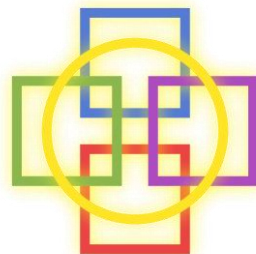




SERMON ARCHIVE 2015

Swedenborgian Community Online



Holographic Repentance

January 4, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Bible: Genesis 1: 9-13

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

From Swedenborg

True Christianity: 9

Now that faith [§§336–391], goodwill [§§392–462], and free choice [§§463–508] have been treated, the related topic of repentance comes next, because without repentance there can be no true faith and no genuine goodwill, and no one could repent without free choice. Another reason why there is a treatment of repentance at this point is that the topic that follows is regeneration [§§571–625], and none of us can be regenerated before the more serious evils that make us detestable before God have been removed; repentance is what removes them. What else are unregenerate people but impenitent? And what else are impenitent people but those who are in a drowsy state of apathy? They know nothing about sin and therefore cherish it deep within themselves and make love to it every day the way an adulterous man makes love to a promiscuous woman who shares his bed. To make known what repentance is and what effect it has, this treatment of it will be divided into separate headings.

Message Holographic Repentance

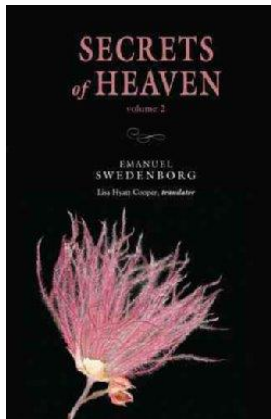
How was your transition to 2015?

The New Year is an ideal time to look more closely at our spiritual growth, which Swedenborg called "regeneration." Generally, he talked about 3 major stages of spiritual growth: Repentance, reformation, and regeneration.

This month, we're going into more depth about "repentance."



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Love, Spirit, Life



Swedenborg likens repentance to the third day of creation:

The third stage is one of repentance. During this time, at the prompting of the inner self, we speak devoutly and reverently and yield a good harvest (acts of neighborly kindness, for instance). These effects are lifeless nonetheless, since we suppose that they come of our own doing. They are called the tender plant, then the seed-bearing plant, and lastly the fruit tree.

-Secrets of Heaven: 9

Later he added:

Genesis 1:11, 12. And God said, "Let the earth cause the sprouting on the earth of the tender plant, of the plant bearing its seed, of the fruit tree making the fruit that holds its seed, each in the way of its kind"; and so it was done. And the earth produced the tender plant, the plant bearing its seed in the way of its kind, and the tree making the fruit that held its seed in the way of its kind. And God saw that it was good. When the earth (a person) is so well prepared as to be able to accept heavenly seed from the Lord and to produce good and truth in some degree, that is the time.

-Secrets of Heaven: 29

The Lord is planting the seeds of our regeneration!



We tend to think of regeneration as a process of personal spiritual growth. However, Swedenborg's theology is one of inter-connection. Swedenborgian scholar Rev. Dr. George Dole sees it as a holographic description of reality.

In his book, **Sorting Things Out**, Dole writes that he came to see Swedenborg's theology differently through reading the work of physicists Karl Pribram and David Bohm on the subject of the

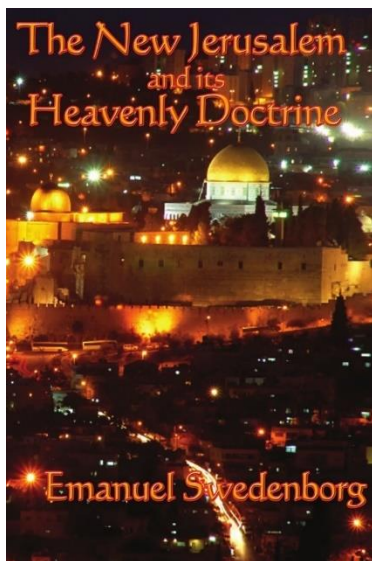
hologram.

“It attracted me because it contained statements that reminded me of statements in *Divine Love and Wisdom*. These were statements that I had taken as presumably true in a philosophical sense, but as basically incomprehensible, statements such as “The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things.”

-George Dole, *Sorting Things Out*

This reminded him of the William Blake poem:

To see the world in a grain of Sand
The universe in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the Palm of your Hand
And Eternity in an Hour.



We tend to think of our inner and outer selves as two different things. Swedenborg wrote:

We are so created as to be in the spiritual world and in the natural world at the same time. The spiritual world is where angels are, and the natural world is where mortals are. And since we are created in this way, we have been given an internal and an external-- an internal through our involvement in the spiritual world, and an external through our involvement in the natural world. Our internal is what is called the inner person, and our external is what is called the outer person.

-The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 36

But these are not two separate things – they are different characteristics of one thing. He goes on to say:

The interiors successively flow into the exteriors, even into the extreme or ultimate and there they exist and subsist together.

-The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 47

We think in terms of “matter” and “energy.” Swedenborg talks about them as form and essence. Love and Wisdom.

Yet, Swedenborg tells us that they are “distinguishably one.” Although they each have some unique characteristics, they function as a unit.

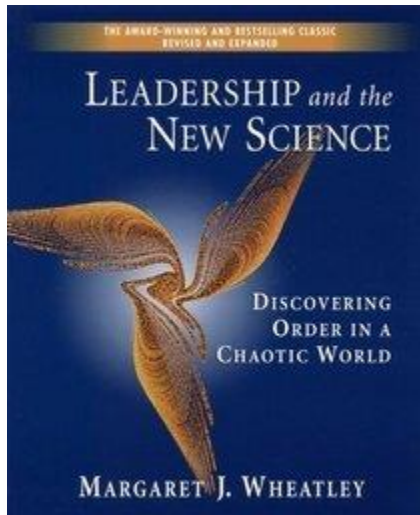
This is what quantum physics is all about.

New physics talks about how the universe consists of both particles and waves. The particles are the solid matter of the world that we can touch. The waves are energies that can't be seen or touched. Dole sees the waves as Swedenborg's "inflow." We have inflows that come to us internally and some externally. Our conscious self is at the center – at the interference of the two waves. This is basically how one makes a hologram – a flow from a single source is divided into direct and indirect flows. They meet in an interference pattern.

That means that the whole universe is in every grain of sand – and in every cell of our bodies.

It also means that "matter" and "energy" are the same thing. They are the same wholeness with two sets of characteristics. But they are one.

Our regeneration cannot be done in isolation; it involves all of creation!
It involves our interactions with the world.



Scientist Margaret Wheatley wrote:

Donella Meadows, an ecologist and author, quotes an ancient Sufi teaching : "You think because you understand one you must understand two, because one and one makes two. But you must also understand and" (1982, 23). When we view systems from this perspective, we enter an entirely new landscape of connections, of phenomena that cannot be reduced to simple cause and effect, or explained by studying the parts as isolated contributors.

-Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World.

Part of regeneration is allowing ourselves to "go with the flow" – to allow God to work in our lives in ways we don't understand. This concept gets us into "chaos theory."

We tend to think of order as one sort of thing, and chaos as another sort of thing altogether -- opposite of each other. But modern chaos theory tells us that they are same entity and neither can exist alone.

Another quote from Wheatley:

New understandings of change and disorder have also emerged from chaos theory. Work in this field has led to a new appreciation of the relationship between order and chaos. These two forces

are now understood as mirror images, two states that contain the other. A system can descend into chaos and unpredictability, yet within that state of chaos the system is held within boundaries that are well-ordered and predictable.

-Leadership and the New Science

This gets us back to what Swedenborg said here:

The interiors successively flow into the exteriors, even into the extreme or ultimate and there they exist and subsist together.

-The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 47

That is similar to what George Dole says here:

The central implication of the holographic model in the area of ethics is both simple and radical. If I am a microcosm of the whole, this has consequences for my entire concept of the self-other relationship. The only 'you' I know is the 'you' within my consciousness. I do indeed love my neighbor as I love myself, and vice versa, because my neighbor participates in my being."

Dole also adds that "every polarity that exists in the world exists within me." He therefore comes to an astounding realization:

"In the holographic model, doing [anything] on the personal scale and doing it on the global scale are inseparable." ...

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

What does all of this mean? We are one. We are part of a holographic oneness. If one person in the world is hungry, we are all hungry. If one person is enslaved, we are all enslaved. If one person achieves a goal, we all grow.

We can't just be spiritual in church on Sunday mornings. Every moment of every day, whatever decisions we make impact everyone. We do not exist in isolation; but in relationship. So every step we take in our own regeneration strengthens the spirituality of the whole! And regenerating steps taken by others elevate our own spirituality.

Let's pray.

"Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: We may not be able to understand how You work in our lives. We can't grasp the miraculous wholeness of Your creation. But we open our hearts to the inflow of Your love, and ask that You guide us daily on our pathways of regeneration – and support each other in the process.

Repentance: Changing Lanes

January 11, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Acts 9: 1-9

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Genesis 1:12

And the earth produced the tender plant, and plant bearing its seed in the way of its kind, and the tree making the fruit that held its seed in the way of its kind, and the tree making the fruit that held its seed in the way of its kind, and God saw that it was good.

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 513

... repentance is not possible unless we know not only in a general way but also in specific detail that we are sinners. This is something we cannot know unless we examine ourselves, see the sins that are within us, and condemn ourselves on their account. The contrition that preachers say is necessary to our faith has nothing in common with the actions just listed. It is only a thought and a confession that we have been born into the sin of Adam and into an inclination toward the evils that spring from that sin, and that therefore the wrath of God is upon us and we deserve damnation, destruction, and eternal death. Clearly, then, this contrition is not the same as repentance.

Message **Repentance: Changing Lanes**

One of my favorite Bible stories is of Paul on the road to Damascus. One of my favorite movies is "Changing Lanes." They both can give us a deeper understanding of "repentance."

We are continuing to explore Swedenborg's first stage of regeneration: repentance, as we find ourselves at the 4th step of A.A.

Both the story of Paul and the movie are about profound and utter "turning around" of one's life. Transformation. In Paul's situation, his conversion was sudden and dramatic. While on the road to persecute Christians, he saw a great light, fell to the ground, and heard a great voice asking, "Saul; why do you persecute me?"

Saul was transformed into Paul; a strong and faithful servant of the Lord's. It happened in an instant.



This form of repentance is probably the fastest possible!

For most of us, our transformation is a long process taking weeks, months, and years. In the movie, *Changing Lanes*, the change in life is not instantaneous, as with Paul. But it doesn't take weeks or years. It happens in one day.

That day just happens to be Good Friday. It is a day in which one man, Gavin Banke (played by Ben Affleck) is racing to court to file an important paper that would bring in millions of dollars to his law firm. It is also a fraudulent piece of paper. The other man, Doyle Gipson (played by Samuel L. Jackson) is racing to family court to fight for custody of his two sons.

As fate – and the movie plot would have it – the two men collide on a busy street of New York. In the ensuing confusion, Gavin has accidentally left his important paper with Doyle. He races off, leaving Doyle by the side of the road with a disabled vehicle. By the time Doyle gets to court, he has lost custody of his sons.

Gavin, facing a judge, tries to explain why he lost this crucial document. He spends the rest of the day trying to get it back from Doyle. He hires a man to ruin Doyle's financial standing. Doyle becomes increasingly determined to destroy the document.

This accident changes their lives forever. The way things unfold on this Good Friday can only be the work of Divine Providence. Although fiction, it is a "fast track" version of how things happen to transform us in our own lives. It reminds us of how God has created "all things bright and beautiful" in the day; even the things that at first seem to be tragedies.

The entire movie can be seen in ten segments on YouTube, beginning with [Segment 1](#). I've summarized the beginning of the movie for you, and now invite you to watch segments #5 and #6. Here you can see God at work, as these men are faced with the most challenging moral struggle of their lives. I will also post the end of the movie, #10, which shows the final stage of transformation and how their lives have changes. WARNING; SPOILER! Because this is the end of the movie, you might want to skip it. Or maybe just watch [it all now!](#) Get the popcorn ready ...



Honoring MLK

January 18, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

**Revelation 21: 1-5, New International Version
A New Heaven and a New Earth**

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.

Micah 6: 8

*He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, 876

"And I John saw the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven" signifies the New Church to be established by the Lord at the end of the former church, which will be consociated with the New Heaven in Divine truths as to doctrine and as to life (n. 879-880)

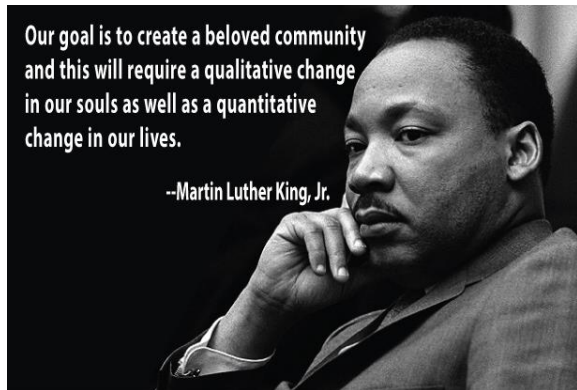
From Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

**Message
Honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.**



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Love, Spirit, Life

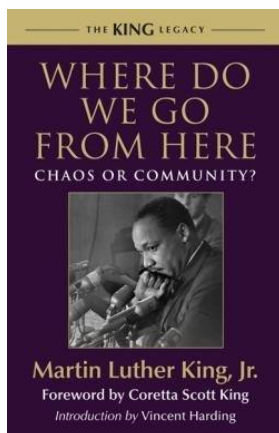


On Monday, we honor the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. In honor of this event, let's focus on King's extraordinary concept of "beloved community." It may seem familiar to readers of Swedenborg, for our Emanuel's New Jerusalem is much the same concept. However, King describes it in passionate ways that articulate the issues of our own time.

In 1956, King spoke at the Montgomery bus boycott. He had only been out of seminary for two years. Yet he put forth the astounding idea that the end goal of the boycott was *reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community.*

What did he mean by "beloved community?"

We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.



After the March to Montgomery in the spring of 1966, several thousand marchers were stuck at the airport due to late planes:

As I stood with them and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids and shop workers brimming with vitality and enjoying a rare comradeship, I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood [Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? (Harper & Row, 1967) p. 9]

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

In a real sense, all life is interrelated.

Let us be dissatisfied until rat-infested, vermin-filled slums will be a thing of a dark past and every family will have a decent sanitary house in which to live. Let us be dissatisfied until the empty stomachs of Mississippi are filled and the idle industries of Appalachia are revitalized. . . . Let us be

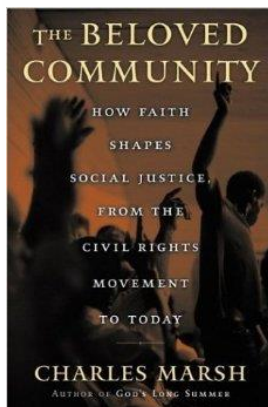
dissatisfied until our brothers of the Third World of Asia, Africa and Latin America will no longer be the victims of imperialist exploitation, but will be lifted from the long night of poverty, illiteracy and disease. ["Honoring Dr. Du Bois," in Freedomways, VIII, s (Spring 1968), pp. 110-111].

In a 1957 speech, Birth of a New Nation, Dr. King said,
The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence is emptiness and bitterness.

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.

In his 1963 sermon, Loving Your Enemies,
With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.

And from "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," 1957
I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end of that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community. But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposites into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.



In *The Beloved Community*, Charles March 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.]

Many people honor MLK day by engaging in some volunteer activity that serves the needs of our community. What will you do this week to help us become a "beloved community"? Choose any volunteer activity that serves others in love. It doesn't need to be an entire day. If you can spend one hour in loving service, you will help transform our violent earth into a caring "beloved community."

Let us pray:

Help me to honor Martin Luther King, Jr., and the many people past and present fighting for racial justice. Please use my hands and feet to walk to where there is need, and to serve others in love. Let me do one thing today to make the world a little bit better, in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.



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Love, Spirit, Life

Dancing with Swedenborg

January 25, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 77: 1-20

I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.

When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;
I mused, and my spirit grew faint.
Selah

You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.

I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;
I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

"Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?"

Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?

Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"
Selah

Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

Your ways, O God, are holy.
What god is so great as our God?

You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
Selah

The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.



The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.

Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.

Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.

You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven, 8339

The meaning of 'dance' as that which has regard to affection for spiritual truth, and means the delightful feeling or gladness belonging to it, dealt with below. In ancient times not only musical instruments and singing served to bear witness to gladness of heart but also dancing. Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. This explains why 'dancing' is mentioned in the Word, meaning the glad feelings that belong to affections for truth, or to faith grounded in good or charity, as in Jeremiah, Again you will adorn your timbrels, and will go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. Their life will become like a watered garden, and they will not sorrow any more. Then will the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together. Jer. 31:4, 12, 13.

Message Dancing with Swedenborg



Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan gave a talk to honor Swedenborg's birthday in 2009 at Byrn Athyn College. She talked about how Swedenborg might have been feeling Jan. 28th, 1709; the eve of his 21st birthday.

She said:

Emanuel Swedberg sat in the library of the University in Uppsala, Sweden. ... Emanuel tried to concentrate. He was a student of philosophy in his final year at the university, a discipline, which at that time included mathematics, his particular passion. He had matriculated ten years ago, as a boy of eleven. First he had attended classes in preparation for gymnasium or high school, later he took



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courses as a gymnasium student; and now he was a man, concluding his university career by writing his thesis or disputation. A successful defense of it would mark his graduation. His thesis was on his mind, but so were other things, tomorrow God willing, he would celebrate his twenty-first birthday. He could hardly wait! He wondered if his fellow members of the Västmanland Dala Student Nation would do something to honor him, a dinner perhaps, or going out on the town. He certainly hoped so!

We know that the young man Emanuel successfully defended his thesis, and went on to achieve a brilliant and unsurpassed career.

Swedenborg lived at a time when religion and science were at odds. He was a lone voice crying out that they belonged together. Swedenborg did not focus on separating them; of choosing between one and the other. His emphasis was that the essence of existence was putting both together. They meld together into a “distinguishable oneness,” in which each retains some of its uniqueness, but together they create something that neither could do alone.

Today he would probably find modern physics compatible with his theology.

Modern physics has established that reality involves both “particle” and “wave.” The “waves” are in constant motion drawing the particles into creative relationship.

Physicist Fritz Capra wrote about reality as a dance:

Modern physics has shown us that movement and rhythm are essential properties of matter ... that all matter is involved in a creative cosmic dance. [Fritz Capra]

In today’s reading from Swedenborg, we can see that he saw dance as a way to honor God.

One of my favorite Biblical passages is in Exodus. God parts the Red Sea so that that Israelites can cross it on dry land. When they safely reach the other side:

Then Miriam the prophetess ... took a tambourine in her hand, and all the other women followed her with tambourines and dancing. Ex. 15:20



Swedenborg says this passage shows us that “dance” means spiritual truth and gladness of heart. [S.H. 420]

Swedenborg also talked about the movement or flow towards wholeness:

346. *When many are speaking at the same time, there is a certain most beautiful harmony, a very lovely kind of wave-like movement toward oneness, because of the agreement. At such times they also possess much more force of action and speech, as I have, by the Divine mercy of God the Messiah, experienced on several occasions, together with a deep happiness. The beauty itself of the*

melodic progression, ending up in unity, was also shown to me in an amazing way, and it was stunning, beyond all description. Spiritual Experiences-Word Explained (Odhner) n. 34

The Sacred Dance Guild believes that sacred dance is a catalyst for spiritual growth and change through the integration of mind, body, and spirit. ... as an agent of change; and as a message of peace.

Some Sufi traditions celebrate dances of peace, and the Whirling Dervishes are Sufi's who use movement as prayer.

Kathryn Mihelick, Development Director and Director of the Leaven Dance Company says: *Movement is the universal language which integrates us, speaks across cultures, and transcends the spoken word to manifest the spirit. "To move is human....to dance is divine."*

Connie Tyler, Resource Director of the dance company, says: *We have Jewish dancers, participants in Dances of Universal Peace, people who do Yoga dance, Buddhist dance, the traditional temple dances of both Northern and Southern India ...What is important is what is in the heart and the soul of the dancer, the connection to the divine.*



All of this says a lot about community.
Last week, we noted this quotation from Margaret Wheatley:

*Donella Meadows, an ecologist and author, quotes an ancient Sufi teaching :
You think because you understand one you must understand two, because one and one makes two.
But you must also understand and" (1982, 23). When we view systems from this perspective, we
enter an entirely new landscape of connections, of phenomena that cannot be reduced to simple
cause and effect, or explained by studying the parts as isolated contributors.
-Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World.*

Community is about the "and." A congregation is a community with a spirituality focus.

You think because you understand yourself and you understand another person, you will understand what their relationship will be like. But a relationship involves the "and" in a constant interactive dance! When we strive to create a better world – Swedenborg's *New Jerusalem* or Martin Luther King's *Beloved Community* – we are in a continuous dance together towards wholeness.

I think if Swedenborg wanted us to remember one thing about him in this birthday week, it would be for us to live in the "ands" where we are constantly dancing with each other and the universe – and integrating pieces into a wholeness.

To honor Swedenborg's birthday, take some time today to enjoy the dance of the universe that is at the essence of our world!.

Finding Your Ruling Loves

February 1, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Ask, Seek, Knock

7"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

8For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

9"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

13"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matthew 7: New International Version

From Swedenborg

TC 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.

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. H.S. 6190

Message **Finding Your Ruling Loves**

Are you ready?

Are you really ready? Entirely ready?

Ready for what, you may ask.

For God to remove all defects of character, of course.

We're comparing Swedenborg's repentance to step 6 of AA:

#6 *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character*
to Swedenborg's concept of repentance.

A.A. refers to our character defects. Swedenborg prefers to talk about the barriers that keep Divine influx away from our hearts.

Wilson Van Dusen says:



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Influx is the very act by which the Divine flows in and creates.

He says that an intense experience of God -- like in a mystical encounter, is simply more influx.

Grant Schnarr discusses this in his book: *Spiritual Recovery: A Twelve Step Guide*.

Focusing on our character defects, admitting them, and then asking God to remove them from us may appear to be a negative process. But these steps are really not negative. Quite the contrary, they are truly positive, as anyone who has practiced them can testify. [Page 59]

Schnarr encourages us to think of a gardener in a rose garden filled with weeds. Is it a negative or positive process to pull the weeds? It may be tedious, hot work. But only by pulling the weeds can the roses flourish.

He also asks us to consider a company that finds a defect on their production line. Is it a negative process to fix the defect? What about diagnosing and removing a cancer?

Schnarr writes: *We often experience God as an obscure, elusive being. But God really is love, and when love enters our hearts, we allow God to enter. God is peace, love, and serenity.*

Schnarr goes on to say:

Swedenborg describes the process of removing our shortcomings as taking away the barriers that impede the inflow of the Divine within us. The light shines because the darkness has been removed. When we become entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character – and then allow God to do so – the Divine flows in and opens us up to influence from heaven. ...After all, we are quite attached to many of those character defects. Of course we are ready to shed those that cause us immediate pain, but we are less inclined to let go of those we are comfortable with.

How is this like repentance?

Looking at our “character defects” is like coming to understand what our deepest loves are.

Swedenborg writes:

Our love is our life itself. What our love is like determines how we live and therefore everything about what we are as human beings. It is, however, specifically our ruling or dominant love that makes us who we are. SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL (2014-08-01). *Regeneration: Spiritual Growth and How It Works* (Kindle Locations 169-171). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.

As we move along the path of regeneration, our love increasingly is for others;

Heavenly love is loving service for its own sake, loving for their own sakes the good things we do for church, country, human community, and fellow citizen. When we love these things for our own sakes, though, we love them only as servants who wait on us. It then follows that when we are caught up in love for ourselves we want our church, country, human communities, and fellow-citizens to serve us rather than wanting to serve them. We place ourselves above them, and them beneath us. SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL (2014-08-01). *Regeneration: Spiritual Growth and How It Works* (Kindle Locations 218-221). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.

MORE ON RULING LOVES:

What is it that you love most deeply? It will guide you into your process of repentance.

Today is Feb. 1st. In the Catholic tradition, it is the feast day of St. Bridget. In the pagan tradition, tomorrow, Feb. 2nd is Imbolc, a day to honor the goddess Brigit. It was a time to celebrate that

spring is just around the corner. It is a time of anticipating “new beginnings.” In the U.S., we often think of this by focusing on “Groundhog Day” to see if we have another six weeks of winter left.

Of course, in Maine, we have another six weeks of winter left no matter whether the groundhog sees his shadow or not! And this year it may take a few weeks beyond that for all the snow to melt!

But it’s not too early to think about “new beginnings.”

To Swedenborg, new beginnings were part of the process of spiritual growth, which he called “regeneration.”

He saw the days of creation as telling this story of spiritual growth.

Regeneration begins with “repentance”

For Swedenborg, the way to begin a spiritual journey is not so much about what we do, but who we are.

In his commentary on Gen 1:3 [*and God said let there be light*], he wrote:

The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something transcendent. [SH, 20]

If you focus just on external matters – of the earth and of the ego – then what you consider “good” is only a selfish idea based on your own need. *We need to know, too, that the Lord is Goodness itself, or life, and truth itself, or the light, and consequently that nothing good or true exists that does not come from him.*

We start the journey by letting in the light – of God.

Let us pray.

Dear Divine Presence: Please help us become ready to open our hearts to Your guidance in our lives. Amen.



Becoming Entirely Ready

February 8, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Ask, Seek, Knock

7"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

9"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

13"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7 NIV

From Swedenborg

C 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.

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. H.S. 6190

Message Becoming Entirely Ready

I want to tell you a story about a modern-day woman named "Eve." She represents any one of us; all of us. It could just as easily be a story about "Adam," and you can change the name if you wish.

One night, as Eve is falling asleep in her upscale New York City condo, an angel appears at the side of her bed and says, "I am here with a message from God -- -- ." Eve half opens one eye and sees this shining figure by the bed. She mutters to herself, "I've got to stop watching the reruns of *Touched by An Angel* before bed at least I've got to stop drinking so much while I'm watching the reruns!"

But the angel -- or whatever -- seems persistent. "God is pure love, you know! And God is sending you this love every moment of your time on earth! We call it *influx*. God is sending you this influx to transform your life! But you keep latching the shutters of your heart." Eve is sure the angel has a



Scottish accent like Monica on the TV show. So she decides to call her “Monica.”

Eve has a busy day tomorrow, and just wants to get some sleep. “Uh, Monica, is that the message? I’m pretty tired...”

“Oh, no. The message is a gift! I have the power to open the shutters of your heart that you have locked to keep God out of your life ... by morning; God will be transforming your life in accord with the Divine Plan. I just need your permission.”

“Sure, fine. Go to it, Angel.” She makes a mental note to remind herself to write this dream down in the morning to share with her drinking buddies at the local bar.

The next morning, Eve awakens early to bright sunlight streaming in the window. “What!” she shouts, jumping out of bed. “I spent a lot of money on window darkening shades and curtains ...” Eve sees that her dream is still going on. Monica is still there – and beaming in an utterly infuriating way for so early in the morning.

“Oh, yes; isn’t it wonderful! God is shining the light into your life now! Time to get up and greet the new day!”

Eve staggers into the kitchen, hoping that this angel can make good coffee. She sniffs something rather disgusting; definitely not coffee.

Monica says: “Oh, that’s my Early Morning Energy Herbal Brew.”

“How nice. But I need coffee to get myself to work ...”

“Oh; not to worry! God signed you up for a vacation day!”

“Oh, no! I only have a few of those, and I’m saving them to go to the beach with friends!”

“Nope. That’s cancelled. God says you always drink too much with that crowd.”

“They are my friends!”

“They were. Now, God has a new list of people for you to make friends with ...”

Eve is shocked beyond words.

Monica continues. “Here’s your new schedule for the day: You are spending the morning at a Wholistic Center where you will get a long-overdue physical check up, a class on meditation, an hour of yoga ...”

Eve is getting panicked. “I never agreed to this ... never.”

“Oh, but you did. You said I could take away all your barriers to God transforming your life! You gave God free reign to transform your life. And now God is helping you achieve those New Year’s resolutions you had for better health and happiness.”

“That will make me exhausted and miserable – not healthy and happy.”

“Ah, but you need to trust God’s wisdom on the best path for you!”

Eve doesn’t believe in prayer. But she finds herself praying: “Dear God – if there is a God – please

make this angel-hallucination-dream thing go away. NOW.”

However, as things turn out, God doesn't answer that prayer. Eve's consent for unmitigated influx takes priority over everything else in the Heavenly Realm. The angels eagerly await anyone's willingness to become open to influx, and they will grab any loop hole to make it happen!

You probably know the end of the story. Eve was utterly miserable for days. For weeks. Actually, for months. She was frightened. She yelled and screamed at God's tyranny in the free will of her life. But God's transformation had begun, and was not to be halted.

Let's look in on Eve a few years later. She stopped drinking and went to A.A. meetings. She got a new group of friends, with whom she shares a zest for spiritual growth. Her work no longer dominates her days. She has time for yoga, and cooking healthy meals. The Divine is part of her every-day existence, and she can't imagine how she ever lived without that sacred intimacy. She hardly remembers how it was that it all started ...she just has a vague sense of some dream that started her life on a different track.

Eve's initial reaction to God in her life is how many of us feel when we read the sixth step of A.A., which is closely related to the fifth. We focused on the fifth step last month, and will consider the sixth step this month.

#5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

#6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character

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Are you "entirely ready to have God remove all defects of character?" It's a big commitment to invite God into your life to re-arrange things. But it can also be a powerful and transformative step.

Let us pray.

Dear God,

Help me to overcome what barriers I have in the way of receiving your transforming love. Help me to become ready for you to work within my life so that I can grow in your love and share it with others.



A Valentine to God

February 15, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Corinthians 13 (New International Version)

Love

1If I speak in the tongues[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If 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. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8Love 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. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11When 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. 12Now 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.

13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Footnotes:

1 Corinthians 13:1 Or languages

1 Corinthians 13:3 Some early manuscripts body that I may boast

From Swedenborg

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.

Divine Love and Wisdom, NCE #424

Message A Valentine to God



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Love, Spirit, Life

What did you do yesterday on Valentine's Day? Did you give a valentine to someone you love? Did you give a Valentine to God?

When we think about those we love, we rarely include God on that list. We usually see our love for the Divine as completely different from our love for each other.

Yet many mystics from many traditions have written of their love for God with a fiery passion, and have expressed it in poetry. Much of the mystical poetry of the world is a kind of valentine to God expressing a passionate love.

In the Sufi tradition, God is the "Beloved," for whom one has the deepest of feelings.

A modern Sufi leader writes this:

"Sufism is a mystical path of love in which God, or Truth, is experienced as the Beloved. The inner relationship of lover and Beloved is the core of the Sufi path. "

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

*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.*

These Sufi poems put loving God in the same category as loving humans.

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 the Christian tradition. 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 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 Mechtild 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 sure.
Only union with the Friend can cure it.*

St. Teresa wrote this:

*Ah, my God without Thee,
Life goes sadly by,
And my yearning for Thee
Makes me long to die.*

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.*

For Swedenborg, the joy of feeling one with God, or the agony of feeling separate, are not particularly important in daily life. Our actions are more important than our feelings; and we express love by loving uses for others.

We serve God moment by moment in our lives, even when we don't feel God's presence. A common earthly experience is two humans feeling deep romantic love for each other, and committing themselves to a life together. As the years pass, the feeling of romance is not present at every moment, yet they find a deeper love in the sharing of life's daily experiences.

We all have our moments of feeling God's love for us so intensely, that we are thrilled to serve God in our lives. Then, much of life is lived with uncertainty as to where God is. Then, we may feel the despair of the one who's Lover is lost. Many days we feel neither love nor loss; just no sense of God – so we simply do our best to live the day as we think God wants.

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 sometimes forget to open our hearts to God's Love that is all around us. We may not feel this every moment of every day. But that's what Valentine's Day is for – to remind ourselves both of our love for each other, and the intense love of God that flows into us at every moment; whether or not we are aware of it. Maybe you didn't send God a Valentine; but you can spend some quality time together now.



Hitting Bottom

February 22, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

The glory that you gave me I have given them, so that they may be one just as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be made perfect in one, and so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I may be in them. (John 17:22, 23, 26)

From Swedenborg

[3] *We can be compared to a garden, our understanding to light, and our will to warmth. A garden has light in winter but no warmth, while it has both light and warmth in summer. So when all we have is the light of our understanding, we are like a garden in winter, but when we have both light in our understanding and warmth in our will we are like a garden in summer.*

In fact, the wisdom in our understanding comes from spiritual light and the love in our will comes from spiritual warmth, for spiritual light is divine wisdom and spiritual warmth is divine love.

NCE Doctrine of Life, #86

Message Hitting Bottom

Step 6

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character

So how does one become “entirely ready” to let God remove our defects? For some people it involves what many call “hitting bottom.”

[Nic Scheff](#), author and addict, writes:

Sometimes people ask me if they can avoid losing everything before they get clean. My story offers a simple answer: I lost more than I ever could have imagined, and then I lost even more. Sometimes people ask me if they can avoid losing everything before they get clean. My story offers a simple answer: I lost more than I ever could have imagined, and then I lost even more.

One question I am almost always asked when I speak at high schools and other places is if it's necessary for someone to “hit bottom” in order to get sober.But all I can do is share my own experience. Because for me, well, yes, I did have to hit bottom—like 10 times.

He says that he was working on his book, *Tweak* [which became a best seller], and had been sober for 18 months. Then he got re-involved with an old girlfriend, who was also sober at the time. Nic was desperate for her affections, so when she got into crack, he did, too. He writes:

Smoking crack led to a drug binge that would turn out to be absolutely the worst relapse of my life.



We were shooting coke and heroin and meth and taking tons of Klonopin and Xanax and Suboxone every day just to keep from going into withdrawals (when you use enough heroin, it counteracts the Suboxone effects). We sold basically everything we owned to get more drugs. I almost lost my arm from an abscess. I kept going into convulsions from shooting too much cocaine.

He ended up becoming psychotic and ended up in the hospital – and from there to rehab.

It was going well, until his girlfriend showed up with drugs and invited him to come join her.

And so I went to my room and started packing up my stuff. But then I looked at her and, suddenly, I realized that if I did go with her, we were both going to die. And it wasn't going to be some romantic Kurt Cobain death. It was going to be real, an end of everything, no-more-chances, no-more-hope death.

He said “no” to her and stayed in rehab. His life was changed forever.

That was the end for me.

That was my bottom.

And, yes, it was necessary for me to...uh...hit it.

And to have that, as they say, God moment—which gave me the strength to make that one right decision in a lifetime of bad decisions.

That was, for him, “hitting bottom” – and encountering God.

The late [Roger Ebert](#), well-known movie critic, also had had a moment like that. He had become quite dependent on alcohol, and his doctor kept trying to get him to stop. He did, for a few weeks, but then resisted any help. He couldn't leave his job for an inpatient program, and had no time for A.A. But his doctor persuaded Ebert to have a conversation with a drug counselor.

This woman, I will call her Susan, had an office on Lincoln Avenue in a medical building across the street from Somebody Else's Troubles, which was well known to me. She said few people stayed sober for long without A.A.. I said the meetings didn't fit with my schedule and I didn't know where any were. She looked in a booklet. "Here's one at 401 N. Wabash," she said. "Do you know where that is?" I confessed it was the Chicago Sun-Times building. "They have a meeting on the fourth floor auditorium," she said. It was ten steps from my desk. "There's one today, starting in an hour. Can you be there?"

She had me. I was very nervous. I stopped in the men's' room across the hall to splash water on my face, and walked in. Maybe thirty people were seated around a table. I knew one of them. We used to drink together. I sat and listened.

Because he learned that there just happened to be an A.A. meeting in the room next to where he worked, starting right away, he walked in. And he stayed actively involved for the rest of his life; and never had another drink.

Grant Schnarr writes:

Swedenborg describes the process of removing our shortcomings as taking away the barriers that impede the inflow of the Divine within us. The light shines because the darkness has been removed. When we become entirely ready to have God remove our defects of character – and then ALLOW God to do so ..the Divine flows in and opens us up to spiritual influence from heaven. Our conscious minds becomes ordered, illuminated, cleansed of defects, and raised up into a new spiritual state. [Spiritual Recovery: A 12-step Guide, p. 60]



He then quotes Swedenborg in *Doctrine of Life* #86, 4 [quoted below in the New Century Edition]:

[4] *If we fail to turn our backs on evils because they are sins, the cravings of our evils clog the deeper levels of our earthly mind on the side where our will resides and are like a thick veil, like black clouds beneath the spiritual mind, preventing it from opening. However, as soon as we turn our backs on evils because they are sins, the Lord flows in from heaven, takes the veil away, dispels the cloud, and opens the spiritual mind, thereby admitting us to heaven.*

Sometimes, when things are the most bleak, God is sweeping out defects that are blocking Love from flowing in. Even the most despairing of life situations can serve as an opportunity to ask for God's help at removing any barriers to pure Love.

In A.A., it's called "hitting bottom;" to Swedenborg it's about turning our backs on evil – which clears the way for God's inflowing Love – and moving from an experience of hell to an experience of heaven!

However, you think of it, it can be a life-altering experience on the road of "regeneration."

Have you had any times when you felt great despair, only to find that you could open your heart to God's light, and begin anew?

Let's pray.

Dear Lord,

Help us to remember that Your inflowing love is always there for us. Help us to turn over to You any barriers that keep us from fully opening our hearts to Your Love. Amen.



Removing Shortcomings with Humility

March 1, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 18:9

And he spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

From Swedenborg

39 Genesis 1:20.

And God said, "Let the waters cause the creeping animal—a living soul—to creep out. And let the bird flit over the land, over the face of the expanse of the heavens."

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.

From the doctrine taught by faith, anyone can see that we cannot so much as think a good thought or will a good result or consequently do a good deed except through the Lord's power. After all, in Matthew the Lord says:

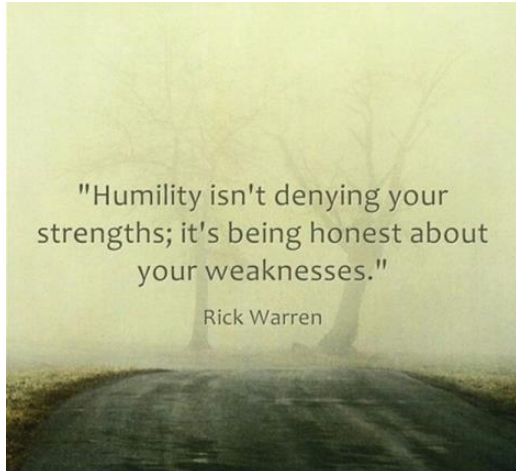
The one who sows good seed is the Son of Humankind.⁶⁰ (Matthew 13:37)

Good cannot come from anywhere but this same unique source, as he also says: Nobody is good except the one God. (Luke 18:19)

Message **Removing Shortcomings with Humility**



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



We are now moving into Swedenborg's fourth stage of regeneration: Reformation. This month we'll be comparing this stage with AA's steps #7:

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings

Here is the Step #7 prayer from the AA Big Book:

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen. [AA Big Book, p. 76]

I heard about a young man, newly sober, who had recently started the A.A. 12-step recovery program. I'll call him Bob. Bob had worked very hard on Step 6, preparing himself to have his defects removed. At last, he was ready for Step 7. He said that he prayed the above prayer one night before going to bed. He awoke with great excitement, eager to live his life free of defects. At breakfast, his wife spilled coffee and he yelled that she was a stupid idiot. At work, his boss wanted his over-due report and he found himself lying again that it was almost ready.

By lunch time, it was clear that he still had most of his character defects. He was so disappointed in God and in the recovery program, that he almost drank that night. Fortunately, he decided instead to go to a meeting. Bob chatted with his sponsor, Sam, during the break and told him about his disappointment. Sam was rather amused, as he pointed out that Bob had been working the steps all by himself; not with a sponsor or a group or even workbook materials. Sam said, "You forgot the most important part: humbly asked God. You have to be humble to know that you can't do it by yourself!"

Bob joined a group working on the steps, and did several things differently. First, he did the first 6 steps again, and took his time to delve into them deeply. By the time he reached step 7, he no longer expected God to magically take away his defects. He was willing to work with God.

This time he read carefully these words in AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions: *The Seventh Step is where we make the change in our attitude which permits us, with humility as our guide, to move out from ourselves toward others and toward God. The whole emphasis of Step Seven is on humility.*

A book on recovery says that there are 3 reasons why we need humility

1. So that we can recognize the severity of our character defects.
2. So that we can acknowledge the limits of human power in addressing these character defects.
3. So that we can appreciate the enormity of God's power to transform lives.

Serenity, A Companion for Twelve Step Recovery, p. 54-55



Grant Schnarr, author of *Spiritual Recovery: A Twelve Step Guide* says:

Humility is used in this step to remind us that we will still be tempted to tackle our character defects alone – without God's help.... Asking God to remove our shortcomings isn't enough. We have to do our part and cooperate with him to allow these changes to take place. [pp. 69-70]

This shows us the similarity between Swedenborg and step #7. We move from stage 3 – where we think we do good all by ourselves – to the humility of stage 4 when we realize God does it all.

Swedenborg writes:

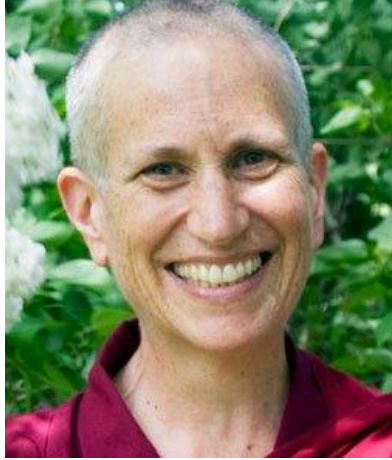
In the fourth state, love stirs and faith enlightens us. Before this time we may have spoken devoutly and yielded a good harvest, but we did so in a state of trial and anguish, not at the call of faith and kindness. In consequence they are now kindled in our inner self and are called the two lights. SH #10

We've already read this by Swedenborg:

*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.
From the doctrine taught by faith, anyone can see that we cannot so much as think a good thought or will a good result or consequently do a good deed except through the Lord's power. ...*

[2] Still, when the Lord brings us back to life, or regenerates us, he at first allows us to harbor these mistaken ideas. At that stage we cannot view the situation in any other way. Neither can we be led in any other way to believe and then perceive that everything good and true comes from the Lord alone. ... SH #39

So, it is essential that we approach this step with humility. Yet, it is also important that we not become so self-critical, that we are beating ourselves up.



Venerable Thubten Chodron, a Buddhist nun, says

There are situations where we have a problem, and, perhaps, we blame ourselves. We are very good at that, too, aren't we? We can really get into that one..."It's all my fault. Something is wrong with me. I'm terrible. I'm this awful person! Look at me! Oh, nobody can love me. I'm horrible. I did it again!

It's called the "Beat-myself-up" syndrome. And we do it very, very well. ...

We're very important, then, aren't we? Extremely important. So it's very curious how, when we get into this performance of blaming ourselves, and feeling guilty, and self-hatred. It's actually a rather contorted way our self-cherishing mind has of making us extremely important.

We can have transformation in our character defects even when there is not a specific point in time when we prayed for that. In the movie, *The Green Mile*, Paul was radically transformed through spiritual experiences. We don't see a specific point when he realized his defects and asked to have them removed. But he gave up his limited understanding of "faith" and "God" through his life experiences.

AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* talks about removing character defects as a life-long process. Grant Schnarr suggests moving through defects one at a time, over a period of years. He emphasizes that there must be teamwork between us and God. He suggests an image of turning your life over to God, and then getting in the passenger seat of your car, and holding up your keys for God to grab and drive! That will be a long wait; God doesn't drive cars for us! But God does offer guidance and strength when we humbly ask for help in letting go of our stumbling blocks to finding union with the Divine.

Is there a particular defect that you would like to ask God to help you with this week?

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen



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Love, Spirit, Life

The Two Lights: Love & Faith

March 8, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

From Genesis I:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

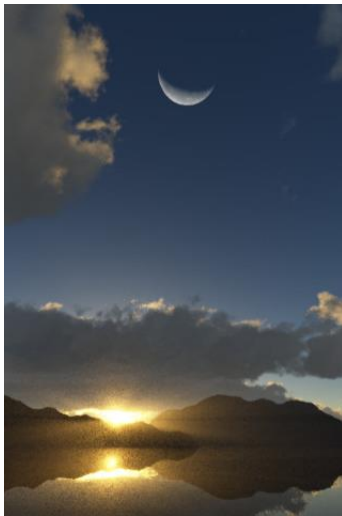
And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

From Swedenborg

Love and faith work the same way in our inner being as warmth and light work in our outer flesh and are therefore represented by warmth and light. This is why the lights are said to be placed in the expanse of the heavens, or our inner being, the greater light in our will and the smaller in our intellect. But they only seem to be present there, just as the light of the sun only appears to be in physical objects. It is the Lord's mercy alone that stirs our will with love and our intellect with truth or faith.

Message **The Two Lights: Love & Faith**



In the passage from Genesis, above, it says:

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.



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Notice that it doesn't say that God made light and darkness to be opposites. It says that both night and day are forms of light; just different kinds. One is a greater light and one is a lesser light.

Swedenborg sees these two lights are parts of our inner being;

Love and faith are first called the great lights, then love is called the greater light and faith the smaller light.

Now, goodwill and faith are two distinct things, yet they become one in us and make us people of the church—they cause the church to exist within us.

--TC 336, 32

This month we're looking at the 4th stage of regeneration: "reformation." Swedenborg sees this stage as connected with the two lights of creation:

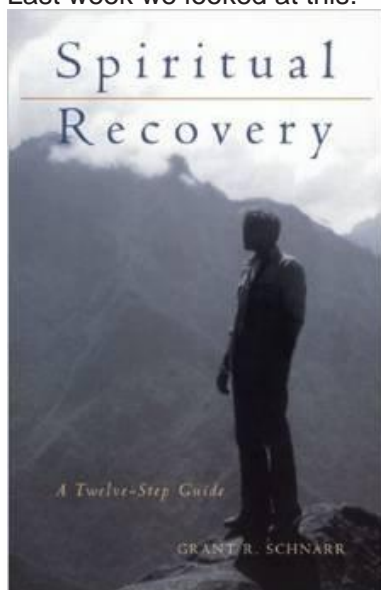
In the fourth stage, love stirs and faith enlightens us. Before this time we may have spoken devoutly and yielded a good harvest, but we did so in a state of trial and anguish, not at the call of faith and kindness. In consequence, they are now kindled in our inner self, and are called the two lights. Secrets of Heaven, #10

What is the connection for Swedenborg between these inner "two lights" and "reformation?"

The seventh step of AA says:

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Last week we looked at this:



Grant Schnarr, author of *Spiritual Recovery: A Twelve Step Guide* says:

Humility is used in this step to remind us that we will still be tempted to tackle our character defects alone – without God's help.... Asking God to remove our shortcomings isn't enough. We have to do our part and cooperate with him to allow these changes to take place. [pp. 69-70]

This shows us the similarity between Swedenborg's "reformation" and step #7. We move from stage

3 – when we recognize how many insensitive and selfish things we've done in the past, to accepting God's help at moving beyond that into a new way of living life.

When we move from "repentance" to "reformation," we are willing to let God into our lives to work with us. We may not recognize how much God is in charge of it all – we still believe we are doing this on our own. But we now want to try to live by the two lights: love and faith.

This month, we'll look more deeply at how we can allow these two lights to be beacons of God's presence in our lives.

During this time of Lent, it is a good opportunity to reflect on the ways that you can invite God to guide your day through the lights of love and faith.

How can you see God's guidance in your life this week? How can you open to heart to God's leading?

Let us pray:

Dear God,

Help me to see Your guiding lights of Love and Faith. Allow me to keep my heart open to Your guidance each day, honoring the lights that You allow to shine all around me – even in the darkest night.



Love: The Greater Light

March 15, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Gen. 1; 20-25, NIV

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven, 30, 2b

In verses 3–13 the things that had no living soul represent factual faith and faith truly understood. Faith brought alive by love, however, is represented by the animate creatures in verses 20–25. Consequently this is the point at which love and the faith that rises out of it are first dealt with, and they are called lights. Love is the greater light that rules by day; faith springing from love is the smaller light that rules by night. And because they must unite as one, the verb used with "lights" is singular, "let it be" rather than "let them be."

Message Love: The Greater Light



When Swedenborg describes the creation, he says that on the 4th day two great lights were created: *love is the greater faith to govern the day and faith is the lesser light to govern the night.*

Let's look at what Swedenborg has to say about love in this section of *Heavenly Secrets*. In this section, he is looking at the creation story as a way of understanding "regeneration." This is also the time we are moving into the 4th stage of regeneration: reformation.

Anyone can see perfectly well that no hint of life ever exists without some kind of love and that no trace of joy ever exists unless it results from love. The nature of the love determines the nature of the life and of the joy.

This is a profound statement of love. No life can exist without love! No joy can exist without love! Love is the basis of life itself – and of the joy that we find in our life. Think of the times in your life when you have experienced deep love and joy. What was happening in your life? If it was true love and joy, it involved your caring for others.

-Heavenly Secrets, 33

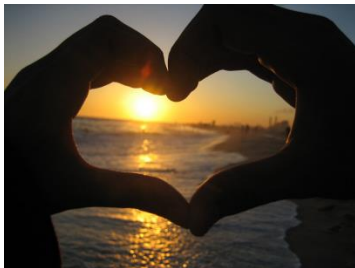
A paragraph later, Swedenborg writes:

Self-love and materialism produce an imitation of life and an imitation of joy, but since they are diametrically opposed to genuine love—that is, loving the Lord above all and loving our neighbor as ourselves—it stands to reason that they are not forms of love but of hatred. Notice that the more we love ourselves and worldly goods, the more we hate our neighbor and therefore the Lord.

This is a very “pithy” and concise way of expressing his most fundamental understanding of love: loving one’s self and material objects are NOT genuine love. In fact, they are so diametrically opposed to real love, that they are actually forms of hatred. If you love materialism, then you are actually involved with hatred – not love at all. In fact, the more immersed we become in loving ourselves and the worldly goods, the more we will be hating our neighbor and hating the Divine itself.

Was there ever a time you were immersed in materialism? If so, what was that like? According to Swedenborg, it would have been a time of selfish living; not a time of loving others.

But we need to differentiate a selfish materialism from the struggles of those in poverty. For many people, every day is a struggle to get enough food and to find a place to stay at night. Some people are struggling with physical illness and mental illness. Their thoughts will have a focus on food, shelter, and life’s necessities because of their need; not out of self-love. Each time we reach out a helping hand to someone in need, we are bringing more love into their lives and into our own.



Genuine love, then, is love for the Lord, and genuine life is a life of love received from him. True joy is the joy of that life.

Only one genuine love can exist, so only one genuine life can exist, and it gives rise to true joy and happiness, like that felt by angels in heaven.

These are uplifting and hopeful words! The more we love God and others, the more we will experience true joy in life!

I think that the message of love includes loving those who live in difficult life circumstances. And it is not just about love in our hearts for others; it is about working to create a more just world; giving more people a pathway to love and joy.

The more we love God, the more we will love other human beings. And the more we will work to bring more joy into the lives of others; which brings more joy to each of us!

It is an inspiring message of what love means as we move closer to Easter.

How do you see love at work in your own life?

Let us pray:

Dear God, help us to love You and to love others every day. Guide us to the ways we can best express Your love in the world. Help us grow in love and joy as we reach out a helping hand to those in need.



Faith: The Lesser Light

March 22, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1:14, 15, 16, 17.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to make a distinction between day and night; and they will act as signals and will be used for seasons for both the days and the years. And they will be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to shed light on the earth," and so it was done. And God made two great lights: the greater light to rule by day and the smaller light to rule by night; and the stars. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens, to shed light on the earth.

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven, 10

In the fourth stage, love stirs and faith enlightens us. Before this time we may have spoken devoutly and yielded a good harvest, but we did so in a state of trial and anguish, not at the call of faith and kindness. In consequence, they are now kindled in our inner self, and are called the two lights.

Secrets of Heaven, 32

Love and faith are first called the great lights, then love is called the greater light and faith the smaller light.

Message **Faith: The Lesser Light**



What is faith?

Let's look at what Swedenborg has to say.

Faith is Part of Love

Secrets of Heaven, 34

Love and faith can never be separated, because they make a single unit. This is why the sources of light when first mentioned are treated as grammatically singular in the statement, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens." Let me report some surprising facts in this connection. Because the Lord gives heavenly angels this kind of love, love reveals all religious knowledge to them. Love also



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gives them such a living and shining intelligence that it can hardly be described. For spirits who learn the doctrinal tenets of faith but lack love, on the other hand, life is so chill and the light so dim that they cannot even approach the near side of the threshold to heaven's entrance hall without fleeing in retreat.



Faith and love are one. Angels have love, and therefore loving faith. However, spirits who have “doctrinal tenets,” they can’t even get close to heaven.

This approach is quite extraordinary in today's world. If you ask most people what their faith is, they will tell you what they believe. If you ask where the beliefs come from, they might say that it is from their family and church; their faith tradition.

Swedenborg would not consider this to be a mature faith. Faith is not about doctrine. It’s about living in a loving way.

Faith is a Partnership with God

Secrets of Heaven, 34, 3

In fact, what else is faith but a partnership with God by means of truths that shape our understanding and thought? What else is love but a partnership with God through goodness that shapes our intentions and desires? God's connection to us is a spiritual connection that comes to an earthly plane; our connection to God is an earthly connection that comes from a spiritual plane.

This is How Faith is Formed

Secrets of Heaven, 348

From what I have said just above it is clear that there are three things that form faith in us: first, turning to the Lord; second, learning truths from the Word; and third, living by those truths.

Faith is about living. This is a central part of Swedenborg that allowed him to be inclusive of all loving religions. It wasn’t significant what doctrines an individual – or a faith community – have. It is how one lives that is important.

Everyone who lives with a love for God and each other is really in place beyond any individual religion. It is, in fact, a “new church” where people of all traditions can come together in loving actions.

- What do you call your faith?
- Is it a mature faith?



- Is it based on what you have actually found to be true, or on what things seem like they might be true?
- Is it something you memorized? Or something you grasp with your mind? Or do you own it in your heart?
- Is it based on your own experiences in life, or on stories of miraculous events that you have heard from others?
- Is it a faith freely chosen, or one that is coerced?
- Is it an integral part of your relationship with God?
- Do you live your life by your faith?

These are good questions to ponder this week as we move towards Palm Sunday.

LET US PRAY:

Dear Creator, help me to find faith deep within my heart; where love lives. Lead me into a week of sharing the love from my heart by living in a loving way – and realizing that this is my faith.



Palms & Prayers of Holy Week

March 29, 2015

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 22:¹_{SEPT}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.

Message **The Palms & Prayers of Holy Week**

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.

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 2015

April 5, 2015

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.

Message Easter 2015



Alleluia! Christ is risen!

What does that mean to you?

Marcus Borg, theologian gives the traditional Christian view:

The most familiar understanding of Jesus' death emphasizes its substitutionary sacrificial nature: he died for the sins of the world. This understanding is part of a larger package; namely, that all of us are sinners. In order for God to forgive us, a substitutionary sacrifice must be offered.



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He goes on to say that this is not the only Christian understanding of the death of Jesus. In fact, it was 1000 years after the crucifixion of Jesus before that concept was fully developed. In Mark's gospel, the substitutionary sacrifice theme is absent altogether.

It is also not Swedenborg's understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.



Swedenborg saw separate levels of reality connected by relationships called "correspondences." All of existence begins with the pure divine, and flows downward – into the heavens, into humans on earth and the animals and plants of the earth. This pure divine keeps flowing down. If we take the very smallest possible thing that exists, even it corresponds to the divine. Everything corresponds to higher levels. That is how both matter and spirit are both real; through correspondence they are all the same.

That is how there is union between humanity and divinity. Swedenborg called it the "Divine human" or the "God-man". And that is what Easter is all about: showing us the union between human and divine that unites us. Swedenborg referred to the "glorification" on the cross when humanity and Divinity become one.

This is one part of Swedenborg's concept of Easter: the union of humanity and divinity.

Another part of Swedenborg's Easter can best be understood through the new physics concept of a hologram.

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. ... 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.'

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.



Dole goes on to say that this helps us understand the resurrection. *It is wholly characteristic of the divine to be wholly present in every part of creation all the time.*

The Easter story is about how human and divine became one. It is about the divine being in the smallest pieces of existence.

We ourselves determine our eternal lifestyle. It is based on how we live; not what we believe. Jesus' time on earth helped to bring heavenly love into a stronger position on earth than evil. He taught us love by how he lived his life, and how he died.

So, Swedenborg's Easter is very sacred and joyful. We can never cease to exist, because we are united with God. As the God-Human, we are always growing and changing. We have eternity in which to explore all that we can be in this universal hologram. This gift is not limited to those of any particular religion or belief; instead it is the right of all human beings to move into union with God. Jesus modeled for us how this can happen by how he lived his life.

Easter is a time to look at new births taking place inside of each of us.

Where do you feel God at work within; allowing old parts of yourself to die as new parts are resurrected?

Dear God,

Thank you for the blessings of Easter. Help us to accept the gift of new birth that is ever-present in each of us. And guide our steps out to the world, where we can all help bring the birth of Your New Jerusalem into the world, where love and peace will flow everywhere. Amen.



Pearls Crushed to Powder

April 12, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 7: 1-6

Judging Others

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

From Swedenborg

True Christianity: 336

The Lord, goodwill, and faith form a unity in the same way our life, our will, and our intellect form a unity. If we separate them, each one crumbles like a pearl that is crushed to powder.

Message Pearls Crushed to Powder



April is our time to ponder the 8th step of AA:

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to amends to them all.

One **twelve-step workbook** [p. 87] says:

Step Eight brings us to the end of isolation from ourselves, our community and our Higher Power, and sets the course for restoring our relationships.

Are there relationships that you want to restore?

Another step book [160] says:

Step Eight begins the process of healing damaged relationships through our willingness to make amends for past misdeeds. We can let go of our resentments and fears and start to overcome the guilt, shame, and remorse we have because of our harmful actions. We can leave behind the gray, angry world of loneliness and move toward a bright future by being willing to make things right.



Our Swedenborgian reading is telling us that faith is part of a unity with the Lord and goodwill. Here it is again:

The Lord, goodwill, and faith form a unity in the same way our life, our will, and our intellect form a unity. If we separate them, each one crumbles like a pearl that is crushed to powder.

-True Christianity: 336: 6

That is quite a dramatic image! Think of your faith, your goodwill, and the Lord's love all like shining pearls when they are together. Then take them apart, and see them crumble to powder.

The Lord flows into everyone with all his divine love, all his divine wisdom, and all his divine life.

-365

Consider this:

...charity wants to coexist with faith but cannot because faith wants to rule over it, which goes against proper order. As long as faith wants to be in charge, it is not faith. But when charity is in charge, faith is faith. This is because the main concern of faith is charity, as shown before [§344]. Charity can be compared to a flame, which is essential for heat and light, since they come from it. Faith when separated can be compared to light, which without the warmth of the flame is still light, but a wintry light—and there is nothing that does not languish and die in winter's light.

-Swedenborg, Emanuel (2010-05-01). Secrets of Heaven 1: Portable: The Portable New Century Edition (Kindle Locations 3855-3860). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Our faith only has meaning when it comes from the Lord and when we live it in our daily lives.

How do you live your faith in your life?

This is a month for us each to ponder this question for ourselves.

Is there anything from the past that gets in the way of fully living your faith?

If so, this is the month to make a list of whatever gets in the way, and think about how to move beyond it.

When you consider what amends you need to make, it can be helpful to start with yourself.



When have you neglected to honor your own needs? When have you despised yourself, instead of loving yourself as God does?

When have you been more self-critical than self-supportive?

When have you denied the gifts and talents that God gave you?

You are invited to take some time this week to review the amends you need to make to yourself.



Earth Day 2015

April 19, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Job 12:7-10

Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Psalm 19:1-4; cf. Psalm 97:6

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 display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

From Swedenborg

***Divine Love and Wisdom* n.77**

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things.

From the Bible

Psalm 96:11-13

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord.

Psalm 148:7-10

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds.

From Swedenborg

***Heavenly Secrets*, #2**

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...

***Divine Love and Wisdom*, #69**

The Divine fills all space of the universe without being bound by space.

Message

"HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO EAT AROUND HERE?"



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Sustainable Food in a Changing Climate
Earth Day 2015

From Creation Justice Ministries of the World Council of Churches.

As we break bread together, both at the Lord's Table and around family and community tables, how are we sharing communion with God, one another, and all creation? We can eat in ways that are healthier for ourselves and more sustainable for all God's creation. We can support food policies that mitigate the effects of climate change and climate policies that support food security for the most vulnerable populations around the world. We can adopt personal actions to tread more lightly to ensure a vibrant, flourishing creation for future generations.

I turn to these resources every year at this time for Earth Day resources. Every year, there a special theme that relates spirituality to Earth Day issues. This year, the focus is on how climate change impacts the earth's food supply, and how we can address the issue.

Here is a succinct statement of the problem in North America and steps we can begin to take:

In North American, projected changes in temperature, soil moisture, carbon dioxide, and pests associated with climate change are expected to decrease food-crop production by as much as 27 percent.

What You Can Do

1. Eat organic food.
2. Eat food that is grown close to where you live.
3. Be intentional when choosing to eat meat. Support local farmers who are committed to sustainably raising their animals.
4. Compost food waste.
5. Grow some of your own food.
6. Support your denomination's hunger programs.
7. Advocate for justice and sustainability in both agricultural and climate policies.

[Creation Justice.org](http://CreationJustice.org) also has useful links for resources and suggested things that congregations can do:

1. Invite a farmer or other speaker to share about your community's Farmers' Markets or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares in your area (localharvet.org)
2. Start a church-based community garden or volunteer at one in your area
3. Glean and/or support gleaning organizations (ampleharvest.org)
4. Compost at church and at home
5. Reduce your congregation's food waste by joining the EPA's Food Recovery Challenge



6. Host a local foods potluck
7. Request more local foods at your area grocery
8. Plant a row for the hungry (growarow.org)

Creation Justice Ministries, formerly the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, develops Earth Day Sunday materials each year to help congregations celebrate and care for God's Creation. For more information, to make a donation, or for additional Earth Day resources, visit **www.creationjustice.org** or email **info@creationjustice.org**

Written by Rev. Carol Devine and Rev. Rebecca Barnes Published February 2015
Creation Justice Ministries, 110 Maryland Avenue, NE, Suite 203 Washington, DC 20002



Making Amends, Part 2

April 26, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5: 43-48

Love for Enemies

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

From Swedenborg

True Christianity, #369: 3

In fact, what else is faith but a partnership with God by means of truths that shape our understanding and thought? What else is love but a partnership with God through goodness that shapes our intentions and desires? God's connection to us is a spiritual connection that comes to an earthly plane; our connection to God is an earthly connection that comes from a spiritual plane.

The ultimate purpose in creating us citizens of heaven and also citizens of the world was this partnership. As citizens of heaven we are spiritual and as citizens of the world we are earthly. Therefore if we become spiritual-and-rational and also spiritual-and-moral, we forge a partnership with God. Through this partnership we have salvation and eternal life.

On the other hand, if we are only earthly-and-rational and earthly and- moral, God is indeed connected to us but we are not connected to him. The result of this is spiritual death (which by definition is earthly life without spiritual life), because spirituality, in which the life of God exists, has been extinguished in us.

Message Making Amends, Part 2:

Amends Beyond The Grave

We've been exploring the theme of "making amends" this month. But a question we haven't considered is: Can you make amends to someone who has died? " I have often heard someone say, "I wish I could make amends to _____, but he/she has died."

Is there anything in our Swedenborgian theology that helps consider the possibility of making amends to a person after their death?





NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES AND SWEDENBORG

[Dr. Raymond Moody](#) is perhaps the best known researcher on Near Death Experiences. Did you know he had been influenced by Swedenborg?

PERSONAL NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

The [International Association of Near-Death Studies \[IANDS\]](#) provides many examples of people having opportunities for making amends beyond the grave.

Here is one where a person met many people from their family:

Met by Mother^[SEP]

After having flu-like symptoms for three days, I realized that I was not getting better and tried to find help where I worked. I was alone in London. Trying to get help I felt like I was walking above everyone. On reaching work they immediately called a taxi, which took me to the nearest emergency hospital. On arrival I passed out at once and awoke hours later in an isolation ward. Several nurses were washing me down with ice-cold water and forcing me to drink iced water. The windows were wide open in the middle of winter. A doctor arrived and told them to stop, as I was dead. At once, my spirit left my body and I looked down and observed the whole scene from above. I could see the nurses had defied the doctor; he slammed the door upon leaving the room.^[SEP] Almost at once I began a terrifying journey down a black spiral tunnel to an amazingly bright light, the likes I have never seen before or since. On arriving in a very beautiful place, I was met by my mother who had died two years earlier. She told me this was heaven and began to introduce me to family who had died and I had never known. There was a bright light there that I could not look at because of its brightness. After about twenty minutes a man who I did not know came up and told me it's not your time yet and you have to go back.^[SEP] The journey back was the same, but this time into darkness. When I re-entered my body I was in great pain. I was unconscious for around three days. When I finally came to, I was told about having suffered double pneumonia and surviving a temperature of over 108. They said to date no one had ever survived such a high body temperature. After two weeks in the hospital, I was transferred to a convalescent home for an additional two weeks.^[SEP] The events are as clear in my mind as if they had happened yesterday. I have told many people about my story and some have said it brought great comfort to them.^[SEP]

^[SEP] Here is one where parents from the other side stopped to pass on some messages they had:

Parental Visits beyond a Dream

My parents were not overly demonstrative and after they passed away, my father on July 11, 1988 and my mother on January 3, 1989, both of them visited me in a single night. I went to sleep normally around 10:00 p.m. and sometimes around 2 a.m. I awoke after having a VERY strong dream, more real than dream-like. I was sitting at my mother's funeral with her to my right during the services. As friends and family gathered and then left my mother watched in wonder, smiling and shaking her head. She said over and over again how this was "such an outpouring of love." After all the crowds of mourners left, she turned to me, patted my right knee with her left hand and said, "I just wanted you to know that I DO love you." This was a true closure for me as she rarely uttered such words. The scene then faded and I woke up feeling refreshed and washed with my mother's love. There was no sadness, only a great, fulfilling completeness. I checked the clock (2:00 a.m.) and immediately dropped off to sleep again. Once again, I was at my father's funeral. He sat to my left. He watched the mourners silently and stoically. Then he turned to me, putting his right hand on my shoulder to get my attention and said, "You need to know that I am proud of you." The scene faded and I awoke. It was barely past 2:30 a.m. My father would NEVER say this while he was alive and I spent the entire 40 years of my life being his daughter trying and failing to get him to acknowledge my accomplishments or to even smile at me. I awoke and felt so completely peaceful and full of love that I know he had a mission to return to me and give me this final message. I slept the remainder of that night peacefully and woke at my regular time of 6 a.m. to go to work.

In these stories, there is no clear example of amends, but perhaps you know of others. Of, course, most of us won't have an NDE opportunity to make amends with someone on the other side! But, are there ways to offer amends to souls in the heaven?



MAKING AMENDS BEYOND THE GRAVE

Our family and friends in the spirit probably know what is happening in our lives. We can behave in ways that show we have made an amend. It may not be to that person directly, but it can be in the general sense of something that person would appreciate.

We can think about the person, and send out our thoughts of regret and apology.

If nothing else, we can know that we will someday have that opportunity when we, too, are in the spirit world.

Are there people in the spirit world that you want to make amends to? Are there people there who owe you some amends? Have you found any ways to continue your amends even beyond the grave?

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Help us remember that life is eternal, and that our opportunities for building and repairing relationships goes on forever. Help us to live each day fully, honoring each other and Your creation.



May Day: Speaking Out

May 3, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13, New International Version (NIV)

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, 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 completeness comes, what is in part 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 the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a 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

Secrets of Heaven 1. #11

In the fifth stage, we speak with conviction and, in the process, strengthen ourselves in truth and goodness. The things we then produce have life in them and are called the fish of the sea and the birds in the heavens.

Arcana Coelestia, Vol.8, 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

May Day: Speaking Out

As we move into the 5th stage of Swedenborg's 7-step regeneration process, we come to **Speaking With Conviction**.



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Love, Spirit, Life

There is much to think about this week in terms of speaking with conviction.

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY



For many people around the world, May 1st is International Workers Day; a time to honor labor and trade unions.

In 1864, workers in Chicago began to agitate for an eight-hour day, which seemed like another form of freedom as in the abolition movement.

A law for an eight-hour day was passed in Illinois and was to go into effect May 1, 1867. That day, tens of thousands of Chicago's workers celebrated *en masse* in the streets of Chicago. But on May 2nd, employers ordered their workers to stay the customary 10 or 11 hours. The city erupted in a general strike, but by May 8, employers had won, and workers went back to work with their long hours.

In 1886, the Chicago Central Labor Union again demanded an eight-hour day and held a strike on May 1st. It led to a huge battle between police and workers. On May 4, there was a huge protest rally at Haymarket Square. Thousands of people were there, and someone threw a bomb at the police, killing one. The police began

shooting into the crowd, killing 11 more people.



Many of the wounded were afraid they would be arrested if they tried to get medical attention. A controversial trial of sorts followed, in which 8 were tried for their political beliefs, and eight were hanged. Around the world, people were outraged about the Haymarket incident. It wasn't until 1938 that a law for an eight-hour day was enacted. SEP SEP

In many countries, May 1st is a day to honor workers and to remember the history of the Labor Movement. In North America, labor is honored in September, but May 1st is an important date for many.

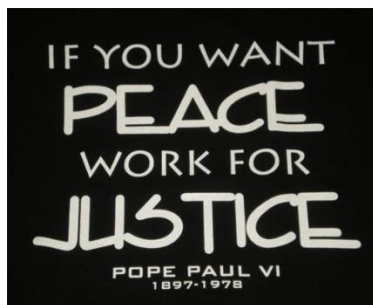
CINCO de MAYO



Some think about May 5th: Cinco de Mayo. It remembers the Mexican army's unexpected victory over the French in the Battle of Puebla [May 5, 1862] during the Franco-Mexican War [1861-67]. It is especially honored in many parts of the U.S. to celebrate Mexican culture and heritage.

These two celebrations: May Day – International Workers Day -and Cinco de Mayo show justice from a Swedenborgian perspective. To Swedenborg, the most important aspect of justice was to honor the needs of others. It involved putting our personal wishes aside to look at what would best serve others. The concept of workers being able to work and also spend time with family would have made sense to Swedenborg. The idea of a country's independence from outside rule could also be seen to honor those concepts.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES



In the United States in 2015, this is a good week to speak about justice, as we watch demonstrations in Baltimore and New York protesting police abuse and the racism in our society. There are many speaking with conviction about these issues.

The Supreme Court is considering a case that will address the constitutional issues of same-sex marriage, and many are speaking up about justice in this issue.

MAY DAY AND MAY POLES



This is also a time to celebrate the return of the sun to many parts of the world, as celebrated in May Day. The traditions of May Day probably go back to pagan roots. For the Druids of the British Isles, May 1 was the festival of Beltane, when they often lit a fire to encourage the sun to return. When Romans took over British Isles, it was changed to honor Flora, the goddess of flowers. People would dance around a live tree intertwining colored ribbons, and eventually Maypole dancing became popular.

So many use this week as an opportunity to celebrate the sun!

You remember that Swedenborg used the sun as an analogy to talk about God, and how God's energy flows into everything. This spring, let the rays of the sun hit your skin, as you think about God's influx of Love flowing into you!

Let us pray: Dear God, help us during the week to become aware of the many ways we can speak with conviction. We can speak out about injustices in society – especially those involving the racial imbalances around us. We can speak in love about giving respect and justice to all people around the world, and to honoring our diverse cultures. Help us to notice the sunshine this week; and to remember that Divine influx flows into us every moment; just as the rays of the sun bring warmth to our being and our planet. Amen.



A Swedenborgian Mother's Day

May 10, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

2 Timothy 1:3-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3167.

And to her mother. That this signifies for natural truth also (namely, that it thence has spiritual things, as is the case with natural good, concerning which see just above) is evident from the signification of "mother," as being the church, which is called "mother" from truth (see n. 289, 2717).

Message **A Swedenborgian Mother's Day**

This is a day to send flowers to Mom and to take her out to lunch, as we remember all the loving sacrifices Moms make every day. It's a day to grieve for Moms who have passed into the next world. These are important aspects of Mothers' Day. ^[1]_[SEP]

^[1]_[SEP] But they are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding Mother's Day and its history.



During the Civil War Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." As she became more famous, she was frequently asked to speak publicly. She began to speak about the horrors of war, and became an advocate for peace. ^[1]_[SEP]

She worked with the widows and orphans of soldiers on both sides of the war.

In 1870, she decided that peace and equality were the two most important things in the world. She called for women to rise up and oppose all forms of war.

She wanted to create a Mothers' Day for Peace, and published "A Mother's Day Proclamation" calling women to pacifism:

Arise then...women of this day!

Arise, all women who have hearts! Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!

Say firmly...

"Disarm! Disarm!

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."

Blood does not wipe our dishonor,

Nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil

At the summons of war,

Let women now leave all that may be left of home

For a great and earnest day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.

Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means

Whereby the great human family can live in peace... Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, But of God



Howe was an inspiration to Anna Reeves Jarvis, a social activist and community organizer in Appalachia. In 1858, she organized poor women in West Virginia into "Mothers' Work Day Clubs" to raise the issue of clean water and sanitation. She also worked for universal access to medicine for the poor. She was also a pacifist who served both sides in the Civil War by working for camp sanitation and medical care for soldiers of the North and the South.

She read Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*.

After Anna Reeves Jarvis died in 1905, her daughter Anna Jarvis continued her work to make Mother's Day a national holiday.

May 1907, Anna passed out 500 white carnations in her Methodist church to commemorate the life of her mother who had been active in that congregation. The next year, that Methodist church created a special service to honor all mothers. Many progressive and liberal Christian organizations--like the YMCA and the World Sunday School Association-- supported the cause and worked to make Mother's Day a national holiday.

In 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed Mother's Day into law. The rest is history! [L] [SEP]

[L] [SEP] However, Anna Jarvis was distraught with the commercialization of Mother's Day. She launched numerous lawsuits against for-profit groups using the name Mother's Day, and eventually spent much of her inheritance on legal fees.

[L] [SEP] In 1925, when an organization called the American War Mothers used Mother's Day as an occasion for fundraising and selling carnations, Jarvis crashed their convention in Philadelphia and was arrested for disturbing the peace. By the 1940s, Jarvis had disowned the holiday altogether, and lobbied the congress to see it removed from the calendar. Her efforts were to no avail, however, and Jarvis died destitute in 1948 in Philadelphia's Marshall Square Sanitarium. [L] [SEP]



[L] [SEP] Diana Butler Bass, writing in the Huffington Post, says:

Although I've never seen it on a pastel flowered greeting card, Mother's Day honors a progressive feminist, inclusive, non-violent vision for world community--born in the imagination of women who devoted themselves to God, not Caesar. [L] [SEP]

[L] [SEP] At times Mother's Day has also been a date for advocating for progressive causes. In 1968 Coretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King Jr., used Mother's Day to host a march in support of underprivileged women and children. In the 1970s women's groups also used the holiday as a time to highlight the need for equal rights and access to childcare. [L] [SEP] [L] [SEP]

On Saturday, May 9, 2015, the day before Mother's Day, there was a Million Mom March in D.C. USA Today [May 9, 2015] said:

Mothers whose children have been killed by police officers marched in Washington, D.C., on Saturday to call attention to police brutality and racial injustice.

The Million Moms March was sponsored by Mothers for Justice United, an organization of mothers whose children have been killed by police officers and others, and the Coalition for Justice.



Maria Hamilton founded Mothers for Justice United and helped organize the march of mothers and their supporters. Hamilton's 31-year-old son, Dontre Hamilton, was shot 14 times and killed by a former Milwaukee police officer.

"This is a call for everybody to wake up," Hamilton said as the march began Saturday afternoon. "We are here on behalf of our babies to tell the United States government that we aren't going anywhere. We aren't going to continue to keep burying our babies. Do something and do it now."

So, Mother's Day is about justice. SEP

To Swedenborg, the Lord *is* justice. He wrote:

SEP*Because of its nature and origin, and because in and of itself it is purely divine, the Lord's justice could not become part of anyone or produce any salvation any more than the divine life could, which is divine love and divine wisdom. The Lord does come into every one of us bring his love and divine wisdom, but unless we are following the divine design in our lives, that life, although it may indeed be in us, makes no contribution whatever to our salvation. It gives us only the ability to understand what is true and do what is good.*

--True Christianity 96 SEP

This is a day to take Mom out to lunch and thank her for all that she has done for her family.

Also remember to thank mothers throughout history who have made this world a better place. Mother's Day came into being as a way to make the world a more just place – which is a very Swedenborgian concept!

Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord, for the blessing of Mothers, who bring love and justice to life in so many ways. Please be with those who grieve the loss of their Mother. And especially be with Mothers who have lost a child – especially in war, in suicide, and in violence. Help us all to the feel embraced by the Divine Inflow that mothers us all.

Speaking with Conviction

May 17, 2015

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.

Message **Speaking with Conviction**

Do you sometimes speak with conviction? And sometimes not? How can you tell when you are speaking God's truth?



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Swedenborg tells us this about his fifth stage of regeneration – spiritual growth:

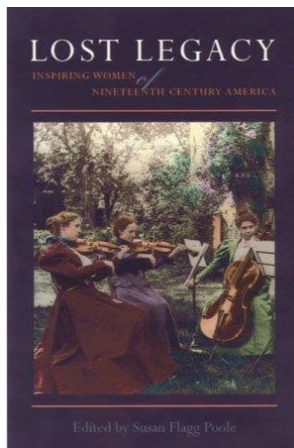
In the fifth stage, we speak with conviction and, in the process, strengthen ourselves in truth and goodness.

--Secrets of Heaven, 11

What an important stage this is in our regeneration! In the 3rd stage – repentance --, we speak devoutly and reverently. Yet, we think that we ourselves are doing so.

By stage 5, we realize that it is God working in us that allows us to discern truth and to speak it. It is when we realize that our words are from God that we speak with conviction, from our deepest selves.

So much of our regeneration up to now has been within ourselves. Now, we are taking our voices into the world, to speak God's truth.



What is this stage like in people's actual lives? Of course, we never know what stage anyone else is in – let alone ourselves! – But we can look at the lives of people who were committed to speaking out – even when their words were unpopular.

There are so many examples. To find one for today, I turned to Susan Poole's book, *Lost Legacy: Inspiring Women of Nineteenth-Century America*. She writes about Swedenborgian women who have made a difference.

I want to share with you what Susan wrote about Ellen Spencer Mussey.

Ellen practiced law before women could be lawyers. She was active in suffrage before women could vote. And she was a Swedenborgian delegate at the first Parliament of World Religions.

Ellen was out of step with society most of her life. Actually, Swedenborgians as a group tend to be out of step with many around them!



Ellen was a shining example of this. 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 knew personally 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, quite an exciting event came into her life: she was appointed to be a Swedenborgian delegate to the Parliament of World Religions. She presumably knew Charles Boney, the Swedenborgian who inspired and organized the Parliament as a part of Chicago's World Fair. It became a pivotal point around the world for religious tolerance and the start of the interfaith movement. Many Swedenborgians were involved in the Parliament, since our theology accepts all religious paths.

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.

If I had an opportunity to take a time machine back into history, I think I would choose to go the Chicago of 1893, as the World's Fair and Parliament of World Religions were taking place. There was also a women's congress held alongside the World's Fair. Many thousands of women – and

many men – were there to attend those meetings.

In Susan Poole's book, she quotes a description of that conference:

Even women's suffrage, so frowned upon that it had been given one session, was arousing so much interest that extra meetings had to be held, and its valiant leader, Miss Anthony, once so ridiculed and defamed, became the veritable luminary of the women's congress. When she talked, crowds stormed the meetings, and when she appeared at other meetings, the crowd broke into the discourse of the speaker on the platform to do Miss Anthony honors.

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.

And so has God given us all a way to communicate: with our voices – through our vocal cords, or with alternatives like sign language or assisted communication, or even with the flutter of an eyelash.

God has given us a way in which to express ourselves in the world.

Another Swedenborgian woman who was a delegate at the Parliament was from Maine: Selma Ware Paine, author of [Fugitive Poems](#). She was a writer and musician. She was active in the women's rights movement, often quoting Swedenborg on uses. In her talk at the Parliament, 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.'

Swedenborgians have been climbing mountains and descending into dark, hidden valleys since their beginnings. We have been at the forefront of social movements such as anti-slavery and suffrage.

Where is God calling you to speak with conviction? Where are you called to climb a mountain or descend into a dark and hidden valley? Is anything holding you back?

Memorial Day 2015

May 24, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

John 14:1, 16-31

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

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, 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. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" 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. 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. These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. 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. 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. 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. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; 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

Arcana Coelestia 6821

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.

Message

Dying for Convictions: Memorial Day 2015

We have explored a number of ways that we can "speak with conviction" for the Lord this month. On this Memorial Day weekend, it seems fitting to consider the many people who have given their lives in standing up for the convictions on which our country was founded.



Swedenborgian
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Memorial Day used to be called "Decoration Day." It seems to have grown up in many towns around the U.S. after the Civil War by many women's groups in the south who decorated the graves of men who died in the war. It was first officially observed on May 30, 1868, with honor to the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers. After World War I, it became a time to honor soldiers of all wars.

In 1915, inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields," Moina Michael replied with her own poem:

*We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.*

She then conceived of an idea to wear red poppies on Memorial Day in honor of those who died serving the nation during war. She was the first to wear one, and sold poppies to her friends and co-workers with the money going to benefit servicemen in need.

To help revive the true meaning of Memorial Day, the "National Moment of Remembrance" resolution was passed on Dec 2000 which asks that at 3 p.m. local time, for all Americans:

"To voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a Moment of remembrance and respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a moment of silence or listening to 'Taps.'"

*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]

On Memorial Day, of course, we honor the many throughout history that have gone to war for our country to fight for some aspect of justice to help preserve our freedoms.

Yet, the issue is far more complicated than that. Swedenborg tells us:

"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.)

How does one determine whether a particular war has a just cause? Many have become conscientious objectors to particular wars and have asked to serve to some other way. Some Swedenborgians have attained this status as a result of their understanding of his writings.

Other issues of justice in war concern how we treat our soldiers and our veterans. Are we attending to their physical and emotional needs?



One of our ministers, Rev. Susan Turley, has raised important questions about how we are addressing the mental health needs of our troops.

Rev. Susan Turley, Associate Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) Supervisor and Chaplain at the Department of Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), speaks with conviction after her son died in Iraq in 2006.

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

Turley's work with veterans helps her understand what her son went through, but the young men she meets often remind her of Keith. She hopes telling her son's story will help raise awareness about the growing problem of military suicide. Keith seemed to be depressed about their mission and his role. He gave signals of being distressed. If just one person had responded to him, Rev. Turley points out, his life could have been saved. Some days are very hard for her to be at work.



She 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.

She does not feel that the Iraq War was a worthy cause to die for. She feels Keith's death can only have redeeming qualities by her responding to it in a way that prevents other suicides. She believes in the afterlife, and that she maintains a relationship with him now – as her angel.

She finds a way to bring good out of the tragedy by working to change the way the military works with mental health and for us all to understand the high rates of suicide among soldiers – during and after service.

Perhaps "justice" on Memorial Day is not so much about whether the cause of a particular war was just, but how we use tragedy to make our world more attuned to justice issues on all levels.



Susan talks about her journey in a film, [Losing Keith, Keeping Faith](#), produced by Pauline Lubens of the San Jose Mercury News.

At 3 PM local time on Memorial Day, observe a moment of silence for all of those who have died and their friends and family. Pray that we all will work for deeper justice within our military and our society.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

Please be with all of those who have lost family or friends to war – both those killed by the enemy, and those dying at their own hands from mental illness. Help us to remember all of those who have died, and to support their friends and family left behind.

Speaking Through Pain

May 31, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Mark 3: 1-6

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

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. ...

DLW NCE, 340

There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. Unless people realize that there is a spiritual world and that it is as distinct from the physical world as an antecedent circumstance is from its consequence or a cause from its effects, they cannot know anything about inflow.

Message Speaking Through Pain



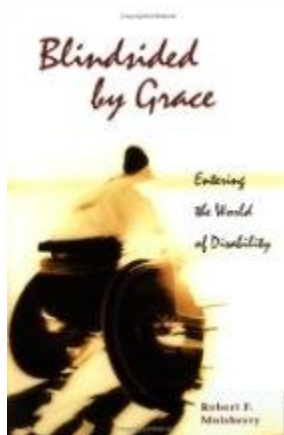


It was 6:00 PM on May 31, 1997. In an instant, Robert S. Molsberry's life was changed forever. He had been living an idyllic life in a small Iowa town as a parish minister, as well as a husband, father, and athlete. He had spent the afternoon working on his sermon for the next day, with a text from the 3rd chapter of Mark about Jesus healing on the Sabbath. He never did deliver that sermon, but he lived through it the next day when doctors spent the Sabbath trying to save his life.

At 6 PM on May 31st, he was riding his bike, when a hit and run driver blindsided him. Mulberry barely survived, with permanently paralyzed legs and a life in a wheel chair.

How could he come to terms with such a tragedy? He wrote a book about his healing journey, called *Blindsided by Grace: Entering the World of Disability*.

He writes:



I was blindsided by a drunk driver and have had to face a great deal of uncertainty, loss, grief, and pain. My losses have encompassed more than the use of my legs. I've also lost a sense of self-image that was highly dependent on my physical abilities and appearance. I've faced ongoing health issues and reconstructive surgeries. My life expectancy, in all likelihood, will be much reduced. Many people who see me roll cheerfully nod with determination through my day have no idea what it costs me, what I've had to give, and how I still grieve.

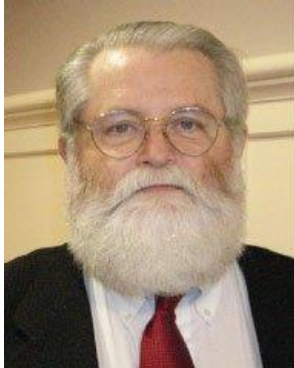
But whole new realities have also opened up as a result of this life-changing incident. My pace has slowed down and I have been forced to become more deliberate and disciplined. People tell me that I was a decent enough pastor before the injury, but I feel as though I have become more caring and

compassionate since the accident. I can empathize more with the trials that all people go through. I see human diversity in a whole new light. I have begun to develop new theological insights. I've had to rethink my understanding of God's role in tragedy and suffering, and what biblical healing is all about. [16]

Michael J. Fox has a similar perspective. He writes about his experience of being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease:

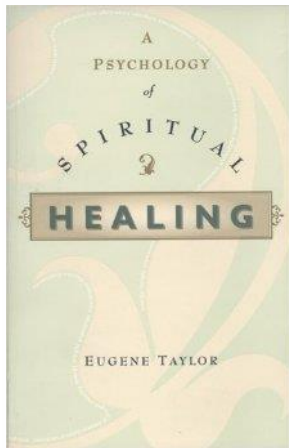
What [the doctor] did not tell me; what no one could, is these last 10 years of coming to terms with my disease would be the best ten years of my life – not in spite of my illness, but because of it. Coping with the relentless assault and the accumulating damage is not easy. Nobody would ever choose to have this visited upon them. Still this unexpected crisis forced a fundamental life decision: adopt a siege mentality, or embark on a journey. Whatever it was that allowed me to go down the second road ... was unquestionably a gift, and absent this neurophysiological catastrophe, I would never have opened it or been so profoundly enriched. [p. x]

How can we understand such injury and illness from a Swedenborgian perspective? Swedenborg tells us that in the 5th stage of regeneration, we are coming alive – we are awakening to who we really are. What if we awaken to paralyzed legs or Parkinson's Disease?



[Eugene Taylor, Ph.D.](#), was a Swedenborgian who had been a Lecturer on Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, and the 1983 William James Lecturer on the Varieties of Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School. He was a scholar on [William James](#) and a professor of [psychology](#) at [Saybrook University](#) and Senior Psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital. In his book, *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing*, he discusses a way to understand healing:

Often, we think of sickness as something transitory; but for millions of people, illness is chronic, even lifelong. The loss of limbs, a radical disfigurement, terrible pain, all of these may be permanent adjustments that a person has to make. Chronic illness, however, can also be a stimulus to kinds of internal growth that would not have been otherwise possible. ... Beethoven composed symphonies while completely deaf. Jackson Pollock, as well as numerous other artists, used conditions of psychopathology to produce new dimensions in modern art. ... while terrible things might happen to us, there is simply no telling what new doors will open up for us in our response to pain, sickness, and infirmity. Our illness can always become the vehicle toward the actualization of a spiritual destiny higher than the physical or psychological. [140-41]



All of this makes sense from a Swedenborgian perspective.

There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. [DLW 340]

The more we align with the spiritual influx, the more we are in a state of healing; regardless of the circumstances of the body.

Physicist Stephen Hawkins says of his severe disabilities:

I guess we're all pretty disabled on the cosmic scale. What difference is a few muscles more or less? Disability does not really affect my consciousness. I see it as an inconvenience like color blindness.

Through reading Swedenborg, Helen Keller came to have a similar view on her disabilities. It was only her physical sight and physical hearing that were impaired. Internally, everyone has impairment of the spiritual eyes and ears. Hers, however, were far more developed than for most people around her.

The true principle of cure is the divine love brought by the Lord's humanity and life of divine truth ...
AC 5712

We can love who we are.

Molsberry writes:

If I could be miraculously cured, ... would I go for it? Darn straight I would! I'm no idiot.but have some gifts appeared as a result of – not just in spite of, but also because of – my injury and subsequent disability? Yes. And is life – just as it is, with no miracle cure on the horizon – manageable? Yes. And is it – just as it is - a good life?.... Darn tootin'! Michel J. Fox considers himself a lucky man for having been diagnosed with Parkinson's. I consider myself gifted for having been made aware of the blessings that followed my injuries and disability.Acceptance is getting to the place where you can value your current condition, whatever it may be, in spite of its limitation. [75]

The basis of healing is the Divine influx. As we align with this, we find healing. It may not be paralyzed legs walking again. But it could be a paralyzed soul dancing. What challenges do you face in your life: physically, emotionally, or spiritually? Are there spiritual blessings in your challenges? How can you find healing through aligning with the Divine in you?

Forgiveness: Pro & Con

June 7, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 17: 1-4

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

From Swedenborg

Divine Providence, New Century Edition, #280

Another popular misconception is that when sins have been forgiven they are also set aside. This misconception is characteristic of people who believe that their sins are forgiven through the sacrament of the Holy Supper even though they have not set them aside by repenting from them. It is characteristic also of people who believe they are saved by faith alone or by papal dispensations. They all believe in direct mercy and instant salvation. When the sequence is reversed, though, it is true: when sins been set aside, they are forgiven. Repentance must precede forgiveness, and part from repentance there is no forgiveness.

True Christianity, New Century Edition, #409

I have also heard from heaven that the Lord forgives everyone's sins and never takes revenge or even assigns spiritual credit or blame, because he is love and goodness itself. Yet for all that, our sins are not washed away. Nothing washes our sins away except repentance. Since the Lord told Peter to forgive up to seventy times seven instances of sin, at what point would the Lord stop forgiving us?

Message Forgiveness: Pro & Con

What does "forgiveness" mean in the context of a crime? Should a victim of a crime forgive the perpetrator? If so, what does that mean for accountability, responsibility, and regeneration?

This question has been in the forefront of the news recently as we learn that a young man in a large Christian family molested several girls when he was a teen-ager. There are many discussions in the news about how his family and church did or should have handled disclosure of the situation at the time, and what role forgiveness should play.





[Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune](#) is a well-known minister who has done significant work in spiritual issues connected with domestic violence and other forms of abuse. She talks about a group therapist who invited her to come talk to the group members. This was a group of men who had been convicted of child molestation. They were required to attend this treatment as part of their sentence. The men kept talking about faith, so the therapist had called in Rev. Fortune to talk with them.

She led the group in a lively discussion of sin and forgiveness. She later [wrote](#):

But the thing I will always remember was towards the end of our time together. They said, "Whenever you talk with church people, tell them not to forgive us so quickly."

Of the twenty-seven men who had molested their own children, twenty-five were active Christians. Each one of them said that when he was arrested, he went first to his pastor. Each one had been prayed over by his pastor and sent home "forgiven." Each said it was the worst thing anyone had done to him. His pastor's "forgiveness" meant he didn't have to face what he had done to his own children and be accountable.

"Real forgiveness", she says, "has to involve justice".

Marie Fortune has been saying that for many years. She helped found the Faith Trust Institute in Seattle -- training and educational Center which criticizes the teachings of many Christian churches about forgiveness.

Dr. Fortune says:

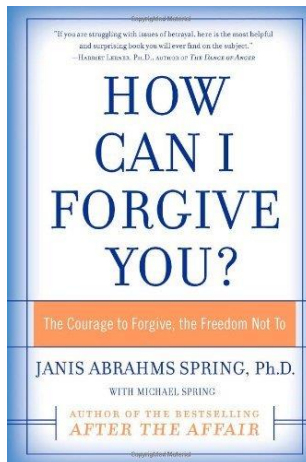
In fact, Jesus' teaching on forgiveness builds on his understanding of Judaism and ethics which expects repentance from an offender who has caused harm to another. In Luke 17:1-4, Jesus is clear that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. ...

Fortune claims that most of our churches have missed the boat on forgiveness. When we do harm to another – individually or collectively – the church quickly forgives us and sends us on our way. When we have been harmed by another, we are encouraged to quickly forgive, forget, and move on with our lives. Neither of these approaches addresses whether the person is working with God on regeneration. If so, then we can expect repentance and reformation to be the process—along with accountability and responsibility.

Swedenborg says that our spiritual growth is dependent on our ability to repent of the harm we have caused to others and to make amends to them; an attitude reflected in the 12 steps of AA.

Swedenborg writes of this as a seven- stage process. The 5th stage, our focus for this month, is

where we speak with conviction. We speak the truth of own life experience with repentance and reformation, which is a long process of learning to change from our sinful ways



When Bill Wilson was in his final hospitalization for alcoholism, he had an experience of a white light. It was dramatic and overwhelming, and he never drank again. But his abstinence was not because of a moment of seeing a white light. It was from the years of going to meetings, asking for help, and making amends to others.

In the same way, it is easy to say, "I see the light ... I will sin no more." But most of the time, the process of repentance is a long one of changing our behaviors; not just our attitude.

Modern psychologist [Janis Abrams Spring](#) has written a book called *How Can I Forgive You? The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not To*. She says that authentic forgiveness depends on authentic repentance. She sees the process of offending against others, and being hurt, as part of life together in this world; and genuine forgiveness as "a healing transaction, an intimate dance."



[Rev. Carter Heyward](#), Episcopal priest, also says that most of us play multiple roles as victims of injustice, and the perpetrators of violence. She says it "is the context in which Jesus invites us to practice forgiveness: Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven," he tells his disciples in Luke 6:37.

Emanuel Swedenborg wrote about similar concepts over 300 years ago. He was critical of Christian

concepts of God's forgiveness coming through sacraments or mere faith. In today's reading, we have this:

I have also heard from heaven that the Lord forgives everyone's sins and never takes revenge or even assigns spiritual credit or blame, because he is love and goodness itself. Yet for all that, our sins are not washed away. Nothing washes our sins away except repentance.

--True Christianity, New Century Edition, #409

Part of the reason that Swedenborg could accept so many faith traditions was that, for him, spiritual growth depends on how we live; not what we believe.

He says that regeneration is not easy. However, "the time arrives when we first start to live." That time is now; as we begin the fifth stage. It is the day of creation when fish and birds appear on the earth.

What does "forgiveness" mean to you? How do you connect it with "regeneration"?

Let's pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom:

We thank you for walking with us every moment of each day. We ask that you help each of us find the pathway to Your forgiveness for all of times we have sinned and have hurt others. Help us to understand that "forgiveness" involves our regeneration. Guide us on the pathway of regeneration as we strive to earn forgiveness when we need it. Help us to forgive those who have hurt us, when they have truly repented with You and asked for forgiveness.

Amen.



New Church Celebration

June 14, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

John 14:1-4

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God[a]; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

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 New Church Celebration



Helen arrived at the mall's food court before her friend Sally; so she sat down, dropped her packages on an empty chair, and ordered tea. Moments later, she saw Sally pushing her baby's stroller and balancing bags of purchases. Sally smiled and waved. She came over and collapsed on the chair next to Helen.

"Whew," Sally said, "I've had so many things to pick up today; I'm so glad we planned to have tea this afternoon. It's going to be a long day; this evening we're going to a celebration at church."

"Yeah? What are you celebrating?" Helen asked.

"New Church Day."

"What's that?"

"Well, it's a celebration of the birthday of our church: June 19, 1770."

"Really? I didn't know your church had a specific start day. I'd love to hear that story."



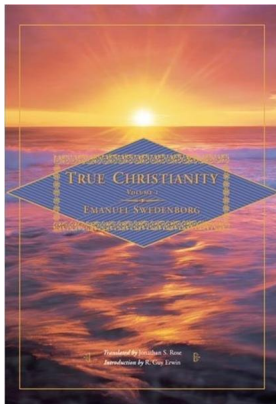
**Swedenborgian
Community Online**
Love, Spirit, Life

The tea arrived, and the women began sipping.

"OK. Here's the story. 1770 was late in Swedenborg's life; he died in 1772. He had just finished writing his 2-volume *True Christianity*. He was told that the Second Coming happened in heaven that day."

"Oh, come on! 2nd Coming! I know my church is pretty fundamentalist from your perspective. We have really clear doctrine on the 2nd Coming. Jesus will come back to earth and there will be a final judgment with the believers going the heaven. Others will be left behind – like in those books."

"Well, that is the traditional Christian approach, of course; Swedenborg was quite adamant that it was wrong."



Sally pulled out her eBook reader, on which had all of the books of Swedenborg in digital format, to find her favorite quotes:

The prevailing opinion in the churches at the present day is, that when the Lord shall come for the last judgment, He will appear in the clouds of heaven with angels and the sound of trumpets; will gather together all who still dwell on the earth, together with all who have died; will separate the wicked from the good, as a shepherd separates the goats from the sheep; will then cast the wicked or the goats into hell, and will raise the good or the sheep into heaven; and at the same time will create a new visible heaven and a new habitable earth, and will send down upon that earth the city called the New Jerusalem,; ...also that into that city will be gathered all the elect, both those who are still alive and those who have died since the beginning of the world; that these will then return into their bodies, and in that magnificent city, as their heaven, will enjoy eternal blessedness. This is the prevailing opinion in the Christian churches of today respecting the Lord's coming and the last judgment.

--True Christian Religion, #768

"Yeah, that's pretty much what we believe," Helen mused.

"And also that one doesn't rise up till the judgment?"

"Yes, of course that's how it will be," Helen asserted. Sally pulled up another quote on her eBook reader.

Another cause of such a belief in the man of the church is that he believes that no one can go to heaven or hell before the time of the last judgment; of which he has conceived this opinion that the visible world is then to perish, and a new one will come into existence, and that then the soul will return into its body, and from their conjunction man will again live a man. This belief involves another about the angels, that they were created from the beginning; for it is impossible to believe that heaven and hell are from the human race, when it is believed that no man goes there till the end of the world.

"OK. I get that Last Judgement happened in 1747. But I don't get how the Second Coming took place in 1770?"

"After Swedenborg finished True Christian Religion, he was told that Jesus was sending out the disciples.
Jesus was coming into everyone's heart and now is inside for all of us."

*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).*

--True Christianity 791

"That doesn't make sense!" Helen exclaimed. "The 2nd Coming is about separating the true Christians from all others. It can't happen till when the Final Judgment comes."

"See, Swedenborg separates the Final Judgment from the Second Coming. The final judgment was in 1747. Then June 19, 1770 was the Second Coming. Here listen to this" Sally found another quote on her eBook reader.

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...

--True Christianity 772

"Swedenborg says it's not about being Christian in the traditional sense – or any particular religion – it's about living with this love inside of us. It was the start of a whole new concept of church – a way of living together that was about doing good; not about what one believed. All of those who strive to live with love, regardless of belief, are part of a new concept of church – a 'New Church.'"

"Oh. So that's why you folks call yourselves the 'New Church'. I thought 'New Church' was just another church."

"Oh, no," that's not what Swedenborg meant. It's sort of post-church. It's beyond the concept of there being different religions. It's people living together based on loving action; not separating themselves by what they believe."



"So Swedenborg said this New Church started on June 19?"

"Yes; it started in heaven. We have a long way to go on earth. But it's part of his concept of the New Jerusalem; heaven on earth; where people are united by how they live; not what they believe."

What this church is to be is fully described in Revelation, where the end of the former church and the beginning of the new are treated of. This new church is described by the New Jerusalem, by its magnificence, and by its being the future bride and wife of the lamb (19:7; 21:2, 9). Besides these I will cite only the following quotation from Revelation. When the New Jerusalem was seen descending from heaven it was said:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples; himself shall be with them, their God. And the nations that are saved shall walk in the light of it; and there shall be no night there. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let them come. And he that wished, let him take the water of life freely. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen (Revelation 21:3, 24–25; 22:16–17, 20.)

--True Christianity 790

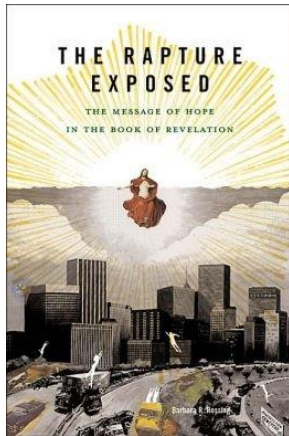
"That's so different from my tradition. I was raised that the Second Coming is where only true Christians are saved. Everyone else is 'left behind.'"

"I know. That's what made Swedenborg so different. He rejected some of the basic concepts of Christianity; and said that being saved isn't about belief – it's about how we live our lives day by day."

The Lord's presence is unceasing with every man, both the evil and the good, for without His presence no man lives; but His Coming is only to those who receive Him, who are such as believe on Him and keep His commandments. The Lord's unceasing presence causes man to become rational, and gives him the ability to become spiritual. This is effected by the light that goes forth from the Lord as the sun in the spiritual world, and that man receives in his understanding; for the heat that goes forth from that same sun is love to God and love toward the neighbor. [The 2nd coming], may be likened to presence of solar light in the world; unless this light is joined with heat all things on earth become desolate. But the coming of the Lord may be likened to the coming of heat, which takes place in spring; because heat then joins itself with light ...

--True Christianity 774





"Swedenborg's view of the 2nd coming is like receiving the light of the sun. For those who open their hearts to receive this loving light it is like a spring day with flowers blossoming. This is the 2nd coming. It did happen, is happening, and will always be happening. We do not need to believe any particular thing; we only need to open our hearts to the love, and share it with others.....Look, here's an interesting book on my eBook reader: [The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation](#) by Barbara R. Rossing. [New York: Basic Books; a member of the Perseus Book Groups, 2004]. She writes:

Jesus never asked of God to 'Beam me up' from the earth, nor can we. ... God saves us not by snatching us out of the world, but by coming into the world to be with us.

In Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech he says: '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.' Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of the New Jerusalem is similar to Swedenborg's. It is not something for us to dream about in the future; it is something for us to create now in this world. Longing for the New Jerusalem is the theme of many African-American spirituals such as "Gonna put on those golden shoes down by the riverside." Rossing asks where that river side is, and answers her own question: "For slaves, the New Jerusalem vision gave hope for freedom even in this life, for a riverside not just in heaven but experienced also as a very real river in their lives that could be crossed to freedom, here and now. They found a glimpse of the riverside of God in the geography of their place. That crossing between the two worlds is key to God's New Jerusalem for us as well.' [165]. The Second coming is about living NOW and changing our world NOW; not about preparing to be snatched off the earth. Swedenborg is all about living in the here and now; not preparing for some judgement and 2nd coming."



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

*The human race is the seminary of heaven, ...
that heaven and hell are from the human race, and that therefore the human race is the seminary of
heaven.*

--True Christianity 10 (2)

*"Well, Sally, that sure is different from my tradition. But it does make sense. I wish you a happy New
Church Day!"*

Let us pray:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the many blessings that we experience in community with each other as we strive to
bring a new church into being on the earth.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Swedenborg's Fathers' Day Card

June 21, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 11: 9-13

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

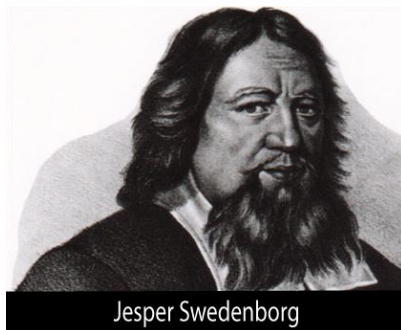
From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 6492:

In a dream my father appeared to me, and I spoke with him, saying after a son becomes his own master he ought not to acknowledge his father as father, as before; for the reason why the father is to be acknowledged during the bringing up of the son, is that the father is then in the Lord's stead; nor does a son know at that time what he ought to do except by the direction of his father. But when a son becomes his own master, and competent to think for himself, and seems to himself to be able to direct himself from himself, then the Lord must be his Father, whose vice regent his natural father had been. These things I spoke in my dream.

Message Swedenborg's Fathers' Day Card

Here it is Father's Day! And right after New Church Day!



I can't help but wonder if Swedenborg – in the spiritual world – might acknowledge his father on Father's Day? And, if so, what might he say to Jesper Swedenborg?

I did some reading about Swedenborg's father and the relationship they had with each other. Here are some thoughts about what Emanuel Swedenborg might say in a card to his father, Jesper Swedenborg.

Dear Father:

Happy Father's Day! You were such an important influence and supporter of the work I did on earth.

Our Family Heritage

You know, I owe a lot of who I was to our family heritage. I think of your Dad – my Grandfather – Daniel Isaacson, who was a miner. I certainly inherited that love – as I was Assessor of Mines for much of my adult life! Actually, Grandpa became quite wealthy through restoring an old flooded mine in the Great Copper Mountain. It certainly helped give us that family fortune that I inherited!

Your Mom, my Grandma, was so pious!



Of course, Mom, too came from a mining family Sarah Behm [1666 -1696]. Her father – my other Grandfather, Albrecht Behm, was an assessor of the Board of Mine. So I got my love of mines from both my Grandpas!

And I got much of my love of theology from you. Yet, some of it comes from Mom's Grandpa [my Great Grandfather], Master Peter Bullernaesius. He was pastor of Swärdsjö. I know you really respected him and his work of leading the clergy in the Great Copper Mountain District. Although his fellow clergy suspected him of being a heretical papist! I think I inherited some of that spunk from him, as I was considered a heretical theologian in my time!

My Childhood



Queen Ulrika Eleonora of Sweden,
enobled Jesper Swedenborg, 1719



You were an army chaplain when I was born Jan. 29, 1688. We, of course, were still “Swedborg” back then. It wasn’t till 1719, when you were a Bishop, that we became ennobled and were known as “Swedenborg.”

I think of what you wrote about my birth in your autobiography:

“The name of my son Emanuel means God with us, in order that he may ever be reminded of the presence of God and the intimate, holy and secret union in which we by faith stand with our propitious and gracious God.”

That sure proved to be true of my life!

You made sure we had regular prayer time at home as I was growing up. It wasn’t the rather boring prayer of many other households – it was moving and personal. I love that you often brought art and music into our family prayer.

I think it’s because of you that I was so religious in my childhood, engaging in prayer and having mystical experiences from the age of four.

Things I got from you:

Love of Writing

Of course, I always had your love of writing. As much as I wrote, Dad, I think you wrote more. Your name, Jesper, of course means in Hebrew “he shall write.” And write you did! You once commented that ten wheelbarrows wouldn’t hold all of your writings. You know, Dad, I never did agree with that goofy psychiatrist, Gilbert Ballet, who claimed that so much writing was a sign of mental disorder! [Gilbert Ballet, Swedenborg (Paris, 1899), 30.]

Trusting Angelic Experiences

I know that your Mom’s spirituality had a big impact on you when, as only a kid, you fell into the millstream near your Dad’s farm. They thought you were dead when they pulled you out. You never said exactly what happened to you there, but it changed you forever. I think you had a Near Death Experience.

By age 13 you were having many prophetic dreams, and they were a major source of guidance in your life. You also saw and heard angels, who guided you daily. You felt angels were with you when you were ordained as a minister and consecrated as a Bishop.

I’ve always been impressed by your angelic encounter during your student days. You wrote in your autobiography:

“God protected me from bad company during my whole student life. My society and my greatest pleasure were the holy men of God, who wrote the Bible, and the many other men who have achieved high regard in God’s Church and whose names are widely known in the scholarly world. God’s angel stood next to me and said: ‘What are you reading?’ I answered: ‘I am reading the Bible, Scriver, Lütkemann, Johann Arndt, Kortholt, Großgebau, J. Schmidt and

others” (Swedberg, 12] The angel said further: ‘Do you understand what you are reading in the Bible?’ I answered: ‘How can I understand without anyone explaining it to me?’ The angel then said: ‘Purchase Geier, J. and S. Schmidt, Dietrich, Tarnow, Gerhardi and Crell’s Biblical Concordance!’” (Swedberg, 85)

I so love that an angel told you exactly which Bible concordance to purchase as a student to understand the Holy book!

Theological Similarity

But really, Dad, I owe most of theological passion to you. Of course, there was a lot of conflict between us in some ways. I was rather contemptuous of your clerical interests as I was so critical of the church and its clerics. But I do think some of my mystical inclinations came from you.

I am proud of you that you were appointed by the King to the third professorial chair of theology at the University of Uppsala [of course, later to become my Alma Mater! Then in 1702, when I was 14, you were appointed Bishop of Skara and we moved to Brunsbo.

I did learn from you to value action over faith. You wrote:

A faith without good deeds, in Swedberg’s opinion, is not a living faith at all; it is “a cerebral faith and not a faith of the heart, a shadow without a body, a dead faith and not a living one, indeed, a devilish faith, one I call the ‘sovereign faith’ in which Christianity takes refuge, and on which God may have mercy.”

You were convinced that the dead continued to influence our lives and guide us!

Differences Between Us

We were so much alike, and yet so different. You were a rather staid and proper clergyman of that time. I was a severe critic of the church of our time, and would never have considered ordination. However, you did become quite critical of the clerics in the 1700’s who, as you wrote in your autobiography:

Deck themselves with blond and powdered perukes, showering a veritable white snowfall over the back and shoulders of their silk mantles.

Many have called you a “mystic” – as I have been called. But we’re pretty different. Actually, you lived in a more traditional concept of angels and demons; heaven and hell. I was beyond all of that into the experience of an ever-loving Divine.

You did believe in a devil that you had to drive out by prayer and exorcism. You were quite the exorcist in your time, Dad!

So, thanks for having been my father during my time on the earth! And I’m glad that we continue to have a relationship in Heaven, and I can honor you on Father’s Day!

Much of the information from this message comes from:



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of His Thought*
Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*

Let us pray:

Dear Lord: Thank you for the many blessings fathers bring into our lives. Please be with those who are in pain on this Father's Day. We think especially of the terrible tragic shooting in South Carolina where children lost fathers; and fathers lost children. Be with all in finding solace and healing in Your ever-present healing arms. Help us to honor and celebrate the love that comes from so many fathers today!



Community & Convention

June 28, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Romans 12:4-5

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Colossians 3:14

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Psalms 133:1

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven

"As to our spirits, we are so united with those beyond us that if we were denied this connection, we would not live for an instant."

"Everyone living in the body associates with some community of spirits and angels, despite being totally unaware of the fact."

"In the afterlife kindred souls gravitate toward each other spontaneously, for with each other they feel as though they are with family...with kindred souls, they enjoy the fullest freedom and find life totally delightful."

"We get to know other people well through paying attention not only to what they do but also to what outcome they want--what they are intending and why. All angels pay attention to these things, as do all wise people in our world."

Message Community & Convention



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



Daisy passed away peacefully in her sleep. [tan and white pom on the left].

Being at our annual Swedenborgian church convention is always an experience of community for me, but never more so than this week.

I broke my foot the week before Convention – my left foot. And because I have a standard shift car, I couldn't drive. So, Rev. Allison Longstaff from the Bath Church offered to pick me up and drive me to our convention site – in Bridgewater, MA, this year – about two hours from my home in Kennebunk. She was so kind to help me with things that are hard to do while hobbling on a cane -- like bringing my garbage cans in from the curb. It took me forever to have everything set to leave, as I needed to make sure I had what my pets needed: my dogs Daisy and Coco and my cat Jasmine.

I especially wanted to make sure Daisy had everything she needed. Daisy was 17 years old and rather frail. But she wasn't sick and had had a couple of great days working with clients as a therapy dog. She gobbled down her Burger King grilled chicken sandwich that one client always shares with her. She enjoyed walking in circles on the front yard grass in the sunshine. I had a very reliable pet sitter who came in twice a day to spend time with them and feed them.



Rev. Alison Longstaff currently serves the Bath Church of the New Jerusalem in Bath, ME.

At last we left, and Alison got us to Bridgewater State College, where our Council of Ministers meetings began. I slept deeply that first night after a couple hectic days.

I was shocked to get a phone call the next morning from my pet sitter telling me that Daisy had passed away in her sleep. I couldn't quite absorb how that could have happened – and I was crying and stunned. Fortunately many chaplains were in our midst, and reminded me that people – and pets – often pass when their loved ones are not around; it's too hard to go otherwise.

I realized I had to get home and be with Coconut and Jasmine – and bury my Daisy. The other ministers were very supportive of my need to be home. Renee, our Central Office Manager helped me figure out I could rent an automatic shift car and drive back to Maine. I had a car in a couple of hours, and was on my way home – albeit through Friday rush hour out of Boston to Maine. I had a peaceful and healing time at home and a chance to give Daisy a funeral and burial.

Then a member of our Portland New Church, Nanci Adair, was getting ready to drive to Convention, but didn't want to use her car. So she got added on to my rental car as an extra driver, and drove us both back to Convention today!

It was so good to have company for the drive, and then to be greeted so warmly by many who knew and loved Daisy and shared my sadness in her passing.



Julie Conaron will be ordained at this year's Annual Convention and has been a hospice chaplain for almost five years.

Our Maine Association was hosting the Convention [although the site was in MA]. People had been invited to bring dirt from their own location, and we put all of the dirt together in a big bowl, and the children planted seeds. I offered a prayer with blessings from our on-line community for the face-to-face meetings of over 100 of us!

Then we had a lovely reception as people greeted old friends and met new ones. There were tables for many different groups – including one for our on-line community!

It had started raining before we headed back to our dorms, but no one seemed to mind.

We're up early tomorrow for morning singing, chapel, and then a visit to our church in Bridgewater for a glorious service with the choir.



Helen Barler, will be our very first
"licensed pastor" to serve Puget Sound.

Upcoming events in the next few days include the ordination of Julie Conaron to our ministry, as well as the celebration of our very first "licensed pastor;" Helen Barler.

Helen will join us in our Sunday evening prayer service and chat and will share more about what "licensed pastor" will mean for her and for our church.

So, during the past week I broke my foot, and lost a special furry companion. But being part of a community helps physical and emotional wounds to heal – and provides great enthusiasm for the celebrations!

Let us pray. "Thank you, Lord, for community. Thank you for the special ties that exist in our cyber community where we can bond across the miles. Thank you for times such as this week when so many are able to spend time together "face to face." Guide us in our efforts to live within and a part of communities." Amen



A Newer New Church

July 5, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Revelation 21, 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.”

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven/Arcana Coelestia, §§6628, 6633

In the preceding exegesis, I have shown that a doctrine of charity was the doctrine in the Early Churches and that this doctrine united all the Churches so as to make one out of the many. They recognized as belonging to the church all who lived in the good of charity and called them their kindred, no matter how they differed as to the truths that we now call “truths of faith.” They taught each other in such matters, and were not upset if one did not accede to the opinion of another, knowing that we all accept truth to the extent that we are engaged in doing what is good Since in our times the doctrine of charity is among things lost, giving rise to a doctrine of faith that is far removed from the truth, I may offer that doctrine, thanks to the Lord’s divine Mercy, before the individual chapters of the book of Exodus, and so restore it to the church.

Revelation Unveiled §912

Everything that church has is the good that love does, flowing in together with light out of heaven from the Lord.

Message **Why Do We Need A "Newer" New Church**



Gabriella Cahaley, Tamara Amato, Wilma Wake and Renee Machiniak with Ken Turley and Paul Deming during live broadcast at Convention



**Swedenborgian
Community Online**
Love, Spirit, Life

“Sad and sore.” That’s what I said when people asked me how I was doing during our 2015 Convention last week. “Sore because of my broken foot ... sad because my doggie Daisy just passed away.” I got a lot of hugs of support!

Daisy was a wise, old Pomeranian doggie whose seventeen years were spent largely in Convention. She had first been rescued by Rev. Nadine Cotton as a companion to her and Jeff’s other Pomeranian, Gizmo. When I visited them, their new little Pom loved sitting on my lap. We bonded. It turned out that Nadine and Jeff couldn’t keep both dogs, so the doggie came to be my companion. She was born “Dakota” on a breeding farm where she produced a number of litters. Nadine and Jeff had thought of calling her “Dizzy” since she kept walking in circles. I finally settled on “Daisy.”

Daisy loved church, and often came to services when I was minister at the Portland New Church. She was quite fond of coffee hour, where children would often give her treats. She applied for membership several times, but was always told that the membership was based on being a human being. Daisy never gave up her fight to expand inclusivity to dogs! [*After all, she would say, “dog” is “God” spelled backwards.*] When I became minister of the on-line community, Daisy often appeared in our videos, and was almost always on my lap while I was online.

So it makes sense to me that Daisy would choose to leave the earth while I was at our annual convention. I was touched by the community where so many remembered her in life, and were compassionate towards me in her death.

Being at convention was an experience of “church” in action. We talked a lot together about what it meant to be a church.



Rev. George Dole reminded us that Swedenborg himself had never intended to start another institutional church. Instead, Swedenborg expected that his doctrines would slowly seep into existing churches, and bring about fundamental change.

After Swedenborg’s death in 1772, his loyal followers gathered to read and talk about his books. This was especially true in England, where there was great interest in the man Emanuel Swedenborg, whom many had met during his travels there. There quickly developed a conflict among his readers in England between those who felt they should start a new church structure, and those who felt that they should stay in their current churches but introduce Swedenborgian concepts.

The “separatists” had the most support, and “The New Church” became embodied. At the meeting to start a church, this resolution was agreed upon:

“That it is the opinion of this Conference, that a complete and total separation from the Old Church is warranted not only from the Theological Works of Emanuel Swedenborg but also from the Holy Word.”

Many still stayed in their churches, but tried to introduce Swedenborg’s doctrines. However, that did not always go over so well, so the separatist movement continued to grow.



Rev. Jane Siebert is our new President-elect.

Dole wrote in his Messenger series:

The separatists distanced themselves from the “Old Church” as to organizational boundaries, but copied it quite faithfully as to organizational structure, usually right down to the matter of architecture. On the premise that form should follow function, I would suggest that we lay all that aside for a while and look at ourselves and at the societal dynamics of the world we find ourselves living in, and then look for forms that might be appropriate to our designated function.

What does it mean that we became a separate church? Is this what Swedenborg had in mind? Now that we are a church, is there a different form that might more closely match Swedenborg’s writings?

During the coming weeks, we’re going to look at [George Dole’s series of articles](#) in the Messenger and at the talk he gave at Convention, and discussions we all had about his talk, to consider what it might mean to become a “newer new church.” We’ll go back to looking at what Swedenborg wrote about “new church,” to see if we can improve on how we live with commitment to useful service.

In terms of our Convention yearly topic, we are moving now from “Regeneration” to “Useful Service.” It is a good time to consider how we can best be of service to others in our troubled world.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, Thank you for the blessings of our Convention, which offers support to so many – in person, on-line, and through many print media. Guide our exploration at how our denomination – and each of us as individuals – can best fulfill service to others. Amen.

The Lost Theology, Pt. 1

July 12, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 15: 1-7, New International Version (NIV)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

From Swedenborg

Revelation Unveiled §912

Everything that church has is the good that love does, flowing in together with light out of heaven from the Lord.

Message The Lost Theology, Pt. 1



In the late 1980's, Rev. Dr. George Dole was attending a meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago. He was approached by an elderly man wearing a saffron robe who said he was Swami Sarveshananda. He was pleased to meet a Swedenborgian, and wanted Dole to know that there was plans underway for a Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893 to celebrate the centennial of the first Parliament.

The Swami said it was essential to get the Swedenborgians involved, "because we owe them so much."

Dole was stunned! He had no idea what the Swami was talking about, so set about to do some

research. He discovered that the first Parliament of World Religions had been the brainchild of Charles Bonney, a Swedenborgian! Because of his religion, Bonney felt it was important for Eastern and Western religions to meet together

One of Russia's great theologians wrote,

“ . . . in Chicago, they have managed not only to unite all the religions, but they have exhibited them into the bargain. Nobody has ever seen such a thing before. . .

The exhibition finished so well that there was not even a single fight! Everyone was astounded.”

--Vladimir Solovyov, War, progress, and the End of History, trans. Alexander Bashky [Hudson, NY; Lindisfarne, 1990], p. 110f



Dole since wrote about Bonney in a monograph published by the Swedenborg Foundation.

I attended the Swedenborg School of Religion in the late 80's and taught there in the early 90's. I learned about how a Swedenborgian had started the first Parliament of World Religions, and how this was considered the start of the Interfaith Movement in the U.S.! [See my book, Wings and Roots].

So, given this piece of our church history, how can we understand the meeting in London in 1789 for Swedenborgians to pull away from other Christian churches? The assembly decided:

That it is the opinion of this Conference, that a complete and total Separation from the Old Church is warranted not only from the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg but also from the Holy Word; and that this Separatism ought to commence in every individual, on being fully convinced of the truth of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church, and of their opposition to those of the Old.

Swedenborg wrote in AC 6632 that “... the doctrine of charity is at this day one of the lost Things...”

*“What men deemed impossible,
God has finally wrought, the
religions of the world have
actually met in a great and
imposing assembly; they have
conferred together on the vital
questions of life and immortality
in a frank and friendly spirit, and
now they part in peace, with many
warm and expressions of mutual
affection and respect.”*

–Charles Carroll Bonney.

Swedenborg said this about the early church:

I have shown that a doctrine of charity was the doctrine in the Early Churches and that this doctrine united all the Churches so as to make one out of the many. They recognized as belonging to the church all who lived in the good of charity and called them their kindred, no matter how they differed as to the truths that we now call “truths of faith.” They taught each other in such matters, and were not upset if one did not accede to the opinion of another, knowing that we all accept truth to the extent that we are engaged in doing what is good.

So, Swedenborg is saying that the doctrine that unites all religions is that of charity [doing good in the world.] So how does that make the “New Church” so different from other religions?

Is this concept of Swedenborg’s – that the New Church is simply all people who are doing good in the world – perhaps a lost theology?

Do we really understand Swedenborg’s writings?

And if we do, might we view our own church differently?



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Love, Spirit, Life

What is Our Theology

July 19, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 22: 34-40

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 7:12

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia1: 6632

“The law and the prophets” are the whole Word in all and each of its parts.

Message **What is Our Theology**

What do Swedenborgians believe? Did Swedenborg have a set of beliefs for the “New Church”?

George Dole, in his third article in the “Towards a Newer Church” series, says

Why didn't Swedenborg give us a brief, clear summary of the theology of the New Church? Wrong question. The right question is, “Why haven't we taken advantage of the brief, clear summaries of the theology of the New Church that we have?”

Case in point:

There are three essentials of the church: the acknowledgment of the Divine [nature] of the Lord, the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word, and the life which is called charity. (Divine Providence 259:3)

Notice how nicely the three essentials match the Two Great Commandments.

The acknowledgment of the divine nature of the Lord equals the love of the Lord, the life which is called charity equals the love of the neighbor, and the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word equals the reference to the Law the Prophets. What could be simpler?

So, breaking this down, we have



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Jesus replied:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

[Swedenborg: the acknowledgment of the Divine [nature] of the Lord]

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

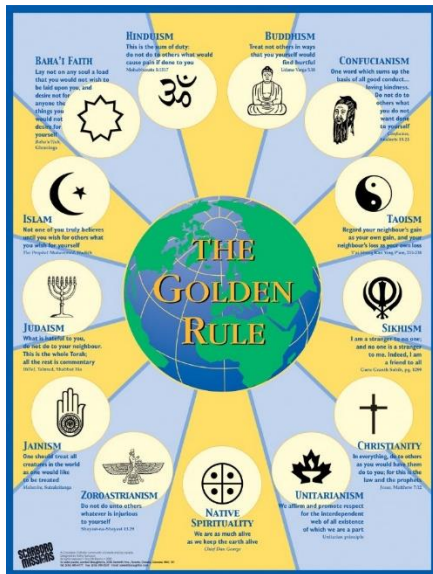
[Swedenborg: the life which is called charity.]

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

[Swedenborg: the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word

“The law and the prophets” are the whole Word in all and each of its parts (Arcana Coelestia 1: 6632.)]

Dole goes on to say that Swedenborg makes the same point in different ways in several different places. In *the New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, his approach is pastoral. In *the Four Doctrines*, he is quite biblical. *True Christianity* is quite academic. But they all boil down to the Great commandments from Jesus and the core of the New Church from Swedenborg.



Many people call those words of Jesus to be “the golden rule.” Other places the “golden rule” is cited in the Bible include Matthew 7:12 [*Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.*] and John 12:34-35: *The night of His arrest, Jesus said to His disciples, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

[Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/do-onto-others.html#ixzz3q4i0JECU>]

Looking at our theology as consistent with the Golden Rules, helps us to see the basic interfaith dimension of Swedenborg's writings.

[One interfaith blog](#) says:

In this past century, a global interfaith movement has been growing, helping to raise consciousness about the need for tolerance and understanding between different cultures and religions. This movement has helped highlight the common goals that most religions share, such as the Golden Rule, which is at the heart of nearly all religious traditions.

--Robert Alan Silverstein

Many see the golden rule at the heart of most of the world's religions.

So, I would to provide a more modern summary of what I understand Swedenborg to say is the heart of our theology:

Honor the Divine Love and Wisdom that are at the center of your being

Love each other and do good in the world.

The laws and the prophets from around the world in many traditions, including the Bible, affirm this.

What do you think about the "three essentials" that Swedenborg describes? Does this seem to you to be the heart of Swedenborg's writings? Do you find it similar to what Jesus taught? What does it mean to you?

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Creator: We thank you for the many teachings about Love on our earth. We are grateful for the words of the Bible that help us stay focused on love of You and of our neighbors. Help us to remember and honor these concepts – from whatever religion or source we find them – and to make them central in our lives." Amen



The Good of Love

July 26, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Revelation 21: 1-8, New International Version (NIV)

A New Heaven and a New Earth

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.”

He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

From Swedenborg

The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine, 101

But charity extends itself much more widely than to the poor and the indigent, for charity consists in doing what is right in every work, and our duty in every office.

The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine, 19

“No one who is in evil, and thence in falsity from confirmation and life, can know what good and truth is, for he believes his own evil to be good, and thence he believes his falsity to be truth; but everyone who is in good and hence in truth from confirmation and life may know what evil and falsity are”

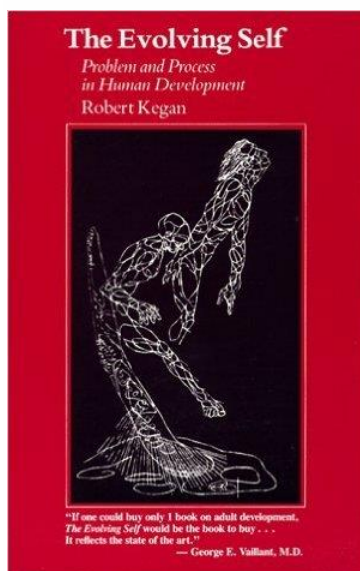
Message The Good of Love





Robert Kegan and I grew up in the same era, being in college during the tumultuous years of protesting the Viet Nam war. He attended Dartmouth and graduated a year before I did from the U. of Illinois. It was the year when Martin Luther King and Robert Kenney were assassinated. It was a year when the draft boards were requiring most young men to report for duty for deployment to Viet Nam. There were only a handful of situations that brought deferments from the draft. One of them, being in college, was now gone for Kegan. Another one, teaching elementary school, appealed to him, given his anti-war sentiments. I would have understood that. My boyfriend, having graduated a year before I did, was teaching elementary school for a deferment before going to graduate school in psychology.

For Kegan, teaching school was life-transforming. He became fascinated with the developmental process, and eventually received a doctorate from Harvard in psychology. He eventually received a number of honorary doctorates for his work in the psychological developments of adults. In his ground-breaking book, *The Evolving Self*, Kegan saw psychological growth to be a dynamic process between, on one hand, wanting to be integrated with culture, families and friends. On the hand, to be independent and autonomous.



Rev. Dr. George Dole, in his Messenger series, *Towards a Newer Church*, believes that understanding Kegan will help us understand Swedenborg. He says that The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine is saying in abstract terms what Kegan says in experiential terms. He quotes Kegan:

Of the multitude of hopes and yearnings we experience . . . two seem to subsume the others. One of these might be called the yearning to be included, to be a part of, close to, joined with, to be held, admitted, accompanied. The other might be called the yearning to be independent or autonomous, to experience one's distinctness, the self-chosenness of one's directions, one's individual integrity. . . . what is most striking about these two great human yearnings is that they seem to be in conflict, and it is, in fact, their relation—this tension—that is of more interest to me at the moment than either yearning by itself.

I believe it is a lifelong tension. Our experience of this fundamental ambivalence may be our experience of the unitary, restless, creative motion of life itself.

**Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p 107.**

Dole goes on to say:

In other words, "A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united," and "It is the intent of Divine Providence that everything created, collectively and in every detail, should be such a whole, and that if it is not, that it should become one"

(Divine Providence §4:4, §7, NCE translation).

That is, let's take Kegan's words about the "motion of life itself" and overlay it with Swedenborg's repeated insistence that the Lord is life itself.

Let's lay "the good of love" over the "yearning to be joined with" and "the truth of faith" over the "yearning to experience one's distinctness"; and then lay all of the above as a kind of template over our own life relationships.

Then we may proceed through the chapters that sketch the relationship between heart and mind and between inner and outer, our different loves, and the various states through which we are called to pass on our way to a deeper union with the Lord—the Lord from whom we have all of this "unitary, restless, creative" life.

Swedenborg talks a lot about the "good of love" and the "truth of faith." It makes sense that these terms are similar to Kegan's "yearning to be joined with," and "yearning to experience one's distinctness."

In this 3rd of 6 articles, Dole is focusing on The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine. It was published about two years after he finished the Arcana and after he had had the experience of the Last Judgement.

He is looking at the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21, and Dole says:

'A New Heaven and a New Earth' means a New Church, both in the heavens and on earth. (§1)"—probably the first clear mention in the theological works of "The New Church" as we understand it.

There follows a very condensed presentation of the spiritual meaning of the individual features of that city

Then we have sections about the new heaven, the new earth, and Jerusalem, with reference to the Last Judgment that has just taken place.

He again talks about the early church that lived in the good of charity, and he again emphasizes that the two great commandments summarize the entire Word. [\[See message of last week\]](#).

Dole points out that this book is quite a radical theology – in fact it is more of a developmental psychology.

The next thirteen chapters—more than half of the total— might best be called a spiritual developmental psychology.

They are not about such obviously “theological” subjects as God, creation, incarnation, salvation, the church, and revelation, but about our human nature and the process by which we can become angelic, closing with chapters on repentance, regeneration, and temptation.

Only then does Swedenborg write about baptism, the Holy Supper, immortality, heaven and hell, the church, the Word, providence, and finally, the Lord. Well, almost finally. There is a brief chapter on ecclesiastical and civil government, unlike all the other chapters in having no second section with references to the Arcana. It doesn’t have the label “Appendix,” but to all intents and purposes, that’s what it is.

So we are finding some fascinating concepts from Dole about a “newer New Church.” Last week we looked at how it is focused on the two great commandments which are part of every major world religion. This week, we can see that another way that we are moving beyond defining “New Church” as a belief system. Now we see that it is a dynamic process in the living of life itself. It is an on-going unfolding of our inner being in relationship to each other, the world, and God.

What is it like for you to think about “church” as a process of growth, rather than a system of beliefs? Or to think of your own spiritual life as on-going relationship with self, others, and God?

Let’s pray:

Dear Divine Process: We thank you for Your presence in our lives as the tension of growth as we struggle to combine being connected and being individual. We are coming to recognize You as that dynamic process of growth in our lives every day. So often, we resent this tension, and want You to give us an answer to our dilemmas and struggles. We want You to tell us which is right: being a part of something, or being independent. Help us to understand that we find You in the tension between the two. You are not so much an answer as a process. Help us to embrace the process of growth, recognizing that we meet You there. Amen.



Why Swedenborg Wrote TCR

August 2, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Daniel 7:13-14

I saw visions in the night, and behold, there was someone coming with the clouds of the heavens—someone like the Son of Humankind. He was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and tongues will worship him. His dominion is a dominion of an age that will not pass, and his kingdom is one that will not perish.

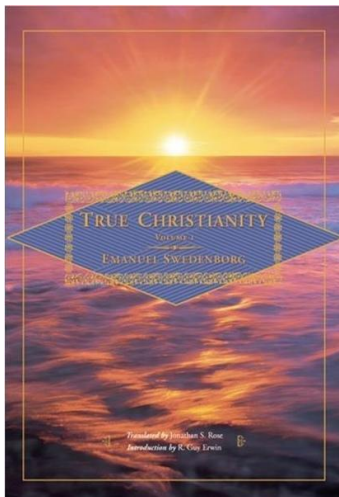
From Swedenborg

True Christianity 463

Nevertheless, the church of today is in fact headed in the opposite direction. It casts the idea of free choice out of its sanctuaries, as is clear from the following teachings taken from the book called the Formula of Concord—a book Lutherans swear to observe.

Message

Why Swedenborg Wrote *True Christian Religion* (*True Christianity*)



It was 1789 in London, and readers of Swedenborg had gathered to create a “new church” completely separate from the “old church.” How could they have thought that Swedenborg’s writings advocated a separate church, when he wrote so many times that the “new church” consisted of all people of goodwill regardless of their beliefs? However, the delegates *resolved that*:

“A complete and total separation from the Old Church is warranted not only from the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg but also from the Holy Word.”



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It was passed unanimously as George Dole writes

either in disregard or in ignorance of the call for a church that would accept “all who live in the good of charity and call them brethren, however greatly they might be at variance in the truths which at this day are called the truths of faith.”

This week we're looking at the fourth in Rev. Dr. George Dole's series, "Toward a Newer Church."

He points out that those who attended the meeting had 42 points taken from Swedenborg's writings in favor of separating from the "old church". 39 of the 42 points came from *True Christian Religion* [*True Christianity*.]

Dole writes:

*The reason for this is not far to seek. As Swedenborg's works began to attract attention, they naturally drew the attention of the Lutheran Church, and promptly came under attack as heretical. This was par for the course. I am grateful to Rev. Dr. Dave Fekete for having called to my attention a couple of volumes by Robert Preus entitled *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970). Preus draws a vivid picture of the temper of the times.*

A characteristic of Lutheran orthodoxy . . . was a polemical tone that pervaded much of the systematic and exegetical theology of the day. . . . Polemics was the order of the day. . . . Particularly annoying to us today was the general practice among theologians of pressing the arguments of their adversaries to their logical but absurd conclusions . . . (p. 31).

So, Dole concludes, that

In True Christianity, Swedenborg responded to his critics in their own language. Unpublished manuscripts show him reviewing the traditional creeds and combining the Epistles – significant authorities for Lutheranism, but largely ignored in Swedenborg's previous theological works.

Dole says we need to be clear about how to utilize True Christian Religion. We can use it as a resource for theological debates – esp. with a dogmatic Lutheran!

There is nothing wrong with rousing debates! However, Dole says he has come to see this work as a "doctrine of charity disguised as a doctrine of faith." It does give much helpful understanding of the regeneration process. But it emphasizes that what we do and how we live is far more important than what we believe.

Dole returns to an important theme in this series, that we have many Swedenborgians living good lives who feel that they can't really articulate Swedenborg's theology.

But yet – despite the thousands of words Swedenborg wrote – perhaps the theology is not meant to be grasped intellectually or even explained with words. It's meant to be lived in countless small daily actions that constitute the essence of charity. Perhaps Swedenborg's teachings are meant to be lived rather than talked about.

Of course, if we want to debate a dogmatic Lutheran of the eighteenth-century, then TCR is quite useful. If we want to simply live by Swedenborg's teachings, then we trust the love in our hearts to guide us.



Do you ever find it difficult to understand or explain Swedenborg's writings? What do you think of viewing this theology as a way of living – rather than a way of thinking or believing?

Let us pray.

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: we thank You for Your ever-flowing love that streams into our being every moment. Help us to be guided by Your Love above all as we walk through each day. Amen.



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What is the New Jerusalem

August 9, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Revelation 21:9-14

The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, 876:n. 879-88

"And I John saw the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven" signifies the New Church to be established by the Lord at the end of the former church, which will be consociated with the New Heaven in Divine truths as to doctrine and as to life

Message What is the New Jerusalem?



George Dole's 4th article in his 6-part Messenger series is called "The Wall."

He again returns to the theme of how Swedenborg's writings support the two great commandments as the essence of his theology.

You may remember this from our recent message, "What Is Our Theology?", where George Dole asks:

Why didn't Swedenborg give us a brief, clear summary of the theology of the New Church? Wrong question. The right question is, "Why haven't we taken advantage of the brief, clear summaries of



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the theology of the New Church that we have?”

Case in point:

There are three essentials of the church: the acknowledgment of the Divine [nature] of the Lord, the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word, and the life which is called charity. (Divine Providence 259:3)

Notice how nicely the three essentials match the Two Great Commandments.

The acknowledgment of the divine nature of the Lord equals the love of the Lord, the life which is called charity equals the love of the neighbor, and the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word equals the reference to the Law the Prophets. What could be simpler?



So, breaking this down, we have

Jesus replied:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

[Swedenborg: the acknowledgment of the Divine [nature] of the Lord]

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

[Swedenborg: the life which is called charity.]

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

[Swedenborg: the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word]

“The law and the prophets” are the whole Word in all and each of its parts (Arcana Coelestia 1: 6632.)]



In this, the 4th part of the series, we focus on the concept of the New Jerusalem. Dole especially looks here on Swedenborg's book, *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*. It was published about two years after he finished the *Arcana* and after he had had the experience of the *Last Judgement*.

In it, Swedenborg is looking at the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21, and Dole says:

'A New Heaven and a New Earth' means a New Church, both in the heavens and on earth. (§1)"—probably the first clear mention in the theological works of "The New Church" as we understand it. There follows a very condensed presentation of the spiritual meaning of the individual features of that city

The wall of the city is mentioned five times. Its literal sense is the deeper meaning of the Word.



Dole says:

I find the Gospels offering us the definitive perspective in the Two Great Commandments. They crystallize the message of "all the Law and the Prophets" (emphasis mine). That, our theology tells us, is the "one faith." That is what is contained within the wall, what lies more or less concealed everywhere in the literal sense.

How are we to find the meaning of the wall for ourselves? If it is about living the two Great Commandments, then it may not have a lot of meaning about institutional church.

One meaning I find in the "wall" for living life by the two great commandments comes from Martin Luther King, Jr. He 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.



I see King's concept of the “beloved society” as similar to Swedenborg's New Jerusalem. It is not something for us to dream about for the future; it is something we need to create now in this world by working towards a world of greater justice and compassion.

Dole ends this article by reminding us of John Clowes, a devoted Swedenborgian of the early years who was convinced that it would be a mistake to put Swedenborg's idea into an institution. Henry James Sr [who claimed he overcame depression after reading about Swedenborg's concept of “vastation” wrote a book called “The Church of Christ Not an Ecclesiasticism.” He decided not to be part of the Swedenborgian separatists in the early years because of his commitment not to institutionalize Swedenborg's writings.

George shares with us his own meaning of the “wall”:

My own conviction is that we are called to be both distinguishably different and united, that there is a tension between these two goals, and that the divine intent of this tension is that it be creative rather than destructive.



What meaning do you find in “the wall”? How would you build a city that is surrounded by a wall based on living the two great commandments? What would that city look like for you?

Let us pray.

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom, thank you for giving us opportunities to reflect on how we can best live Your two great commandments in our lives. Help us each to find our own meaning in the “wall” that reflects the Word. That Word may be taking us to the center of existence; where we struggle between being distinctly ourselves and living in community with others. Help us to stay in this creative tension, and to learn from it each day.

The Gold Standard

August 16, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Rev. 21: 18-27, New International Version (NIV)

The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

From Swedenborg

Revelation Unveiled: §912 and §917

Everything that church has is the good that love does, flowing in together with light out of heaven from the Lord.

'And the street of the city was pure gold like clear glass' means that all the truth of that church and its doctrine [emphasis mine] takes the form of the good love does when it flows in together with light out of heaven from the Lord"

Message The Gold Standard

"So what?" Yeah, "so what, Dude?" What does it matter, really?

Rev. Dr. George Dole tells us that Cal Turley's favorite question was "So what?"



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Rev. Cal Turley

Rev. Dr. Cal Turley was the Professor of Practical Theology at the Swedenborg School of Religion and was a member of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. Sadly, he died suddenly in 1984 of a heart attack while serving as President of Convention.

He was a popular professor at our seminary. George refers to his frequent question of “so what?” in reference to theological statements. “If you believe that point of theology, what difference will it make in how you live your life and treat the people you love?”

Not every point of theology makes a difference in our lives.

But some of our attitudes make a huge difference.

If we think that God is preparing to damn us to hell. Dole quotes Rob Bell, whom he states says it loud and clear in his book, *Love Wins*:

Inquisitions, persecutions, trials, book burnings, blacklisting—when religious people become violent, it is because they have been shaped by their God, who is violent.”

-- Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), p. 183.

Dole suggests that some of the violence in our world could be related to a belief in a violent and vengeful God.

What if, instead, we honor a God of pure love?

Dole says it was years before he understood this passage of Swedenborg:

“What is true enables us to sense what is good because it teaches us.”

That could be saying that our beliefs lead us to good works – something that Swedenborg contradicts in most of his writings. But Dole discovered the rest of this passage:

. . . But this is an appearance. It is something good that is enabling what is true to perceive. You see, the good is the soul or the life of the true.

In other words, Dole says “living rightly comes before thinking rightly.” And this is about everyday events. I sometimes think that my whole day becomes better when I pass through a toll booth with a collector giving me a big smile and saying “have a good day!” Whatever I’m feeling when I come to the booth, I’m feeling happy and loving when I leave.

**We are accepted into heaven
when we accept
heaven into ourselves.
-Emanuel Swedenborg**

The whole pattern of the Holy City assumes nothing more than everyday human nature. It assumes that we matter to each other and to ourselves, that we make a difference to each other. When it talks about the good that love does, then it is talking about individuals not as isolated units but as individuals in community.

We are accepted into heaven when we accept heaven into ourselves (Heaven and Hell §420). We become members of an earthly community by taking that community.

The Holy City is the “Gold Standard.” [“and the city was pure gold like pure glass.”]

What is that “pure gold?” *“everything that church has is the good that love does, flowing in together with light out of heaven from the Lord”* (Revelation Unveiled §912). Everything.

It keeps coming back to “love.” Love now – not in a future heaven.

In fact, Swedenborg emphasizes that heaven is here and now. Right now, in this day of your life, you can choose heaven or hell to define your existence.

We are accepted into heaven when we accept heaven into ourselves (Heaven and Hell §420). We become members of an earthly community by taking that community into our minds and hearts. We become human through “the good that love does.” The good that love does teaches us what it means to be human. Doctrine simply articulates that knowledge; we understand doctrine when we experience what it is talking about, whether or not we can put that understanding into words.

Actually all of this is Swedenborg’s description of a new church. This description does not talk about an organization, about clergy, about collection plates or even about formal worship. It talks about a life of good works based in love.

This is the “gold standard” of the New Jerusalem. Not it’s structure, but the way people choose to live their lives.



This makes a lot of sense! Yet, we could argue that it is just more theology. More words. How could we actually have a church that supports that?

Dr. Dole suggests we not make a “u-turn” to give up what we have. I agree with that! For me, our church is not so much about our theology or our buildings – but our people. When I became a Swedenborgian, it was the community of people that attracted me beyond anything else.

We are a community – that includes all 725 of us who have registered with this on-line community and everyone who engages with our pages and recordings.

Let’s not abandon the good we have created. But perhaps we can find more ways to emphasize the community within our church structure – and emphasize our role in the larger Community of the world.

How can our church provide more support to us on a daily basis? Dole suggests AA meetings as one possible model for church. It could be people gathering to support each other in living in love.

The early Swedenborgians were people who gathered in reading groups to read and discuss Swedenborg’s writings.

I don’t think Dole’s articles are trying to suggest that we tear our church apart. But he is giving us ideas from Swedenborg’s writings about ways we could do “church” differently.

Can you think of ways we can do a better job of supporting each other on our life’s journey? Of being loving people striving to live lives of good? How can we focus more on how we live and less on what Swedenborg wrote?

We’ll be exploring these questions in the weeks and months ahead!

Let us pray:”

“Dear Divine Presence: “Help us to always walk in Your light, and to remember that You live within us and in everything around us. Help us to better love ourselves, each other, and our world. Help us to focus less on defining our theology, and more on living lives of love.” Amen.

Exploring Music in Worship

August 23, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Exodus 15: 19-21

When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen[e] 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.

Message Exploring Music in Worship

I loved my times of study and retreat at the Shalem Institute. We would always have a few days of Sabbath time with God when we didn't speak to each other. That doesn't mean, however, that we did not dance and sing. The Rev. Tilden Edwards would put on music and encourage us to move – all as part of our prayer with the Divine.

Are music and movement part of your worship? As we explore how to rejuvenate the soul, 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



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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 form 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.

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.

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 8339-8339.

'With timbrels and with dances' means praise from joy and gladness. This is clear from the meaning of 'timbrel' as that which has regard to an affection for spiritual good, or to the good of truth, and means the delight or joy belonging to it, dealt with just above in 8337; and from the meaning of 'dance' as that which has regard to an affection for spiritual truth, and means the delightful feeling or gladness belonging to it, dealt with below. In ancient times not only musical instruments and singing served to bear witness to gladness of heart but also dancing. Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. This explains why 'dancing' is mentioned in the Word, meaning the glad feelings that belong to affections for truth, or to faith grounded in good or charity ...

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).

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.

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.



Worship Through Art

August 30, 2015

READINGS

From Bible via Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 254: 2

That "to create," in the Word, signifies to reform and regenerate, is plain from these passages:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a firm spirit in the midst of me (Ps. 51:10).
Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good; Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit; they are created (Ps. 104:28, 30).

The people which shall be created shall praise Jah (Ps. 102:18).

Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth, rejoice for ever in that which I create; behold I create Jerusalem an exultation (Isa. 65:17-18).

Jehovah createth the heavens, He that stretcheth out the earth, He giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein (Isa. 42:5; 45:12, 18).

Thus saith Jehovah thy Creator, O Jacob, thy Former, O Israel; I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by My name; everyone that is called by My name, I have created him in My glory (Isa. 43:1, 7).

They were prepared in the day that thou wast created; thou was perfect in thy ways in the day that thou was created, until perversity was found in thee (Ezek. 28:13, 15).

These things are concerning the king of Tyre, by whom are signified they who are in intelligence by the Divine truth.

That they may see, know, consider, and understand that the hand of Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy one of Israel hath created it (Isa. 41:20).

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed (Rogers) n. 475

Who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it. This symbolically means, who animates all who are in heaven and the church, and enlivens each and every thing in them.

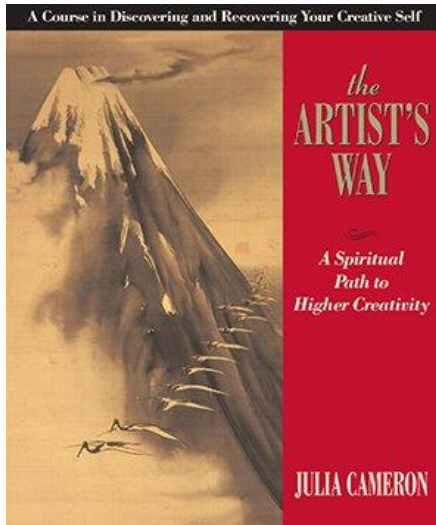
In the natural sense, to create means to create, but in the spiritual sense to create means, symbolically, to reform and regenerate (nos. 254, 290), which is also to enliven. Heaven means the heaven inhabited by angels. The earth and the sea symbolize the church ? the earth those people who concern themselves with its internal elements, and the sea those people who concern themselves with its external ones (nos. 398, 470). The things that are in these symbolize each and every thing in such people.



Message

The Artist's Way

Exploring Worship Through Art



Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* writes: *Creativity is a spiritual force. The force that drives the green fuse through the flower, as Dylan Thomas defined his idea of the life force, is the same urge that drives us toward creation. There is a central will to create that is part of our human heritage and potential. Because creation is always an act of faith, and faith is a spiritual issue, so is creativity. As we strive for our highest selves, our spiritual selves, we cannot help but be more aware, more proactive, and more creative.*

William Blake wrote: *I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me.*

How are creativity and spirituality connected? To Swedenborg, they were the same. *That "to create," in the Word, signifies to reform and regenerate.*

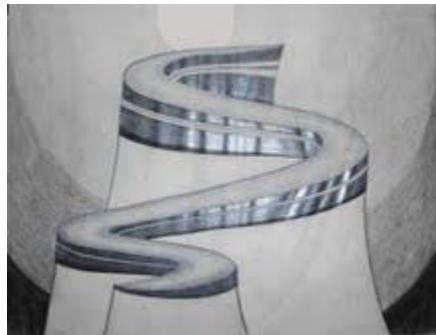
For Swedenborg, regeneration was a deeply spiritual process of a human being becoming one with the Divine.

In your life, how do the creative and the spiritual merge? Below is art work from D'Ann Loomis, one of the registrants on our web site. She writes about how the creative and the spiritual are connected for her:



Music, 1968, Tempera Painting

I feel a desire to make a picture -- a drawing or a painting, of whatever I feel very taken with, either something I see in life, or in a photograph, or in my mind. As I become more involved in making the picture, I feel that I see more and more what is there for me to find and bring out in my portrayal of it. I keep working with it until I cannot see any way to make it more like that, or when it seems to express those qualities as well as possible. Often the finished picture is quite different from what I originally had in mind when I began the work. Doing art work opens my awareness of what I see around me. Everything becomes more vivid and enjoyable to look at and I notice things I had passed by without really seeing. I go for long periods without doing art work. Music is a great comfort to me, and I'm participating in several groups -- the church choir, local university civic orchestra, and a piano ensemble group. I was a professional violinist in my younger days.



Journey, 1968, D'Ann Loomis -- pencil with computer enhancement by son Jerry



Firebird, 1968, D'Ann Loomis. Ink with computer enhancement by son Jerry

Julia Cameron offers what she sees as the Basic Principles of creativity. They are also the Basic Principles of spirituality:

1. *Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.*



2. *There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life -- including ourselves.*
3. *When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives.*
4. *We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.*
5. *Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.*
6. *The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.*
7. *When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction.*
8. *As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected.*
9. *It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.*
10. *Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.*

Take some meditative time to consider your moments of deep encounters with the Divine. Did they inspire any creative expression in you? Consider your moments of creative inspiration. Did they feel like encounters with God?



Spiritual Uses

September 6, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5: 13-16

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 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

Apocalypse Explained 1942

Everything in heaven, in the world, and in the human body both great and small, was created from use, in use and for use.

Message What are "Spiritual Uses"



I first heard of "Emanuel Swedenborg" as a college student reading books by Wilson Van Dusen. [1923 – 2005].

Van was a clinical psychologist who worked within the framework of Swedenborg's writings. He was also an artist and a mystic. He [wrote](#) before his death:

For a long while, I have reported I am of the Universal Church described by Swedenborg. I have made up a slogan for us: 'Seek out aid and the good in all Churches'. People have difficulty understanding my clear support for Swedenborg's works. Mar Joseph Vredenburgh reminded me recently that I may soon see Swedenborg. For my money, Swedenborg has clearly reached the status of Bodhisattva. I wish I could report back.

Van

Every year, Convention has a worship theme. Last year it was The Year of Regeneration. We have started a new church year, following the annual convention, and our new theme is: The Year of Spiritual Uses.

One of our sub themes is: true faith as the life of charity, what we actually do, not just think or say

We've focused on that by exploring the articles of Rev. Dr. George Dole on how the "newer church" is one of doing good in the world.

One of my favorite writings on Swedenborg's "uses" is [Van Dusen's "Personal Spiritual Development through Uses"](#) first published by Studia Swedenborgiana.

He begins by saying:

The simplest and most powerful method for personal spiritual development in Swedenborg's theology lies in the idea of uses. Part of its beauty is its simplicity, which permits carrying it out in the midst of ordinary duties and labor, indeed, in any human act. It can be applied anywhere, anytime, by anyone. Part of its power lies in its wonderful concreteness. Much of religion has to do with masses of words and ideas. Use lies in concrete acts. Words are unnecessary. The very concrete immediacy of uses takes us out of ourselves, out into circumstances, out toward others and a larger world.

He makes clear that Swedenborg is not talking about simply "good works" or charitable acts. It is both deeper and simpler than that. And Van Dusen saw it as the heart of Swedenborg's writings:

If only one idea could be saved from his writings, this is the one I would choose, for it turns out to be the hinge pin of both personal development and of his whole theology.

This is my favorite example from his article about "uses" in practice:

We have two shoe repairmen, both making a living at this trade. One has as his aim making the most money. He cuts corners on materials and workmanship. He has to grind out as many repairs as possible. The second also is concerned with profit, but he enjoys meeting customers, talking of shoe problems, and he enjoys his craft. The aim of the first is his profit above the customer's welfare. The aim of the second is profit through the customer's welfare. This is the difference between hell and heaven. If you visited these two shops, you probably would quickly sense the difference. If we sent in a shoe repair expert, he could probably find the difference in the repaired shoes. The idea of



uses is intimately related to quality. Could not the second man be even more charitable by cutting prices and thereby giving away his services as a charity? No. This would overlook his obligations to himself and his family. He has a difficult judgment to make in relation to his needs and the needs of others. His needs have to be met as well as those of his customers. If he gives away his services and materials, he will soon be out of business and no longer of service, while having harmed himself and his family. The charity is to be toward the self, loved ones and others.

I think about “uses” when I’m driving on the Maine interstate. There are a number of toll stops, where one can choose an “automatic drive through” [if you have the pass] or to give money to a live person. I always choose the live person. Even in miserable weather – and I’m sure at times when the toll person is having a hard time personally – I get a friendly greeting and a “have a nice day.” After hearing that, I usually do!



What people have you encountered who are working out of love – people whose everyday tasks are “spiritual uses”?

What things do you in a routine day that contributes to the loving actions of the world?



Uses in a World of Tragedy

September 13, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

John 14: 25-27

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

From Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven, #8455

Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he is at peace, since he fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs him. How far a person attains this state depends on how far he attains love to the Lord.

Message Uses in a World of Tragedy

How can times of tragedy and suffering turn into opportunities for loving uses in the world?



Horatio Spafford was a prominent attorney in 1860's Chicago. He and his wife Anna had four daughters. In the great fire of 1871, he lost virtually all of his wealth.

He and his wife, Anna, were strong supporters of the evangelist Dwight L. Moody and they wanted to serve others. They worked tirelessly to help those who had become homeless in the fire. After two years, they were exhausted, and decided on a trip abroad that would start by working with evangelist Dwight L. Moody. At the last minute, Horatio had a business crisis and decided to join the family later. Anna and the four girls boarded the ship *Ville Du Havre*.



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Another ship collided with theirs, and 226 people were drowned, including all four of the Spafford daughters.



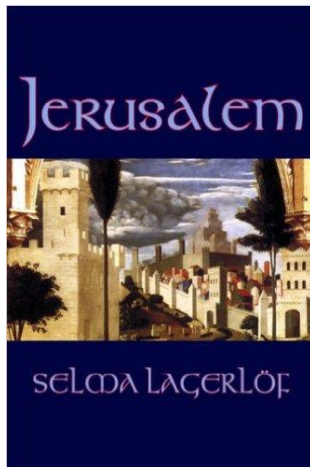
Anna faced unbearable despair as she made her way back on the rescue vessel, not certain she wanted to continue living. Horatio got on a boat to meet her. As his boat passed the spot where his daughters had drowned, he penned the words to the song, *It Is Well With My Soul*.

It is a deeply moving song about faith in God during times of sorrow. It has inspired countless numbers of people through the years.

Anna and Horatio returned to Chicago to carry on their lives. They had three more children. Sadly, their son died when he was four of scarlet fever. However, there were two girls – Bertha and Grace -- who grew up to carry on the good work of their parents.

The family worshipped in a local Presbyterian church, but it seems that they had theological dissention with the rest of the congregation. Horatio and his family were convinced that God would not send anyone to hell, but that we could all earn eternal salvation.

The Presbyterians felt he was a heretic and that perhaps his son had been taken by God as punishment for his beliefs!



The family with a few friends decided to immigrate to Jerusalem. They moved into a house in the old part of the city, and started a community they called *The American Colony*. Their purpose was to show the love of Jesus by serving those in need. The colony later became the subject of a Nobel Prize winning book, *Jerusalem*, written by Swedish novelist Selma Lagerlöf.

They worked with people of any religion without attempting to convert them, so they gained the trust of Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

The community grew over the years. In 1894, Anna Spafford visited Chicago and made contact with Olaf Henrik Larsson, the leader of the Swedish Evangelical Church. A number Swedes from Chicago decided to join the community. Thirty-eight adults and seventeen children sold all their possessions and joined the Colony, arriving in July 1896.



In 1925, Bertha Spafford Vester founded the Spafford Children's Center in Jerusalem. They provide medical care for children of any religion. The Center is still active today, and is run by descendants of Horatio and Anna. They help over 30,000 children every year.

The lives of Anna and Horatio are a dramatic example of turning tragedy into loving uses. They could have lived out their days in seclusion, mourning the deaths of their 4 daughters. They could have kept this tragedy on the personal level: what was God teaching them? Instead, they took the impact of the tragedy into the world. The world lost the contributions of the 4 Spafford daughters who drowned. The world gained the survival of thousands of children through the good work of the colony and children's center in Jerusalem.



We don't know if the Spafford's had ever heard of Emanuel Swedenborg. Their lives in Chicago did overlap that of Daniel Burnham's [the architect's] family, and they worked closely with Swedish people who emigrated from Chicago.

We do know that they deeply lived two important dimensions of Swedenborg's theology:

Interfaith perspective: They lived a life inspired by Jesus, and never tried to convert people to their religion. They became trusted by Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

Transformation by Uses: Swedenborg's approach to transforming tragedy was to go into the world and make a difference. Despite immediate suffering, the long-term impact can be one of transforming the world.

What tragedies in your life have transformed the world in some way – no matter how small?

How could current tragedies help you bring transformation into the world? 


Let us pray: 


Dear Divine Love and Wisdom, Help us turn to You with every tragedy in our lives, and let You turn our sorrows into loving uses for others. Amen.



Helen Keller: A Life of Uses

September 20, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

John 1

The Word Became Flesh

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.

3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it.

6There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.[b]

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3223

3223. There are two lights whereby man is enlightened—the light of the world, and the light of heaven. The light of the world is from the sun; the light of heaven is from the Lord. The light of the world is for the natural or external man, thus for those things which are in him, and although the things which are therein do not appear to be of this light, they nevertheless are so; for nothing can be comprehended by the natural man except by such things as come forth and appear in the solar world, thus except they have somewhat of form from the light and shade therein. All ideas of time and ideas of space, which are of so much account in the natural man that he cannot think without them, are also of the light of the world. But the light of heaven is for the spiritual or internal man. Man's interior mind, in which are his intellectual ideas that are called immaterial, is in this light. Man is unaware of this, although he calls his intellect sight, and ascribes light to it; the reason is that so long as he is in worldly and corporeal things he has a perception only of such things as are of the light of the world, but not of such things as are of the light of heaven; the light of heaven is from the Lord alone, and the universal heaven is in this light.

[2] This light (namely, that of heaven) is immensely more perfect than the light of the world; the things which in the light of the world make one ray, in the light of heaven make myriads; within the light of heaven there are intelligence and wisdom. This light is that which flows into the light of the world which is in the external or natural man, and causes him to perceive sensuously the objects of actual things; and unless this light flowed in, man could not have any perception, for the things which are of the light of the world derive from it their life. Between these lights, or between the things which are in the light of heaven and those in the light of the world, there exists a correspondence when the external or natural man makes one with the internal or spiritual man, that is, when the former is subservient to the latter; and the things which then come forth in the light of the world are representative of such things as come forth in the light of heaven.

Message Helen Keller: A Life of Uses



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There are so many people who come to mind whose lives demonstrate "uses." Probably my favorite is Helen Keller, whose book *Light in My Darkness* tells of her spiritual journey that was guided by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Like many people, when I first became interested in the Swedenborgian Church, I had no idea that Swedenborg's writings had been so central to Helen Keller's life. She wrote:

I do not know whether I adopted the faith, or the faith adopted me. I can only say that the heart of the young girl sitting with a big book of raised letters on her lap in the sublime sunshine was thrilled by a radiant presence and inexpressibly endearing voice ... the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light and a staff in my hand, and by his vision splendid I am attended on my way.

If you don't know much about Helen Keller and Swedenborg, be sure to visit [our page](#) about her on our site. While there, you'll be able to read the [text of the talk](#) she gave to our 1919 convention.

And you can read a [sermon](#) by her good friend and minister in the NY Church, Clayton Priestnal.

These are some of the words he spoke at her memorial service, after her death in 1968 at the age of 85.

At least two foundation stones of Miss Keller's religious philosophy were hewn out of Swedenborg's teachings on the afterlife. The first was hope. She began to see clearly that this world was not an end in itself, but a seminary of heaven--a proving ground for the life eternal. Her faith assured her that she would not be burdened forever by sightlessness and a total inability to hear and distinguish sounds. Helen Keller could now look upon her handicaps as a challenge, as a means of spiritual growth, as an education for a future life when she would be able to see, hear, and speak without impediment. There was no bitterness in her towards divine providence, for she knew the Lord was good to all, and he was not in any way accountable for the visitation of a dreadful affliction. This hope that shone forth so radiantly in her personality shone into the dark corners of despair where sat others who were also without sight.

The other foundation stone of her faith was this: love and use are synonymous. Over and over again her thoughts turned to this basic doctrine of Swedenborg: "The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses" (Heaven and Hell #387). This truth became the driving force of Miss Keller's life. Love has no reality, no existence, no meaning, until it goes forth into the lives of others in the form of some essential service.

As a teen-ager, Helen came to have many questions about spirituality. It so happened that a very prominent Swedenborgian wandered into her life about that time. He was John Hitz. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell in an organization to provide material about deafness. When Helen took her questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of his writing.

Reading it in Braille, she had a spiritual awakening similar to the one she had had years earlier with her teacher, Anne Sullivan when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

Helen Keller was an ardent advocate of the rights of the disabled and others socially disadvantaged by society.

Her spiritual comprehension is profound. When we talk about God's light in our darkness, most of us are using the term metaphorically, to refer a spiritual or emotional state. Most of us see physically

with our eyes, but encounter many periods of spiritual darkness.

In our opening song, Johnny Cash sang:

*Just like a blind man I wandered astray
Straight is the gate and narrow the way
then like the blind man that got back his sight
Praise the Lord I saw the light.*

*I saw the light I saw the light
No more darkness no more night
now I'm so happy no sorrow in sight
Praise the Lord I saw the light.*

He wasn't really singing about a physical light, but rather comparing God's light that is beyond the physical eyes.

For Helen, her darkness was only to the physical world. Her spiritual eyes within saw God, giving her far clearer sight than those of us with physical seeing.

What we need to see God are spiritual eyes; not physical eyes. We need to hear God whispering in our heart; we don't need physical ears for that.

Helen Keller did not just say those words ... she lived them in her busy life of social activism. As a Swedenborgian, she believed that action is the greatest form of spirituality.

If Helen Keller could find God's light in her darkness, then so can the rest of us. Some days it feels so hard to sense any Divine presence in our lives. We can feel very much cut off and alone. In those times, remember Helen Keller who could not see or hear on this physical plane. But she came to learn that those senses are of little lasting value. It is our capacity to hear and see God in our hearts that is important. And this hearing and seeing are preparation for the spiritual senses we will have for eternity.

She wrote:

"I cannot see the stars scattered in the heavens; but other stars just as bright shine in my soul. Soul is very real and important to me."

When we despair of God's light guiding us through darkness, let's remember that God's light is inside. We may not see the divine light with our physical eyes. But we can see clearly with our spiritual eyes. So many of us have "spiritual disabilities" and are fortunate to have the leadership of one with such perfect spiritual sight as Helen Keller.

Join in our closing song, "*I Can See Clearly Now.*" As you sing, focus on "seeing" with spiritual eyes, as Helen Keller taught us:

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)*



Sun-Shiny day.

*Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
it's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Johnny Appleseed: A Life of Uses

September 27, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

John 13:34-35

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another

From Swedenborg

Divine Love and Wisdom #330

The goal of creation is a heaven of angels from the human race; so human beings are the goal of creation. All other created things are intermediate goals. Since all of them relate to humanity, they focus on these three aspects: our bodies, our rationality, and our spirituality--which looks toward our union with the Lord.

We cannot be united with the Lord without being spiritual, nor can we be spiritual without being rational, nor can we be rational without being in a state of physical wholeness. It is like a house: our body is like the foundation, our rationality is like the structure of the house built on it, and our spirituality is like the furnishings of the house. Living in the house is being united with the Lord.

Message

Johnny Appleseed: A Life of Uses



I love living in New England, where fall is my favorite season. I am so joyful to see the leaves turning vibrant colors and to smell crackling fires in the evenings as fireplaces and wood stoves are lit. As I walk along the lane by my house, I see trees bulging with their ripe apples; some already falling to the ground. When driving back roads, I see many local stands selling bags of apples and cider. Apples are undoubtedly my favorite fruit, and I love tasting the different varieties.

I grew up in the Midwest, so heard many stories of the legendary Johnny Appleseed, who had walked the Midwest plains. I always assumed it was mostly legend. Then when I moved to New England, I found myself occasionally driving by Leominster, MA, where big signs proclaimed the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed.

It wasn't long after that until I found the Swedenborgian Church, and was amazed to discover that Johnny Appleseed was not only real; he was one of the first Swedenborgians. His way he lived his life grew out of his religion. When someone asks me to explain Swedenborgian theology to them, it is Johnny who leaps to mind first as one whose life exemplified the concepts.

The days of apple harvest are such a great time to think about Johnny. But there is another reason

to celebrate him this week. He was born in September.



Let's go back in time

.... To Leominster, Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774. A baby was born to Elizabeth and Nathaniel Chapman. They named their son "John." Less than a year later, he was baptized in the Congregational Church. When John was two, his mother died, so John and his sister were raised by relatives as their father served in the Continental army. Later his father re-married and had ten more children.

When John was 18, he felt a strong yearning to "go west", and persuaded his half-brother Nathaniel to join him in the adventure. He took on the profession of "nurseryman." Along the way, he encountered the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg [who had died in 1772]. The very first General Convention of our denomination was in Philadelphia in 1817. Shortly before this first convention convened, there was a fascinating article in a Swedenborgian newsletter from England:

There is in the western country a very extraordinary missionary of the New Jerusalem. A man has appeared who seems to be almost independent of corporeal wants and sufferings. He goes barefooted, can sleep anywhere, in house or out of house, and live upon the coarsest and most scanty fare. He has actually thawed ice with his bare feet. He procures what books he can of the New Church Swedenborg, travels into the remote settlements, and lends them wherever he can find readers, and sometimes divides a book into two or three parts for more extensive distribution and usefulness. This man for years past has been in the employment of bringing into cultivation, in numberless places in the wilderness, small patches (two or three acres) of ground, and then sowing apple seeds and rearing nurseries. These become valuable as the settlements approximate, and the profits of the whole are intended for the purpose of enabling him to print all the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and distribute them through the western settlements of the United States.

He became active in Ohio, where the government was giving land grants to people from Canada and Nova Scotia who had fought on our side in the Revolutionary War. Johnny was planting trees before settlers even arrived. He continued westward, planting trees, just ahead of the wave of immigration. As an elderly man, he returned home to Ohio in 1842. He died there 3 years later, and was buried near Ft. Wayne.

This is a fascinating story, and I love learning about Johnny Appleseed's life. But for today, I'd like to focus on this question: what was there about Johnny [Chapman] Appleseed's life that exemplifies Swedenborgian theology?

This is a question I hope we can all ponder and share ideas about during this week [and thereafter.] I'll begin the conversation with what I see as 4 central Swedenborgian themes in his life:

1. He lived **both with his heart and his mind**. He learned about his profession and the Van Mons theory of planting fruit as seed rather than grafting. He learned what kind of soil the trees needed, and he would go back often to check on the growth of his trees. Yet all that he did was focused in his love of people and of the Lord. He felt that he was called to be a preacher and healer; to help God care for people on the plains. He also planted medicinal herbs, and often shared them on his journeys. Swedenborg said that both Love and Wisdom are central to life. They represent spirit-matter; God-humanity; heart-mind. We must bring these “dualisms” into oneness in our lives.
2. He was **friend of all**. He learned many Indian languages and was held in high regard by many of the tribes. He cared about the concerns of both the Indian tribes and the white settlers, and often intervened in conflict. He never killed – either people or animals. He lived in complete harmony with nature. “In field and meadow and forest, he walked, concerned with the spacious thoughts of God. The singularity of his thinking and his living was inextricably entwined with his religious views”. Swedenborg emphasizes our oneness with all creation; we are part of a web of existence and we contribute to and are nurtured by the whole.
3. His life was **focused on “uses”**. He lived to be of service to others. Yet, he also attended to his own needs and, as always, that inner leading. He made a living, but money was not his motivation. He would accept cash for his trees – or clothing or food or even nothing at all. He never asked a person to pay a debt, for he reasoned that if God wanted him to have the money, God would move the customer to pay. Besides, the customer knew that he or she owed the money, without being reminded of it. However, he was not poor, and had some assets that he rarely used. Swedenborg tells us that Love and Wisdom must be expressed by our living a life of useful service to others. Johnny saw himself as a minister, and often said he was bringing *good news; fresh from Heaven*.
4. He lived by the **guidance of his inner calling**. Swedenborg tells us that God’s Love is always inflowing to our very being and essence. We can connect with the Divine by looking inward, to find the deep guidance at the depth of our soul. For there we find our deepest love and passion; and it is out of this that we live in oneness with God and the world.



How can Johnny’s life inspire our lives today?

No matter what happens in our lives, we can always return to nature to be reminded of our oneness with all creation, and the presence of the Divine in everything. I find that when life gets really complicated and confusing, I feel great peace by walking in nature. Just be being around trees or on the beach, I go to the depths of my knowing God. As a minister, I talk a lot about God! But those are words only. When I am within nature, I am aware of my participation in God’s being; and God’s in mine. It is a knowing that is beyond words and concepts. It is, to me, the essence of Swedenborg. Despite his many volumes of writing, there is an essence of his teachings – as in all mystical paths – that is beyond words. It is the place of being. We are called to this place to renew our spirit and remember our roots.

I guess that gets me back to apples! What better expresses the Divine than a tiny seed so full of its potential to become nurturing, glorious, and useful? Those apple trees and their fruit provide many of

us with shade, with food, with spiritual sustenance. This might be a good today to enjoy some apples ... and give a few seeds to your friends to start more apple trees!

PRAYER

Dear God, we ask your help in being of use in our world, in whatever ways you guide each of us. Help us to learn about You and our world through the humble apple seed. Guide us each into the depths of our souls -- where our human and Your Divine can be as one.



Johnny Appleseed's Unique Gifts

October 4, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1: 1-8 NIV^[1] 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.^[1] 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.^[1] 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.^[1]

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 Unique Gifts

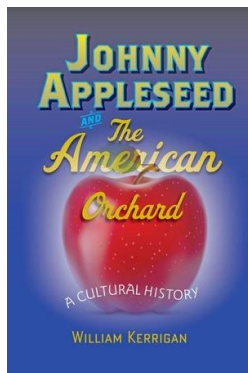


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Was Johnny Appleseed a real man or made-up myth? How about Daniel Boone? Paul Bunyan? Davy Crockett? Howard Means did a survey on those questions for his book: *Johnny Appleseed: The Man, The Myth, the American Story*. 2500 adult Americans were surveyed, 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.

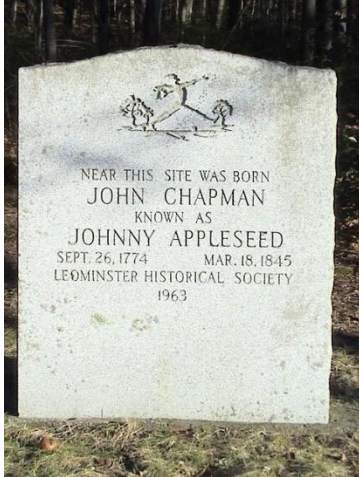


Johnny lived his life during important periods of history. He was born two years before the Revolutionary War [two years after the death of Emanuel Swedenborg.]

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

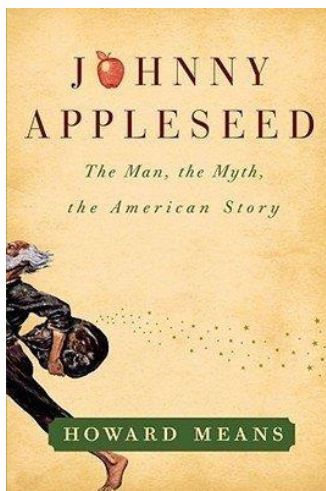


Johnny Chapman was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774, to Elizabeth and Nathaniel Chapman. He had an older sister named “Elizabeth” and they named their son “John.” Less than a year later, he was baptized in the local Congregational Church. His father had joined the local Minutemen 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 Call of God

October 11, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Samuel 3:1-10, New International Version (NIV)

The Lord Calls Samuel

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

John 1:43-51 New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

Psalms 139, New International Version (NIV)

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;



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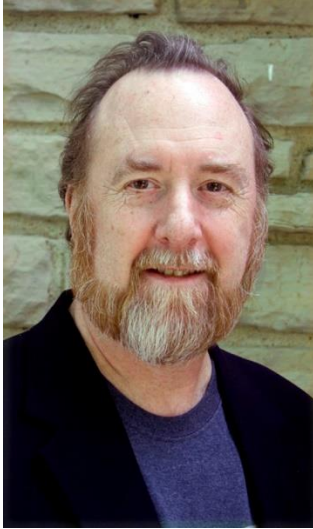
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.
If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.



Message

The Call of God

by Rev. Dr. David Fekete



The theme connecting our Old Testament reading and our New Testament reading is God's call. In these Bible stories, I identify a series of four different responses to God's call. First, ignorance and maybe even skepticism. Second, openness to God's voice. Third, realization that God knows us intimately and knows what is good for us. And fourth, when we follow God's voice, a greater and greater revelation of God's glory and power comes to us through our partnership in God's work.

Both Samuel and Nathanael initially respond with ignorance. 1 Samuel 3:7 tells us that "Samuel did not yet know the Lord." Samuel heard God's voice, but did not know that it was the voice of God. He thought that it was the voice of Eli. It was the prophet Eli who told Samuel that God was calling to him, and to respond to God next time He calls. We are told that the next time God calls, the Lord stood before Samuel, and then Samuel understands that it is God calling. Samuel then says, "Speak, for your servant hears." In our New Testament reading, Nathanael did not know Jesus. In fact, you could say that Nathanael's response was somewhat contemptuous. Philip runs up to Nathanael all excited and says, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was located in Galilee, and Galilee was looked down upon by the inhabitants of Judah. The Galileans were thought to be crude, uncultured, and backward. This actually fits with Jesus' ministry. He was often in the presence of people whom society looked down upon. He is accused of befriending thieves, prostitutes, tax collectors, and other sinners (cf. Matthew 11:19). So at first, Nathanael responds with skepticism about just who this Jesus of Nazareth is.

Now we are into the second response to God's call. Samuel is open to hear what God has to say. And although skeptical, Nathanael keeps an open mind. In response to Nathanael's skepticism, Philip says, "Come and see." Come and see. Nathanael is open minded enough to at least go to see Jesus.

The third aspect of God's call is full knowledge of humanity. When Nathanael sees Jesus, Jesus tells him that He knows him. We see that Nathanael is honest, as Jesus says, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." Nathanael is surprised. He asks Jesus how He could know that about him. Jesus replies that He saw Nathanael when he was under the fig tree, before Philip called him. Nathanael then sees and openly confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.

Recognition of God brings us to the fourth aspect of God's call. We see the power and greatness of God when we respond to God's call. Jesus tells Nathanael that he will, "see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man." When Nathanael sees that Jesus is God incarnate, and when he follows Jesus, more and more of God's nature is revealed to him. The same is true of the prophet Samuel. The Bible tells us,

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel (1 Samuel 3:19-21).

So we can identify a series of four different responses to God's call. First, ignorance and maybe even skepticism. Second, openness to God's voice. Third, realization that God knows us intimately and what is good for us. And fourth, when we follow God's voice, a greater and greater revelation of God's glory and power comes to us through our partnership in God's work.

God does call to us. God calls us into partnership with Himself. We are agents of God's will on earth. God works through us in bringing His kingdom to earth. And as we work with God, we come to know more about His kingdom and about His Divine nature. We learn what it means to love and what God's love is like. And ultimately, by working together with God to bring His kingdom on earth, we ourselves are transformed into an image and likeness of God.

Although God calls to us, we may not hear His voice, or understand the nature of His call. God may call us into a service that seems contrary to the purposes we have set for ourselves. I think of the prophet Jonah. God called to Jonah asking the prophet to go to Nineveh and preach to them to change their ways. But Jonah actually rebelled against God's call. We are told that Jonah, "ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish" (Jonah 1:3). But there was no running away. God caused a great wind to rise up at sea, and the frightened sailors asked Jonah what was wrong. Jonah told them about God and the sailors worshipped. Jonah then tells them that he is the reason for the tempest and tells them to throw him overboard. When they do so, the sea becomes calm. A whale swallows Jonah up and brings him to Nineveh after all. Even after Jonah preaches to the people of Nineveh, and even after the people of Nineveh repent, Jonah wants God to destroy the city, rather than save it.

My own life followed a pattern like that of Jonah. I think of my life immediately after graduating from my Ph.D. program at the University of Virginia. I had no work lined up in Virginia and I needed to live with my parents temporarily until I found work. So I moved down to Naples, Florida. The culture of Naples was very different from what I was used to in Virginia. In Virginia I was in a college town and had a lot of opportunity to exercise my intellect. But when I got down to Florida, I found that there were no major universities in the town. I could find no opportunities to expand my mind, as I had in Virginia. At first, I was very much upset. I missed the academic climate I had grown used to in 13 years of graduate study.

But God had other plans for me. God knew me and knew what was best for me. In school, I had studied so many world religions that I had lost my own faith. I was lost in all the intellect I had been exposed to. I was almost too smart for God. I was like Nathanael, thinking, "Can there be any good thing in Naples?"

I took work in a mental health facility. There, I worked with persons who had cognitive and affective disorders. Here, again, my intellect was of no use to me. I had to relate to my clients through my heart. My work was all emotional. I had to cut off my head. By the way, this was exactly what my AA sponsor had told me earlier. "Cut off your head," he used to say. It was as if God were saying to me, "Your intellect has had enough of a work-out for now. But where is your heart?"

In doing my work, my own emotional life got richer and richer. I discovered that too much mind could be a handicap. I also saw that too much knowledge about religions could be a hindrance to my own faith life. Living in Florida and working in the mental health facility changed me. Doing the work that God called me to do, in the place that God called me to, made me into a different person. I found faith. My soul sifted through all the information I learned about religion in school. And I discovered what I considered most true and most reasonable from what I had learned. Out of all that information, God led me into a faith of my own. I saw that through my life in Florida and through my work with cognitive and affective disorders, God was calling me back to Himself.

As with all of us, I discovered that when I found room for God in my heart, God revealed more and more of His Divine nature to me. We never work alone. God is working with us in all our affairs. And as God and I worked together, I came to understand what Divine Love is like. I understood Divine Love because I, myself, was becoming more loving. God was forming me into an image of Himself as I did His work.

God works through each and every one of us to bring His kingdom to earth. In great and small ways, we are God's hands in this world. We may partner with God in an occupation, or in individual interrelations with the people in our little world. If we hear God's voice--or if we are but open to hearing God's voice--God will come into our lives and show us where and how we can bear witness to His glory. Jesus tells us, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Let us, then, listen for Jesus' voice. Let us be open to His call. Let us see where and how we can be an agent to help bring His kingdom to earth.

I'll close the lyrics to a song. The song was called to my attention by a teen at this Christmas' youth retreat at Almont. She recited these lyrics in our closing worship service. The song is "Where is God?" by Marie Cain & Steve Schalchlin and can be found on an album called THE BONUS ROUND SESSIONS:

Did you see Sally Struthers on TV the other night?
All concerned and bothered by the starving children's plight?
It seems to me like Sally could have spared them all a bite
But she didn't. She stood there asking Where Is God
The Channel Seven newsteam did a special live report
'Bout how cold the homeless man was in his corrugated fort



I bet that cozy newsroom would have seemed like a resort
They didn't take him there. They asked him Where Is God
My grandmother told me just before she passed away
She said she had the answer to the question of the day
She said the saints and sages have been telling us for years
But no one wants to listen
No one seems to have the ears
Then she turned to me and said,
"If God has hands they're our hands
If God has eyes they're our eyes
And if God has love, it's our love."



Blindsided: Sharing Gifts After Tragedy

October 18, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 5: 43-48, New International Version

Love for Enemies

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[i] and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

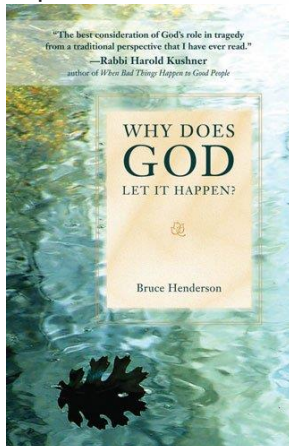
From Swedenborg

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 **Blindsided: Sharing After Tragedy**

Have you ever faced terrible tragedy in your life? How did you handle it? Many of us discover depths within ourselves that he had never imagined before the crisis.



Bruce Henderson, in his book: *Why Does God Let It Happen?* Addresses some of these issues.

This award-winning book incorporates many of the insights of the ground-breaking book: *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Rabbi Kushner. However, Henderson's book is written from a Swedenborgian perspective.

Henderson says that Swedenborg is clear that it is *never* God's will that bad things happen to us and *God will not permit anything evil that cannot be turned eventually to good.* [p. xiv]

How does God help us transform life's tragedies into the triumphs of regeneration? Sometimes God helps us find new depths in ourselves. Here's an example from an inspiring true-life story.

Jean-Dominic Bauby



Jean-Dominique Bauby lived an exciting life as editor of the French magazine *Elle*. Then, when only 43, he suffered a stroke that left him totally paralyzed. He could not speak, and could not move any parts of his body – except for his eyelids. This condition is called “locked-in syndrome.”

As you can imagine, Bauby suffered an intense depression and desire to die.



Yet, he slowly became transformed inside. He developed an alphabet code through blinking his eyelid and, through it, wrote a compelling book named *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. It was later made into an enchanting movie.

The Christian movie review site, *Hollywood Jesus*, says this about it:

The film is showing us how we have to deal with suffering and with bad things happening to us. We're strong people. This film shows us the dignity, and the courage, and the patience. We don't

decide for so many things. The only thing we can decide is the way we handle situations and the way we see situations. This is a hopeful film; it's all about hope and life.

The first time Bauby saw himself in a mirror after his stroke, he wrote:

Whereupon a strange euphoria came over me. Not only was I exiled, paralyzed, mute, half deaf, deprived of all pleasures, and reduced to the existence of a jellyfish, but I was also horrible to behold. There comes a time when the heaping up of calamities brings on uncontrollable nervous laughter – when, after a final blow from fate, we decide to treat it all as a joke. [p. 25]



After his stroke, he identified with a diving bell, which has a strong pressure to help divers stay under water. Yet, as he discovered his imagination, he came to feel as free as a butterfly.

Far from such din, when blessed silence returns, I can listen to the butterflies that flutter inside my head. To hear them, one must be calm and pay close attention, for their wing beats are barely audible. Loud breathing is enough to drown them out. This is astonishing; my hearing does not improve, yet I hear them better and better. I must have butterfly hearing. [P. 97]

Bauby had to open his heart to God's influx. When he did so, he discovered a world of joy inside of himself, despite living with "locked-in syndrome."

What ways in your life can you see Divine Providence transforming your tragedies?



Mahatma Gandhi: Living for Justice

October 25, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Micah 6: 8

*He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

From Swedenborg

The Doctrine of Charity (1766) Passage 210, Translated By John Whitehead in 1914

*To will not to do evil to the neighbor is to love him. For he who loves another does not do evil to him.
...This is evident, that he who loves the neighbor does not commit these evils.*

Message

Mahatma Gandhi: Living for Justice



If we want to understand Swedenborg's concept of "peace", then we could have no better example than Gandhi's life.

Swedenborg tells us where peace comes from:

First, we need to say where peace comes from. 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.

-Heaven & Hell 286

The Lord's Divine peace was within Gandhi, but it was a long road for him to peace – and to freedom. He was born Oct. 2, 1869 and died Jan.20, 1948.

He was leader of the [Indian independence movement](#) in India – then ruled by Great Britain. He led



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Love, Spirit, Life

the country to independence, using only techniques of nonviolent civil disobedience.

He became the father of civil rights movements around the world. Martin Luther King, Jr. was greatly influenced by him, as was Nelson Mandela.

Gandhi was a Hindu, raised in India and trained in law in London. He worked for awhile in South Africa, where he fought for justice.

He was imprisoned many times, for many years, in both South Africa and India.

He was on the path of “karma yoga” or “yoga of action.” There one seeks unity with God through good actions or *Satyagraha* -- the way out of hurting others. It was a term that Gandhi developed. He explained it this way:

I have also called it love-force or soul-force. In the application of satyagraha, I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent but that he must be weaned from error by patience and compassion. For what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other. And patience means self-suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of truth, not by infliction of suffering on the opponent, but on oneself.

Gandhi attempted to live nonviolence in all situations of his life. He lived modestly, eating a simple vegetarian diet as well as having many fasts as both self-purification as well as forms of social protest.

His birthday, Oct. 2, is a day of International Nonviolence.

Gandhi influenced many people. Nelson Mandela said of Gandhi, “In many respects, he was my role model.”



Mandela was born July 18, 1918, in a small village in South Africa and he was named Rolihlahla Mandela. His first name is sometimes translated as “troublemaker.” He was given the name “Nelson” when he was older and studying in a Methodist school, where the children were given Christian names.

Nelson’s father died when Nelson was nine, and he was sent to live with a prominent family that enabled him to receive a good education. He learned about the history of Africa, and the oppression that came from the British domination. He attended a college that was Africa’s “Harvard,” but soon he became involved in civil disobedience trying to obtain better conditions for the students. He was expelled. His adopted father was furious. He selected a wife for Nelson, and demanded he return to college. Mandela ran off to Johannesburg, where he got his bachelor’s degree by correspondence. He began to study law.

Soon he became actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement. He joined the African National Congress in 1942. He worked to make the ANC a real grassroots movement, inspired by the peasants of the land. Mandela became a leader of the movement, and for twenty years led non-violent protest against apartheid.

By 1961 he came to believe that some violence was needed to secure freedom for Black people and he became involved in guerilla warfare. He was arrested and tried – and sentenced to life in prison. He was greatly relieved because he had expected to be put to death.

Like Gandhi, he was imprisoned for many years. He said:

“I realized that they could take everything from me except my mind and my heart. They could not take those things. Those things I still had control over. And I decided not to give them away.”

He finished his law degree while in prison, and helped many prisoners appeal their cases. He helped make education available to all of the prisoners.

He was finally released. He writes of that day:

But as I got closer to the car that would take me away, I realized that when I went through that gate, if I still hated them, they would still have me. I wanted to be free. And so I let it go.”

-Mandela, Nelson (2008-03-11). Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Kindle Locations 49-56). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.

He has also said: *“To make peace with an enemy one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes one’s partner.”*

He lived that philosophy. In 1993, he and President de Klerk won the Nobel Peace Prize for their work at ending apartheid. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa, and Mandela became the first Black president of the country. The same year he published his autobiography, much of which had been written in prison.

Gandhi and Mandela both demonstrated a concept of peace that comes from within – from one’s relationship with the Divine. They showed an understanding of “peace” that includes everyone; recognizing that all of humanity is truly one – and no one is inferior to another.

Mandela’s long walk to freedom was a walk with Divine Providence. Mandela understood that the very essence of peace was that the Divine is in each of us; that Divine Providence IS peace.



Another person influenced by Gandhi was Martin Luther King, Jr., He was in seminary in 1950 when he heard a lecture by Howard University president Mordecai Johnson on Gandhi [who had been killed in 1948; two years previous].

King wrote in his autobiography:

His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works. Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform.

So King now came to see a method for eradicating social evil: Non-violence.

King said that one can bring about change through the force of one's moral character; not by violence.

He wrote:

While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change.

King came to understand that non-violence was deeply rooted in the understanding of the nature of God.

In 1959, the Kings embarked for India. King wrote in his autobiography:

I was delighted that the Gandhians accepted us with open arms. I left India more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. . . . The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But the way of nonviolence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.

He was saying that God's redemption comes to us through non-violent living in community. Non violence only makes sense in the context of a God of Love.

King also embraced Gandhi's God of Truth. Gandhi was a deeply spiritual Hindu who said "Truth is God, God is Truth. " When asked if he believed in God, he said, "God is even in these stones."

In his 1959 sermon on Gandhi, he wrote:

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.

In the same sermon, he contrasted violent versus nonviolent resistance to oppression.

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.

Gandhi – a simple and humble man – achieved Indian independence from Great Britain through non-violence. He had a major influence on Mandela and King.

We've been looking this month at the special gifts that each of us has within us. Gandhi was called to a larger purpose in his life, and found his gifts by following that calling.

Where does God call you in your life, and what special gifts shine forth when you follow that calling?



Brooding Over the Waters

November 1, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1:1-5, New International Version (NIV)

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.

Mark 1:4-11, New International Version (NIV)

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Psalms 29, A psalm of David.

Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic.
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.
The voice of the Lord strikes
with flashes of lightning.
The voice of the Lord shakes the desert;

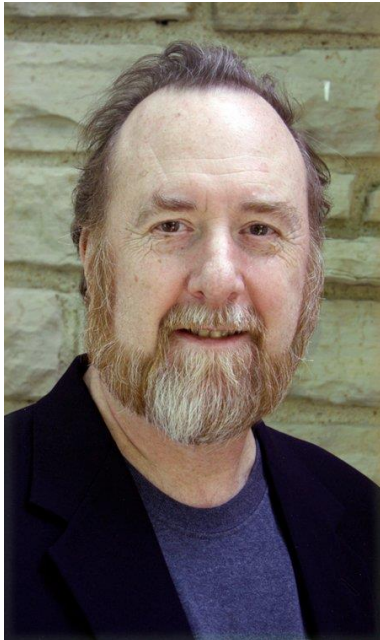


the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.
The voice of the Lord twists the oaks
and strips the forests bare.
And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord is enthroned as King forever.
The Lord gives strength to his people;
the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Message Brooding Over the Waters

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete



The first chapter of Genesis that we heard this morning puts the human race in perspective. It tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. It tells us that God preceded everything. Before there was anything, there was God. It tells us further that God governs the whole created order. We are in a universe over which God is in control.

Other creation myths in the Ancient Near East narrate the creation of the universe as a cosmic battle between the chaos waters and a hero-god. These stories have the chaos waters existing at the same time as the other gods exist. It is by subduing the chaos waters that creation happens. These myths do not begin with a God who creates everything.

These Babylonian myths, however, do find their way into the Hebrew Scriptures. In Psalm 29, which is older than Genesis 1, the raging waters are mentioned. We read that "The voice of the Lord is over the waters;" "The Lord thunders over the mighty waters;" "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood." Lines like this suggest the influence of Babylonian mythology that has creation begin with the defeat of the chaos waters. And we find an analogous idea in Genesis--God is supreme over the

chaos waters. This is only hinted at in the line, "the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters."

What these readings give us is an image of creation. It is an image in which God is in control of the forces of chaos. It is an image of the world that God made by His own Word. The Bible writers put these stories first to say that all the history of the world to follow is a history that God works in.

Immediately after the creation of the universe, the human race is created. There are actually two creation stories. The first one is Genesis 1:1-2:3. In this story humans are the last thing created, and the human race is the culmination of the whole creation process. We are created in God's own image--male and female. In the second creation story, humans are created first, and then the Garden of Eden is planted for Adam to live in.

This sequence of events tell us two things. First, that all of creation is made by God, who governs it. And second, that humans are the primary beings created, who are watched over by God.

This, too, differs from other world-views in the Ancient Near East. In myths of other cultures in the ANE, humans are lowly creatures whose only purpose is to serve the gods by performing sacrifices. The gods live above the world of humans, and care little for our wellbeing. In fact, the flood story from the ANE happens because the human race makes too much noise and keeps the gods awake. The flood occurs to get rid of the noisy human race.

But for the Hebrew culture, we are God's children. We are made in God's image; we are set in a world created by God; we are watched over by a loving God.

How comforting this is! The world we live in can look very grim. We see the horrors of war and its violence. We see terror. We see genocide. We see random shooting acts of unspeakable tragedy. We see unemployment and privation. When we contemplate all these ungodly events, we can yield to despair. But in all this, we need to remember that this is my Father's world.

When the Bible writers composed the first creation story--the story that put God above the created order--their world had seen terrible calamities, too. The creation story at the beginning of Genesis had been written after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. The writers of that story had seen the horrors of war with Assyria, and the complete devastation of their king and kingdom. Not only that, but I think the case can be made that the Assyrian kingdom was perhaps the most bloodthirsty and cruel the Ancient Near East had ever seen, maybe the world had ever seen. And yet the Bible writers could still see human history as one in which God governs creation from the beginning of the universe to the giving of the Law to Moses.

In the gospel of Mark, we learn that the same God who created the universe and who governs history actually entered history. Just after Jesus is baptized by John, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus. A voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In this passage, we see the power of God descending on Jesus. It is as if God is saying, "From now on, Jesus represents me." Or put stronger, "Jesus is my embodiment." This is what John's gospel makes clear. It begins with a beautiful hymn:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God; all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have



beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, . . . No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (1:1-3,14, 18).

In the Christmas season, we think about the birth of Jesus. We then think about the gifts from the Magi. Now we turn our attention to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The gospel of Mark begins not with Jesus' birth, but with His baptism and the beginning of His ministry. The only stories we have of Jesus infancy are in Luke and Matthew. And those infancy stories are exhausted in the first two chapters of each gospel.

Clearly, the gospel writers are interested in what Jesus does as an adult. They are interested in Jesus' teachings, His ministry, and His healings. These are all examples of God's interaction with humanity. For the Bible is all about humanity's relationship with God. Although there is a lot of history and narrative in the Old Testament, there is also meaning to that history and narrative. The meaning of those stories is how sin or obedience led to prosperity or destruction for the Israelites. So the essence of the Old Testament is examining the consequences of turning from and turning toward God's laws. Or, in other words, the essence of the Old Testament is a person's relationship with God.

The same is true of the New Testament. Jesus' advent and healings show God's love for the human race. They show the eternal covenant God made with us from the very beginning of creation. God came to us to heal and save.

And Jesus' teachings show us how to live in relationship to God. They are a reminder of the essential teachings of the Old Testament. They are demonstrations and stories about how to live with God in a love relationship, and how to live with each other in Christian love.

They are a reminder, also, that God is governing the universe and watching over us. For when the powers of darkness became too great in the spiritual world and on earth, God Himself came to us. He opened up a connection to heaven and to God through Himself. He was and is the new Way, the Truth, and the Life. And in the person of Jesus, that creator God flowed through heaven, and into the material body of the Only Begotten Jesus Christ. Creator and creation became fully one as God merged with the Divine Humanity of Jesus of Nazareth.

In Jesus, humanity is again made central to the created order. The Divine Humanity of Jesus Christ dignifies the human form. And in doing so, it places humanity at the center of creation, as is the case in the very first book of the Bible. The birth, baptism, and ministry of Jesus show that God is ever watching over us. They show that God is governing creation and history. They show us that we are never alone; that we are never apart from God; that we are always in a caring universe. Wherever we are, in whatever state we find ourselves, God is always with us; God always cares about us; God always is in the process of leading us to greater and greater joy, happiness, and love. I think the Psalmist said it best,





Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast
(Psalm 139:7-10).



Sharing Gifts through the Arts, P. 1

November 8, 2015

READINGS

John 9 (New International Version)

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

"Where is this man?" they asked him.
"I don't know," he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

From Swedenborg

Heavenly Secrets 18-20, NCE

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.

The Spirit of God stands for the Lord's mercy, which is portrayed as moving constantly, like a hen brooding over her eggs. What is being brooded over in this instance is what the Lord stores away in us, which throughout the Word is called "a remnant" [or "survivors"]. It is a knowledge of truth and goodness, which can never emerge into the light of day until our outer nature has been devastated. Such knowledge is here called the face of the water.

Genesis 1:3. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something

transcendent.

People who focus exclusively on externals do not even know what is good or what is true; everything connected with self-love and love of worldly advantages they consider good, and anything that promotes those two loves they consider true. They are unaware that such "goodness" is evil and such "truth" false.

When we are conceived anew, however, we first begin to be aware that our "good" is not good. And as we advance further into the light, it dawns on us that the Lord exists and that he is goodness and truth itself.

Message

Sharing Gifts through the Arts, Part 1

Helen Keller & the Arts



We've been exploring the special gifts we all have to share with the world. This month we're considering how one's unique gifts can sometimes be expressed in the arts. Helen Keller is a good example of how someone with disabilities can use the arts for personal expression.

At the core of Helen Keller's life was her Swedenborgian faith, which she adopted at age 13.

I do not know whether I adopted the faith, or the faith adopted me. I can only say that the heart of the young girl sitting with a big book of raised letters on her lap in the sublime sunshine was thrilled by a radiant presence and inexpressibly endearing voice ... the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light and a staff in my hand, and by his vision splendid I am attended on my way.

If you don't know much about Helen Keller and Swedenborg, be sure to visit [our page](#) about her on our site. While there, you'll be able to read the [text of the talk](#) she gave to our 1919 convention.

And you can read a [sermon](#) by her good friend and minister in the NY Church, Clayton Priestnal.

These are some of the words he spoke at her memorial service, after her death in 1968 at the age of 85.

At least two foundation stones of Miss Keller's religious philosophy were hewn out of Swedenborg's teachings on the afterlife. The first was hope. She began to see clearly that this world was not an

end in itself, but a seminary of heaven--a proving ground for the life eternal. Her faith assured her that she would not be burdened forever by sightlessness and a total inability to hear and distinguish sounds. Helen Keller could now look upon her handicaps as a challenge, as a means of spiritual growth, as an education for a future life when she would be able to see, hear, and speak without impediment. There was no bitterness in her towards divine providence, for she knew the Lord was good to all, and he was not in any way accountable for the visitation of a dreadful affliction. This hope that shone forth so radiantly in her personality shone into the dark corners of despair where sat others who were also without sight.

The other foundation stone of her faith was this: love and use are synonymous. Over and over again her thoughts turned to this basic doctrine of Swedenborg: "The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses" (Heaven and Hell #387). This truth became the driving force of Miss Keller's life. Love has no reality, no existence, no meaning, until it goes forth into the lives of others in the form of some essential service.

As a teen-ager, Helen came to have many questions about spirituality. It so happened that a very prominent Swedenborgian wandered into her life about that time. He was John Hitz. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell in an organization to provide material about deafness. When Helen took her questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of his writing.



Reading it in Braille, she had a spiritual awakening similar to the one she had had years earlier with her teacher, Anne Sullivan when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

Helen Keller was an ardent advocate of the rights of the disabled and others socially disadvantaged by society.

Eugene Taylor, PhD, was a Swedenborgian who was a Lecturer on Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, and the 1983 William James Lecturer on the Varieties of Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School. In his book, *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing*, he writes this about art and disabilities:

Often, we think of sickness as something transitory; but for millions of people, illness is chronic, even lifelong. The loss of limbs, a radical disfigurement, terrible pain, all of these may be permanent adjustments that a person has to make. Chronic illness, however, can also be a stimulus to kinds of internal growth that would not have been other possible. ... Beethoven composed symphonies while completely deaf. Jackson Pollock, as well as numerous other artists, used conditions of



psychopathology to produce new dimensions in modern art. ... while terrible things might happen to us, there is simply no telling what new doors will open up for us in our response to pain, sickness, and infirmity. Our illness can always become the vehicle toward the actualization of a spiritual destiny higher than the physical or psychological. [140-41]

Swedenborg wrote:

"There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. " [DLW 340] and "The true principle of cure is the divine love brought by the Lord's humanity and life of divine truth ..." [AC 571]

The more we align with the spiritual influx, the more we are in a state of healing; regardless of the circumstances of the body.

Physicist Stephen Hawkins says of his severe disabilities:

I guess we're all pretty disabled on the cosmic scale. What difference are a few muscles more or less? Disability does not really affect my consciousness. I see it as an inconvenience like color blindness.

Through reading Swedenborg, Helen Keller came to have a similar view on her disabilities. It was only her physical sight and physical hearing that were impaired. Internally, everyone has impairment of the spiritual eyes and ears. Hers, however, were far more developed than for most people around her.

The Helen Keller Art Show was established in 1983, as a project among agencies in Alabama that serve children with visual impairments. It presents winning entries of art by children who are visually impaired, blind and deaf blind; using a variety of media.

For Helen, her darkness was only to the physical world. Her spiritual eyes within saw God, giving her far clearer sight than those of us with physical seeing.

We think of these as physical terms that describe aspects of our bodies. To Helen Keller, they had a deeper spiritual meaning. Ponder these "impairments" as spiritual, rather than physical. How might they apply to your own spiritual life? How does the hope of Helen Keller inspire you in your life's journey today?

As you enjoy the following art work shown at the Helen Keller Art Show, consider the concept of being "blind" or "deaf." They have a spiritual meaning for all of us, and are healed through God's inflowing Love.



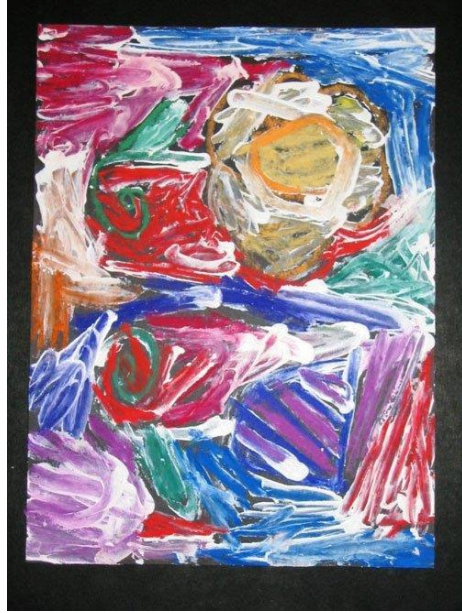
Children Playing in the Park
C.C. Perry
Gardendale High School – Jefferson County
Teacher: Liz Jansen, O & M
Medium: Acrylic Paint



Purple in my Mind
Matthew Calhoun
ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND
Teacher: Stephanie McGhee
Medium: Acrylic Paint, Textured Brushes



Stars
Curtis Taylor
Center Point Elementary – Jefferson County
Teacher: Bonnie Armistead, VI - Kimberly Brodie-Art
Medium: Watercolor



Jumble

Haley Haynes

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Teacher: Muffet Conover

Medium: Paint and Pastels



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

A God So Near

November 15, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft,



murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

Psalm 15

A psalm of David.

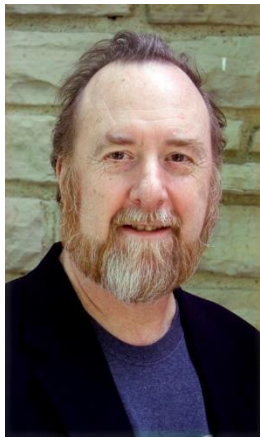
Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?

The one whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from their heart;
whose tongue utters no slander,
who does no wrong to a neighbor,
and casts no slur on others;
who despises a vile person
but honors those who fear the Lord;
who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
and does not change their mind;
who lends money to the poor without interest;
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

Whoever does these things
will never be shaken.

Message A God So Near

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete



In our reading from Deuteronomy, Moses says a touching line to the Israelites. He says, "What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him" (Deuteronomy 4:7). God is intimately present when we call upon God's name. This idea can lead us into a theological tangle that we should sort out before going any further with this doctrine. The complication I'm thinking of is God's omnipresence. The word "omnipresence" means that God is present everywhere. This means that God is always present to us, whether we are

calling on God or not.

But the notion that God is always present can be understood as presence from God's point of view. From God's point of view, God is always present. But there is also our point of view. For our relationship with God is two-way. There is God's relationship with us, and there is our relationship with God. In the depths of our souls, and wherever we are, God is present. That is the matter from God's point of view. But where are we in relation to how we see God? Is our mind centered on God? Are we approaching God? In order for there to be a genuine relationship, there is movement from both parties. There is movement of God to us and there is movement of us to God.

While God is ever present with us, we may be distant in our own minds and hearts. There are things that come between us and God. When we are obsessed with control and the pursuit of wealth we may not have a love for our neighbor in our hearts. We may thus not have a feeling of love for God, either. If we are not filled with love for God, how can we say we are near God? God is always coming to us, but it is we who can turn away. Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus is knocking at the door, but He doesn't come and eat with us unless we hear His voice and open the door. Likewise in John, Jesus says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love" (15:10); and also "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (15:14). To be in God's love, we need to do the things God asks. That constitutes our movement to God.

When we call upon God, and God comes near, it is not so much God coming near us, as it is us coming near to God. When we read the Bible especially, God comes near us. But this too, is a matter of us bringing our hearts and minds to and toward God. So Moses is right when he says that God is near to us when we call on Him. On God's part, God is always near. But on our part, we need to come to God in prayer and by doing the things God asks.

There are some historical considerations that make this passage from Deuteronomy especially interesting. All around Israel at this time were religions of the Ancient Near East. They shared some similar components of worship. First of all, the gods for them were actually distant. The gods lived in the sky, and did not care much about the race of humans. In fact, in the Babylonian flood story, the gods flood the earth because humans are making too much noise and we are disturbing the peace of the high, sky gods. Second, people did not have direct access to the gods. The king was the intermediary between the gods and humans. In fact, the king was semi-divine. It was up to the king to perform certain rituals and sacrifices in order to ensure peace in the land and prosperity in the field. So the people followed the laws of the king and the king followed the laws of the gods. The gods were very distant to the average person in the Ancient Near East.

Consider how different things were for the ancient Israelites. Consider the tabernacle that the Israelites carried with them as they wandered in the desert. This was a simple tent--not a magnificent temple. Actually, it was a pretty elaborate tent--but a tent nevertheless. God actually lived in the tent, and so travelled in the very heart of the Israelite community wherever they went. And God was with every Israelite personally, even those low on the social scale. For instance, God hears the cry of poor people. In Exodus 22, we read,

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. If you ever take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you

shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate (25-27).

Not only does God hear each individual when we call to God, but God even hears the poor when they call out to God. This is not a God of kings and nobles only. Yahweh is a God of even the poor, of widows, and of foreigners.

The idea that God hears everyone, and that God is compassionate is at the heart of the Old Testament. It is this picture of God that Jesus seeks to revive. I say that Jesus seeks to revive this image of God because I think that this image of God had been lost in Roman times. The many rules and rituals of the Pharisees and rabbis of the first century AD buried the teachings about God's love and compassion. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Israelites, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it" (Deuteronomy 4:2). Yet it appears that the Pharisees of Jesus' time had done just that. Our story begins with a challenge to Jesus. The Pharisees ask him why his disciples do not wash their hands according to the ceremonial purity rituals of the ancient Jews. There is a very important line here. The Pharisees call this "the tradition of the elders." That is, the ceremonial washing was a tradition, not God's law. Jesus accuses them on this very issue. He accuses them by saying, "You leave the commandment of God and hold fast to the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). He also, among many other issues, declares all food to be ritually clean. In doing this, Jesus lifts the rules about keeping kosher.

Jesus declares all food clean by pointing to personal morality. He says that what comes out from a person's heart is what renders a person unclean, not what goes into a person's stomach. Since the issue is eating with ritually impure hands, Jesus counters with what makes a person morally impure. That occasions the list of personal evils,

What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a man (Mark 7:20-23).

I don't think that even the worst of people could be all these things. But think of being caught up in a few of them. Does it make sense to say that God is near to one whose heart is obsessed with, say, theft, murder, envy and pride? Yes, we can say that God is always near a person. But is such a person near God in his or her heart and mind? A love relationship is always two-way. And I would suggest that such a person is turning away from God, who is approaching this fictional person. In Deuteronomy, we read that God is near to those who call upon Him. I doubt that our fictional wicked person is calling upon God.

On the flip side, let's consider a person who is chaste, generous, loving, honest, affirming of others, humble, and wise. I would venture to say that such a person approaches God and the relationship is mutual. God comes to such a person and the person comes to God. This is the relationship we hear of in Deuteronomy. This is a relationship in which God is near to those who call upon God. This person is calling on God, and God hears and the two mutually approach each other.





One final note. God is always approaching everyone. God is always acting to turn individuals toward God and away from selfish and worldly obsessions. This is to say that God is drawing everyone to heaven and to eternal happiness. Even in the case of our fictional wicked person, God would continually try to lead this individual from their evils toward good feelings and acts.

God is always present in the depths of our souls. The real issue for us, is where we are in relation to God where our mind and heart is in the present moment. God is a God who hears and is near to those who call on Him. Let us be those who call upon God and who complete the circle of love.

But Will God Dwell on Earth?

November 22, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

2 Samuel 7:1-17, New International Version (NIV)

After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."

But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'

"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

Mark 6:30-34, New International Version (NIV)

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus

landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Mark 6:53-56, New International Version (NIV)

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Psalms 23, New International Version (NIV)

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

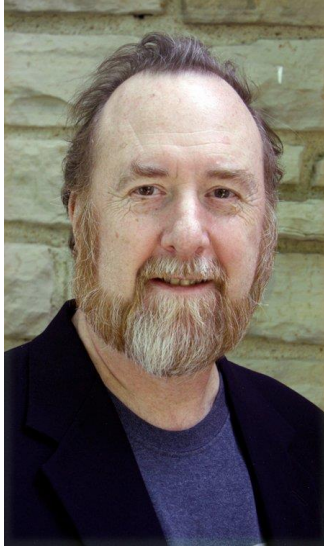
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever

Message But Will God Dwell on Earth?

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



Does God need a magnificent temple to be honored in? Does God need elaborate rituals and grand ceremonies? When King David wanted to build God a magnificent temple of cedar, God told him,

Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" (2 Samuel 17:5-7).

No, God does not need pomp and grandeur in order to be honored.

God does promise King David, though, that David's son shall build God a temple. But even when Solomon does finish building a temple to God, he recognizes that this mere house of cedar does not contain the vastness of God Himself. With humility, King Solomon says to God,

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day; that thy eyes may be open night and day toward this house, (2 Kings 8:27-29).

The question arises, "For whom would we want to build such a temple?" King David compares the way the Ark of the Covenant is housed versus the way the king, himself, is housed. King David is living in a splendid palace of cedar, while the Ark of the Covenant is in a tent—in fact the Tabernacle constructed in the desert wanderings of the Israelites. Is the temple to glorify God? Or is the temple to glorify the king?

This is a live question, because God's answer to David seems to pacify the King's ego. God will not allow King David to build a house for God, but God will give David a great name and another type of house, an everlasting house. God tells David,

I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. . . . I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. . . . but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever (2 Samuel 7:9, 12-14, 15-16).

So David will have a legacy, the legacy he may be asking for when he wants to build God a temple. David is promised first, that he will have a great name. That must have pleased David. Then God promised David that his son will build God a temple. Finally, God promises David that his children will remain on the throne of Israel for ever. That, finally, is the house God will build for David. God says, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me."

I can't but think that David is really asking about his legacy more than he is asking about honoring God. But I don't think that ego is the only issue here. There is the issue of what Swedenborg calls "the externals of worship." That term means the outer rituals and symbols of our worship. That term means the ceremonies with which we worship and the buildings in which we worship.

Here, Solomon seems to capture the essence of how we best use the externals of worship. Solomon acknowledges that God's greatness far transcends the little temple he would build for God. But he humbly asks that God's eyes, "may be open night and day **toward** this house" (2 Kings 8:29). What Solomon is saying is that God attend the worship that goes on in the temple. So Solomon realizes that God is everywhere, but that a special place in which we focus our thoughts on God is helpful. I think that it is helpful for us humans. I think that the final truth here is that it is helpful for us humans to have a place in which we can focus our thoughts on God, such as in a temple or a church.

It is helpful, but I don't think necessary. When I was growing up in the late '60's and early '70's there was a lot of questioning and rebellion. Among the things we rebelled against were all forms of authority. This included our parents, the government, and the church. We had the notion that we didn't need a priest, a minister, or even a church to find God. We could call on God everywhere and at any time. I recall the words to a song by one of my favorite bands back then named "Jethro Tull." The song went like this, "I don't believe you, you have the whole damn thing all wrong, He's not the kind you have to wind up on Sunday." So many of us abandoned organized religion back then, thinking that we could find God in our own hearts in our own place and time.

But maybe we went too far. I think that the legacy of the '60's was the abandonment of all forms of religion. All forms of what Swedenborg would call the externals of religion. When the church as an institution and the church as a place of worship are abandoned, it is easy to get lost spiritually. Without the weekly reminder of Sunday worship, what happens to a person's prayer life? Without the weekly reminder of Sunday worship, what happens to conscience? Without the church structure and its symbols, do our internal feelings for God open? Amid the traffic and toil of the workaday world, do we still remain open to God?



I think that there is something to be said for the symbols of external worship. When I walk into a church, or a temple, a peacefulness comes over me. My head clears from the business and worry of day-to-day living. But this may be because I treat places and symbols of worship with holy care. I keep my holy places sacred in my own mind. I consciously leave my worldly concerns outside the church walls, so that when I enter the church, I am ready to let God in, and to let my own heart open up. This is how I interpret that commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. It doesn't mean just go to church on Sunday. It means keep a holy place in our hearts for all that Sunday means. And that includes sacred spaces and the emotions and thoughts associated with them.

So I think that we need sacred spaces. And this I will concede to all the old hippies out there, myself included: sacred spaces need not be only church buildings. But I do think that we need places to be sacred. These might be woodland clearings, rivers, forests, or any place we feel at one with God.

This is not to say that we can leave our sacred feelings in our sanctuaries and go about the business of life forgetting all we come to treasure in our sacred spaces. No, we need to practice our spiritual principals in all our affairs. We need to bring the holiness we feel in our sacred spaces into our daily lives to the extent that it is possible. This means we need to bring our spiritual peace of mind into our driving habits, for example.



But without a special, holy space, we may never find that channel of spiritual love and enlightenment. Without a holy space, we may not find the spirituality to infuse our lives with. We may forget about God; our prayer life may suffer; and we may become materialistic. God does not require a temple or elaborate rituals to be honored with. But it is my belief that we humans do.

Sharing Gifts: Phineas Quimby

November 29, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

John 9: 1-7

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

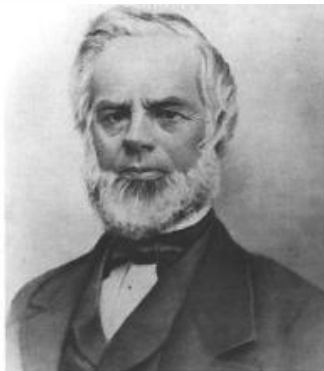
From Swedenborg

Soul-Body, 14, XII

By the human mind are meant its two faculties, which are called the understanding and the will. The understanding is the receptacle of the light of heaven, which in its essence is wisdom, and the will is the receptacle of the heat of heaven, which in its essence is love, as was shown above. These two, wisdom and love, proceed from the Lord, as a sun, and flow into heaven universally and particularly, whence the angels have wisdom and love; and they also flow into this world universally and particularly, whence men have wisdom and love.

Message

Healing by Phineas Quimby



We have been looking at the unique gifts each of us has, and considering ways to share them with the world. An example of someone who shared his special gifts is Phineas Quimby (February 16, 1802 – January 16, 1866).

Many people believe that Phineas Parkhurst Quimby was the most effective healer since Jesus. It

does seem that he used some of the techniques of Jesus; as well as tools of a psychology that hadn't yet been developed in his time. There is no longer anyone living who was a patient of his, but we have many accounts of his work.

His patients included: Mary Baker Eddy, Warren Felt Evans, Julius Dresser, Annetta [Seabury] Dresser, and Horatio Dresser.

Phineas Parkhurst Quimby was born in the town of Lebanon, N. H., February 16, 1802. When he was about two years old, his parents moved the family to Belfast, ME. His father was a blacksmith, and had seven children. He only attended school for a short time, and learned much later in life from reading on his own.

When he became old enough to go to work, he learned the trade of watch and clock making, which was his occupation for many years.

One day Quimby attended a lecture in Belfast on a new concept sweeping Europe and the states: "Mesmerism." It was based on the idea of animal magnetism, involving a kind of electricity. It was believed that using this magnetism, one mind could control another. It evolved into hypnotism.

Quimby was excited by this new concept, and was actively involved in using hypnotic states to heal. While engaged in experiments, Mr. Quimby became more and more convinced that disease was an error of the mind, and not a real thing. On this assumption, he began to facilitate miraculous cures in people around him. In the year 1859 Mr. Quimby rented a room in Portland. He rented a room in the International House Hotel on Exchange St., where he remained until the summer of 1865, treating the sick by his method. His waiting room would fill up with people waiting to see him, and he often came out and chatted about his theories.

The last five years of Quimby's life were exceptionally hard. He was overwhelmed with patients, and greatly overworked, and could not seem to find an opportunity for relaxation.

His death occurred January 16, 1866, at his residence in Belfast, at the age of sixty-four.

Quimby never published anything, but he kept copious notes. Horatio Dresser later edited Quimby's material and published it as *The Quimby Manuscripts*

How did this great healer do his healings? I don't know if anyone knows for sure. But we have his writings and that of patients of his. Here are some things that are mentioned in a lot of the material:

Explanations to the patient.

Annetta Dresser wrote:

His treatment was largely explanatory, -- an explanation of the real as opposed to the seeming condition of the patient. He seemed to make a complete separation between the sufferer and the sickness, and he talked to the sufferer in such a manner that, gradually his senses would become attached to the new life or wisdom which his words conveyed instead of the painful sensations; and, as this continued, the sickness disappeared.

He was convinced that illness and suffering are an error of mind. He would take time to explain this to the patient, explaining the causes of the ailment, and show the patient the truth.

Quiet impressions and insight:

His patients tell us that Quimby had remarkable insight into their character. He connected with them in silence, as he opened his mind to discern their real life and "see it whole."

Rapport.

Rapport with the patient was crucial; a connection spirit to spirit.

Absence

No less important was Quimby's power of "absenting" himself, as he called it, from the patient's concept of his disease. Quimby saw the patient as whole and healed.

Jesus as model

In Quimby's work, imitating Jesus was fundamental and central.

The Unconscious

Perhaps Quimby was a pre-cursor of modern psychology. It sounds like Annetta got in touch with repressed memories and feelings: I remember one day especially when a panorama of past experiences came before me; and I saw just how my trouble had been made....
Quimby may have helped his patients move beyond repressed beliefs.

Many people have studied his techniques, but he remains unique and mysterious in how he healed. He insisted that he did not work with energy -- like in Mesmerism or hands-on healing. He said he did not go into trances or contact spirits. He said he simply established a rapport with the patient and came to understand how their thinking was causing their illness. Then he helped them change their thinking.

There has been a lot written about Quimby and about the various healing movements that grew from his work. He was a humble clock maker who discovered unique gifts within himself – and found ways to share them with the world!

What gifts do you have within that can be shared with others?

Let us pray

Dear Lord: Thank you for the blessings of others who have shared their gifts with the world. Help each of us to find our gifts and learn how to share them with others.



It's a Wonderful Life: the Back Story

December 6, 2015

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 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 (n. 32 and 34) 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

It's a Wonderful Life: the Back Story

As we move into the Christmas season, many of us pull out our favorite Christmas movies on DVD or look for them in the TV listings.



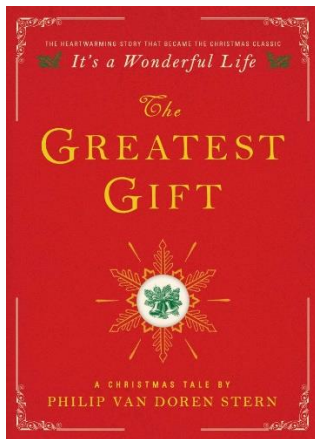
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Love, Spirit, Life



Do you have a favorite Christmas movie? Mine is "It's A Wonderful Life." I've been watching it since I was a child.

I only recently, however, learned that the story began with a dream.

Philip Van Doren Stern [1930-84] was a respected researcher and historical author. He had a dream one night, in the late 1930's. The next morning he wrote it down, and realized he had written a short story. He titled it "The Greatest Gift: A Christmas Tale." He tried to have it published, but no one was interested. He had 200 copies printed, and then in 1943 sent them as Christmas cards to his friends.



The story begins with George Bailey hanging over the railing of a bridge, preparing to jump in and end his life – when a quiet stranger grants his wish to never have been born! The little [booklet](#) is in print, audio and on kindle.

Stern's daughter, Marguerite Stern Robinson, writes an afterword in this edition and says she remembers a Saturday morning in February 1938 when her father was shaving and talking about the dream he had that night – a dream that came as a complete short story from beginning to end!

He tried writing it that spring, but had never written fiction and didn't like his effort. In 1943 he tried again and sent it to an agent – who couldn't get anyone interested in buying it! So that Christmas, he made it into a 24-page Christmas card to send to 200 friends.

A few magazines ran the story.

That spring he got a telegram from his agent that a studio who had seen it and wanted to buy the movie rights! Frank Capra left the service in 1945 wanting to do a movie with the message that no one is a failure, and anyone with friends is rich. A studio told him about this Christmas card they had purchased and he was thrilled. He felt that Jimmy Stewart would be perfect for the role. Stewart was thinking of leaving acting after his time in the service and was hesitant. But he agreed and the rest is history!



It was released in 1946 as "It's A Wonderful Life," with James Stewart, Donna Reed, and Lionel Barrymore. It was nominated for five academy awards, but won none. It was a flop at the box office success, Capra considered it his favorite film, and Jimmy Stewart felt it was his personal favorite of his films.

It was shown on public TV channels at Christmas time for many years. In 1974, the copyright expired, and it became shown on commercial TV stations. A colorized version was done, which Jimmy Stewart fought against avidly.

This is a movie with deep spiritual themes that have been explored through the year. However, the messages are clearer in the original short story, "The Greatest Gift." It contains some important lessons for us in this 2nd week of Advent.

Below is a summary of his story:

THE GREATEST GIFT

Excerpts from the story by Philip Van Doren Stern.

The story begins with a depressed George Pratt on a bridge Christmas Eve.

The water looked paralyzingly cold. George wondered how long a man could stay alive in it. The glassy blackness had a strange, hypnotic effect on him. He leaned still farther over the railing...

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," a quiet voice beside him said.

The little man shook his head. "You know you shouldn't think of such things—and on Christmas Eve of all times! You've got to consider Mary—and your mother too."

George opened his mouth to ask how this stranger could know his wife's name, but the fellow anticipated him. "Don't ask me how I know such things. It's my business to know 'em. That's why I

came along this way tonight. Lucky I did too." He glanced down at the dark water and shuddered. "Well, if you know so much about me," George said, "give me just one good reason why I should be alive."

The little man made a queer chuckling sound. "Come, come, it can't be that bad. You've got your job at the bank. And Mary and the kids. You're healthy, young, and—"

"And sick of everything!" George cried. "I'm stuck here in this mud hole for life, doing the same dull work day after day. Other men are leading exciting lives, but I—well, I'm just a small-town bank clerk that even the army didn't want. I never did anything really useful or interesting, and it looks as if I never will. I might just as well be dead. I might better be dead. Sometimes I wish I were. In fact, I wish I'd never been born!"

The little man stood looking at him in the growing darkness. "What was that you said?" he asked softly.

"I said I wish I'd never been born," George repeated firmly. "And I mean it too."

The stranger's pink cheeks glowed with excitement. "Why that's wonderful! You've solved everything. I was afraid you were going to give me some trouble. But now you've got the solution yourself. You wish you'd never been born. All right! OK! You haven't!"

The angel gives George a bag of brushes, so that he can approach people's homes as a bush salesman.

George goes first to the bank building, where he works as a clerk. However, the bank is closed. He chats with a man who said there was a bank clerk named Marty Sterns [the job George had had] embezzled \$50,000 which forced the bank to close. Most of the people in town had been ruined financially. Marty's brother, Arthur, became an alcoholic who married Mary [the woman whom George had married.]

George is quite shaken, and decides to visit the home of his parents.

He looked around the little parlor, trying to find out why it looked different. Over the mantelpiece hung a framed photograph which had been taken on his kid brother Harry's sixteenth birthday. He remembered how they had gone to Potter's studio to be photographed together. There was something queer about the picture. It showed only one figure—Harry's.

"That your son?" he asked.

His mother's face clouded. She nodded but said nothing.

"I think I met him, too," George said hesitantly. "His name's Harry, isn't it?"

His mother turned away, making a strange choking noise in her throat. Her husband put his arm clumsily around her shoulder. His voice, which was always mild and gentle, suddenly became harsh. "You couldn't have met him," he said. "He's been dead a long while. He was drowned the day that picture was taken."

George's mind flew back to the long-ago August afternoon when he and Harry had visited Potter's studio. On their way home they had gone swimming. Harry had been seized with a cramp, he remembered. He had pulled him out of the water and had thought nothing of it. But suppose he hadn't been there!

Then George visits Mary.

Art Jenkins came in. He stood for a moment in the doorway, clinging to the knob for support. His



eyes were glazed, and his face was very red. "Who's this?" he demanded thickly.

"He's a brush salesman," Mary tried to explain. "He gave me this brush."

"Brush salesman!" Art sneered. "Well, tell him to get outa here. We don't want no brushes." Art hiccupped violently and lurched across the room to the sofa, where he sat down suddenly. "An' we don't want no brush salesmen neither."

George looked despairingly at Mary. Her eyes were begging him to go. Art had lifted his feet up on the sofa and was sprawling out on it, muttering unkind things about brush salesmen. George went to the door, followed by Art's son, who kept snapping the pistol at him and saying: "You're dead—dead—dead!"

Perhaps the boy was right, George thought when he reached the porch. Maybe he was dead, or maybe this was all a bad dream from which he might eventually awake. He wanted to find the little man on the bridge again and try to persuade him to cancel the whole deal.

George is thrilled to return to his life.

His wife came toward him, dressed for going to church, and making gestures to silence him. "I've just put the children to bed," she protested. "Now they'll—" But not another word could she get out of her mouth, for he smothered it with kisses, and then dragged her up to the children's room, where he violated every tenet of parental behavior by madly embracing his son and his daughter and waking them up thoroughly.

It was not until Mary got him downstairs that he began to be coherent. "I thought I'd lost you. Oh, Mary, I thought I'd lost you!"

"What's the matter, darling?" she asked in bewilderment.

He pulled her down on the sofa and kissed her again. And then, just as he was about to tell her about his queer dream, his fingers came in contact with something lying on the seat of the sofa. His voice froze.

He did not even have to pick the thing up, for he knew what it was. And he knew that it would have a blue handle and varicolored bristles.

What lessons are here for the 2nd week of Advent?

Everyday life can be filled with "despair." George feels that his life is dull, that he is not accomplishing anything. In the movie version, George Bailey is in crisis with his life swirling out of control. In the short story, George Pratt is experiencing the despair of everyday life.

Every life also contains the joy of living. In the movie version, George Bailey is head of a savings and loan that helps many people buy homes. George Pratt in the short story has a less glamorous job; he is a bank clerk. Yet he sees the impact he has had the lives of others. Without his life, there would have been a bank embezzlement that closed the bank and ruined many people. Mary would have married an abusive alcoholic and been very unhappy. His brother would have died in childhood.



Life is the “greatest gift” that George discovers:

“Change me back,” George pleaded. “Change me back—please. Not just for my sake but for others too. You don’t know what a mess this town is in. You don’t understand. I’ve got to get back. They need me here.”

“I understand right enough,” the stranger said slowly. “I just wanted to make sure you did. You had the greatest gift of all conferred upon you—the gift of life, of being a part of this world and taking a part in it. Yet you denied that gift.”

In both the short story and the movie, it is our relationships that give life its deepest meaning. Pratt realizes how much everyday joy he gets from his family. Bailey sees not only that, but that he is “the richest man in town” because he has so many friends who are there for him.

Swedenborg tells us that joy comes from our connection with the Divine. The more we open our hearts to the Divine Love and Wisdom flowing into us, the more joy we can experience. We connect to the Divine by serving our neighbor in love.

The more we share this joy with each other, the deeper we experience it ourselves.

In this time of so much violence in the world, let’s remember that Swedenborg tells us that Love is far more powerful than hate. Love is the Divine, and is the strongest force that exists.

How does this story inspire you in your own life at this time?



The Bells of Christmas Day: the Back Story

December 13, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 9:2-7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

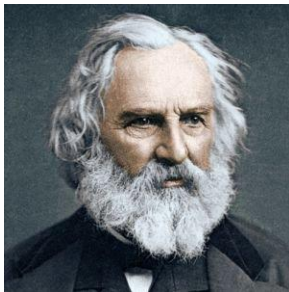
From Swedenborg

True Christianity, #89

Now, because God came down, and because he is the design ... there was no other way for him to become an actual human being than to be conceived, to be carried in the womb, to be born, to be brought up, and to acquire more and more knowledge so as to become intelligent and wise. Therefore in his human manifestation he was an infant like any infant, a child like any child, and so on with just one difference: he completed the process more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than the rest of us do.... He grew up more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than the rest of us ...

Message

The Bells on Christmas Day, the Back Story



For Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the famous poet who lived from 1807 to 1882, Christmas had become a season of grief. He never got over the tragic death of his wife Fanny in July of 1861.

It was a terrible accident, on a lovely day. She was cutting locks of her daughter's hair and wanted to preserve them in an envelope. She melted sealing wax with a candle, and a breeze came through the window, causing her dress to catch fire. She ran to the next room, to her husband, who threw his arms around her to try and extinguish the flames. He himself was badly burned, and she died the next day.

He was already deeply-saddened by the Civil War that had begun just a few months before her

death. The first Christmas after Fanny's death, Longfellow wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays."

A year after the incident he wrote, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace."

In the Christmas of 1862 he wrote, "'A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."

Just before Christmas 1863, Longfellow heard that his oldest son Charles, a lieutenant in the Union army, had been severely wounded with a bullet that had almost paralyzed him. The Christmas of 1863 was silent in his journal.^[1]

But then, on December 25, 1864, he heard the bells and felt hope again stirring in his heart. Perhaps he was encouraged by the re-election of Lincoln, and saw hope for the end of the war.

On that Christmas morn, he was able to write: "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead, nor doth he sleep! The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail, with peace on earth, good-will to men!'" Again, hope had defeated despair.



I felt a kinship with Longfellow and his family while I attended seminary at the Episcopal Divinity School, just down the street from Longfellow's home in Cambridge. I passed by it often, and wondered what their life had been like there. Now I know that it was filled with deep tragedy; but, still he was able to hear the hope of the bells on Christmas Day, and write one of our most beloved Christmas carols.

The hope of this this is especially poignant this year, with the many killings in our country; violence around the world; and bitter disagreements among people on how to find peace. Perhaps you are thinking:

*And in despair I bowed my head
'There is no peace on earth,' I said,
'For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.'*

So, when that verse is singing in your heart, listen to the final verse:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men*



Let us pray:

Dear Lord: Help us to find peace on earth this Christmas, despite the hatred and violence that surrounds us. We know that, no matter what, "Your right will prevail."



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Love, Spirit, Life

Christmas Spirituals, Part 1

December 20, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 1:26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called [b] the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell, NCE, 284

Anyone who has not experienced heaven's peace cannot know what the peace is that angels enjoy....In order to perceive it, we need to be the kind of person who as to thought can be raised and taken out of the body and brought into the spirit so as to be with angels. Since I have perceived heaven's peace in this way, I can describe it, but not in words as it really is, because human words are not adequate.

There are two things at the heart of heaven, innocence and peace. We say that they are at the heart because they come straight from the Lord.

Message

Christmas Spirituals: the Back Story, Part 1

Some of the most beautiful and profound Christmas music comes from the African-American tradition.

The blog site, [Pancocojams](#) edited by Azizi Powell, gives more varieties of this spiritual and others in an article entitled Black Christmas Songs About Naming Jesus.



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The call and response is an important feature of this song. [Rev. Kory](#) says in his blog site, [Thoughts on God and other stuff](#):

But for the slaves, each and every year this was a miracle that carried with it the hope and promise of liberation. "Oh my Lord!" It's a response of reverence and gratitude, not only for Christ, but for the miracle of birth itself....not only did a birth renew hope in the future, but it gave comfort in the present. In "Mary Had a Baby," as the slaves sang about the birth of a Savior so long ago, they acknowledged the arrival of Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Each time they responded "Oh my Lord!" they were demonstrating a deep, spiritual understanding that, even in slavery, God was present with them as they honored the command to be fruitful and brought forth new generations. By continuing to bring new human beings into an inhuman world, the slaves were defiantly stating the plain truth that every child brings with it world the gift of hope, even in the most hopeless circumstances.

The railroad references could be about liberation through the Underground Railroad.

When we read about the profound meaning this song had for those in slavery, it can enrich our own appreciation of the Divine birth as inner and outer liberation for each of us.

Sing along:

While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night,
Behold throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light

Chorus:

*Go, tell it on the mountain. Over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain. That Jesus Christ is born.*

The shepherds feared and trembled
When lo! Above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth;

Chorus:

Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born;
And God sent out salvation
That blessed Christmas morn.

Chorus:

When I was a seeker
I sought both night and day
I sought the Lord to help me
And He showed me the way.



Chorus:

He made me a watchman
Upon the city wall
And If I am a Christian
I am the least of all.

Chorus:

In 1907, John W. Works III, a professor at Fisk University put together a book: *Folk Songs of the American Negro*. He wanted to explore and preserve African American music. He said that this song was being sung by at least 1865 by African American slaves.

For the slaves, what could be more important than the birth of a savior to set us all free. Such news could only be properly announced from a mountain top.

Those of us growing up in the '60's sung a version of it along with Peter, Paul and Mary as a Civil Rights theme song. In the 1990s, Art Paul Schlossel re-wrote and adapted it for children as *Go Tell It on the Swingset*.

Tell It on the Mountain

Adapted and rewritten by [Peter, Paul and Mary](#)

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, to let my people go.

Who's that yonder dressed in red, let my people go
Must be the children that Moses led, let my people go
Who's that yonder dressed in red,
Must be the children that Moses led
Go tell it on the mountain, to let my people go.
Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, to let my people go.

Who's that yonder dressed in white, let my people go
Must be the children of the Israelite, let my people go
Who's that yonder dressed in white,
Must be the children of the Israelite
Go tell it on the mountain, to let my people go. Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere
Go tell... [Full lyrics on Google Play](#)

More versions of this spiritual and its history can be read at this site, [The Hymns and Carols of Christmas](#).

Here is a [medley](#) of 13 Christmas spirituals from Odetta's album, [Christmas Spirituals](#), for you to enjoy – music that came out of African-American slavery. We can try to appreciate what the songs might have meant to the slaves. But we know what meaning they have for us today.



Christmas Spirituals, Part 2

December 27, 2015

READINGS

From the Bible

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.

Philippians 4:4-13

From Swedenborg

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.

Divine Providence #37

Message

Christmas Spirituals: the Back Story, Part 2

How is Christmas going for you so far? Of course, Christmas is not over! Christmas is a season that begins on Christmas Eve and last for 12 days – the 12 days of Christmas. The season ends on January 6, Epiphany or the Day of the Three Kings [*el Dia de los Tres Reyes.*] It is the day that the 3 Wise Men, or Magi, arrived in Bethlehem to give gifts to the baby Jesus. January 5th is the 12th Night.

In some traditions, the Christmas presents are exchanged on Jan. 6th.

So – if you didn't have time to buy all the presents you wanted – or didn't get your Christmas cards out – there is still time!



As we continue celebrating Christmas, let's return to our exploration of Christmas spirituals.

We started today with "Children Go Where I send Thee."

Family Christmas on-line says:

This song is a little like the "Twelve Days of Christmas" in that each verse is numbered and "piggybacks" on the previous verses. But Gospel music is more free-form than English carols - this song can get longer at either end, depending on the mood of the songleader.

Wikipedia says:

"Children, Go Where I Send Thee" is a traditional [African-American spiritual](#) song,^[1] as well as a [cumulative song](#). This song is also known as "The Holy Baby" or "Born in Bethlehem." There are many versions of this song, each giving a Biblical meaning to the numbers mentioned.

One for the little bitty baby ([Jesus](#)).

Two for [Paul](#) and [Silas](#).

Three for the three men riding ([Biblical Magi](#)); or the Hebrew children, in some versions.

Four for the four knocking on the door ([Four Evangelists](#)).

Five for the Five that came back alive; or Gospel preachers

Six for the six that never got fixed.

Seven for the seven that all went to Heaven

Eight for the eight that stood at the gate.

Nine for the nine that stood in the line.

Ten for the [Ten Commandments](#).

Eleven for the eleven deriders.

Twelve for the [Twelve Apostles](#)

This is the Peter, Paul, and Mary version:

Lyrics

Children go where I send thee: how shall I send thee?

Well, I'm gonna send thee one by one

One for the little bitty baby

Who was born, born, born in Bethlehem

Said he was born, born, born in Bethlehem

Children go where I send thee: how shall I send thee?

Hey, I'm gonna send thee two by two

Two for Paul and Silas

One for the itty bitty baby

Who was born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Children go where I send thee: how shall I send thee?

I'm gonna send the:

Three by three, three for the Hebrew children

Four by four, four for the four that stood at the door

Five by five, five for the five that stayed alive

Six by six, six for the six that never got fixed

Seven by seven, seven for the seven who never got to heav'n



*Eight by eight, eight for the eight that stood at the gate
Nine by nine, nine for the nine that dressed so fine
Ten by ten, ten for the ten commandments
He was born, born, born in Bethlehem.*

Some say that the meaning of the song is instructions in how to preach the gospel. What meaning does it have for you?

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Light,

We thank you for the joy of Christmas and for the many Christmas songs that come from the Black experience in America. Help to remember the struggles for freedom in the past, as we continue to make this world safer and freer for all. Amen.

