city. We pride ourselves on being open, inclusive, and accepting of other cultures. So in Edmonton, the American motto, E Pluribus Unum still applies well—out of many, one.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

So how much do we share? Can we say that there is an overarching principal that we all hold in common? Can we say that there is one God, the same God we all believe in, with different names? I'm not so sure.

There was a philosopher of language by the name of Jean-Francois Lyotard whose discussion about meta-narratives seems germane to my talk today in ("The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge," Manchester University Press, 1984). A meta-narrative is an overarching narrative, or shared story, or world-view, or shared belief system. Lyotard asserts that today, society has fragmented so much that there is no shared world-view, or meta-narrative. In Lyotard's language, unifying meta-narratives have fragmented into "pragmatic valences specific to its kind" (xxiv). So we

all know only a specific world-view, or narrative. We are so fragmented from one another, that Lyotard even says in some places that, "to speak is to fight" (10).

This understanding of fragmentation is true of nationalities, social structures, and interfaith gatherings. I am claiming that we do not share much, as far as religions go, nor as far as our cultures go. And again, turning to Lyotard's system, we do violence to our differences when we try to force commonalities that may not be there. Lyotard writes,

"Is legitimacy to be found in consensus obtained through discussion, as Jurgen Habermas thinks? Such consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games (xxv)."

What I take from this quote is that in our discussions with one another we need not look for commonalities. Put a little stronger, we should not try to look commonalities.

As in science, religious tenets tend to claim universality, or what Lyotard calls the "pretention to universality" (30). And they should. Religion is supposed to be ontological; it is supposed to explain the whole created order. Religions describe the way the universe is and how it came to be; what our place is in it; and other grand ideas that are true for everyone. Religion is supposed to describe God and God is about as universal as you can get.

It's the same God—right? There's only one God. Well, I'm not so sure we can say even that. I'm not so sure we would want to say that. As an example, my God is Jesus Christ. But in my understanding of Judaism, and, I think, Islam, there can be no image of God. And as a Human form, Jesus is an image of God for Christians. Further, the Greek Orthodox Church goes so far as to say that if God is incarnated in Jesus, and has a Human form, then we can paint pictures Jesus. So we have the tradition of those beautiful Orthodox ikons. This could never be the case in Judaism or Islam. Don't we do violence to our unique valences, our particular belief systems, if we were to claim that my Jesus is the same God as the Muslim Allah?

I don't mean to suggest that we must be divided, due to diversity. What joins us is a willingness to enter into dialogue. In interfaith relations, I think that dialogue plays a central role. But not dialogue that seeks consensus. How will I learn about Islam, for instance, if I listen only for similarities between my religion and Islam? Won't both of our interests best be served if we honor one another in our differences, as we dialogue?

But for dialogue to happen, a safe space will be important. I believe that dialogue needs to take place in what Martin Buber calls an I-Thou relationship. Where the other is treasured in a loving relationship. The willingness to engage the other, to enter into an I-Thou relationship with the other, to use Buber's term, may be a way to maintain constructive relationships in the failure of an overarching meta-narrative. I can honor and respect a Muslim prayer and a Muslim praying without myself becoming a Muslim.

THEOLOGICAL SOURCES

The Tribal League Period

There are Biblical references that affirm E Pluribus Unum—out of many, one. I think of the Tribal League Period in ancient Israel. There is that one line from Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). In the Tribal League

Period, there was no central power, such as a king. There were tribal clans—each distinguishably different one from another—who were united by ancestry and by shared worship of Yahweh. In the Tribal League Period, the binding force socially was also the binding force theologically. That binding force were the laws of Yahweh, especially as we find them in the Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23:9).

The twelve tribal units were distinct one from another, yet united by their common adherence to the God Yahweh and Yahweh's Laws. But the distinctness of each tribal unit, and, indeed, of each individual who "did what was right in their own eyes" was remembered throughout Israelite history. This loose confederation of tribes was considered by some to be a kind of golden age for Israelite governance politically, and for Israelite theopraxi. They didn't need a central organizing power like a king, didn't want a king. From the point of view of the elders in Israel, when kingship did arise, it was seen as a departure from the ideal society. In fact, it was even seen as a rejection of Yahweh Himself as king over the tribes, "The LORD said to Samuel . . . they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). When King David assumed the throne, he was careful to receive a blessing from the elders of all twelve tribes. In fact, he was anointed twice—once by the ten northern tribes (2 Samuel 4:3) and once by the southern tribes (2 Samuel 2:7). The memory of the pluralistic period of the twelve tribes remained even during the time of the kings. The ideal government for ancient Israel was the pluralism of the Tribal League period—not that of Israel's great kings, not King David nor King Solomon.

In the Epistles of Paul

"E Pluribus Unum" is in the Christian Scriptures, too. We have a powerful image of it in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In an extended metaphor, Paul uses the image of the human body to show diversity in unity. The human body is a unity. But the body is made up of distinguishably different parts. There are the foot and the hand, the ear and the eye. So, for Paul, we all have distinct, different gifts that we bring to the whole. Some are healers, some possess wisdom, some have strong faith, some can work miracles, some speak different languages, some translate. There are many gifts that the Spirit of Christ gives to individuals. But there is only one Spirit—that of Christ. There are many different gifts, but each gift holds an important place in the Body of Christ.

Paul wrote this letter to plead for church harmony. The threats of squabbling, factions and dissensions were real in early Christianity. That is the other side of pluralism. For by affirming diversity, the threat of fragmentation and even fighting and war are real possibilities. But as I suggested above, an I-Thou relationship in which differences are celebrated, the other is honored and respected, can hold us together in unity despite our diversity. Or, as in Paul's time, the unifying Spirit of Christ can hold together different expressions of Christianity.

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, 12:1-31:

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to

the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."

Swedenborg's Idea of Heaven: The Greatest Human Form

Swedenborg builds on Paul's imagery of the body—the one body made up of diverse parts. For Swedenborg, heaven is arranged in the Greatest Human Form. Our individual human bodies take their form from the Greatest Human Form, or heaven. It is heaven, the Greatest Human Form, that holds our atoms and cells together and inspires our minds with truth and our hearts with love. For instance, angels who live as the heart are loving; angels who live as the eyes are brilliant, or wise; angels who discern spiritual qualities are as the nose; those who are as the ears are obedient; and so on with all the organs of the body.

So Paul's metaphor of different parts in the body of Christ becomes a spiritual reality in Swedenborg's vision of heaven. By means of symbolism, heavenly affections and world-views are given a place in the Greatest Human Form

E Pluribus Unum for Swedenborg is seen in the countless individual societies in heaven that correspond to parts of the human body. And for Swedenborg, the variety and diversity of heavenly affections and ideas make for a perfect whole. Pluralism of emotions and thoughts make for a better

whole than sameness ever could—if it were even possible.

Since heaven in its entirety does reflect a single individual, and is in fact the divine spiritual person in its greatest form and image, heaven is therefore differentiated into members and parts like a person, and these are given similar names. Angels know what member one community or another is in and say that this community is in the member or province of the head, that one in the member or province of the chest, that one in the member or province of the genitals, and so on (*Heaven and Hell*, n. 65)

Further still, heaven is where the Lord is recognized, trusted, and loved. The different ways he is worshiped . . . —do not cause harm but bring benefit, because they are a source of heaven's perfection. . . . a perfect whole is formed from a variety of elements . . . when a whole does arise from a variety of elements, and the elements are in a perfected form in which each associates with the next in the series like a sympathetic friend, then it has a perfect quality. Heaven is, then, a single whole composed of a variety of elements arranged in the most perfect form; for of all forms, the form of heaven is the most perfect. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 56).

Jain Parable and Theological Reflection

Three blind men encountered an elephant for the first time. Each man felt only one part of the elephant. When they asked one another what the elephant was like, each had a different description. The man at the trunk said, "This creature is like a thick hose." The man at a leg said, "This creature is like a tree trunk." The one at the elephant's stomach said, "No, it is flat like a wall."

All three men were right. The elephant trunk is like a hose; the leg is like a tree trunk; the stomach is like a wall. The only problem is that each man didn't have the whole picture of the elephant.

It seems to me that this story captures the place we all are in our differing religions. We are all of us finite. Since we are all finite, our religious systems are finite. But God is infinite. No one of us has the whole infinite story about God.

And reflecting on the elephant story, our differing articulations of religion can all be right. In the religious sphere, we can indeed claim that our religion is right. And simultaneously, we can affirm that other religions are right, too.

No one of us has the whole elephant. And this pluralistic understanding of religions holds for the practice of religion as much as it does for belief systems. For instance, from what I have learned about Hinduism, ritual has a more prominent place in it than it does in my religion, as does the power of language in Hinduism. Regarding ritual, in Hinduism, worship can take the form of lighting a fire for Agni, or smearing clarified butter on a Shiva linga, or bringing sweets or flowers to a temple and receiving back other sweets. And regarding the place of sacred language, in some forms of Hinduism, passages or phrases or even a single word from the Vedas are chanted over and over as worship. This is because the universe was created by the very same poetic meters that the Vedas were written in. So reciting phrases or words from the Vedas brings the very power that created all things into the worship experience. In my own Swedenborgian religion, understanding theology and expressing our understanding through healthy emotions, true thinking, and ethical behavior are

primary modes of worship for Swedenborgians. So cognition, emotion, and service to our fellows are the main means of worship for Swedenborgians. We have little ritual and no real mantras. And these days we don't follow much of a religious calendar, which does play a significant role in religions like Judaism. Some of the most significant aspects of Judaism are festivals which are to be observed according to the sacred calendar. If I am not mistaken, even readings from the Hebrew Scriptures follow the sacred calendar. As a Protestant, I think that belief plays a vital role in religion. But for other religions, ritual, chants, and the sacred calendar may matter more than belief—or at least as much. We may indeed have different beliefs, but belief itself may not play as vital a role in some religions than it does for others of us.

This leads up to the point I am making about perfection consisting in variety. Since no one of us has the whole elephant, we have a better picture of the whole elephant when we have multiple perspectives. The greater the diversity we have among different faith traditions, the greater vision of the whole elephant we will know.

Thus interfaith works best when there are strong articulations of different faiths. It does not work as well when participants in interfaith profess a kind of hybrid faith made up of many faiths. I am not sort of Buddhist, sort of Hindu, sort of Muslim, sort of Jewish, sort of Swedenborgian. Over the years, I encountered all the different religions that I have encountered as a Swedenborgian. I come to interfaith gatherings as a Swedenborgian. An open-minded Swedenborgian, certainly. A Swedenborgian who is a seeker, certainly. A Swedenborgian who is a life-long learner, certainly. But a Swedenborgian.

So, then, what do I do with other religions? What do we do with other religions? What are we doing here? Largely, I dialogue. I want to hear other religions from believers and practitioners or other religions. I did not say, "I hear about other religions." I want to hear the religions. And I want to hear the religions in their integrity. I do not listen to my Muslim fellows with an ear for doctrines that sound like Swedenborgian doctrines and then celebrate how much we have in common. I want to hear Islam as a Muslim experiences it. And I reflect on Islam as I hear it from a practicing Muslim. One initial reaction is to say, "Now I have heard another facet of the infinite God." For that, I celebrate the religion and person of the religion that I have been hearing. Sometimes I want to think or practice in the ways I hear. Sometimes I remain in my Swedenborgian mindset and hear the other as a differing friend. And sometimes, I incorporate what I hear into my own religion. Then my own vision of the infinite grows a little greater. So my encounter with the religion of the other can be different and respectful; and it can also be different and mind-expanding.

My own understanding of religion has grown through my exposure to other religions. For instance, I deeply appreciate religious observance that emphasizes ritual, like what I have found in Hindu and Sikh services. I have been moved deeply by the iconography—the vivid colors and the imagery—that I experienced in a Ukrainian Catholic Church in Edmonton. My own beliefs have expanded through exposure to different faith perspectives—the different doctrines and different emphases and, in fact, foreign concepts. My understanding of what religion can be has grown even when I haven't incorporated the other into my own world-view.

But I am suspicious when I hear a person say that interfaith is their religion. I'll say again, I'm not sort of Buddhist, sort of Hindu, sort of Muslim, sort of Jewish. There was a time when I thought I was. But as I look back, I had no living personal faith during that time period. I think that Robyn Lebron, the co-presenter with me, will be exploring the ramifications of interfaith in her presentation, so I won't say much more about it now.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Never, I think, has the world needed the kind of approach to "E Pluribus Unum" that I have been talking about. The recent posture of the U. S. president is narrow, uninformed, and xenophobic. And it would seem that the example he sets is spreading in US culture. It seems to me that religious hate crimes or hate language are now more prevalent than they had been in previous administrations. Even up in Canada. May I go so far as to suggest that they are disapproved of less vehemently than they had been in the past? However one feels about the current president, I can't recall a president who has engendered such division and intolerance. Now, more than other we need mutual understanding and the affirmation of difference. Now, more than ever, we need interfaith gatherings like NAIN, the Parliament of the World's Religions, and local movements like Poway and the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action.

I think that we need to be evangelists. We need to spread our gospel—our good news—that people of different faith traditions, nationalities, and cultures actually benefit from diversity. That diversity perfects community; it doesn't weaken our social cohesiveness nor water down our personal religious perspective.

I'll conclude with a story from my life. I recall my upbringing in an all-white suburb of Detroit. I remember spending our Saturday afternoons mostly leaning against my neighbor Don Range's car telling jokes that didn't even make us laugh. Growing up in this white suburb bored me to no end.

I can contrast that community with the vibrant cosmopolitan city of Edmonton, Canada where I now live. When I first got there, I noticed different groups of people in a Starbuck's speaking different languages—Chinese, Lebanese, African languages, and, of course Canadians talking in English. In Edmonton, I have taken classes in Tai Ch'i at Ji Hong Tai Ch'i Academy. I am currently undergoing acupuncture treatments by a doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine. I enjoy eating Vietnamese food, Indian cuisine, perogies, pad tai, burritos, molcajete, lasagna, and hamburgers chez McDonald's, among many other options that Edmonton has to offer. We have ethnic festivals like Heritage Days in the summer, or City Centre festivals that honor a different nationality each week-end. City Hall itself celebrates a different faith tradition each month with a launch and display which remains up all month.

My musical interests are also ecumenical, too, you might say. I first heard Sikh sacred music at a temple to which the Edmonton Interfaith Centre was invited, as one of our bi-monthly Interfaith Explorations. And I heard the same genre at a convenience store where a young Sikh was piping his sacred music through the store intercom. Soon after, I downloaded from iTunes some Sikh music, and a friend of mine from India gave me one of her Sikh CD's. Of course, now that I am going to the acupuncture clinic, I downloaded some traditional Chinese music. And from a jazz musician who befriended me in Detroit City, I developed an affinity for Latin music which I have also downloaded a considerable amount of. As good as they are, I wouldn't want a diet of only the Beatles, and certainly not "Yummy, Yummy, Yummy I got love in my tummy."

Much of my interfaith work has been in the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action. I have been a board member for about 7 years, vice president for 2, and president for another 2. The Edmonton Interfaith Centre will be hosting NAIN 2018 in the wonderfully cosmopolitan city of Edmonton where I now happily reside. From the boring, homogeneous life I knew in the all-white suburb of Livonia, Michigan, I now live an exciting and fulfilling life in the multi-cultural city of Edmonton. And through the interfaith work I have participated in in Edmonton, I discovered NAIN. And it is a delight to be a member of NAIN and an honor to be here with you all today.

Thankfulness in Today's World

November 19, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Amos 5:24, New International Version (NIV)

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

From Swedenborg

Heavenly Doctrine

Merit and justice belong to the Lord alone (n. 9715, 9979). The merit and justice of the Lord consist in His having saved the human race by His own power (n. 1813, 2025, 2026, 2027, 9715, 9809, 10019). The good of the Lord's justice and merit is the good which reigns in heaven, and is the good of His Divine love from which He saved the human race (n. 9486, 9979). No man can of himself become justice, nor claim it by any right (n. 1813). The quality of those in the other life who claim justice to themselves (n. 942, 2027). In the Word, the man to whom the justice and merit of the Lord are ascribed, is called "just;" and the man to whom his own justice and merit are ascribed, "unjust" (n. 5069, 9263). Whoever is once just from the Lord, will be continually just from Him; for justice never becomes man's own, but is continually the Lord's (n. 3686). They who believe in the justification taught in the church, know little of regeneration (n. 5398).

Message

Where is Thankfulness in Today's world



Happy Restorative Justice Week! Did you know that Nov 19-26 is Restorative Justice Week? I did not know this until I began exploring things to be thankful about in today's world.



In trying to learn more about it, I kept coming across the name of Charles Colson. What? THAT Charles Colson? YES! A bit more web research and I learned that it WAS the Charles Colson of Watergate fame.

In 2005 a new biography about him was released and discussed in the [New York Times](#). *There is a new biography out, "Charles W. Colson: A Life Redeemed," by Jonathan Aitken, that explores Mr. Colson's strange odyssey.*

I purchased a copy of the book via Kindle and read a fascinating story.

On October 16, 1971, Charles Colson celebrated his fortieth birthday. The anniversary took place at the peak of his White House career. He was close to President Nixon, and actively involved in the administration for much of the Watergate era. He was a wealthy attorney. On his 43rd birthday in 1974, Colson was in prison and miserable. He had been sentenced to 1 to 3 years, although other Watergate figures who had done less had less time to do. He was losing his law license, so would have no way to earn a living after being released.

But he was sustained by an event that occurred before imprisonment which he called "Conversion"—the title to the tenth chapter of this biography. Having lived as an expert in "dirty tricks" – some perhaps crossing the line to crimes – he had a sudden, overwhelming sense of presence of Christ and became a Christian. His path forward was confusing, but felt his faith helped him make the most honest approaches to all that he had to contend with legally.

The conversion opened his life to a community of other Christians – some in government in D.C. – others he met later in prison.

He still went to prison but with a faith that sustained the daily indignities. He was sentenced to 1 to 3 years, but was released after 7 months.

Just as his life was transformed by a conversion, it was also changed by his time in prison.

His biographer, Aitken wrote:

After he finished his sentence, he started a prison ministry to bring inmates to Jesus. There is nothing particularly unusual about a conservative Republican gravitating to evangelical Christianity, though given his record, his critics were skeptical. (Harriet Van Horne, the liberal columnist, wrote that "If he isn't embarrassed by this sudden excess of piety, then surely the Lord must be.") What is remarkable, though, is the other role he took on: impassioned, even radical, prison reform. ...

Justice Fellowship made its first big impact in Washington State, where, thanks to Colson's campaign to improve Walla Walla, the legislature enacted many of its proposals. Soon, Justice Fellowship was advising other state legislatures on prison justice issues. This advice reached Capitol Hill, where Senator Sam Nunn and other federal legislators started to use Justice Fellowship's recommendations as the basis of new clauses in criminal justice statutes. [Aitken, Jonathan. Charles W. Colson: A Life Redeemed: A Life Redeemed (Kindle Locations 6639-6643). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]

He couldn't return to law, but he was drawn to a new career in prison ministry and writing. He died in 2012 at [80 years of age](#).

So that is part of the story of Restorative Justice Week.

Here's what I learned from Wikipedia about Restorative Justice:

Restorative justice is an approach to justice that personalizes the crime by having the victims and the offenders mediate a restitution agreement to the satisfaction of each, as well as involving the community. This contrasts to more punitive approaches where the main aim is retributive justice or to satisfy abstract legal principles.

What does this have to do with Thankfulness? One could argue that it shows that anyone no matter how selfish their life, can be converted to Jesus. That is an interpretation that one might hear within fundamental strands of Christianity. As a Swedenborgian, I might think in terms of how the Divine can take any of our experiences and make them part of the pathway to regeneration. This approach is more open to a varieties of pathways one might take to find the Divine, and allow the Divine to shape one's journey in life.

One could also look at the lesson values. Riches and reputation can be lost. But there are deeper values that actually bring contentment in life – esp. those connected with regeneration and community service.

Perhaps also there is a lesson in how things can unfold in the world. A situation that looks great from the world's view might be very far from God. As one gets closer to God, one might be in situations that look very bad to the world -- and yet one might be happier then.

Or maybe it is a view of the world that sees how the Divine can keep moving the world towards growth even when many human beings try to thwart it. We had a very bad situation with Watergate – at a time when Colson had a lucrative situation personally. But then, down the road, we are honoring Restorative Justice Week that about, in part, from the prison ministry of Charles Colson.

Where do you see thankfulness at work in the world?



Holy and incarnate one
who longs to set the prisoner free
and to heal the broken hearted:
We pray for our brothers and sisters
who are offenders,
who stand accused in our courts and who serve time in our prisons.
**Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness like an ever flowing stream.**

We pray for our brothers and sisters
who are victims of crime,

and who, like many victims, are re-victimized by our criminal justice system.

**Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness like an ever flowing stream.**

We pray for our Church,
remembering that in our corporate history
we have been both offender and victim.

**Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness like an ever flowing stream.**

We pray for all those in our criminal system who try to do justice:
for police officers, judges, lawyers, chaplains, and for corrections,
parole, and probation officers.

**Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness like an ever flowing stream.**



We pray for our neighbourhoods, our communities,
and our society, where the impact of crime and the fear that it breeds
harm people, damage relationships, and tear at the human spirit.

**Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness like an ever flowing stream**

**Blessed are you, Lord our God,
who sent your Son among us
to bear the pain and grief of humankind.
Receive the prayers we offer this day
for all those in need in every place
and grant us strength on our journey.
Amen.**

[From *A Justice That Heals and Restores: A resource on restorative justice* jointly produced by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections and the Anglican Diocese of Toronto's Working Group on Restorative Justice in collaboration with the EcoJustice Committee of the Anglican Church of Canada as part of the A Decade to Overcome Violence project (September 2005). For more information: www.cjic.ca]

Thanksgiving with Rev. Adam

November 26, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 138: 1-8

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.
On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.
For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.
Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.
The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Explained, 689, Verse 17

Saying, we give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, signifies the acknowledgment that all being, living, and ability are from the Lord. This is evident from the signification of "saying and giving thanks," as being to acknowledge, since "to fall upon the face and to worship," and then "to give thanks," can have no other signification than to acknowledge, here the omnipotence of the Lord. Also from the signification of "the Lord God," as being the Lord in respect to Divine good and Divine truth; for where Divine good is meant in the Word the names "Lord" and "Jehovah" are used, and where Divine truth is meant the name "God" is used, therefore "the Lord God" and "Jehovah God" mean the Lord in respect to Divine good and Divine truth. Moreover, "Jehovah" in the Old Testament, is called "Lord" in the New. It is also evident from the signification of "Almighty," as being to be, to live, and to have ability of Himself, and also that the being, life, and ability of angels and men are from Him. (That this is meant by omnipotence, may be seen above, n. 43; also that Divine omnipotence means what is infinite, n. 286.)

Message Thanksgiving with Rev. Adam

Every Thanksgiving I think about Adam Seward. He became a student at the Swedenborg School of Religion when I was a faculty member there. In his first year, as Thanksgiving approached, he shared his anger about that celebration, and told us he would stand in protest all day at Plymouth Rock. Adam was Native American.

I learned so much from Adam about the real history of Thanksgiving.

Last week, I wrote about searching for what we have to be thankful for in this chaotic and divisive world. I was happy to learn that this is [Restorative Justice Week](#). [Sept. 19 – 26; esp. honored in Canada and Europe]. It is a time to consider a new way of approaching justice. I quoted from Wikileaks:

Restorative justice is an approach to justice that personalizes the crime by having the victims and the offenders mediate a restitution agreement to the satisfaction of each, as well as involving the community. This contrasts to more punitive approaches where the main aim is retributive justice or to satisfy abstract legal principles.

This week I discovered that Restorative Justice is not a new concept. It comes from the tribal justice of Native Americans



I found this: **The Honorable Robert Yazzie**, Chief Justice Emeritus of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court

In Native American and First Nation justice philosophy and practice, healing, along with reintegrating individuals into their community, is more important than punishment. The Native peacemaking process involves bringing together victims, offenders and their supporters to get to the bottom of a problem. While contrary to traditional Eurocentric justice, this parallels the philosophy and processes of the modern restorative justice movement. In the Native worldview there is a deep connection between justice and spirituality: in both, it is essential to maintain or restore harmony and balance. [eForum Archive: Restorative Justice Practices of Native American, First Nation and Other Indigenous People of North America: Part One. April 24, 2004]

Yazzie is saying that the ultimate goal is HEALING of the individual and the community. In our justice system, we strive to find the person who did something wrong, then to take that person out of their community, and punish them by putting the person in jail.

The Native American approach is the opposite.

For example,

A death occurred in a Native American community, and the family wanted to do a home burial. Neighbors protested this and went to court for an injunction. The judge suggested peacemaking instead.

So, everyone involved spent a day going back and forth with all the concerns. By sundown, everyone agreed to use a cemetery.

In another case, a few boys trashed a store, and were convicted. But the store owner wanted them to feel remorse, so went to peacemaking. *And at one point he showed this one picture, and said, 'This is the last thing I had left from my deceased father.' The picture was damaged, and he was very emotional about it. That did it; it broke the ice, and the boys were very emotional, and they apologized. They said, 'We're sorry, we're responsible for this,' and they agreed to pay for the damage and even help the owner do some work.*

Peacemaking doesn't work in every situation; but it does in many. Both systems can be available, so that if peacemaking fails, the regular criminal justice system is always available.

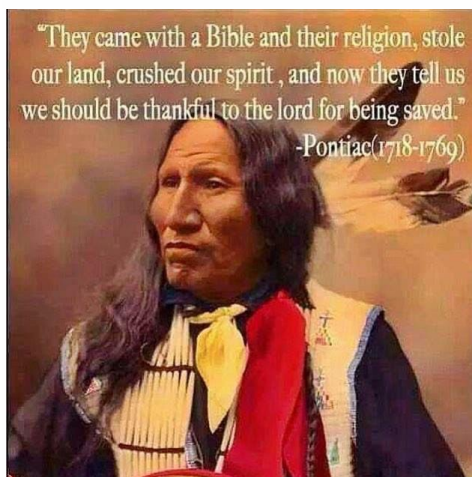
The peacemaking process is related to the concept of k'e, or respect, said Yazzie, adding, "K'e means to restore my dignity, to restore my worthiness." Through the peacemaking process, an offender can come to feel better, said Yazzie, especially when the person can say, "I'm responsible, I'm accountable.' That does a lot to the spirit, the mind, and the body of those who participate in the process," he said.

Yazzie believes that most of the knowledge and the process of the restorative justice movement comes from the indigenous experience.

Many have written about the roots of restorative justice in Navajo peacemaking.

I was excited to learn about the [International Institute for Restorative Practices \[iirp\]](#). It says that "restorative practices" has evolved from Restorative Justice and it is a new field of study. You can get a graduate degree, or continuing education credit – or attend some international conferences.

I'm excited that Restorative Justice is not just something of the past; it is our future. Today many are learning from Native American peacemaking practices to bring greater peace to our divide world.



So, thinking about Adam has led me to explore these areas. Adam Seward was ordained as one of our ministers, but due to poor health he was unable to serve for long in our ministries. He devoted his short life as minister to serving as a chaplain to pets. He journeyed to the next world this past year.

I always think about Adam at Thanksgiving. He helps me remember that the story of happy Pilgrims

and Indians celebrating together is a myth. The reality is about white people brutalizing and killing Native Americans. That is a sad story of our past. But it is also a hopeful story for our future; about learning from Native Americans traditions to make the world a more peaceful place for all.

Hope in Today's World

December 3, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 24:36-44

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

From Swedenborg

Divine Providence 178, New Century Edition

The need to preserve our ability to act in freedom and to act rationally is also the reason we are not granted foreknowledge of events. That is, it is common knowledge that if we love something, we want it to happen and we use our reason to move in that direction. Further, whenever we are considering something rationally, it is from a love of having it become a reality by means of our thought. So if we knew the result or the outcome because of some divine prediction, our reason would yield, and our love would yield along with it. Love and reason together find closure in results, and a new love takes over from there.

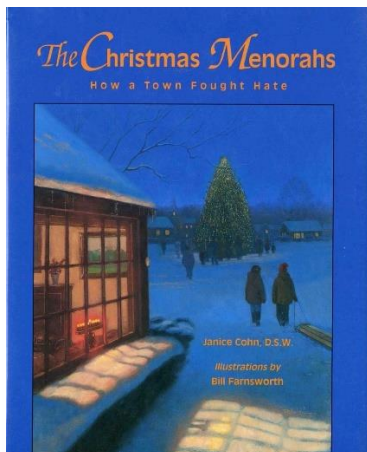
The very delight of our reason is to see a result that comes from love by thought, not as it happens but beforehand, or not in the present but in the future. This is what gives us what we call hope, waxing and waning in our rationality as we see or await a result. This delight finds its fulfillment in the outcome, but then both it and thought about it are cancelled. The same thing would happen if an outcome were foreknown.

Message Hope in Today's World

In a search for hope, I knew where I wanted to go. Billings, Montana –1993. It's a famous story and you have probably heard it. But it is more relevant than ever in a world where intolerance seems to be gaining in strength.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



This little town had been experiencing increasing acts of violence because the Klu Klux Klan was moving into the area. In the Hanukkah – Christmas season, one small Jewish boy made a paper menorah and taped it on his window. Then one night, a rock was thrown at it, shattering glass all over the boy's bedroom – fortunately he was out of the room at that moment. The family was horrified. Fortunately, the rest of the community was as well. Menorah's sprouted in windows all over town. Other windows got trashed – including those in Christian churches that Menorah's displayed. But the more windows that were shattered, the more Menorah's appeared in windows. The local paper included a large colored Menorah to cut out and display. Most of the town did.

Eventually the hate crimes diminished and the community could unite in its stand against intolerance. A movement came out of Billings: *Not in Our Town*.

The story has been told many times in many ways. Here are some of them:

- The official website: [Not in our Town website](#)
- Website with readings and discussion questions for students: [Facing History and Ourselves](#)
- The story as told: [by a Jewish rabbi](#)
- The video: [Not in Our Town Movement](#)
- The video of song: ["Not in Our Town"](#)



Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The word *Advent* means "coming" or "arrival" of something we have been waiting for. Most Western Christian Churches celebrate Advent as the beginning of the Church liturgical year. It is the season of waiting for the birth of Jesus – or as Swedenborg would emphasize – the coming of light into a dark world.

Many churches have an Advent wreath, and light one candle each of the four Sundays of Advent. The first candle is lit today, and is considered by most to be the candle of Hope.

A single candle burning is a powerful statement of Hope.



Hanukkah is about an amazing story of Hope. The Jews had to defend their Temple from the Greeks and finally won the battle. They needed to re-dedicate it, and they wanted to light the Menorah. There was only enough oil for one night. But, miraculously, the candle kept burning for eight nights! The song, "Light One Candle" commemorates that occasion.

This year, Hanukkah begins on the evening of Tuesday, Dec. 12 and lasts until the evening of Wednesday, Dec. 20th.

For Swedenborg, Advent had a lot to do with light. Swedenborg points out that "Advent" is a morning of the Lord.

As in the proper sense the "morning" signifies the Lord, His advent, and thus the approach of His kingdom, it is evident what it signifies besides, namely, the rise of a new church (for this is the Lord's kingdom on earth), and this both in general and in particular, and even in the least particular; in general, when any church on the globe is being raised up anew; in particular, when a man is being regenerated, and being made new (for then the Lord's kingdom is arising in him, and he is becoming a church); and in the least particular, whenever the good of love and faith is working in him; for in this consists the advent of the Lord. Hence the Lord's resurrection on the third day in the morning (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1) involves all these things (even in the particular and the least particular) in regard to His rising again in the minds of the regenerate every day, and even every moment.

[2] This time or state is called in the Word the "dawn," because the Lord then comes; or what is the same, His kingdom then approaches. The case is similar with the good, for at such a time there shines out with them a semblance of the morning twilight or dawn; and therefore in the Word the advent of the Lord is compared to the "morning," and is also called the "morning." Arcana Coelestia 2405

These four weeks of Advent are a new dawn for each of us.

For Swedenborgians, there is an emphasis on the light that is coming into the world and into our

hearts. In Advent we celebrate the knowledge that light and love are always stronger than dark and hate. Peace is always stronger than violence. Compassion is stronger than love of the ego. The Light of Christ is birthed in all of our hearts. By connecting with this inner event, we help create heaven on earth.

Swedenborg wrote:

The Lord [Divine Light] is perpetually present with every person, wicked as well as good, for no one could live without His [This] presence. ... It is the Lord's [this] perpetual presence which gives a person the faculty of reason and the ability to become spiritual. This is brought about by the light which comes from the Lord as the sun of the spiritual world, which a person can receive in his understanding. That light is the truth which gives him the power of reasoning.

Swedenborg says that before the Lord came into the world, evil had become increasingly stronger. There were more times of "darkness," when evil was gaining in power. God decided to come into the world in order to bring light into the darkness. The birth of the Christ child WAS the light coming into the world.

All of this helps us to understand an important aspect of Divine Providence: Hope.

When we look at all that is happening in the world today, it is easy to feel despair, with a world filled with war, violence, intolerance, and inhumanity.

Yet the world is also filled with loving people who live a light-filled useful life.

For Swedenborg, "light" and "hope" are closely intertwined. When evil became overwhelming in the world, the Lord was born to bring us new light.

Each of us is another light in the world, bringing hope to darkness. There is hope in the light that is inside of you, and in all of the people around you. There is no darkness so deep, that the light of Divine Providence cannot bring hope!

The Love of Angels

December 10, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 1:26-38

The Angel Gabriel Comes to Mary

Six months after Elizabeth had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee. The angel went to a virgin promised in marriage to a descendant of David named Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary.

When the angel entered her home, he greeted her and said, "You are favored by the Lord! The Lord is with you."

She was startled by what the angel said and tried to figure out what this greeting meant.

The angel told her,

"Don't be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God.

You will become pregnant, give birth to a son, and name him Jesus.

He will be a great man and will be called the Son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.

Your son will be king of Jacob's people forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, "How can this be? I'm a virgin."

The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy child developing inside you will be called the Son of God.

"Elizabeth, your relative, is six months pregnant with a son in her old age. People said she couldn't have a child. But nothing is impossible for God."

Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you've said happen to me."
Then the angel left her.

From Swedenborg

AD 3900:9

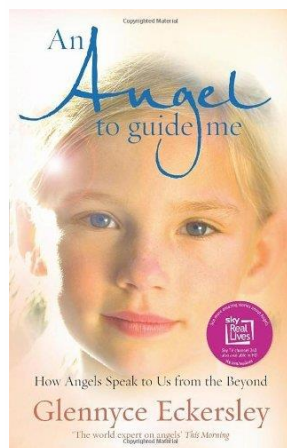
The coming of the Lord is not according to the letter, that he would again appear in the world, but it is his presence in each one, which takes place as often as the gospel is reached, and its holiness is thought about.

Message The Love of Angels

It was a crisp December morning as I walked my dogs down the lane by my house. The cat sauntered along at my side. One does not, of course, "walk" a cat -- but rather walks with the feline. I thought about how much I loved my pets, the lane we use for walks, my neighbors, and my house.

Despite all the turmoil of the world, there are many things I love in my life and on the earth. I especially love the relationships I have with people, knowing that God is the essence of our connections. It is often through each other that we come to know the Divine.

"Love" is our theme for this week of Advent. There are many aspects of "love" we could explore. The one that appeals most to me in this Advent week is the love from angels.



In January of 2002, I flew to England to spend 6 weeks as a guest faculty member at New Church College in Manchester.

I found that I was spending much of my time with the school cook, Glennyce Eckersley. In her free time she investigates stories of angels at work in people's lives. She has published a number of books on the subject. Here are a few of those stories:

The Advent season of 2008 was extremely cold in Great Britain. The ice was very thick on sidewalks and roads.

Edith was an 85-year-old woman who lived in a little cottage on the British coast. She tried to stay inside during the bad weather, but she knew that eventually she would have to go out for groceries. After four days inside, the sun came out, and the world looked peaceful and beautiful. She bundled up, and stepped outside. It was extremely cold, but others were out shopping and walking. She started to cross a road to a shopping center, when she suddenly lost her balance! She found herself falling into a concrete road. She braced for broken bones - - and perhaps even death.

But suddenly, she felt herself being lifted up by loving arms and placed gently down on the ground.

A couple walking their dog appeared at the top of the steps that led from the beach. They rushed to her aid. 'Are you OK?' they asked, helping her to her feet. Edith looked around but there was no one behind her. 'I'm fine,' she replied shakily. 'If it hadn't been for the kind soul who caught me as I fell I'd surely have broken several bones.' The couple with the dog stared at her in confusion. 'No one caught you,' the man said. 'We saw you fall and rushed up the steps to help – you were completely alone on the promenade.'

Edith KNEW that arms had picked her up. She had always believed in angels, but this was her first encounter with an angel.

Another story in the same book is "An Angel in the Alps."

It was summertime in the French Alps, and Penny was with a group of friends who were on vacation climbing mountains. Her friends were more experienced climbers than she was, but she did her best to keep up. By the 4th day, she was exhausted. Unfortunately, her foot slipped and she fell forward, free falling until her rope caught her and she landed on a small ledge. She saw above that her friend roped to her, had also slipped, but clung to a rock and pulled herself to safety.

Penny was in extreme pain, and clearly was badly hurt. It was too risky for her friends to try to pull her up. They called for help, but there was going to be a long wait. Glennyce writes this:



This painting is by John Flaxman, *Angels Guiding a Soul to Heaven*, (based on Swedenborg's wingless angels)

Her pain became increasingly intense, and she wondered just what the extent of her injuries would be. Inevitably the worst possible scenarios rushed through her thoughts. At that moment, a warm shaft of sunlight landed on Penny's face – or so she thought at first – as she turned her face away from the rock. Although the day was bright, the sun was well hidden behind the clouds and the intensely bright light was certainly not from sunshine. The warmth and light washed over her, taking her pain with it. In the centre of this light, Penny made out a face, beautiful and smiling and very clear. It brought a sensation of calm and confidence. Incredible though it seemed to Penny, she was in no doubt that this was an angel sent to calm her. The angel was with Penny for only a moment, but she knew instinctively that she would be rescued and that all would be well.

Although it took a long time for the rescue teams to reach Penny, the feeling of calm and peace stayed with her the whole time. Despite a badly broken leg and wrist, she experienced no more pain, even when being lifted onto a stretcher.

Penny was quite certain that she had not been hallucinating, but was having an angel encounter. She felt that her grandmother, in the spirit world, had helped in her angelic experience.

I can't think of any other explanation for these stories than the presence of angels. These are just two of the thousands of angel encounters from all over the world in all traditions.

Swedenborg tells us that we rarely see our protective angels – or feel them or hear them. But they are ALWAYS with us.

In what ways do you think angels might be with you during this Advent season?

Finding Joy in Our World

December 17, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Philippians 4:4-13

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and

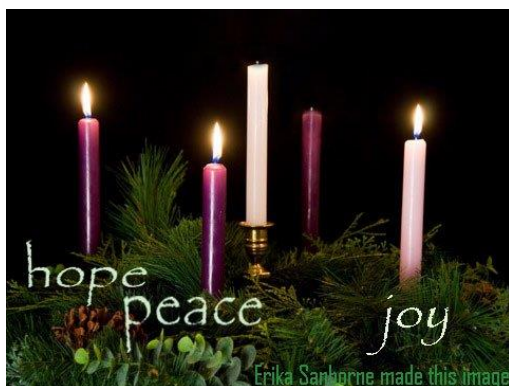
I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

From Swedenborg

Divine Providence #37

The more closely one is conjoined to the Lord the happier one becomes. The like can be said of degrees of happiness as was said of degrees of life and of wisdom according to conjunction with the Lord. Happiness, that is, blessedness and joy, also are heightened as the higher degrees of the mind, called spiritual and celestial, are opened with man. After his life in the world these degrees grow to eternity.

Message Finding Joy in Our World



I often remember the day my cat, Marty, tried to kill me. Not on purpose, of course. But it was a warm summer day and I was wearing shorts as I sat in my yard. Marty was apparently angry at me about something [Marty was frequently angry] and he sunk his claws into my bare leg. I didn't think much about it until red lines appeared I called the ER and they said to get there pronto. I was on a table in the ER for a long time, as they tried various IV antibiotics to stop the advancing infection. I was left alone for a while in a cubicle, and I was suddenly floating above my body. And I was in the presence of – well – I guess God. I was utterly and completely known. And I was utterly and completely loved. I was overjoyed being BOTH known and loved! That was pure joy. Joy is the theme of our 3rd week of Advent.



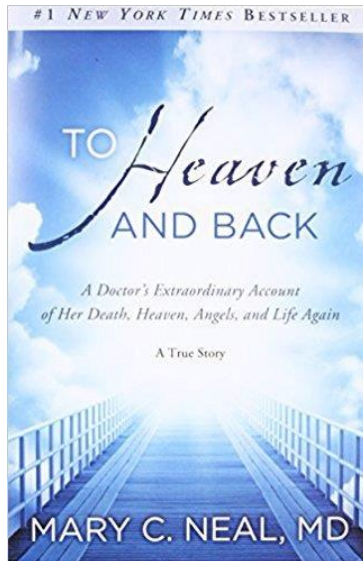
I often think of that experience when I consider what heaven must be like. I really enjoy reading experiences of people who have Near Death Experiences. One of my favorites is the story of Dr. Mary Neal. I've [written before about her](#).

Mary Neal has quite a story of "joy." Most of this information is from her first book, *To Heaven and Back; a Doctor's Account of her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again. A true story.*

Mary Neal grew up in Michigan, and attended the University of Kentucky and UCLA. She received advanced training in orthopedic spinal surgery. While in training, she met Bill, her future husband. They married and set up practice in orthopedic surgery. They had children, and were living an idyllic life.

She and her husband took a trip to South America, where Mary took a kayak trip with friends. Her kayak capsized and she was caught under a waterfall. She was technically dead for half an hour, before she was revived for a long recovery journey. Mary revealed that during that half an hour, she went to heaven and back; returning reluctantly only because she was told that she had to. She writes:

Many have described my accident as terrible and tragic. I describe it as one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

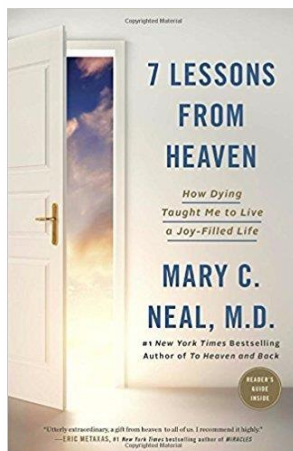


When she first realized that she was pinned under the waterfall, she didn't panic, but did use tools she knew from her considerable experience. However, they did not work this time.

She writes:

I thought about my family and desperately tried to raise my head out of the water in search of air. I quickly realized that I was not in control of my future. God had saved me more than once in the past so I, once again, reached toward God and asked for His divine intervention. I did not demand rescue. I knew that He loved me and had a plan for me. I asked only that His will be done. At the very moment I turned to Him, I was overcome with an absolute feeling of calm, peace, and of the very physical sensation of being held in someone's arms while being stroked and comforted. Neal MD., Mary C. (2012-05-23).

[To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story (p. 57). The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]



Now she has a new book out now: *7 Lessons from Heaven: How dying taught me to live a joy-filled life.*

In this book she asks:

Does God really work all things together for our good? During my life review, as I witnessed beauty emerging from every event, my faith in God's promise shifted from a somewhat vague theological hope into complete trust. I understood that He genuinely does make everything beautiful in His time.
Neal, Mary C... *7 Lessons from Heaven: How Dying Taught Me to Live a Joy-Filled Life* (p. 28). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Her story is one of joy. No matter how dire things can be on earth, God is pure love and joy. And we're here to keep bringing more of God's joy into a troubled world.

Let us pray: Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Help us to find the joy of existence, and to bring this joy into our lives and the lives of others.

Where is the Peace?

December 24, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Psalms 96: 1-13

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.
Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with
righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Luke 2:8- 20

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."
So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and

all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Message

Where is the Peace? Inside? Outside? Both?

100 years ago: Christmas Eve of 1914. It was the first Christmas of the first World War.

One soldier in the trenches that night wrote about what happened:

It was a beautiful moonlit night, frost on the ground, white almost everywhere; and about 7 or 8 in the evening there was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and there were these lights - I don't know what they were. And then they sang "Silent Night" - "Stille Nacht." I shall never forget it, it was one of the highlights of my life. I thought, what a beautiful tune.

Another soldier wrote about what happened next:

*Then suddenly lights began to appear along the German parapet, which were evidently make-shift Christmas trees, adorned with lighted candles, which burnt steadily in the still, frosty air! ... First the Germans would sing one of their carols and then we would sing one of ours, until when we started up "O Come, All Ye Faithful" the Germans immediately joined in singing the same hymn to the Latin words *Adeste Fideles*. And I thought, well, this is really a most extraordinary thing - two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war.*

A German soldier wrote:

I shouted to our enemies that we didn't wish to shoot and that we make a Christmas truce. I said I would come from my side and we could speak with each other. First there was silence, then I shouted once more, invited them, and the British shouted "No shooting!" Then a man came out of the trenches and I on my side did the same and so we came together and we shook hands - a bit cautiously!

Another soldier wrote:

We shook hands, wished each other a Merry Xmas, and were soon conversing as if we had known each other for years. We were in front of their wire entanglements and surrounded by Germans - Fritz and I in the center talking, and Fritz occasionally translating to his friends what I was saying. We stood inside the circle like street corner orators. ... What a sight - little groups of Germans and British extending almost the length of our front! Out of the darkness we could hear laughter and see lighted matches, a German lighting a Scotchman's cigarette and vice versa, exchanging cigarettes and souvenirs.

Christmas Eve is a time for miracles. Swedenborg talks about God as the like the sun; with its rays shining down on every one and every thing. He talks of God as "inflow" of light and love into each one of us every moment of every day.

How can you open your heart more fully to accept this light tonight? What is God birthing in your heart tonight, that will shine forth within your life?

What's New in the New Year?

December 31, 2017

READINGS

From the Bible

Revelation 21: 1-5, New International Version (NIV)

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

From Swedenborg

New Jerusalem and Heavenly Doctrine (Whitehead) n. 2

Before the New Jerusalem and its doctrine are treated of, something shall be said of the New Heaven and the New Earth. What is meant by "the first heaven and the first earth," which passed away, is shown in the small work *Last Judgment and Babylon Destroyed*. Immediately after that event, that is, after the Last Judgment was completed, a New Heaven was created or formed by the Lord. This heaven was formed of all those who, from the coming of the Lord to the present time, had lived the life of faith and charity, since these alone were forms of heaven. For the form of heaven, according to which all consociations and communications therein are effected, is the form of the Divine truth from the Divine good proceeding from the Lord; and this form man acquires by a life according to the Divine truth. That the form of heaven is thence may be seen in the work on *Heaven and Hell* (n. 200-212), and that all the angels are forms of heaven (n. 51-58, and 73-77). From these things it may be known, who they are of whom the New Heaven consists; and thereby what its quality is, namely, that it is altogether unanimous. For he who lives the life of faith and charity, loves another as himself, and by love conjoins him to himself, and thus reciprocally and mutually; for in the spiritual world, love is conjunction. Wherefore, when all act thus, then from many, yea from innumerable individuals consociated according to the form of heaven, unanimity exists, and they become as one; for then nothing separates and divides, but everything conjoins and unites.

Message

What's New in the new year?

Tonight is New Year's Eve; a time that carries many different meanings. For some it is an opportunity to party with friends. For some, it is a time to let go of past problems and start anew with fresh resolutions. It can also be an opportunity for spiritual reflection.

Sue Marie, one of the active registrants in the on-line community, wrote this:

An end-of-the-year practice I have done for several years now is to review my journal for the year that is coming to a close. Within those entries, I find God—I discover, sometimes re-discover, how God has been working in my life and has been there with me ALL the time, even when I didn't realize it.

Sue's approach to the New Year shows a spiritual focus that brings God into our process of transition to the New Year.

Looking at the concept of "new", we see the term used many times in the Bible and the writings of Swedenborg. Our scripture and Swedenborg readings for today focus on the New Jerusalem and God making all things new.

The New Jerusalem is also our denominational theme for 2017-18. Here is the description on our website:

2017-2018 THE YEAR OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW WORLD:

- *the Second Coming in the Spirit now*
- *the new world & new consciousness emerging now*
- *building the future: the unity of the human family in justice and peace*

OUR FOCUS: CREATING A WORLD OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

What will this "New Jerusalem" be like?



One inkling of how it might be is to look at Martin Luther King's concept of the Beloved Community. It is not something for us to dream about for the future; it is something for us to create now in this world.

He lived a new understanding of racial justice and human dignity. His life is an example of the faith in the actions of everyday life that Swedenborg wrote about.

King's theology was about the Beloved Community, but not as a future event; rather as a way of living life today.

Martin Luther King said this in his "I Have a Dream" speech:

It's alright to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,' but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee.

King's concept of the Beloved Community is similar to Swedenborg's New Jerusalem. It is not something for us to dream about for the future; it is something for us to create now in this world.

His approach to making the Beloved Community a part of our everyday lives shows his "faith in action." He lived a new understanding of racial justice and human dignity.

In *The Beloved Community*, Charles Marsh concludes:

The logic of King's dream was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of divine love in lived social relation. To be sure, King's concept of love was surely not the platitudinous "all you need is love"; it was rather the passion to make human life and social existence a parable of God's love.

[Marsh, Charles (2008-07-31). *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (p. 2). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.]

In his 1959 Sermon on Gandhi:

The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle's over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor....The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But, the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.

As we move into the New Year, we often make resolutions about things we want to change in our life – exercise more, eat healthier. Those are all worthwhile goals. But let's also remember our resolutions for helping the world move closer to the New Jerusalem in 2018.