

JULY 2009

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD



↑ TREE OF LIFE

Invitation

You are invited to use *Our Daily Bread* as a source of inspiration and as a guide for personal meditation and reflection. It is also a resource for home, small group, and church worship. Each issue has a theme, with weekly sermons focusing on various aspects of that theme. Daily meditations provide food for thought throughout the week.

Our Daily Bread has been published by the Swedenborgian Church since December 1949. May you be fed with spiritual nourishment as the Lord gives us this day our daily bread.

Prayer

I'm weary with my former toil;
Here shall I sit and rest a while.
Under the shadow I will be
Of Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree.

- *Anonymous Shaker poem (18th century)*

ISSN: 1056-3296 • Volume 60, Number 3 • July 2009

Published by the Swedenborgian Church

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter, Editors

43 Hobart Square, Whitman, MA 02382

ourdailybreadmag@gmail.com • (781) 447-4901

www.odb-online.com

Cover artwork: Anna Berezina

Issued under the auspices of the

Council of Ministers of the Swedenborgian Church

USA & Canada: US \$15/year

From the Editors

Dear Readers,

The summer months often make us think of vacations and relaxation, but this month we invite our readers to consider a different idea—that of active rest. We are truly rejuvenated when we embrace the inflowing of the Lord’s love, when we grow, learn, and develop; life is, after all, rarely best lived when maintaining the status quo.

Swedenborg writes that “a human being is an organ of life, and God alone is life. God pours his life into the organ and all its parts, as the sun pours its warmth into a tree and all its parts” (True Christian Religion 504:5). The Tree of Life is an age-old symbol of rootedness, hope, beauty, fecundity, and nourishing love; both the Garden of Eden and Revelation’s New Jerusalem feature a tree that stands at their center. Even the wooden cross on which the Lord was crucified became a tree of life in its own right—the tree from which sprang the fruits of our own spiritual healing and possibility.

Such images are precisely what the New Jerusalem and the book of Revelation are all about. We begin this issue with a message from the late Rev. Edwin Capon about the way our tradition views the book of Revelation and what it means for our spiritual life. The Rev. Antony Regamey talks about the life that flows to us from the Lord, symbolized by the River of Life flowing through the base of the Tree of Life. The Rev. Kit Billings discusses the unique qualities of our tradition and speaks of how New Church Day reminds us of the

(continued on inside back cover)

In This Issue

<i>How Swedenborgians Understand the Book of Revelation</i> by Rev. Edwin Capon.....	2
<i>River of Life</i> by Rev. Antony Regamey.....	10
<i>The Joy of New Church Day</i> by Rev. Kit Billings.....	18
<i>The Divine Lockout</i> by Rev. Dr. George F. Dole.....	27

JUL **5** How Swedenborgians Understand the Book of Revelation

— The Reverend Edwin Capon

The Reverend Edwin Capon departed from this world and entered into the fullness of the spiritual world earlier this year. He dedicated his life to spreading the message of love found in the Swedenborgian Church. Through parish ministry and his roles as president of the New Church Theological School and Convention, he will be long remembered as a great force for good in the church.

Revelation 1:1-8

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Some years ago a song from a popular musical proclaimed “the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.” I haven’t heard that particular term used recently, but I do hear about and read of a “New Age” that some seem to think is upon us. I’m not sure what its signs and indicators are supposed to be, and I’m not sure that all who speak of it point to the same new trends. But I do know that our Church believes a New Age is coming into being, not because we see certain signs and indicators (though we may like to point to some) but because we read of it in sacred scripture and note Swedenborg’s observations about it.

Last Sunday I spoke of the rediscovery of the meaning of the Book of Revelation that has taken place in recent years. I indicated that in its original and literal sense the book was written to strengthen those of the infant Christian Church facing bitter persecution from the Roman Empire, and to enable them to endure until the final victory of Christ and His Church. I also indicated that the Swedenborgian Church sees an inner meaning in the book that is still relevant long after the disappearance of the Roman Empire. It is this meaning that points to a new age, not of new external circumstances such as the conquest of the Roman Empire by the Church, but a new age of the Spirit.

With a little imagination and some understanding of the nature of the apocalyptic genre, it is not difficult to see that the book of Revelation is an account of the warfare of good with evil and of the final victory of good after much trial and suffering. Concretely, the struggle pointed to was that between a seemingly all-powerful state and a minority of its least influential citizens. Looked at from another perspective, the eternal battle of good with evil is portrayed. But we believe a particular episode in that battle is pointed to.

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the Roman Empire.***

Historians have named certain stages or phases in human history as “Ages.” They speak of the “Middle Ages,” the “Age of Reason,” and “the Renaissance.” The state of religion may or may not be a part of the description of these ages. Should it not be possible also to divide human history by the stages or phases of humankind’s relationship to God? Is not such thinking implicit in St. Paul’s assertion, “But

when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians 4:4)? There are times when we human beings seem to be close to God in both spirit and obedience, and other times when, like the younger son in Jesus' parable, we have traveled into a far country distant from our Father's house . . . and we begin to be in want, spiritual want. At such a time God takes steps to rescue us.

At such a time God takes steps to rescue us.

According to Swedenborg, there have been several times in human history when we human beings have come close to losing all connection with God and, therefore, all safety for ourselves. The one we recognize most clearly is the time St. Paul spoke of as "the fullness of time," the time when God Himself came in the flesh to restore the connection.

But Swedenborg tells us that the book of Revelation speaks of another time, a later time, under the image of the Holy City New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven, a time that would begin a new age for the Christian Church. The Christianity of the fourth century, in conquering the known world, seems in a real sense to have been conquered by that world. By the 17th and 18th centuries there was little real Christianity left. The monotheism it had inherited from Judaism had become diluted by a Trinity that looked strangely like three separate deities. Jesus' stress upon love had been replaced by a focus on faith alone in the Protestant tradition and a sacramental system among Catholics as the means of salvation. Religion had become largely a matter of externals that in essence ignored Jesus' assertion that "a person must be born again, if he is to see the kingdom of God."

And in addition to this, a nascent science and excessive confidence in human reason were undermining the foundational beliefs of the Christian religion and their source, the Holy Bible. Once again the human race's connection with God was threatened. That threat is symbolized by the enemies of the true Christian pictured in the book of Revelation. God's response to that threat is symbolized primarily

by the picture of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven, a picture many have seen as symbolizing God's final redemption of the human race.

The second coming of Christ was a cosmic event eagerly expected to take place many centuries earlier. Some still look for a physical Second Coming. But unless the Lord were prepared to violate human freedom, such a Coming in itself would have little more effect than the first one.

Swedenborgians believe that the Second Coming spoken of in Scripture was to be a spiritual Second Coming, a coming to the hearts and minds of men and women, an inner action of God changing human perspectives and purposes. Swedenborg wrote of it and contributed to it, but it was God's action. And as a result a New Age is coming into being, or—better yet—a New Church, not as a special organization, but as a kind of new spiritual climate affecting many church organizations. It will be (and already is, in part) a renewed Christianity.

The New Church will be above all Christocentric and monotheistic. It was amusingly ironic to me that when our denomination sought admittance into the National Council of Churches, one of the objections raised was that we made too much of Christ. How can any church reading the book of John think we make too much of Christ? Swedenborg says that the doctrine that will hold the chief place in the New Church is this: "God is one both in person and essence; the Trinity is in Him; this God is the Lord."

*A New Age is
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spiritual climate.*

The acknowledgment of one God is the first of two essentials by which "conjunction," or bonding, "with the Lord, and thence salvation, is effected." The second, according to Swedenborg, is "repentance of life," for he says in his *Apocalypse Revealed*, ". . . At this day, instead of the acknowledgment of one God, there is an acknowledgment of three, and instead of repentance of life, there is repentance of the mouth only. . . . Unless a New Church should arise,

which acknowledges these two essentials and lives accordingly, no one can be saved.”

These two essentials of the Church are somewhat expanded upon in what Swedenborg calls “the faith of the New Church in its simple form”:

1. That there is one God in Whom is the Divine Trinity, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Saving faith is to believe in Him.
3. Evils ought to be fled from, because they are of the devil.
4. Goods ought to be done, because they are of God, and from God.
5. And they ought to be done by man as of himself, but it is to be believed that they are from the Lord, with Him and through Him.

Clearly, Christians of the New Church will not be Christians in name only. Indeed, Swedenborg says that “in the New Church there will not be any external separated from what is internal.” Whited sepulchres are out.

The motivating force in this New Church will be love, for Swedenborg writes that “all things of the New Church are from the good of love.”

For many Swedenborgians, one of the happiest aspects of this New Church is the rejection of any demand that Christians believe without understanding. We may continue to need revelation and cannot rely on reason alone, but we are encouraged to use our own reason and to seek to understand. We are not required to accept any human authority, even when it masquerades as God’s voice.

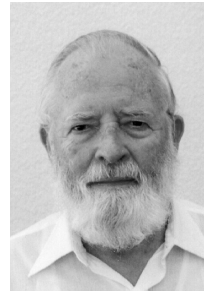
***The motivating force
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Because of this new freedom of thought and inquiry both granted and given by the Lord in these times, some have seen as signs of the new age the great scientific advances humankind has made. Others have seen it in freer and purportedly more natural lifestyles. It has

also been seen in the greater attention many people give to what goes on inside them and to spiritual disciplines enhancing inner growth.

Whether any or all of these are true signs of a new age of the spirit, I do not know. There have certainly been great changes in the Christian Church since Swedenborg's day, changes in the direction of greater humaneness and of stressing our manner of life more than our religious practices. The result may well be that church organizations as such will have less influence in the future because religious living will become more important than church loyalty. Such a loss of influence would, I hope, be offset by the growing influence of Christians who are Christians from the inside out, who are truly motivated by the good of love, and whose actual repentance is leading to changed lives. So might a New Age, one that is truly new, come.

The Reverend Edwin Capon served several parishes, and was also president of the Swedenborgian Church and the New Church Theological School.



Prayer

Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life, moving force of all things, root of all creation, and purifier of all that lives; remove from us all that stains our beauty, wipe away all our sins and anoint all our wounds; that, awakened by your Spirit, our lives may shine forth your praise, now and evermore.

St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 6

And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *Genesis 2:9*

The tree of lives is love and the faith it leads to; in the middle of the garden means in the will that belongs to the inner self. *Secrets of Heaven 105*

Tuesday, July 7

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. *Genesis 2:10-11*

The river from Eden symbolizes wisdom born of love (Eden being love). To water the garden is to give the gift of intelligence or understanding. *Secrets of Heaven 107*

Wednesday, July 8

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. *Genesis 2:15*

The Garden of Eden symbolizes everything in a heavenly person, which is the subject here. Cultivating the garden and guarding it means that such a person is free to enjoy all of those things but not to claim personal possession of them, because they are the Lord's. *Secrets of Heaven 122*

Thursday, July 9

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." *Genesis 2:16-17*

People are allowed to depend on any perception they receive from the Lord to tell them what is true or good, but not on themselves or the world around them (in other words, when inquiring into religious mysteries, they are not to rely on sense impressions or facts); and to do so would be the death of their heavenly quality. *Secrets of Heaven 126*

Friday, July 10

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" *Genesis 3:1*

The snake is used here to mean our senses, which we trust. The wild animal of the field, here as before [s. 46], means every emotion in our outer self. The woman means selfhood. *Secrets of Heaven 194*

Saturday, July 11

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" *Genesis 3:2-3*

The new descendants did not learn from good about truth; they did not learn from love about faith's tenets. Instead, from truth they acquired facts about goodness. To put it another way, from religious knowledge they acquired facts about love. And many of them gained little more than facts. *Secrets of Heaven 198*

JUL 12 River of Life

The Reverend Antony Regamey

Revelation 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

What keeps religion going? Surely this is something worth wondering about. It came into our world from beyond the hills of time. It was there, farther back than history can remember. And it brought us to this church today.

When we dig into the remains of ancient civilizations, we find religion's unmistakable marks: an image, an altar, mystic symbols, sacred vessels, the ruins of a sanctuary. The many forms it has taken through the ages were sometimes crude, at other times elaborate and surprisingly perceptive. But it would seem that wherever man has been, and wherever human life is, there is evidence of a faith, a cultus, a belief, an attempt to reach out into the invisible for protection, guidance, favor, enlightenment, or sheer adoration. And here we are today, at worship, playing a part in the same unfolding drama.

What, then, is that mysterious, disturbing factor in the very nature of man that makes him look up and seek both completion and

fulfillment above himself? That fills him with a sense of awe and sets him on the quest for life's meaning? That leads him to acknowledge dependence on and accountability to a power greater than his own? That tells him he ought to think, will, do—nay, even be—otherwise than his natural inclinations dictate? And that will not leave him alone till he has learned to relate himself to it?

What is that power that, in the course of time, appears to have drawn him to itself, and fashioned him, in countless instances, from the beast into manhood as we know it at its best? Let us say, from the caveman to an Albert Schweitzer, the self-effacing “ten-talent man” of our generation?

Surely, if this has taken place, there is something personal at the core of that relatedness, on both sides. In that power there must be something human, even if it be superhuman. Man cannot respond to, nor speak with, nor love that with which he has no kinship, that which is not in some measure like him. We may well be supercilious about primitive religion and say that man created in his own image the God or gods he worshipped. It is so to a large extent. Yet it was so because, in the first place and although man did not know it, God had created him in his image and likeness. Could God have done otherwise?

Man cannot respond to, nor speak with, nor love that with which he has no kinship, that which is not in some measure like him.

So, for man, that power has never been “It” but “Thou.” It has been as intimate as all that from the beginning. And when the crude ideas of outward human shape disappeared, personalness remained an integral part of man's sense of God. Intimacy remained also, and man's response was purified, empowered, and made real in the measure in which he learned not to take it for granted.

At last, with the coming of Christ, the men who were closest to him became convinced that this personal God had shown himself to us in the limitations of our nature. In him they saw human life as it should be when it is truly lived. In him they found a living answer to the meaning of life itself: that we should grow like him, attain the full stature of our humanity in his image and likeness—and this through

our learning to love one another as he has first loved us, and so does love us still. Such was the beginning of the Christian religion. And with it the intimacy grew. Though returned to his Fatherhood, they felt that he, the God-Man, was alive in them and they in him.

In him they saw that truth that is eternal and that through the ages had been struggling to make itself known.

In him they saw that truth that is eternal and that through the ages had been struggling to make itself known: that he is a God of love, and that he lives in us, yearning for nothing more than that we should make ourselves hospitable to him and let him fashion us into the spiritual persons we ought to become, not only individually, but in all our human relationships. Thus Paul exclaims, "I live, and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is what Christianity means. Or, listen to what one of the early Fathers of the Church, Saint Augustine, has to say: "That which is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and there never was a time when it did not exist, from the planting of the human race until Christ came in the flesh. At that time the true religion that already existed began to be called Christianity."

What keeps religion going, then? It is neither our theologies nor the intellectual scaffoldings by which we seek to reach the divine. It is not rituals, nor ecclesiastical hierarchies, nor institutional machinery. These are but means to an end, forms that may come and go. But it is the response of the heart that, for all people, at all times, remains the same. It is the experience of God, in commitment to him, on the part of the humble. And in this, the initiative is not theirs, as they well know, but the Lord's.

What keeps religion going is that unseen, strange power of God's love and truth, pouring itself out continually, pressing on us to be received, urgent to make itself known, to find a welcome within us. Then, when it meets a response, something happens in the depths of a man's life. An insignificant nobody, on his knees, begins to hold converse with the eternal. He becomes a new man. He begins to count as he forgets himself, overcomes his lower nature by the strength that is given him, and determines to match his life more and more with that of the Master. His life becomes meaningful in that it is related to

God's purpose throughout the ages. Through him, God becomes real in the world and much else is changed besides him, wherever he may reach. Through him, and through many like him, twice-born men, the life-giving power of God's love continues to make itself felt and to heal the hurts and the disorders of mankind. With him, God's truth marches on.

And what is true of individuals is also true of the church. For the church is alive only in the measure in which God is alive in its members. It is their corporate response to him. Swedenborg would agree with Augustine, for instance, that the fundamental truths of the Christian religion have been in existence and have been true from the beginning of the human race. But he would add that man's insight into them has only been gradual and at times very dim. He would agree, again, that the real life of the church has been its understanding and practice of love. But then he would point out that there have been long periods when, by and large, the love that Christ came to disclose in its fullness was sadly lacking.

Great religious eras, which Swedenborg sometimes calls churches, have in the past succeeded one another. They have begun with great promise, gathered momentum, and for a while borne fruit, only to wither and die. The same has been true of many churches and many revival movements within the Christian Church. What is remarkable, however, is that despite its internal conflicts and many divisions, the Christian Church itself never died. Unlike other human institutions, it has survived and outlived civilizations, kingdoms and empires, wars and persecution, and died in appearance only to be born again. The new church that Swedenborg was hailing in advance, the church of this new age, is naught else but Christianity reborn, given new light and a new will to be one in the practice of love by its Lord.

Despite its internal conflicts and many divisions, the Christian Church itself never died.

But whence this power of inner renewal? In his writings, Clement of Alexandria compares the church to a great river. "Sometimes it flows," he says, "with impetuosity through a narrow channel. Sometimes it spreads like a flood. Sometimes it divides into several

streams. Sometimes again it seems to disappear underground only to reappear at some distance farther." But John, who sees the same image in the vision of our text, takes us into it more inwardly. He takes us to the source of that life-giving stream.

"And he showed me," he says, "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." From God himself, a God who cared enough to be man—which is what is meant by "the throne of God and of the Lamb"—is that continual influx of power and love and truth for human life that has never been without a witness among humanity, and that cannot be defeated.

"Clear as crystal." Now it is possible for men to be aware of their kinship with God; to see God in Christ both risen and glorified; to know that he lives in them, and be caught up and empowered by all that is implied in his Divine Humanity. For if we, in our turn, care enough, there is in the God-Man, through us, the power to make this a better world, where wars will become a thing of the past and man's inhumanity to man be replaced by true brotherhood.

"The river of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." That is the central fact and force at work in the fashioning of this new age. Through this clearer understanding of him, God comes closer to humanity, and the more urgent becomes our challenge to make this a more humane world, in his image and likeness.

The church in whom he lives, the church that is called his body, the church reborn and made anew for the task, as a willing instrument

God comes closer to humanity, and so the more urgent becomes our challenge to make this a more humane world, in his image and likeness.

of his purpose, needs your fuller and more complete commitment to him. The church in whom you can become a receiver and transmitter of that life-giving stream; the church in whom you are an heir to the ages, one with religion's glorious past, one in the fellowship of heaven, one with all who worship God now, through all the world, one with the generations yet unborn, awaits your

decision.

So John adds, "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him that heareth, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Are we athirst enough for that?

The Rev. Antony Regamey was
ordained in 1923 and served
New Church parishes and the
denomination for over fifty years.



Prayer

Loving Lord,
I am not brave enough
to make great sacrifices,
or even bold gestures.
Teach me to be faithful in little things,
in small but frequent kindnesses,
that your love might increase within me,
might grow with such compound interest
that brave or not, my fund of love might spill out
and be shared with my sisters and brothers
who live next door, in the next street,
or on the other side of the world
for your love's sake.

(Frank Topping, *Daily Prayer*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 130)

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 13

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. *Revelation 22:1*

There are two things that go forth from the Lord, Divine love and Divine wisdom, or what is the same thing, Divine good and Divine truth. In its essence the Word is both of these.

True Christianity 191

Tuesday, July 14

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. *Revelation 22:2*

With those who are in the goods of love and at the same time in the truths of wisdom there appear fruit-bearing trees, luxuriant with beautiful leaves, but with those who are in the truths of some wisdom, and speak from reason, and are not in the goods of love, there appear trees full of leaves, but without fruits. *Apocalypse Revealed 936*

Wednesday, July 15

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Revelation 22:3-4

This signifies that all who desire to be with the Lord will turn themselves to the Lord, and the Lord will turn Himself to them, because they are conjoined through love.

Apocalypse Revealed 938

Thursday, July 16

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. *Revelation 22:5*

There will not be any falsity of faith in the New Jerusalem, and that men there will not be in knowledges concerning God from natural light which is from their own intelligence, and from glory arising from pride, but will be in spiritual light from the Word from the Lord alone. *Apocalypse Revealed 940*

Friday, July 17

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

Revelation 22:6

the Lord, from whom is the Word of both covenants, has revealed through heaven unto those who are in truths from Him, the things which will certainly come to pass.

Apocalypse Revealed 493

Saturday, July 18

"See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." *Revelation 22:7*

Near or nearness of time is not meant; the Word in the purely spiritual sense does not derive anything from the idea of time nor from the idea of space, because times and spaces in heaven do indeed appear like times and spaces in the world, but still they are not there; wherefore the angels cannot measure times and spaces, which there are appearances, otherwise than by states, according to their progressions and changes.

Apocalypse Revealed 947

JUL 19 **New Church Day**

The Reverend Kit Billings

Psalm 127

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.

Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Rev. 21:1-27

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then 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 as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

This is a great day indeed for us this morning as we celebrate one of the high points in the New Church calendar. This morning we celebrate New Church Day, which is really the most defining Sunday for our tradition. No other Christian church on earth celebrates New Church Day, and so what we are enjoying together this morning is profoundly special.

I can say with peace and thankfulness in my heart how deeply and wonderfully helpful this church has been for me over the last twenty-two years of my life, as gradually, week by week, month by month, I have had the joy of learning about my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in several great ways—through reading and engaging the Light that shines through the literal sense of the Bible, and even more deeply through the even more penetrating Light of the inner sense. The spiritual and doctrinal structure of the New Church has helped me to be more open to the Lord, and to understand spiritual and heavenly things much more than I would otherwise.

*He shows himself
in the shape and
colors and infinite
variety of every
human body and
face.*

I've been blessed to enjoy some wonderfully great friendships with others who see a similar kind of light from heaven. And yet, as our theology reminds us, God enters the hearts, minds, and lives of human beings through many paths and avenues: through dreams and an infinite variety of spiritual experiences and visions; through music both sacred and secular; through many gifted and blessed writers, poets, artists, and architects; and certainly through God's great "green Cathedral," within Nature herself. Indeed, the Lord reveals aspects of Himself within the soul movements and spiritual feelings and insights we all have. He shows himself in the shape and colors and infinite variety of every human body and face.

But I can share with joy that when I have needed a wonderfully full, broad and clarifying exposure to the nature and substantive reality of the Lord, there is a light that comes through the inner meaning of the Word in concert with the teachings of the New Church that simply surpasses anything else on earth. Something wonderful happened from 1757 through 1770, as we read about in the writings of the New Church, which we may boil down to this:

***I'm referring to
God's purifying and
re-ordering of all
life in both heaven
and in hell.***

an immense outpouring of Divine Truth, which not only has given humanity the core principles we need to know to find ultimate peace, growth, and joy, but also something else, something awesome and profound. I'm referring to God's purifying and re-ordering of all life in both heaven and in hell. And because this Last Judgment was completed long before you and I were born, we can enjoy a kind of deep-down strength and stability which is precious. Swedenborg described the difference between Christianity on earth before the Last Judgment and Second Coming and after it, and he wrote that on the outside or external level of things not much would change. The various denominations would go on as before, essentially separate yet spiritually connected. But down deep, where things really count, human life on earth changed big time!

We read in *The Last Judgment In Retrospect*, para. 73:

“People in the church [after the Last Judgment and Second Coming] from now on will have more freedom of thought as to matters of faith—that is, as to the spiritual issues pertinent to heaven—because [a measure of] spiritual freedom has been restored to them. In fact, everything in the heavens and the hells has now been brought back into order, and it is from the heavens and hells that all the thinking in favor of the Divine and in opposition to the Divine flows. Since [a measure of] spiritual freedom has been restored to us, the spiritual meaning of the Word has been disclosed and deeper divine truths have been revealed by this means.”

Look back in history at what has unfolded ever since the Age of Enlightenment began. Look at the new hunger to understand God, the Bible, ourselves, our psychology, the scientific processes and “workings of nature. Hellish forces have remained, but our understanding and therefore our faith in God and His Word has emerged from the obscure period of the early Renaissance into the fuller light of inquiry and thirst for higher reasoning of the Age of Enlightenment. Rather than being burned at the stake, we are enjoying

freedom of access to all manner of reflection about God's Word, as well as many forms of spiritual insight and discovery.

New Church Day is a time when we are blessed to celebrate one of God's greatest achievements in history. Today is about celebrating none other than our Lord Jesus Christ's Second Coming, which was not a coming in the flesh, as was the Lord's First Coming, but His coming in Spirit and in Truth.

The Lord's Second Coming, which a good number of people in history as well as Emanuel Swedenborg have had the joy of shouting from the rooftops, has happened fully in the spiritual realms. Indeed, the Lord's Last Judgment and coming in Divine Truth reordered and fully stabilized life in both heaven and hell, and produced the world's final great revelation of doctrinal truth for people to use and enjoy: the deeply helpful teachings of our church.

The Lord has fulfilled His promise to finally stabilize His creation, which does not mean that the Lord was coming to us from some distant place, as if God were not everywhere at all times. The Lord God is infinite—God is all life and has always been in every thing He creates and sustains. But the manner in which the Lord reveals or manifests Himself unto creation has changed over the eons—for example, as when the Divine Human, the Infinite, incarnated into human natural flesh for the first time, in Jesus of Nazareth. That was, in my opinion, the greatest event in all history. While ministering on earth, Jesus said He would come again, in power, in glory, and riding on the clouds, with a great trumpet blast heralding His return. Well, He has come again, not in human form as before, but cosmically in Divine Truth, which is what the sound of trumpets in heaven represents.

Well, He has come again, not in human form as before, but cosmically in Divine Truth, which is what the sound of trumpets in heaven represents.

Our theology is very helpful in that it opens the lid of understanding of the nature of God's Word, revealing that this wonderful Bible now lying behind me contains both a literal and an inner meaning—each of which gives vital and useful light for us to see by. Indeed, there

are many passages in the literal sense of the Word that are like rays of sunlight shining through dense clouds. But there are also many passages, stories, and especially visions in the Bible that until their inner meaning is opened up can lead people into thinking false and harmful thoughts. For example, we read

There is nothing to fear about the Lord.

in Revelation that those who choose to embrace a life and a character that is evil, selfish, and cruel will wind up being sent by God into a sulfuric place of fire and torture. There are still many Christians today who believe these words in a literalistic fashion, which means that their belief and faith in God is founded upon fear much of the time. A relationship based on fear has a very different effect upon the human soul compared to one based within love, mercy, and understanding.

There is nothing to fear about the Lord. Those folks we typically call “mystics,” who have some kind of major, immense, and life-altering personal encounter with God (such as Abraham and Isaac, Peter, James, John, Joan of Arc, or John of the Cross, to name but a few) reveal the Divine Lord to be a being of Love and Light, who permeates them with love and acceptance and goodness and enlightens their minds, reveal that there are countless times of deep, difficult, and sometimes agonizing trials and temptations that ultimately serve our growth and salvation.

The Book of Revelation was never meant to be taken in a literalistic fashion—that is, in an external way alone. Revelation does have passages that are literally true, such as that those who endure to the end are saved and that we are judged by our works (and the intentions and kind of faith behind them) and not by our faith alone, but it contains much that has only an inner meaning. It is a book of many visions, and visions typically contain special internal significance. The various cataclysms and major struggles and battles depicted within it reveal several essential things. One is the final period of deep and intense spiritual struggles that had to happen in the heart and mind of Jesus before his final victory and glorification. Another is the amazing spiritual battles and changes that took place in the spiritual world when the First Christian Church era finally collapsed,

giving way to the great victory of the Second Christian Church era brought about by the Last Judgment and Second Coming.

The third is very important. Like Jesus (although on a lower level), when we begin to mature spiritually in adulthood, it is highly likely that we will be led into deeper and deeper inherited (or acquired) evils within our natural degree of mind that really need to be dealt with, either in this world or the next—and these tough and difficult internal battles and the great victories that follow for those who worship and follow the Lord come about especially as we choose to expose ourselves to the deeper and more penetrating truths of God that come from within the inner meaning of the Word.

I cannot tell you how many good, faithful Christian adults in their upper thirties, forties, and beyond have been deeply puzzled, if not terribly worried, about the fact that some of their spiritual struggles and inner battles get tougher and more intense as they age. The truth is, we find, as we peer humbly and deeply into the deeper Light from heaven pouring into our world through the inner meaning of the Word, that the Lord expects us to find deep and intense spiritual struggles as we mature. Why? Because in our younger years we typically are not ready for the deeper inherited evil inclinations we've been given from our ancestors and families of origin. It takes strong love and faith in the Lord to take on the deeper hellish forces we all are connected to, which are no match really for the power, goodness and truth of Christ, our Alpha and Omega. The literal and inner meaning of Revelation is so helpful, since it underscores many of the other places of the Lord's Word that help us to understand that, as Psalm 127 reveals, those who labor spiritually without reliance on the power of God inside labor in vain. We cannot match wits or power with "dark side" of life relying on ourselves alone—we must bring our whole self into our spiritual growth and development, empowered and fed by our Lord Jesus. "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor in it, labor in vain." "And He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;

*Those who labor
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labor in vain.*

the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The Book of Revelation has long been known as the great charter of the New Church. Everyone on earth, regardless of their affiliation or creed, is part of the New Church, but only those who believe in and make use of the light and love that pour through His New Church in specific enjoy the fruits of what we may learn and use within the deeper levels of truth God gives us to perceive. The images of the Holy City New Jerusalem descending out of heaven offer powerful inspiration and encouragement. And they reveal to us that all the spiritual laboring and hard work we go through while traveling through life on earth wind up being not in vain but an enormous blessing! The golden streets, the translucent streets and buildings made of gold, the foursquare walls surrounding the Holy City, its foundation studded with many types of precious gems, its twelve gates made of pearl, the river running through it with the Tree of Life in its midst, and our wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus blessing it all with His presence, reveal the angelic and heavenly quality of our souls. New Church Day, and what preceded it back on June 19, 1770, has made it possible for us to grasp all of this and so much more, and therefore to embrace life to its fullest.

The Rev. Kit Billings served as pastor of the Church of the Open Word in St. Louis and is currently a hospital chaplain.



Prayer

All praise, honor, and glory belong to the Lord, whose first and Second advents make an adventurous, purposeful, and miraculous experience of life possible. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 20

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man?
Why do you boast all day long,
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? *Psalm 52:1*

Evil people lose their rationality because in the world their rationality did not dwell in their deeper natures but in their outer ones. Still, they seem to themselves to be wiser than anyone else.
Heaven and Hell 506:2

Tuesday, July 21

Your tongue plots destruction;
it is like a sharpened razor,
you who practice deceit. *Psalm 52:2*

When they notice good affections, they change them instantly into evil ones by using delights in something else to lead them astray in quite amazing fashion. They do this so subtly and with such malign skill that the victim does not notice anything.
Heaven and Hell 506:2

Wednesday, July 22

You love every harmful word,
O you deceitful tongue!
Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin:
He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Psalm 52:4-5*

In heaven, however, the Lord keeps these demonic spirits away from anyone for whom there is any hope of reformation because they are the kind of spirit who can not only destroy conscience but also stir up our inherited evils that would otherwise lie hidden. *Heaven and Hell 579*

Thursday, July 23

The righteous will see and fear;
they will laugh at him, saying,
"Here now is the man
who did not make God his stronghold
but trusted in his great wealth
and grew strong by destroying others!" *Psalms 52:6-7*

The upright individual is one whom goodness inspires to be truthful, or in other words, a person who speaks and acts on truth out of love for others. *Heaven and Hell 579*

Friday, July 24

But I am like an olive tree
flourishing in the house of God;
I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever. *Psalms 52:8*

The union of the true and the good makes an angel, and also makes angels' intelligence, wisdom, and happiness. The actual nature of angels depends on how what is true in them is united to what is good, and what is good is united to what is true.

Heaven and Hell 370

Saturday, July 25

I will praise you forever for what you have done;
in your name I will hope, for your name is good.
I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

Psalms 52:9

Everyone in the heavens knows, believes, and even perceives that nothing good is intended and done by the self and that nothing true is thought and believed by the self. Everything comes from the Divine, which means from the Lord.

Heaven and Hell 8

The Divine Lockout **26** JUL

The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole

Genesis 3:14-24

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Revelation 1:10-18

I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

Apocalypse Revealed 82

But I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first charity, signifies that this is against them, that they do not hold goods of life in the first place, which, nevertheless, was and is done in the beginning of every church. This is said to this church, because by it are meant those in the church who primarily or in the first place regard the truths of doctrine, and not the goods of life (n. 73); when yet the goods of life are to be regarded in the first place, that is, primarily; for in proportion as a man is in the goods of life, in the same proportion he is really in the truths of doctrine, but not the reverse. The reason is, that the goods of life open the interiors of the mind, and these being opened, truths appear in their own light, whence they are not only understood, but also loved. It is otherwise when doctrinals are regarded primarily or in the first place. Truths may indeed then be known, but they are not seen interiorly and loved from spiritual affection; but this may be seen illustrated above (n. 17). Every church in its beginning, regards the goods of life in the first place, and the

truths of doctrine in the second; but as the church declines, it begins to regard the truths of doctrine in the first place, and the goods of life in the second; and at length in the end it regards faith alone, and then it not only separates the goods of charity from faith, but also omits them. From these things it may now appear, that by, "Thou hast left thy first charity," is signified that they do not hold the goods of life in the first place, which nevertheless is, and has been done in the beginning of every church.

The Bible tells the story of a relationship between divinity and humanity, a story that begins with creation and ends with the descent of the Holy City. Like parentheses, in a way, the beginning and the ending hold the story together. We might think of them as marking it off from the rest of the world's literature, as establishing the boundaries within which its particular meaning is contained. A great deal happened in the world outside those boundaries—far more, certainly, than happened within them; but here is where we are called to focus our attention.

There is a rabbinical tradition that carries part of this message in quite a charming way. The first letter of the Old Testament is the letter beth, the first letter of the word b'reshith, "in [the] beginning." It is shaped rather like a backward "C," and since Hebrew is written from right to left, it is open toward what follows and closed to anything before it. We could say the same of an English text that began with the letter "C." A rabbinical explanation of this is that what happened before the story started is beyond our knowing. What we need to know is contained in what follows.

In a way, the closing words of the Book of Revelation serve a parallel function. What happens after the descent of the Holy City? "Let anyone who will take the water of life at no cost. . . Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen" (Revelation 22:17, 21-22). The story may close with an invitation, with a promise, but it is decisively closed.

There is a further symmetry to be seen when we lay the beginning and the ending side by side. The long tale does not end with a return to the garden but with the descent of a city. Different as the city is

from the garden, though, they are both enclosures of blessedness. Everything that God made in the beginning was “very good” (Genesis 1:31), and nothing that in any way defiles will enter into the city (Revelation 21:27). In both garden and the city there are rivers (Genesis 2:10, Revelation 22:1), and in both garden and city we find the tree of life (Genesis 2:9, Revelation 22:2). It is a little like coming home after a lifetime in other lands and finding that home has changed a

great deal while we were away, but somehow it is still home. The Holy City is what we were born for when we were born in the garden.

We are simply structures that are organized in such a way that they receive life.

The mixture of sameness and difference between the garden and the city is quite beautifully caught in one pair of details. We read in Genesis (3:24) that after the expulsion

from the garden the Lord God “placed the cherubim and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.” There is no going back to the state of primal innocence once we have left it. On the literal level, some few individuals may succeed in going back to a pre-technological simplicity of life and living off the land, but for the vast majority of us there is no realistic prospect of turning the clock back.

The Book of Revelation, though, tells us in effect that the cherubim guard only one of the ways to the tree of life. That same tree is found in the Holy City, and “its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there.” The problem presented by the cherubim is resolved by the openness of the New Jerusalem.

Just what is that tree of life, though? Perhaps the most concise explanation in our theology is found in Divine Providence (241): “We may conclude, then, that the tree of life in Genesis means the Lord as to his divine providence, and that the tree of knowledge means us as to our own prudence.” If we take seriously the statement that “our own prudence is nothing” (Divine Providence 191), we are at least intellectually aware that we are totally dependent on the Lord, as dependent as newborn babies. We are simply structures that are organized in such a way that they receive life, which is the essential theological meaning of the word “organisms.”

We cannot see into the minds of infants to know when they begin to become conscious of themselves as distinct beings, but we can see

the growth of a will to take charge. This makes for difficulties, to be sure, but we know that without it there can be none of the acceptance of responsibility that is central to maturity. When Jesus said that we are to become as little children (Matthew 18:3), he did not mean that we are never to grow up. He was talking about a kind of humility that does not take on full meaning until it coexists with the awareness that the Psalmist expressed in the words, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." The humility the Lord wants of us is not some abject recognition of worthlessness, but a recognition of the nature and source of our pricelessness. Each of us might say, "Yes, I'm wonderful, but it's not my fault." As a matter of fact, when we try to redesign ourselves we tend to make a mess of it.

The description of the Holy City includes something like a paradox that begins to complete our sense of symmetry between the beginning of the story and its end. What is the point of the great, high wall if there are gates on every side and the gates are never shut? Or to put it another way, if no one enters in who "practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27), what keeps such people out?

Probably the simplest and most obvious answer has just been given: "And the city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 22:23). The light of God's glory is that one light that shows everything in its true colors. In that light abomination looks abominable and falsehood looks false. In that light, deception vanishes the way night vanishes when the sun rises. How are we judged? The Gospel of John says it most concisely: "And this is the judgment—that light has come into the world and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light—and why?—"so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (John 3:19-21).

*The door we left
by has been forever
closed to us.*

This is what our reading from Swedenborg is saying when it says that "the Lord never consigns anyone to hell. Rather, we consign ourselves." The context in which it says this calls for our close attention. It is said in explanation of one item in the self-description of the risen and glorified Lord: "and I have the keys of hell and death."

I suspect that most of us instinctively read this as a statement of the power to keep the hells confined, but that is not the way our theology reads it. Here, it says, it means “the power to open hell,” to open hell “so that we can be brought out, and the power to close it” for one reason only, “so that we do not go back in once we have been brought out.”

There is a way of reading this that may complete the symmetry between beginning and ending. Let us imagine simply that ever since leaving the Garden of Eden, we have been on the wrong side of the door. The door we left by has been forever closed to us, but there are other doors, the gates to the Holy City. To enter one of these gates is to leave hell behind, so to say that these gates are always open is just another way of saying that the Lord is constantly opening the gates of hell to let us out. The Lord, and only the Lord, has the key.

***The Lord, and only
the Lord, has the
key.***

The Lord is the key, because the essence of hell is our belief in the illusion that we are self-sufficient, that we do not need the Lord. Here, though, we need to proceed with some care. The essence of hell is not the illusion itself, but our refusal to recognize that it is an illusion, or in more careful theological terms, “an appearance.” Our own prudence is nothing, we are told, but it does seem to be something, and it should seem to be something (*Divine Providence* 191). We are to shun evils as if of ourselves. A friend in Germany recently sent me an article in which a German neurologist argues insistently that our freedom is an illusion, that all the workings of our minds are determined by what has happened in the past; but the neurologist then goes on to say that this is not a belief we could live by. We need a sense of freedom in order to have the sense of accountability on which human society depends for its survival.

We are not, then, “evil people” because we are on the wrong side of the door. That is where we find ourselves, not where we have consciously chosen to be. The invaluable merit of the appearance that our own prudence is something is that it is the basis of a sense of responsibility. The problem with it—or one problem, at any rate—is that it all too easily mushrooms into a sense of total and absolute responsibility, a burden so great that our only alternatives are denial or despair.

If the first law of divine providence is that we should act in freedom according to reason (*Divine Providence* 71ff.), this can be read as another way of saying that the Lord is constantly making sure that there is a way open to us out of the denial or despair that comes when we believe in the illusion of self-sufficiency. It is the way to the tree of life that is a way forward and not backward, a way to the recognition that the Lord is life itself and that we are designed as receptors of that life. That, surely, is the logic behind the statement in our third reading, "The reason 'having the keys of hell and death' does not mean the power to consign us to hell but the power to save us is that this follows immediately after the statement, 'See, I am living for ages of ages,' which means that he alone is eternal life."

Does all this make sense? It certainly leaves unsaid vastly more than it says. It does not cross all the ts or dot all the is, and it may actually put dots on some of the ts and crosses on some of the is; but there is surely a kinship between beginning and ending. After all, the One who has the keys of death and hell calls himself Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, the First and the Last. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole is the pastor of the Bath Society in Maine. He is also a faculty member at the Swedenborgian House of Studies.



Prayer

Lord, as you set the world in motion with your love, let your spirit guide me now, that I, with your assistance, might unlock the fullness of my being. Help me O Lord, to look to you and be of service to you in this world, that the Holy City, New Jerusalem may more fully descend. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 27

For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD;
I sing for joy at the works of your hands.
How great are your works, O LORD,
how profound your thoughts! *Psalm 92:4-5*

The oneness of the Divine of the Lord with His Divine Human,
which is the "Sabbath." *Prophets and Psalms 342*

Tuesday, July 28

The senseless man does not know,
fools do not understand,
that though the wicked spring up like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they will be forever destroyed. *Psalm 92:6-7*

Love for the Lord and for one's neighbor constitutes
heaven, as do the joy and happiness it brings. By the same
token, spiteful opposition to the Lord and one's fellow
human constitutes hell, as do the penalties and torture it
brings. *Secrets of Heaven 693*

Wednesday, July 29

For surely your enemies, O LORD,
surely your enemies will perish;
all evildoers will be scattered.
But you, O LORD, are exalted forever. *Psalm 92:9-8*

The Lord never sends anyone to hell but wants to lead
everyone out. Still less does he inflict pain. Instead, since
evil spirits actually run to get there, the Lord turns all the
punishment and torment to good and puts it to some use.
Secrets of Heaven 696

Thursday, July 30

You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox;
fine oils have been poured upon me.
My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries;
my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.

Psalms 92: 10-11

Each of us, as to spirit, is actually united to some community, either heavenly or hellish, evil people to hellish communities and good people to heavenly ones.

Heaven and Hell 510

Friday, July 31

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
planted in the house of the LORD,
they will flourish in the courts of our God. *Psalms 92:12-13*

All the people who have lived lives in the world focused on what is good and have acted in accord with their consciences are actually thinking from heaven's light and therefore from a deeper wisdom; and they are acting from what is good and therefore from a deeper affection. *Heaven and Hell 506*

Saturday, August 1

They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
proclaiming, "The LORD is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Psalms 92:14-15

Our volitional life, the life of our love, goes back to what is good, while our cognitive life, the life of our faith, goes back to what is true. Since everything good and true comes to us from above, it follows that this is the source of all of our life.

Heaven and Hell 9:2

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The Swedenborgian Church bases its teachings on the Bible as illuminated by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish scientist and theologian. Swedenborg envisioned a new Christianity coming into being that was revitalized by the Spirit of the Lord.

We believe that there is one God, known by many names. We worship Jesus Christ as our Lord and our God, who made himself known to us through his life as the divine human Jesus of Nazareth, and whom we continue to know through his Holy Spirit, which operates through and around us.

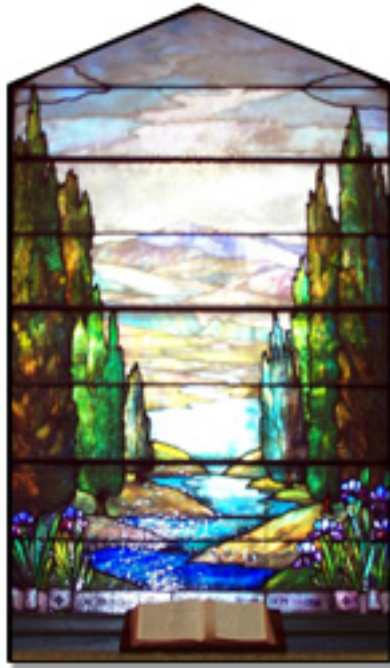
We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and that in its pages we find two parallel stories: the account of people, places, and events; and within that account a spiritual reflection of our individual and corporate journeys. The Bible, with its infinite depth of meaning, is truly a living Word, guiding us as we strive to make ourselves temples for the Lord by loving and serving others. We believe that, above all, "all religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." The Swedenborgian Church exists to help people be open to the Lord's presence and leading, and to facilitate their spiritual well-being. We invite you to participate with others who are seeking to deepen their inner life and pursue their spiritual journey.

gifts given by the Lord. The Rev. Dr. George Dole offers a perennially important message—that God never turns his back on us.

We pray that this summer will offer you chances, both planned-for and serendipitous, to find nourishment and peace in the deep-rooted, everlasting, all-encompassing love of God.

Blessings,

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter



The River of Life window at the front of the Chancel in the Laporte New Church, Laporte, Indiana

***Our Daily Bread* is a ministry of the Swedenborgian Church**

Our Beliefs in Brief:

- God is pure love, pure wisdom, and pure creative power.
- God became human in Jesus Christ and dwells with us.
- The Bible is God's Word, and has many levels of meaning.
- God loves and saves people of all religions.

*All Returns to:
Leah Goodwin, Editor
43 Hobart Square
Whitman, MA 02382*

