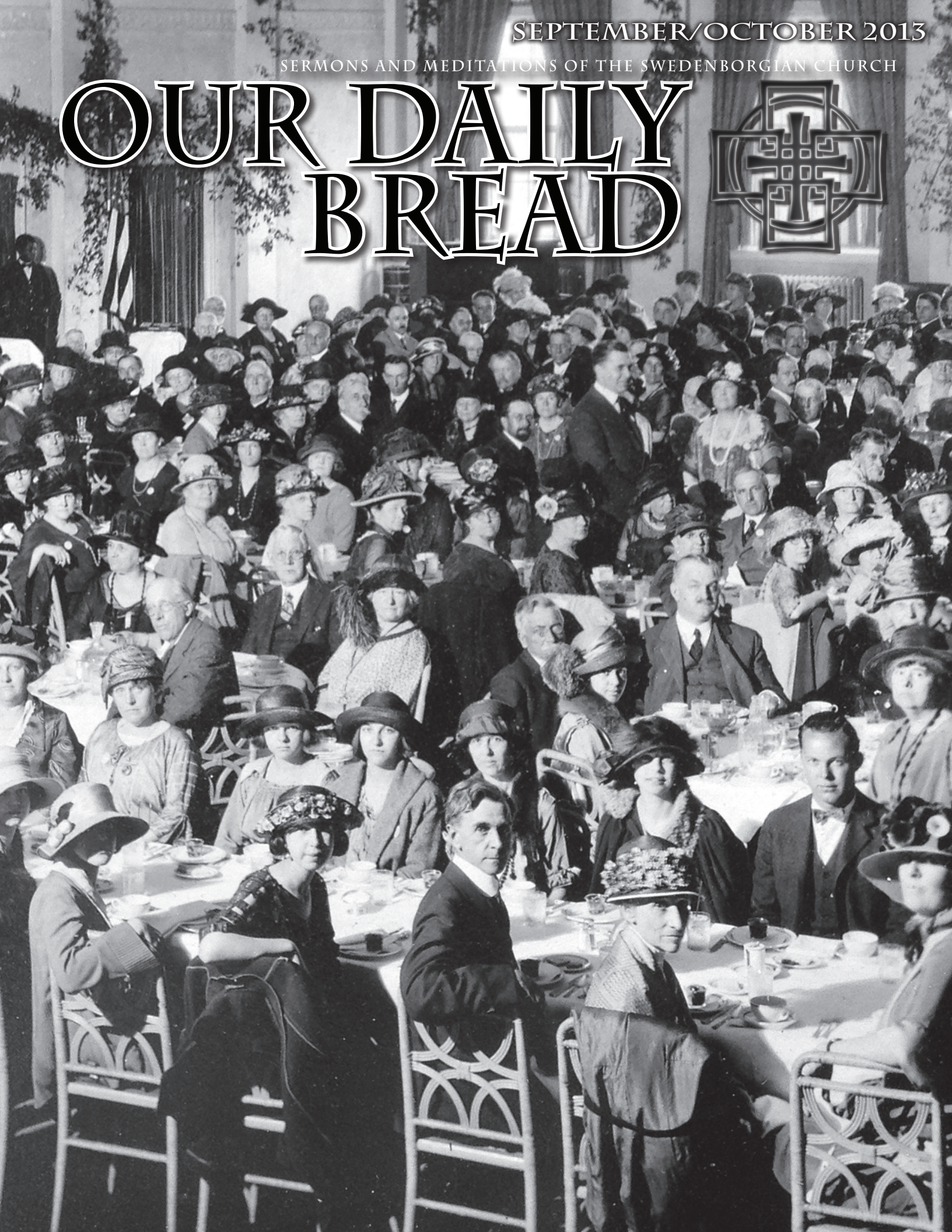


SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2013

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD



Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
Whose arms of love were stretched wide
upon the cross
So that all may come within your saving
embrace,
Stretch forth in mercy the hands of your
church today,
That in its ministry of compassion
we may enter again
Into the Kingdom of your justice and grace.

*Bishop Charles Henry Brent
(1862-1929)*

Cover Image:

The banquet of the delegates to the Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem, at the City Club, Washington, D.C., May 1923

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Dear Reader,

We hope this issue's arrival finds you healthy in body and soul, and that the unfolding season is rife with blessings. After a summer hiatus, *Our Daily Bread* returns with an issue devoted to sermons preached at annual conventions of the Swedenborgian church, as well as a history of the New Church's first century (presented in 1917 as a speech by Rev. H. Clinton Hay) and a piece written by Rev. John Clowes, a notable figure in the earliest days of the Swedenborgian denomination's emergence. These writings span two centuries of New Church thought.

An old saying reminds us that "the more things change, the more they stay the same." So it is: for all their diversity of perspective and setting, the sermons and writings in this issue share a common thread. All express an abiding belief that the Lord created this world in love and for a purpose; that humanity is uniquely created to fulfill that purpose; and that we are all on a gorgeous, terrible, and blessed journey together. "Nothing unconnected ever occurs, and anything not connected [to the Divine] would instantly perish," notes Swedenborg. We forget that truth at our own peril.

Much later and in a very different cultural context, Carly Simon wrote, "Let the river run; let all the dreamers wake the nations. Come, the new Jerusalem!" May you, all you dreamers, indeed wake the nations to God's kingdom of goodness, justice, and mercy, his new Jerusalem.

Many blessings, Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

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Contributors To This Issue



The late Rev. H. Clinton Hay delivered this speech at the one hundredth anniversary of the General Convention (1917). At the time, he served as the associate pastor for the Boston Society and as secretary for the New Church Theological School.



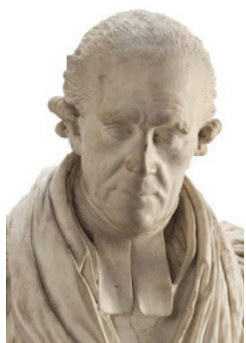
Rev. John Maine is the pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario. He preached this sermon at the 2010 Swedenborgian Church Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Rev. Renee Billings-Machiniak is the pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan and a hospital and police chaplain. She preached this sermon at the 2001 Swedenborgian Church Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota.



The late Rev. Richard M. Baxter served the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Church of the Holy City in Washington, D.C. He preached this, his final sermon, at the 1993 Convention in Massachusetts.



The late Rev. John Clowes (1743-1831), an Anglican priest, was a devoted reader of Emmanuel Swedenborg and a prolific author of Swedenborgian collateral material.



Rev. Junchol Lee is the pastor of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco, California. This sermon was given at the 2009 Convention of the Swedenborgian Church in Seattle, Washington.



Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell is the pastor of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church in San Diego, CA. This sermon was preached at the 2011 Convention of the Swedenborgian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Rev. Dr. Calvin Turley was a professor at the Swedenborg School of Religion and served as president of the Swedenborgian Church. This sermon was preached at the 1961 Convention of the Swedenborgian Church in Washington, D.C.



Rev. Andy Stinson is the pastor of the Second Congregational Church of Warren in Warren, Maine. This sermon was preached at the 2012 Convention of the Swedenborgian Church.

S E P 1 THE FIRST CONVENTION

Rev. H. Clinton Hay

Revelation 21:1-5, 9-17

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, 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, "Now the dwelling of God is with people, and he will live 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." Then the one sitting on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new!" . . .

Then 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 in the spirit, he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length, width, and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits--the measurement of a human being, that is, of an angel.

True Christian Religion #779, 780

This, the Lord's second coming, is taking place by means of a man, to whom the Lord has shown himself in person, and whom he has filled with his spirit, so that he may teach the doctrines of the new church that come from the Lord through the Word.

Since the Lord cannot show himself in person, as has just been demonstrated, and yet he predicted that he would come and found a new church, which is

the New Jerusalem, it follows that he will do this by means of a man who can not only receive intellectually the doctrines of this church, but also publish them in print. I bear true witness that the Lord has shown himself in the presence of me, his servant, and sent me to perform this task. After this he opened the sight of my spirit, thus admitting me to the spiritual world and allowing me to see the heavens and the hells, and also to talk with angels and spirits. This I have now been doing continuously for many years. At the same time, I affirm that from the first day of my calling I have not received any instruction concerning the doctrines of that church from any angel, but only from the Lord, while I was reading the Word.

In order that the Lord could be constantly present with me, he has revealed to me the spiritual sense of his Word, in which divine truth is illuminated by its own light; and in this he is continually present. For it is through the spiritual sense and in no other way that he is present in the Word. His presence passes through the light shed by the spiritual sense into the shadow that covers the literal sense. This may be compared with the sun's light in daytime obscured by an intervening cloud. I showed above that the literal sense of the Word is like a cloud, and its spiritual sense is the glory, and the Lord himself is the sun that gives light--so that the Lord is the Word.

Sermon

Delivered at the Annual Convention of the New Jerusalem Church, Philadelphia, 1917, on the occasion of its one hundredth anniversary.

It is a satisfaction to every New Churchman in America to feel that his church and his country were born into the world at the same time, and in a connection with each other that he understands and appreciates. And it may well seem to him more than a chance coincidence, believing as he does in the divine providence over every detail of earthly events for the sake of eternal results, that the beginnings of his country and of the national organization of his church should have taken place in the same city, Philadelphia, whose very name speaks of brotherly love, and whose Biblical predecessor in the book of Revelation is the one of the seven cities that symbolizes the new Christian Church in its purest form, as gathered out of the Christian churches of the past.

Emanuel Swedenborg was the first New Churchman in the world, and the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in his divine founding of the New Jerusalem, symbolically described in the closing book of the Bible as the church of his Second Coming, and

as descending from himself out of heaven into the thoughts and affections, deeds and characters of men to “make all things new.” Swedenborg, the son of a Lutheran bishop, was born at Stockholm, Sweden, January 29, 1688. He was held in highest esteem among the scientific men of his day until he began his work as a theologian in his fifty-eighth year.

Then a division of opinion began to arise. His theological writings seemed so extraordinary and so opposed to the prevailing doctrines of the day that his sanity was doubted by some, and his position as a man of natural science discredited. But there were others who found in them a rational unfolding of the Sacred Scriptures that was like the rising of the sun out of the clouds of theological night. For they solved the great mystery of the Trinity and revealed the Lord Jesus Christ, within the appearance of the letter of his Word, as the one God in whom “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). And this new revelation of God, and the new intimacy of loving service with him to which it introduced his disciples, was shown to be the fulfillment of his Second Coming—a coming in spirit and in truth.

Some were ready for this gospel of the New Age and embraced it eagerly. Not long after Swedenborg’s death it was found that forty-six of the clergymen of the established church of Sweden had accepted it in the diocese of Gottenburg, and 60 percent of those in the diocese of Skara. There were also believers in Great Britain, Germany, and France.

Swedenborg died in London, on Sunday, March 29, 1772, where he had found freedom to publish his writings. His remains were placed in a tomb under the front of the chancel of the little Swedish chapel where he had worshipped. There they were reverently kept until 1908, when, at the request of the King of Sweden, they were removed to the cathedral of Uppsala, and in a beautiful sarcophagus were placed in a chapel opposite to the one in which the remains of the great botanist Linnaeus, who had been his friend in earthly life, lay in repose.

Among those who had received the Lord thus in his Second Coming was the “saintly” John Clowes of Manchester, England, a rector of the Anglican Church. He immediately engaged in translating the writings of Swedenborg into English and in preaching and teaching them by tongue and pen; and many converts to the new faith resulted.

At this time, Robert Hindmarsh, a printer, nineteen years of age, heard of Swedenborg through friends who were engaged in printing the first English

translation of *Heaven and Hell*, made by the Rev. Thomas Hartley and Mr. Cookworthy. But he did not begin to read his writings until four years later, when he found his mind prepared under the divine providence to accept them heartily. He could then find only two or three persons in London with whom he could enjoy conversations about them. He invited them to his house, not far from where Swedenborg had died, to meet with him regularly for study. After a time, John Augustus Tulk made the fourth member of this little reading circle.

Still later, to secure publicity, they took chambers at the Inner Temple, Fleet Street, and advertised in the newspapers, inviting all readers of Swedenborg to come and help in extending a knowledge of his writings. This brought James Glen, a Scotchman who was on his way to settle at Demerara, South America. He related how the captain of a ship in which he had sailed back from a previous voyage to South America had presented a copy of *Heaven and Hell* to him, which had filled him with astonishment, first at the nature of the information given, and second at the goodness of the divine providence in opening his mind to such a flood of spiritual truth.

So Mr. Glen sailed for America, full of gratitude and happiness, to become the pioneer missionary of the Lord in his Second Coming to the new world of freedom—of democracy—and in this special sense, perhaps, the “new earth” prepared to receive the New Jerusalem now descending from God out of heaven. On June 5, 1784, at Bell’s auction room and bookstore, he gave the first public proclamation of the New Church in America, if not in the world. He succeeded in so interesting Francis Bailey, a printer who became a publisher of the Writings; Judge John Young; and one or two others that they soon became the nucleus of the New Church in Pennsylvania. He delivered two more lectures in the same place, and then went to Boston and lectured with similar results. Discouraged that so few sympathized with him in this great gift of heavenly light, he sailed for his new home in Demerara, where he established the first society of the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere.

After his departure, a box of books from Mr. Hindmarsh arrived for him at Philadelphia, which being unclaimed were sold at public auction. They fell into the hands of Hetty Barclay and others, and directly and indirectly made many more converts than had the voice of the missionary himself. Thus the Lord in his divine providence makes use of

his servants in ways unexpected, and not seldom unknown to them.

Another example of this hidden working of the divine providence is seen in the case of Rev. William Hill, who married Esther Duché, the daughter of the Rev. Jacob Duché, who offered prayer at the opening of the first Colonial Congress in a manner so acceptable that he was appointed Chaplain. He was then rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, but became a New Churchman the next year. In 1794 his son-in-law, the Rev. William Hill, came from England to Boston, where he published a number of New Church works and lectured. Dr. Samuel Brown, Dr. James Mann, Miss Margaret Carey, and others were led to receive the doctrines. But the great and unexpected result under divine providence came from his gift to the library of Harvard College of an original set of the *Arcana Coelestia* in three volumes of which there were annotations by Swedenborg in his own handwriting. Other volumes containing similar annotations by Swedenborg are in the library of the Argyle Square Society at London. It was this set in the library of Harvard College that was found by Thomas Worcester, Sampson Reed, and others who were then students with them there, which led to the formation of the Boston Society.

In recounting thus the pioneer missionaries and forces that prepared the way for the first Convention we must not forget “Johnny Appleseed”—John Chapman—who visited the new settlements of Ohio in 1801, sowing apple seeds and New Church truths at the same time by the wayside, for the benefit of coming generations. The latter kind of seed being somewhat scarce with him, he would break the bindings of such books as *Heaven and Hell* and leave the successive chapters at successive houses, and move them along at his successive visits, greeting his readers as he approached with the cry, “Here is news straight from heaven for you.”

The books that James Glen and William Hill brought to America were multiplied by the printing press of Francis Bailey in Philadelphia, assisted by Judge Young, and in Boston at the expense of Mr. Hill himself. The edition of *True Christian Religion* printed by Mr. Bailey in 1792 contains a list of the subscribers that helped to meet the expense. Among them appears the name of Benjamin Franklin, and also that of Robert Morris, who financed the Revolutionary War and thus contributed largely to its success. A copy of this edition of *True Christian Religion* was sent to President George Washington in the year following, to which he replied expressing appreciation and

attributing all glory to the overruling Providence. It has been learned from a member of the Washington family that in his last years he was a reader of Swedenborg. Lord Thomas Fairfax of Virginia was then a full receiver, and his son Ferdinand, and a Mr. Wilson M. C. Fairfax, are mentioned in 1803 as the first New Churchmen of the city of Washington.

Col. Robert Carter of Nomony Hall, Virginia, on becoming a New Churchman in 1790, manumitted his numerous slaves at large pecuniary sacrifice. Afterwards he moved to Baltimore and became the leader of the society there. The Rev. James Wilmer became its minister, preaching the first New Church sermon in America on April 1, 1792. He had been an Episcopal clergyman previously. From this beginning finally came the building of the first house of worship for the New Church in America. On the first Sunday of the nineteenth century, January 2, 1800, the temple was dedicated. It was on the southwest corner of Baltimore and Exeter Streets, and was of brick, about 32 by 40 feet in size. The parsonage in the rear of the building is still standing, but the church was taken down in 1866. The Rev. John Hargrove had become the Pastor of the Society in 1798, when he resigned his pastorate in the Methodist Church in the same city. He immediately began to get subscriptions to build the temple. With what joy he must have preached the dedication sermon, which crowned this blessed achievement! It is preserved in a printed volume of his sermons, and has for its text the words spoken by the angel to John in Patmos, saying, “Worship God.”

Mr. Hargrove was a preacher and a man of such power that he was twice appointed to preach before President Thomas Jefferson and the Congress of the United States. One of these sermons is preserved in the volume just mentioned. It was delivered on Christmas Day, 1804, and had for its subject “The Second Coming of the Lord.” We also find in this volume a valedictory sermon preached to the First Baltimore Volunteers on their departure for the War of 1812.

The building of the first temple in America at Baltimore was followed seventeen years afterwards by the building of the second at Philadelphia. Mr. William Schlatter was then the leading layman, and it was owing to his generosity that the temple was built. His grandfather, Michael Schlatter, known as “Old Pastor Schlatter,” was the organizer of the Dutch Reformed Churches of Pennsylvania. He became a New Churchman in 1790, but lived afterwards only about a year. It is said that his grandson, William, was taught Latin from an original edition

of Swedenborg's works that had belonged to his grandfather. At all events, he grew up a devoted New Churchman. He was born in 1784 and died at the age of forty-three years. When the American Society for Disseminating the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church was formed in Philadelphia, he was made its vice president. He was already engaged in publishing editions of the Doctrines for gratuitous distribution, and doubtless was most useful to that organization if not the real originator of it.

At this time the Philadelphia Circle of receivers were meeting in Norris Alley, in the schoolroom of Mr. Maskil M. Carll, who was their leader, and who afterwards became their pastor. He was ordained by the Rev. John Hargrove, December 31, 1816, with ordaining powers conferred then, and became one of the most useful ministers of the Convention. He participated in the formal organization of the Boston Society in 1818, when Mr. Thomas Worcester was made its leader. He visited the church widely in this country and in England, and served as Secretary and also as President of the Convention.

On June 6, 1816, the cornerstone of the temple in Philadelphia, built by William Schlatter, was laid at 12th and George (now Sansom) Streets. And on January 1, 1817, it was completed and consecrated by the Rev. John Hargrove of Baltimore and the Rev. Maskil M. Carll of Philadelphia. A large assembly of people attended, including a number from the New Church in other states. It was then and there determined to hold the First Convention of the New Church in the United States in that newly consecrated temple on the fifteenth day of May following, which would be Ascension Day, for the purpose of consulting upon "matters concerning the general interest of the Church."

The First Convention met on the day appointed, and elected the Rev. John Hargrove of Baltimore its first president, and Mr. Condy Raguet of Philadelphia its first secretary. The ancient record tells us that "many members of the Church, male and female, from the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Ohio, were present; also two from the British Isles." The minutes of the last English Conference were read, and a congratulatory address was prepared and adopted to be sent to the brethren across the ocean, introducing a custom which has been continued.

An application was received from Ohio for the ordination of Mr. David Powell into the ministry. Whereupon a committee of five ministers and five laymen, from the five different states represented

at the Convention, was appointed to consider the establishment of regulations for the ordination of ministers in the New Church. Among those on this Committee not already mentioned, we notice the name of Rev. Adam Hurdus, the first pastor of the Cincinnati Society. The question of establishing a fund such as that now administered by our Board of Missions was discussed, with the conclusion that the time for it had not yet arrived. But measures were adopted to bring the Convention into full touch with what already existed of the New Church in the country, and provision was made for holding the Second Convention at Baltimore the next year, Ascension Day and the two days following.

And now in closing, let us remember that it was in Philadelphia, this city, a hundred years ago that our General Convention was organized; and that the period of its birth, and of the preparation leading up to it, was in close connection with that of the birth and infancy of our country; that the Declaration of Independence was adopted July 4, 1776—four years after the death of Swedenborg; that here the Colonial Congress held its early sessions which, with the sword's help, gave freedom to our country and shaped its destiny; here the Constitution of the United States was framed and adopted in 1787—three years after the first proclamation in America of the Second Coming of the Lord; and that here, at the suggestion of General Washington, in her home which is still standing at 239 Arch Street, Betsy Ross made the first American flag, with its thirteen stars and thirteen bars, which was adopted by Congress in Independence Hall, June 14, 1777. Long may it wave, the first among the flags of the great democracies which now the Lord in his Second Coming is giving to the New World of human freedom and spiritual progress.

Prayer

O Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ, we thank you for sending laborers into the vineyard of your church. We thank you for inspiring men and women, our spiritual ancestors, to leave their old associations and carry out the many tasks of founding a new church that looks for its pattern and inspiration to the New Jerusalem, now descending from you in heaven onto this earth. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, September 2

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." *Genesis 12:1-2*

The very essence and soul of everything in a comprehensive theology is the acknowledgment of God [arising] from a concept of him. Therefore it is necessary to begin with the oneness of God.

True Christianity 5

Tuesday, September 3

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. *Genesis 12:4-5*

There is an inflow from God into us. This is obvious from everyone's ready admission that everything good that is truly good and that exists in us and is done by us is from God. *True Christian Religion 8*

Wednesday, September 4

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. *Genesis 12:7-8*

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. *Divine Providence 8*

Thursday, September 5

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live."

Genesis 12:10-12

The same God who gives life to us gives life to every animal, so it is the form on the receiving end that makes the animal an animal and the human a human. *Ibid.*

Friday, September 6

"Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. *Genesis 12:13-15*

The sun flows the same way into every tree; the difference in trees is a result of each one's form. The sun flows the same way into a grapevine as into a thorn bush, but if a thorn branch is grafted onto a grapevine, the inflow is changed and adapts to the form of the thorn branch. *Ibid.*

Saturday, September 7

But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and be gone." *Genesis 12:17-19*

Our minds are varied according to their forms, which are inwardly spiritual depending on our faith in God and also on our life from God. *Ibid.*

SEEKING AND BEING FOUND

Rev. John Maine

Psalm 34

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.
I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.
Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.
O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.
O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.
The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Sermon

This sermon was preached in St. Paul, Minnesota.

I want you all to know that being here has a very special, personal significance for me. It was right here, on this campus, nine years ago almost to the day, that I was ordained into the ministry of our church. It was all rather a blur at the time, but nonetheless, I recall being very aware of the irony conferred by my surroundings.

There I was, a proponent of the New Church, being ordained at a school affiliated with the old, and in a city named for the apostle whose letters are foundational for the old faith, both Catholic and Protestant, but of little account in the new.

Well, ironic maybe—but also, I think, a perfect metaphor for every human life. All of us are this mix of old and new at one and the same time, the person we were and the places we’ve been and the person we may yet be and the places we hope still to go. We carry both with us, and the regenerative life we seek to live is all about *integrating* the two, bringing our past into the light of God’s present, that we might both journey together into a new future.

But “old” and “new” are loaded words, aren’t they? New is fresh and exciting and good; old is stale and boring and bad. New ways versus old ways, New Testament versus Old, New Church versus old church—in this neat, black/white, us/them kind of formulation, it can become so easy for us to forget the One in whom we, and all things, live and move and have our being, the One who works to bring all things into the light—usually in surprising and unexpected ways.

With this in mind, I’d like to tell you a story. This happened years ago, when I was completing an internship as a hospital chaplain and assigned to the ICU, the intensive care unit. One morning my supervisor called me in to attend my first so-called “family conference.”

These, I quickly discovered, are always difficult meetings, a mixture of dread and hope, as the doctor lays out the options and risks for the relatives of the patient. Questions are posed, answers are given, and decisions are made. People struggle to understand and to find words, but ultimately there are no words for what is felt in those moments, the anguish and longing and love for someone so intimately known, so precious, and yet so terribly far away.

On this particular morning, it was a weary, middle-aged woman who was the lonely witness to this truth. She’d come in from far, far out of town, only to hear from the doctor that the prognosis for her elderly mother continued to be very poor. Whatever happened, her mother wasn’t going home again. However, there was a faint possibility, a procedure that would first require that all her mother’s medications be temporarily suspended while certain tests were done. If the daughter agreed, would she then please come in to be with her mom to help keep her calm during those difficult hours when her mom would be without the aid of any drugs to allay her pain and anxiety?

At this, I recall how all eyes shifted to the woman, so silent, looking down at her hands. Finally, she

nodded slightly and said yes, yes she wanted the procedure for her mother but then, no—and here the tears came—she just couldn't possibly come in on the day in question, and there wasn't any other family member around to take her place. In a pleading voice she said, "All my mom really needs is someone to say the rosary with her. She believes in God, and if she was ever upset about anything, I'd pray it with her and then she'd be okay."

Well, my supervisor and I exchanged glances, and I was promptly introduced as the ICU student chaplain who'd be glad to pray the rosary with her mom. The woman looked at me a bit uncertainly and asked, "So, you're Catholic?"

"No," I said, "I'm Swedenborgian!" At this, of course, her face went completely blank. "Sweden-what?"

So I did my best to explain. Swedenborgians, I said, were sort of "universalist Christians." We recognize the presence of God in all churches and religions, all paths which honor the truth of God's love and share that love for the well-being of others. So of course I'd be more than happy to pray the rosary with her mom. All she needed do was write out the words of the prayers to be said, and I'd take it from there.

Well, it was immediately agreed, and, with relief and gratitude flooding her face, the woman took her leave and the meeting ended. Needless to say, I felt great to have this chance to make such a positive difference in someone's life. In fact, truth to tell, I felt a little like the Lone Ranger coming to the rescue. He had silver bullets, as I recall, but, thanks to a purchase I had made that very evening, I now had a lovely silver cross. It came attached to a string of highly polished beads, made of real cedar wood from the Holy Land, at least according to the package—and only \$24.95. With my shiny new rosary in hand, I was good to go.

However, things began to unravel the next morning when I dropped by the chaplaincy office to pick up the daughter's instructions for what I was to say. My eye was caught by the one prayer most associated with the rosary, the famous "Ave Maria" or "Hail Mary."

For those of you who don't know it, it goes like this: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

For us as Swedenborgians, there are some big problems with this prayer. For a start, we don't pray to Mary. In the writings, Swedenborg reports how he once spoke with Mary in heaven. She was a radiant young woman, he said, who was distressed and amazed that people on earth would venerate her as some kind of quasi-divine being. And why?

Because Mary is not "the Mother of God" but the mother of the human child Jesus, who wasn't simply born God but who grew to become one with God, in all the ways that make his life a model for our own. Then there's that part about "us sinners." As evangelists of the New Church, we know that we're not helpless sinners, abject and unworthy, but the free co-creators with the Lord of our spiritual destinies.

It was with these objections turning over in my mind that I then made my way to the intended recipient of my good deed. There my sense of unease only deepened, as I looked upon the elderly lady before me. She was very small lying there on this big, raised bed, wires and tubes leading from her to the usual array of machines and bags of fluids on poles.

I remember wisps of iron-gray hair framing this small, round face, the features somewhat distorted by the big breathing tube pushed into her mouth. The eyes looking back at me spoke plainly of her distress and fear. They'd fastened straps across her body to keep her from moving or tearing out any of the tubes. She was utterly helpless. This was the moment to which life had brought her and also brought me. It was time to pray. I moved as gently and slowly as I could, smiling and carefully showing her my new rosary. She nodded ever so slightly, and so I began.

But here's the thing: the more I recited that Hail Mary, the harder it got. Because I knew I was saying something that I didn't believe, and what's the good of mouthing words you don't believe?

Soon I was berating myself for letting my doubts and selfish concerns get in the way of my praying. When that didn't work, I began to condemn myself for my inadequacy as a spiritual guide and support—because I certainly wasn't helping this lady. Every so often she'd suddenly twist and turn against the straps that held her down, her cries muffled by the breathing tube into soft gasps and groans. It made me want to call the nurse, but of course they couldn't give her anything—after all, that's why I was there. So I began to feel terribly alone, filled with a sense of shame and unworthiness, unable to find God anywhere and not knowing where to look.

How long this sorry state of affairs might have continued I don't know, but fortunately for me, as for us all, God is merciful and God is good. Just when I felt most completely helpless and lost, a word suddenly formed itself in my mind, as clear as a bell, as clear as I see you now. That word was simply "pray." Not think or analyze or judge—just pray.

So I did. "Hail Mary, full of grace . . . Holy Mary, Mother of God . . ." over and over and over again. That's all I did, all I could do—for five minutes? Twenty-five minutes? More? Less? I don't know.

All religions have prayers like this. Their real purpose is to help get us past our big, noisy selves, our need for control, our notions of what's right and proper—to get all of that to one side, so we can let ourselves simply be and be open to the Mystery beyond thoughts to know or words to describe, the power of love present in the depths of our being.

So I prayed, and then, at some point, I opened my eyes—or perhaps, rather, I had my eyes opened. Because I looked down, in amazement, to behold the miracle accomplished: this lady, hands folded over her heart, breathing slowly and evenly, eyes closed, looking utterly at peace—in fact, serene. No pain was troubling her; where, and in whom, she was resting, no fear could reach her. In today's lesson, Jesus says to us, "Seek and you shall find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Yes.

Here is the truth I have learned from my nine years of ministry and that I continue to learn: that our task is not so much to seek for God as to let ourselves be found; that all the forms our religions take—whether as a string of prayer beads or thirty big volumes of theology—these things serve as useful but only very partial attempts to point us toward the Mystery. They are not the Mystery. The love which surrounds you and me, flowing through us and breathing us into life at every moment, willing everything good for us, is of an order of grace and wonder and saving power beyond all our limited ways to comprehend.

And here is my final witness to that saving power. The best memory I have of that student chaplaincy long ago came on the final day. I paid a last visit to that same elderly lady, only this time she was sitting up in bed, a regular hospital bed, her daughter by her side. I remember they both had these huge grins on their faces, from ear to ear. Because that lady had made a complete recovery, to the utter astonishment of the doctors, and, that very day, she was going home!

We, too, are pilgrims on our homeward way, our hearts often anxious, doubting, distracted, but

nonetheless always seeking the love for which they were made. Let us always remember that, whatever may happen, love has already found us. Home is wherever we are, in whatever moment we are, and in that love all things are possible and our way is sure. Amen.

Prayers

Show us, O Savior, the silence of humility and the silence of love. Show us the silence that speaks without words and the silence of faith; and grant that in the silence of our hearts we may know the deep movement of your Holy Spirit.

- *Sir Thomas More (1478-1535)*

Jesus, love of all loving,
in the ploughed-up earth of our lives
you come to plant the trusting of faith.

A small seed at first,
faith can become within us
one of the most unmistakable Gospel realities.

It keeps alive the inexhaustible goodness of a human heart.

- *Brother Roger of Taize (1915-2005)*

Remember, O Lord, what you have wrought in us,
and not what we deserve;
and as you have called us to your service,
make us worthy of your calling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- *Leonine Sacramentary (fifth century)*

God our Father, in all the mysteries of life,
help us to know in whom we have believed,
and in that knowledge may we find the love
that beats at the heart of creation;
through Christ our Lord.

- *A. S. Peake (1865-1929)*

Daily Meditations

Monday, September 9

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king said to Daniel, "So you are Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard of you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that enlightenment, understanding, and excellent wisdom are found in you." *Daniel 5:13-14*

The underlying reality of God, the underlying divine reality, cannot be described. It is beyond the reach of any idea in human thought. Everything human thought can conceive of is created and finite; it cannot conceive of what was not created and is infinite.

True Christian Religion 18

Tuesday, September 10

Then Daniel answered in the presence of the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else! Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and let him know the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar kingship, greatness, glory, and majesty." *Daniel 5:17-18*

The one God is called Jehovah from "being," that is, from the fact that he alone is and was and will be, and that he is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, September 11

"And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. He killed those he wanted to kill, kept alive those he wanted to keep alive, honored those he wanted to honor, and degraded those he wanted to degrade. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he acted proudly, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and his glory was stripped from him." *Daniel 5:19-20*

The one God is substance itself and form itself. Angels and people are substances and forms from him. To the extent that they are in him and he is in them, to that extent they are images and likenesses of him. *Ibid.*

Thursday, September 12

"You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven! The vessels of his temple have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them. You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know; but the God in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways, you have not honored." *Daniel 5:23*

The intrinsic, underlying divine reality and intrinsic capacity to become manifest cannot produce anything else divine that is intrinsically real and has an intrinsic capacity to become manifest. Therefore another God of the same essence is impossible. *Ibid.*

Friday, September 13

"So from his presence the hand was sent and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: mene, mene, tekel, and parsin. This is the interpretation of the matter: mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; tekel, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." *Daniel 5:24-28*

What else is faith except spiritually seeing what is real? And what else is living by God's instructions except an actual acknowledgment that he is the source of salvation and eternal life? *True Christian Religion 22*

Saturday, September 14

Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed in purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made concerning him that he should rank third in the kingdom.

Daniel 5:29

Those who worship one God in whom there is a divine trinity and who is therefore one person become more and more alive, and become angels on earth. *True Christian Religion 23*

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Rev. Renee Billings-Machiniak

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
- Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

15 SEP

Psalm 34:4-10

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.
I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.
Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.
O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.
O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.
The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Luke 9:18-20

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."

Sermon

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

A dirt road borders the Almont New Church Assembly property—Tubspring Road—and every time I walk down this road, something wonderful happens.

During the women's retreat there this past May, I was strolling down this road contemplating the theme of this year's convention, "A Swedenborgian Odyssey." Those of you here who know and love Almont are familiar with the point in the road where there is an intersection that offers four clear directions to the traveler. I found myself wandering unknowingly right to the center of this intersection, where I paused and considered in which direction I might go.

I put myself in the mindset of traveling on a spiritual journey and stood for a while facing each of the four directions. I turned and saw a very flat, yet beautiful landscape of beginning crops and open farmland. I turned to the next direction and saw the same thing. I turned to the third position, and again, the same landscape. But, down the fourth road—ah, a big rock, much like the rock Rev. Jonathan Mitchell referred to several days ago from Isaiah . . . except I'm pretty sure Isaiah's rock didn't have graffiti on it! Right next to this rock there stands a big, beautiful tree that reminded me of the tree of life. I thought to myself, "This is the road that I want to travel!"

Meditating upon our convention theme, I headed down the road toward the rock and the tree. That is when it happened. As clear as the bell that rings from our quaint little Almont country chapel, I heard inside my heart the voice of the Lord ask a question. He whispered, "Who do you say that I am?" Just after He spoke, a funny little toad hopped by, and I became distracted from the Presence before me (those of you who know me well know that this is like me). The moment faded, but the question has remained strong in my heart over the past few months.

I believe—with all of the changes taking place at this point in our church's history, and for each one of us personally—it is time to look at this question with more intentionality, to ask ourselves who we believe the Lord to be. Our values and priorities and everything that we do flow from our answer to this question. I invite each one of you here to consider the

question and take it back with you to the people in your local societies, to invite people to talk about it at retreats, association meetings, regional meetings, or perhaps in worship.

Every once in a while, someone comes along who reminds us of the reality and the power of the presence of the Risen Lord moving with us and through us. We are given hope and sustained by their stories. Recently, a man came to our church in Royal Oak, Michigan, for the first time and, after sharing worship with us, purchased a copy of *Heaven and Hell*. The next week he returned and urgently asked to have coffee with me to talk about his thoughts on the book and his personal faith journey. We met, and he told me about a most amazing occurrence.

He was born a cultural Jew and raised in New York. At the age of nine, he contracted polio and became very ill. At that time, near the end of World War II, the vast majority of the children afflicted with polio died. One night, he felt the presence of the Risen Lord specifically move through his body and heal it completely. He knew he was made well by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as it turned out, the doctors confirmed soon afterward that he was clear of the disease. The doctors could not explain it, and to this day, many years later, he searches for the unfolding meaning of this healing.

Now, I bet that this man has a pretty clear sense of the answer to the Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" Indeed, he felt the reality of the Lord's presence in his very bones and blood. With a humble tone to his witness, he confirms Peter's conviction: "You are the Messiah."

Most of us here have probably not had this kind of direct encounter. But this is as it should be. Our individual journeys are all supposed to be different and unique. Honoring diversity of experience and open-mindedness is a rich part of our theology in the church. But we do get glimpses every now and then of the Spirit that moves among us so personally. We get what we need to sustain and inspire us on our journey.

For myself, I feel the Lord present as a voice inside that speaks to me. Last May, I was guided by a clear voice inside that spoke the question to my heart. And then, as I sat with it, a shift happened. The question, "Who do you say that I am?" shifted toward myself and became "Who am I?" The two questions worked off each other in my mind, as if they were in a dance, so that I have come to see that the two are clearly intertwined. A direct relationship exists between

my living experience and understanding of the Lord and my own sense of myself. The more time I spend praying and living with the Lord's presence, the more I am aware of—and awake to—my own human potential and the various levels of my inner darkness that tend toward secrecy and selfishness. The Lord's light uncovers what needs to be healed. We can put our faith in that.

For most of us, I believe, it is fairly easy to acknowledge the Lord when we are in the midst of the joys of life. But we can, more and more, seek to merge the Lord's Spirit into our darkness and our times of suffering. This is a shift to bring all of who we are into the Light. Our suffering transforms into mercy, compassion, and deeper understanding when we ask the Lord to be with us in it. The point is, then, no longer the suffering alone; rather, the point is that our suffering leads to a higher kindness and charity. This intentional shift toward the Lord's light is needed more today.

The Rev. Paul Zacharias published an article in the *Messenger* last year suggesting to Convention that, in order for our church to survive and to move successfully through all of the changes taking place today, we must be willing to shift our mindset and grow—both in a personal sense and as a church collectively. I believe that the shift we need is to move closer to the Lord's presence and to walk with Him by our side—every step of the way. All of life, then, shifts and becomes holy.

Prayer

O, Lord, we thank you, we thank you, we thank you—for the gift of this time here together with You. As we continue to walk our faith journey down the road less traveled, and as we discover more of who we are, keep us near you; safe under your Providence and open to your Spirit. With you by our side, we can serve the higher good, and we are truly blessed. O Lord, we thank you, we thank you, we thank you. Amen.

Monday, September 16

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; *Psalm 1:1*

There are two things that emanate from the Lord: divine love and divine wisdom (or what amounts to the same thing, divine goodness and divine truth). In its essence the Word is each of these.

True Christian Religion 191

Tuesday, September 17

but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night. *Psalm 1:2*

The Word connects us to the Lord and opens heaven, therefore the Word fills us with love for what is good and wisdom about what is true. It fills our will with love for what is good and our intellect with wisdom about what is true. This is how we receive life through the Word. *True Christian Religion 192*

Wednesday, September 18

They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper. *Psalm 1:3*

As the Word came down, the divinity itself, which was originally inexpressible and imperceptible, became adapted to the awareness of angels and, further on, to the awareness of human beings. As a result, the Word has a spiritual meaning that is present within its earthly meaning much the way our soul is present in us, the thoughts of our intellect are present in what we say, and the feelings of our will are present in what we do. *True Christian Religion 193*

Thursday, September 19

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away. *Psalm 1:4*

Because the Word is inwardly spiritual, it was written entirely in correspondences. Anything that is written in correspondences has an outermost meaning that is written in a style like the one used by the prophets, by the Gospel writers, and in the Book of Revelation. Although that style appears poor, nevertheless it conceals within itself divine wisdom and all angelic wisdom. *True Christian Religion 194*

Friday, September 20

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; *Psalm 1:5*

Inside its [the Word's] literal meaning, which is earthly, there is an inner meaning that is spiritual; and inside the spiritual meaning there is an innermost meaning that is heavenly. The outermost meaning, which is earthly and is called the literal meaning, is a container for the two inner meanings. Therefore it is a foundation for them and also a structural support. *True Christian Religion 212*

Saturday, September 21

for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1:6

In the Lord's case, he is love itself and wisdom itself, and therefore goodness itself and truth itself. He became all this through fulfilling all the goodness and all the truth in the Word. Someone who thinks and speaks only the truth becomes that truth. Someone who intends and does only what is good becomes that goodness. *True Christian Religion 263*

SE P 22 PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Rev. Richard M. Baxter

Revelation 21

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."

Then 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 in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the

seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Sermon

I have spent a lot of time in the hospital. I was there so long that I changed roommates many times, and as was always the case, sooner or later it would come out that I was a minister, and a religious discussion would ensue.

One roommate had a rare form of terminal cancer and a very talkative wife. I overheard that they were members of the United Pentecostal Church. Immediately upon arrival at the hospital, they made contact with their local church, and their side of the room was soon flooded with members bringing food and with visits from the minister. (The irony was that the patient couldn't stand the sight of food and didn't want to talk to anyone.) Meanwhile, I was just recovering from my own severe treatments. I did not feel in any mood to take on the Pentecostals.

But one day a nurse blew my cover by calling me "Rev." The talkative wife immediately followed up, and I explained as briefly as I could that I was the pastor of a church in Washington near the White House, hoping that would satisfy her. She responded by saying that her church, the Pentecostal Church, was founded upon the scripture verse from Matthew that says: "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

"What scripture verse is your church founded upon?" she asked.

The Swedenborgian Church has such an individualistic approach to religion that I don't think it ever occurred to me to hold up one particular scripture verse as representing the whole church! Well, being the quick-witted, resourceful person I am, I coughed several times, had a pain or two, and wished that I smoked a pipe so I could conveniently put it in my mouth and gain some time to think. I

finally replied that our church was founded upon the scripture from the book of Revelation that says, "I, John, saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven."

How did I do? Is that what you would have replied?

She stated that she had often studied the Book of Revelation but couldn't make much sense of it. It had so many mysteries and prophesies! She asked me if I thought a certain prophesy applied to a present international situation.

I said, "Well, try this outline and see if it helps. Try to think about Revelation as prophesy about yourself, about inner dynamics within yourself—not about the Nazis, the Russians, the Middle East, the Chinese. It's not about somebody out there, but about what is going on inside you."

I said that the Book of Revelation can be divided into three parts. The first part is the message to the seven churches. Each of the churches was in some kind of physical or spiritual trouble, but, if each persisted, it would be given a reward that was particularly relevant to them. (A branch from the Tree of Life, the bright and morning star, the hidden manna, the crown of life—all symbols for Christ elsewhere in the Bible.) They would all receive Christ in a form that was particularly appropriate for them, considering the path and the struggle that the seven churches were going through.

The middle part of the book—the part about the beast and the dragon, the plagues, and the trumpets—represents our spiritual battles.

The third part, about the Holy City, describes the goal. It is a transformation of the original Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life is still in the center, but instead of the simplicity—instead of the innocence of ignorance of the Garden of Eden—you now have the complexity of a city, which implies a complex web of relationships. It implies the developing sophistication of being aware of the world but not conformed to it—the innocence of wisdom.

In this spiritual journey, you have all the experiences of life—all the ups and downs of everything that happened in the Old Testament and New Testament, leading up to the reward and goal of Christ—and the innocence of wisdom that comes with dwelling in His presence.

This woman had never heard any explanation like this before, and it clearly gave her something to think about. Just then the nurses and doctors came in to look at her husband and me, and we never did have

an opportunity to discuss what I had said. So I am not sure what kind of impression it made on her, but I think the impression was a positive one.

The exchange also gave me something to think about. As I lay back and reflected on the conversation and the difference between our two scripture verses, it occurred to me that hers was an action statement—and her church was very busy being active!

The scripture verse describing the descent of the Holy City, on the other hand, is a vision statement. There is a difference of feeling between the two. The scriptural basis that says "go teach others" implies the known, suggesting that you have a list of what you are going to teach them. The scriptural basis of a "descending holy city" implies mystery. It is introspective. We are paying attention to getting in touch with our own inner world, which we see pictured in the Biblical vision.

The difficulty with a vision is that you must describe it pretty completely before it makes much sense to others, and then you must interpret the symbolism of the vision and make it relevant to contemporary life. Maybe that is why we Swedenborgians feel so inadequate when we try to answer a question as to what our church is all about. Where do you start?

You could start at the beginning with the creation story. We see the creation story as a parable showing the potential, the growth that human beings are capable of, from the first ray of light that is the dawn of consciousness until the sixth day, when we have developed into mature men and women.

But our scriptural basis is wider than the creation story, even though that seems to be the one we teach over and over again. The creation story shows the pattern of our potential. Our actual story is much longer and more circuitous than that. As our scriptural basis, we see within the books of the Bible that have an inner sense two parallel stories: the historical account of people, places, and events of the literal story—and within that account a deeper spiritual level that reflects our individual journeys.

Therefore, the scriptural basis of our spiritual journey begins with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, in a simplistic relationship with God. It proceeds through infancy and childhood, illustrated by the children of Abraham. There is a necessary period of desert wandering on our own before we can claim the Promised Land. There is struggle before we can assume the kingship of adulthood. Our so-called "mid-life crises" can be compared with the division of that kingdom, with the "ways of the world" pulling

us one way and the biblical prophets pulling us another—calling us to our former ideals. The New Testament shows us a deeper maturity based on the inner meaning of Jesus' parables. The Book of Revelation ties together many of the biblical themes into a vision of spiritual maturity in the Holy City.

But I say to you today that, even with this all-encompassing vision, our scriptural basis would be spotty and incomplete unless we made as our scriptural basis all the books of the Old Testament: Ruth, Esther, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, and so on, which have so much to tell us about brave human beings caught in desperate circumstances.

A scriptural basis should also include the Apocrypha—those books that cover that 400-year period between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Washington church received a Tiffany stained-glass window from the Brooklyn church. No one knew anything about the window. We found, from the Tiffany Studio catalog, that it was of the Archangel Raphael. Raphael is only mentioned in the Bible in the apocryphal book of Tobit. In thirty years of association with this church, I doubt if I have ever heard reference to the Apocrypha. I thought, "This window must be some kind of mistake!" But I looked up Raphael in Swedenborg, and there he was. (I have always found Swedenborg to be wider than the church.) In *Apocalypse Revealed* (AR 548), Swedenborg said that the archangels such as Raphael represent ministries in heaven. Raphael had three ministries in the Book of Tobit: (1) guiding wayfarers, (2) healing the sick, (3) and arranging propitious marriages. Do these sound like good subjects for a New Church window?

But our scriptural basis has to be even wider than that. It has to include a proper recognition of the letters of the early church. Again, Swedenborg makes many references to them, but the church usually has not. In the 1850s, the Reverend Bayley, a New Church minister, gave a series of lectures at Brighton, England. The questions and discussion from the floor centered around the letters of the early church. Dr. Bayley gives a brilliant defense of the Swedenborgian theology based on the letters and their proper translation. His answers have been an inspiration to me. I have Xeroxed the whole book and have it on my desk all the time. I commend them to you.

You can see by now that I am uncomfortable singling out one verse as being our scriptural basis. My reflection in the hospital convinced me that our scriptural basis has to be the whole Bible.

We must have the full scope, the *big picture*: our potential described in the creation story, and then our spiritual journey from the Garden of Eden to the Holy City. This prepares us for all kinds of ministries both here and in heaven. Our task as a church is anything that involves spiritual growth—churches, groups, retreats and retreat centers, personal counseling, wedding ministries. The danger is that the vision becomes just an umbrella under which a collection of individualists pursue their own thing. We need to ask how the vision connects to the task of community if each of us is on our own individual pilgrimage. We need to ask how the vision connects with our individual gifts to enable us to support and implement the vision. The vision can empower us. The vision should empower us. The vision must empower us.

This convention session we have asked ourselves: Who are we? Where are we going?

I know the answer. We are the People of the Book, and we are on a journey from the Garden of Eden to the Holy City. I'll see you there!

Prayer

Let the river run;
Let all the dreamers
Wake the nation.
Come, the New Jerusalem! . . .
We're coming to the edge,
Running on the water,
Coming through the fog,
Your sons and daughters.
We, the great and small,
Stand on a star
And blaze a trail of desire
Through the dark'ning dawn.
It's asking for the taking!
Come run with me now;
The sky is the color of blue
You've never even seen
In the eyes of love.
Oh, my heart is aching!
We're coming to the edge,
Running on the water,
Coming through the fog,
Your sons and daughters.
Let the river run;
Let all the dreamers
Wake the nation.
Come, the New Jerusalem!

- from "Come, the New Jerusalem" by Carly Simon

Monday, September 23

But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, "Where is he?" *John 7:10-11*

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. For this reason, among the ancients it was a matter of contention and dispute which of the two should be primary and rightly be called the firstborn.

True Christian Religion 336

Tuesday, September 24

And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, "He is a good man," others were saying, "No, he is deceiving the crowd." Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews. *John 7: 12-13*

We are to believe or have faith in God our Savior Jesus Christ because this is believing in a God who can be seen, in whom is what cannot be seen. Faith in a God who can be seen—who is both human and divine at the same time—goes deep within us. Although faith is earthly in its form, it is spiritual in its essence.

True Christian Religion 339

Wednesday, September 25

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me." *John 7:14-16*

...goodwill and faith give us the capacity of providing ourselves with eternal life through a power that is assigned and given to us by God. The more we use that power and look to God, the more God increases the power until he turns every aspect of our earthly goodwill into spiritual goodwill and every aspect of our earthly faith into spiritual faith.

True Christian Religion 340

Thursday, September 26

"Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him." *John 7:17-18*

Truths need to be taken from the Word, because all the truths that make a contribution to our salvation are there. These truths are genuinely effective because they have been given by the Lord and have been engraved on the entire angelic heaven. *True Christian Religion 347*

Friday, September 27

"Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished."

John 7:19-21

The angels say that there is never an end to wisdom. Wisdom has no other source except divine truths that have been analytically divided into forms by means of light flowing in from the Lord. Human intelligence that is truly intelligent has the same source.

True Christian Religion 350

Saturday, September 28

"Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

John 7: 22-24

The more spiritual our faith and our goodwill become, the more we are drawn away from our self-centeredness. We do not focus on ourselves, on payment, or on reward; we focus only on the pleasure of perceiving truths that relate to faith and doing good actions that relate to love. *True Christian Religion 361.2*

SEP 29 THE APPELLATION OF FATHER

Rev. Jonathan Clowes, M.A.

*Preached in the Parish Church of St. John, Manchester,
By the Rev. J. CLOWES, M. A. RECTOR OF THE
SAID CHURCH, AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY
COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.*

Matthew 6:9-13

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Sermon

After this manner therefore pray ye: “ Our Father which art in Heaven.”

INTENDING in this and some future discourses to unfold and explain the several particular petitions contained in that most holy form of prayer, called the Lord’s Prayer, I shall bespeak a previous attention to some general observations on the nature and use of Prayer.

It is then the great end and design of Prayer to change, to reform, and to purify our hearts and lives. Our Lord therefore taught us in what manner we should pray, that He might teach us what is the best, the purest, and most reformed state of heart and life.

In repeating therefore our Lord’s prayer, if we would render it of any real benefit to us, we should consider not only the words, but the spirit of it, or what state of heart and life it recommendeth to us, and hath a tendency to produce in us. For if we only repeat the words, and do not at the same time attend to the spirit, the meaning, the purpose, intended to be expressed and conveyed by the words, how plain is it to see, that if we repeated the prayer twenty times in a day, it would leave us just as unimproved, because as unpurified, as it found us.

For God, it deserves to be noted, is not pleased with our prayers for His own sake, but for our sakes. Our prayers cannot affect God, so as to make any change in His disposition towards us, but they are intended to affect us, and to make a change in the disposition

of our hearts before God; and when they have this effect, then they are pleasing to God; because then they make us such as God would have us to be; reducing us to such a humble and holy state of heart and life, as is most pleasing in His sight, because He knoweth it to be most pure, and beneficial, and blessed to ourselves.

In discoursing to you, then, on our Lord’s Prayer, I shall endeavour to point out to you the spirit which it involves, or that state of heart and life which it recommendeth to us, and is calculated to form in us, because then only we shall enter into the uses and the benefits of it, when we discover its spirit, and endeavour to correct the state of our hearts and lives by its divine purity, wisdom, and sanctity.

Now the spirit of our Lord’s Prayer, or that state of heart and life which it recommendeth, and is calculated to open and form in us, is the most heavenly, the most sublime, the most angelic, the most wise and perfect that can possibly be conceived; because in its inward spirit it is divine. For in its inward spirit it is full of the love, the wisdom, and the power of the Almighty Himself, and therefore it has a tendency to impart to the devout supplicant such a spirit or temper of heart and life as must of necessity be in all respects most perfect, most holy, and most blessed.

Let us attend then to this sacred form of Prayer as to the purest wisdom of God, designed to convey a measure of the same wisdom unto ourselves, whereby our hearts may become changed into the likeness of God, and we ourselves, being made partakers of His nature, may be made partakers of His glory, of His happiness, of His immortality.

The first address which demands our attention in this divine Prayer, is in the words of my text, “ Our Father which art in Heaven.” Let us consider now the spirit of these words particularly and attentively, that so we may find all that spiritual instruction which is contained in them, and intended to be conveyed by them.

The words resolve themselves into three distinct considerations;

1st. What is involved in the appellation of Father, as applied to the Great and Holy God;

2ndly. Why we are taught to address Him as our Father;

and 3rdly. What we are to understand by the concluding terms, “Which art in heaven.”

In my present discourse I shall confine myself to the first of these considerations, viz. What is involved in the appellation of Father, as applied to the Great and Holy God.

The holy title and character of Father, as applied to God, instruct us in these great truths — 1st. That we have originally derived from Him the beginning of life, with all its several blessings and comforts. — 2ndly. That we owe to Him the daily continuation, growth, and perfection of that life. — 3rdly. That we are therefore dependent upon Him at all times for all that we are or have, whether it be internal or external. — 4thly. That God hath the purest and tenderest love as a parent towards every one of us, and that therefore we may with the utmost confidence approach Him; we may with the utmost confidence lay open our hearts before Him; because He will receive us, He will listen to us, with all the tenderness of the tenderest parent; and He will no more withhold from us those real blessings which we in sincerity ask of Him, and which He seeth we want, than a kind father upon earth will withhold good things from the child whom he affectionately loveth.

Our Blessed Lord therefore taught us to address the Divine Being under the affectionate and venerable name of Father, to remind us of the tender and holy relationship which subsists between us and Himself, that so we might learn to approach Him with dispositions suitable to the nearness and dearness of such a connection. Let us learn then, brethren, to call God our Father, not in words only, but in the more true and sensible language of feeling and affectionate hearts.

Let us learn to adore Him as the Father and Fountain of life with all its blessings and comforts, both in ourselves and in every other creature: let us learn to confess that we daily owe to Him the continuation, the growth, and the perfection of our life: let us thus teach ourselves to acknowledge that we are dependent upon God for all that we are or have, whether it be natural or spiritual, whether it be temporal or eternal; and that every good thing both within us, and without us, is of the divine mercy, grace, and love of our Heavenly Father. Let us thus learn to worship; let us thus learn to adore; let us thus learn to approach our Divine Parent; not as slaves and servants, who are afraid of Him, but as children and as sons whom He infinitely loveth, and whom

He hath called to a holy liberty with Himself, and by whom He wisheth to be loved, to be importuned, and to be trusted in, as a Father of endless blessing, protection, hope, and comfort both now and for ever, unto all His creatures.

Alas! how little in general do we know God! How little therefore do we love Him, because we do not thus approach Him as our Father; because we do not thus adore Him as the God and Parent of our life, in whom we live, and move, and have our being! We all of us indeed with our lips call God our Father, but how few of us do really know and acknowledge Him to be so with our hearts! How few of us do really see and confess that all we are or have is from Him; and that what we call our life is but an emanation from His all-blessed love and wisdom communicated daily in mercy and kindness unto us! Oh then, if we would truly know, if we would truly love and worship God, let us contemplate and adore Him as the Father and Fountain of life, of blessing, and comfort, both in ourselves and in all the boundless universe of creatures and creation both visible and invisible, which he hath formed.

But further—If we would call God indeed our Father, we should study to purify and perfect our souls through His divine righteousness and truth. For this is the only true mark of our being the children of God, and that He is our Father, when we are endeavouring to become like unto Him in wisdom, in holiness, in purity of life and conversation.

It is therefore written, “That they only are the sons of God who are led by the spirit of God” (Rom. viii. 14). If we do not therefore partake of our Father’s wise and righteous spirit, suffering ourselves to be led and governed by it in all our thoughts, words, and actions, it is a plain proof that we are not His sons. For sons or children do always partake of a life similar to that of their parent. We are all of us sons or children of earthly parents, because we partake of an earthly life which we have derived from them; even so, to become the true sons or children of God our heavenly parent, we must partake of a heavenly life, which will be derived to us from Him according as we endeavour to purify and perfect our hearts by heavenly righteousness, wisdom, and truth. If then we desire to call God our Father; if we desire to know and to find Him to be related to us by such a near, such a holy and happy relationship, let us endeavour to live righteously; let us endeavour to purify our

*The spirit of our Lord's
Prayer . . . is the most
heavenly, the most
sublime, the most angelic,
the most wise and perfect
that can possibly be
conceived; because in its
inward spirit it is divine.*

souls by the lessons of our Father's heavenly and eternal wisdom; let us take care that we may ever be partakers of His holiness, and that we may always keep open the communication between His righteous Spirit and our own hearts. Thus shall we become indeed the true sons and children of our Father which is in Heaven, deriving from Him a heavenly and eternal life, as we have derived from our earthly parents an earthly and a temporal life.

Lastly. Let me give you here one word of important and instructive caution. Whensoever you approach and address yourselves unto your Father which is in Heaven, remember that He now dwelleth bodily in the Glorified Humanity of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and that you can only be admitted to Him, or have any communication with Him, as you approach Him through this Divine Humanity of the Blessed Jesus. This is what He declared when He said, "No Man cometh to the Father but by me" (John xiv. 6). And again, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John xiv. 11). And again, "He that hath seen me hath seen my Father also" (John xiv. 9), by which words He meant to instruct us in this great and important truth, that if we would approach unto or have any communication with the Godhead of the Eternal Invisible Father, we must now approach unto Him, we must now seek communication with Him through the Humanity which He assumed here below; and in which He now dwelleth bodily and visibly in the glorified Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Do we wish then to find and to worship God as our Father? Let us first seek Him in the centre and depth of our own hearts, as the Father and Fountain of all the life, blessing, and comfort, which we ourselves and all other creatures do daily receive. But let us here seek Him in righteousness, in purity, in wisdom, and in truth: let us remember that He is our Father, and we are His sons, only so far as we partake of and are led by His righteous, pure, wise, and heavenly spirit: let us remember lastly, that He now dwelleth with all His fulness in the Glorified Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that therefore we can have no communication with Him but through this Divine Humanity: let us therefore draw nigh and approach unto the Blessed Jesus: let us acknowledge Him from henceforth as our God and Father, agreeably with the magnificent prophetic testimony concerning Him, where it is written, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah ix. 6). Amen.

Prayers

Most gracious and holy Father,
give us wisdom to perceive you,
intelligence to understand you,
diligence to seek you,
patience to wait for you,
eyes to behold you,
a heart to meditate on you,
and a life to proclaim you,
through the power of the Holy Spirit
and the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Frank Topping, 1994

Eternal Trinity, you are a deep sea,
into which the more I enter the more I find,
and the more I find the more I seek.
My soul hungers in the mystery of your depth
and longs to see you in and through your own light;
as the deer years for clear spring water
so my soul yearns for your truth.

- After St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Show us, O Lord, what it is to reverence you,
to adore you, and to love you.
Amidst all our sins and shortcomings,
help us to long for your grace
and to be wholly united to you.
Refresh us with your Spirit
and take our aching hearts to yourself,
for in your love alone
is our healing and our peace;
to the glory of your name.

- Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882)

Monday, September 30

After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things?'" *Acts 4:23-25*

Faith and goodwill are united, just as truth and goodness are united. And truth and goodness are united like light and heat in springtime.

True Christian Religion 392

Tuesday, October 1

"The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah. For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."

Acts 4:26-28

Love for heaven means love for the Lord and also love for our neighbor. Love for heaven could be called love for usefulness, because both love for the Lord and love for our neighbor have usefulness as their goal.

True Christian Religion 394

Wednesday, October 2

"And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. *Acts 4:29-31*

Love for the world is not only love for wealth and possessions but also love for all the things that the world provides that please our physical senses: beauty pleases our eye, harmony pleases our ear, fragrances please our nose, excellent food pleases our palate, soft touches please our skin. It also includes beautiful clothes, spacious accommodations, and social groups to belong to—all the pleasures that we get from these and many other things. *Ibid.*

Thursday, October 3

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:32-33

Love for ourselves is not only a love for respect, glory, fame, and status but also a love for seeking and getting high positions and becoming a leader. *Ibid.*

Friday, October 4

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. *Acts 4: 34-35*

Goodwill has something in common with each of these categories of love, because goodwill is by definition a love for usefulness of all kinds. Goodwill wants to do what is good for our neighbor, and goodness is the same as usefulness. *Ibid.*

Saturday, October 5

There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. *Acts 4:36-37*

Each of the categories of love just mentioned have usefulness as their goal: love for heaven has the goal of being useful in spiritual ways; love for the world has the goal of being useful in earthly ways, which could also be called forms of civil service; and love for ourselves has the goal of being useful in physical ways, which could also be labeled benefits at home for ourselves and our loved ones. *Ibid.*

OCT 6 SEEKING AND FINDING

Rev. Junchol Lee

Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will you give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Sermon

This sermon has been edited for publication, with transitional notes in italics. (Thanks to Messenger editor Herb Ziegler for the transitional notes.)

The Rev. Junchol Lee has a relaxed, conversational manner. He connects with worshipers by speaking without notes, looking directly at individuals. His message is laced with self-deprecating humor and wry observations about his life. In his opening, Junchol explained that he does not write out his sermons; he conceives them and then speaks from his mental notes. He also explained that he is a highly organized person, preparing for future events and commitments long before the event. Naturally, then, he prepared not one, but two

. . . good, rational, intellectual, well-thought-out sermons, one based on the Bible, another on Swedenborg. I thought, “I’ll just choose one.”

Explaining his daily practice of meditation, he related how he was meditating the day before arriving in Seattle.

. . . and something almost like a thunderbolt hit my heart, and I felt those two sermons I had prepared disappearing from my memory—now they’re gone, so I have nothing to say!

Well—no; God doesn’t work that way, right? So, God was telling me, “You should tell your friends, your brothers and sisters, about your life.”

You may wonder how an Asian guy ended up standing here. I was born in South Korea. I hated English throughout my entire school life in Korea.

Did you know that? In all my classes in English, from middle school through college, I never got higher than a C minus—solid C minus all the way.

Doesn’t that tell you something? And I’m here preaching in English. Odd—God really works in odd ways, but that really brings us miracles. It changes our attitudes, and you’ll never know where you’ll end up.

Junchol shared that the first time he thought, “Why was I born?” he was only six years old. But why this thought at such a young age? His parents had divorced when he was three. They were too involved with themselves to pay attention to him, so he spent much time with his grandparents. But he was stuck between two families pointing at each other and blaming the divorce on the other’s child.

So one family told me, “Your dad is horrible,” while the other said, “Your mom is . . .”—I can’t repeat it. I found myself trapped between those angry, sad families. I was just trying to say I didn’t choose to be born here. And so, I was six years old, sitting on a hill in the village where my grandparents were living. I felt no love—just looking at the sky—and I thought, “Why am I here? Why was I born? What should I do?” Honestly, I wanted to stop existing at that moment—and I was only six. But that was the beginning of my spiritual journey.

I’ve read a lot of books. If you check out my bookshelves, you will not know what my profession is. I read business, literature, history, psychology, science books about the human brain, and even books written by atheists. Why?

My subject has been and still is the human. Growing up in such a dysfunctional family and encountering so many self-destructive adults persuaded me to pursue the study of the human. Why do we do things in certain ways, and why don’t we do what we’re supposed to do? And why, sometimes, can we not love the ones we should love?

Life seems so complicated, but it is so simple. All the leaders of all religions tell us, “Live your love and love one another.” Is it easy? No, it’s hard. And there’s another consideration: you can live your love, but are you sure you’re not hurting anybody by doing so? Amazingly, we assume so many things to be true simply because “it is true in my head.” I tried to avoid being trapped in such misery, but later I had to discover that I too am merely human.

When I was nineteen, after studying Confucianism and Buddhism, I decided to become a Taoist. I was determined to eliminate every conscious emotional

feeling because emotions seemed to be totally useless. Why? They seemed to bring only one thing: pain. And all the emotions I felt seemed to work in negative ways. So I worked hard to transform my mind into a machine by using meditation techniques that I had learned from Buddhism. It took me many years, but I was quite successful at the end. I felt invincible and somehow peaceful. How sad.

That's when I came to America.

I started to read Swedenborg at Bryn Athyn College, and he gave me something strange—he showed me God. This God does not judge, and does exactly as he says, and—this is the best part—this God simply welcomes you and accepts you, wherever you are. You don't have to prove anything. You don't have to be better to be loved by God.

And I thought, "Wow."

And I got in trouble. I had this well-built defense system that was protecting and defending me, and Swedenborg was telling me that I had to tear it down. I was scared to death. Why? I didn't know what was out there. What I knew was it was safe in here. It took me many years of sorting, meditating, and praying to be willing to try to trust just one person.

The Old Testament says, "I brought you up from Egypt, brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors." See?

A personal connection: God was telling me, "I brought you here; I want to liberate you from your dungeon." But I was saying to God, "Who are you? Do I even know you? Can I really trust you?" It took me five years.

The turnaround occurred during my second year at the Swedenborg School of Religion. I locked myself in my room—I'm extroverted, by the way. So, an extroverted guy was sitting in his room meditating all day every day for a week.

Why? There was a task that I had been working on very hard. Then, one day, after meditating for perhaps two hours, I felt like I was in a dark, narrow tunnel. It seemed I had been walking in the tunnel for a while. A voice kept whispering, "You have to keep walking."

I said, "Why? I'm tired. I want to go back." This was not fun. I had to continue walking through the long and dark passageway. And who knew whether what was at the other end was better than where I started? However, as I neared the end of the tunnel, I saw light, and I felt very strange and uncomfortable. At that point I turned around and went back to my safe haven.

You know, our spiritual growth does not happen like it does in novels or movies. It doesn't happen overnight—you read a book, then you are a different person—it doesn't happen that way. It takes a long period of conscious effort, not to change to be someone else, but to change who you are—more precisely, your perception of what you are. That's what God was telling me: "Junchol, you deserve better than this. You're hiding in the cave for too long. Come out."

After a few months, I finally made it out.

Wow! The world looked different: bright and shining—amazing. And I felt peaceful, very peaceful. I cannot describe all the wonders that I felt, but that's the reason I'm standing here today as a Swedenborgian minister. If that hadn't happened, I'm quite sure I would have quit that "boring school" and done something else. What happened to me was I read Swedenborg, prayed with it, and God came to me. Wow. It's real, not just a story in books.

Of course, God cannot be found in books. Books serve only as a connector. What is essential in those books is not what's written in them but what we hope to gain from them. In other words, we are the igniters of miracles prepared by God since the beginning.

What I had been doing was trying to forge my own god out of my intellectual search. I needed my version of God instead of finding the real God. And if you find yourself in the same circumstances, my recommendation is to do a very simple thing: pray to the real God. That might sound kind of lame, I know, but pray. It works, but only if you believe in it.

I felt peace, and can you guess what happened next? "Hey, I get one step up—I'm good"—ego. This thing almost never dies. Whenever there's an opportunity, it rises, sneaks up, and tells you, "You're good, you're better." So, I was in a peaceful place, but my ego was coming up and . . . I got married.

When love happens to you for the first time, you will be scared to death; you don't know what it is. . . . God is calling all of us, in that love that you can find in your heart because of others.

I was thirty-five years old at that point, and I had conducted more than 100 weddings and counseled more than fifty wedding couples; I had read I don't know how many books about marriage and . . . see where this is going now? I thought, "Hey, I know everything about marriage. I won't have any problem in my marriage." Wonderful, isn't it? The married life has taught me a lot of things in the past five years.

Above all, what I have learned and am still learning is what love is, and what it means to love somebody else. Today, and probably almost every Sunday morning, we read together the Affirmation of Faith as it is written in the program: we love each other as ourselves. "What a lie," I thought after the marriage. A truth unsealed in my mind that I was not even able to love my own wife as myself. If that is my limit, how true would it be when I say that I love you as myself? However, the beauty of love is that it's noncontrolling and accepting—and above all, it's just there. Sometimes you don't have to do anything.

I have observed man times that my American friends seem to be scared in relationships, probably feeling that they are constantly being pushed to do something—just keep moving and thinking. Do you feel that you cannot sit still, but you have to do something, either to make your relationship work or to improve it? My suggestion is that one day you may want to just sit by your loved ones, relaxing your brain and mind, and simply enjoy their presence and their love for you. Also, if you can, try to bring out your love to be present with them. When this happened to me, I felt that my heart was actually moving (I mean being alive!), and that was for me the second big step.

Junchol illustrated how his normal emotional state is a flat line. He explained that what sometimes sounds like passion from him is just passion of the voice, reminding us that he has read thousands of books. His wife, however, experiences peaks and valleys of emotions, ". . . and I like it." At first he wanted to fix her by smoothing out the peaks and valleys, and she tried to fix him. Together they found a balance.

I call her my heart. Her joy is my joy. That's why I am saying this amazing power of love is real. It is good to love and to be loved. I thought, "It is wonderful."

And then, a son was born to us. I call him my miracle. I never pictured myself a father. The first happy and loving family I ever experienced was Barb Halle's family, with whom I stayed when I was twenty-six. Think about it—I hadn't seen a single good family until I was twenty-six years old! I had no plans ever to have children or even to get married. I had no

idea how to be a father and still am not sure how to be a good father. I saw my father only four times after I was four years old. Nobody wanted me as a son.

When my son was zero days old, I held him in my arms and looked at him, but somehow I wasn't scared. I felt that something big was just added to my heart. He was and still is a living miracle from God. And my wife is the best gift my God has given me.

Think about it. Where do you think you find love? Don't try the Bible. It's not in there. Don't try one of Swedenborg's books either, because it's not in there. Where is it? It doesn't happen in your brain, either. So seeing it doesn't matter; your heart has to feel it and be moved by it. And if it happens to you for the first time, you will be scared to death; you don't know what it is. "Oh, my goodness, am I dying?" was my first reaction to it. God is calling all of us in that love that you can find in your heart because of others.

My wife did not hand over love to me, nor did my son. Something happened in my heart: walls were broken; I was pouring this thing out—and it was not from me, it was from God. I believe in my God, who is explained by Swedenborg, and I'm proud to be a Swedenborgian minister. And I hope you are proud of what you believe in. Why? It is a real thing. Believe—it will come.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
write your truth in my mind,
your joy in my heart,
and your love in my life;
that, when I am filled with truth,
possessed by joy,
and living in love,
your integrity,
your humor,
and your compassion
might be born again in me.

- Frank Topping, 2000

Monday, October 7

When the townspeople rose early in the morning, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the sacred pole beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. So they said to one another, "Who has done this?" After searching and inquiring, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it." *Judges 6:28-29*

As we go through the early stages of our lives, there are many things that prepare us for the church and introduce us into it; but acts of repentance are the things that actually produce the church within us. *True Christian Religion 510*

Tuesday, October 8

Then the townspeople said to Joash, "Bring out your son, so that he may die, for he has pulled down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pole beside it." But Joash said to all who were arrayed against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down." *Judges 6:30-31*

Acts of repentance include any and all actions that result in our not willing, and consequently not doing, evil things that are sins against God. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, October 9

Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. But the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them. *Judges 6:33-35*

Before repentance, we stand outside regeneration. In that condition, if any thought of eternal salvation somehow makes its way into us, we at first turn toward it but soon turn away. That thought does not penetrate us any farther than the outer areas where we have ideas; it then goes out into our spoken words and perhaps into a few gestures that go along with those words. *Ibid.*

Thursday, October 10

Then Gideon said to God, "In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said." And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. *Judges 6:36-38*

Nevertheless, having a concept of sin does nothing for us unless we examine the actions we have taken in our lives and see whether we have either openly or secretly done any such thing. *True Christian Religion 525*

Friday, October 11

Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew." *Judges 6:39*

Repentance becomes effective if we practice it regularly—that is, every time we prepare ourselves to take the Communion of the Holy Supper. Afterward, if we abstain from one sin or another that we have discovered in ourselves, this is enough to make our repentance real. *True Christian Religion 530*

Saturday, October 12

And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. *Judges 6:40*

Our will, then, is the home in which we live. Our intellect is just the front hall through which we go in and out. This is why I said above that we must examine the intentions of our will. When these are examined and have been laid aside, we are lifted from our earthly will—where the evils we inherited and the evils we have actually committed are lodged—to our spiritual will. *True Christian Religion 533*

Psalm 91

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.
Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.
For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.
With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Revelation 21:1-5a

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."

These things are concerning the new heaven; something shall now be said concerning "the new earth." By "the new earth" is meant the new church on the earth; for when a former church ceases to exist, then a new one is established by the Lord. For it is provided by the Lord that there should always be a church on earth, since by means of the church there is a conjunction of the Lord with the human race, and of heaven with the world; for there the Lord is known, and there are the Divine truths by which man is conjoined to him. That a new church is at this time being established, may be seen in the small work *Last Judgment* (n. 74). The reason why a new church is signified by "the new earth" arises from the spiritual sense of the Word; for in that sense, by the "earth" no particular country is meant, but the nation dwelling there, and its Divine worship; this, in the spiritual sense, being what answers to earth in the natural sense.

Sermon

In Revelation, John said that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. I'm not going to vouch for the new heaven—I believe and pray that it's there—but I can certainly vouch for the fact that we are seeing a new earth.

In my ministry at Wayfarers Chapel, where we do many, many weddings, I'm realizing that the world is becoming one and that I am marrying everybody to everybody. Part of the joy and part of the challenge—a joyful challenge—of that is to adapt myself to many cross-cultural situations. It's a new earth.

I'm sure many of you here have been affected by the economic downturn and the globalization of our economy. If you're not experiencing it personally, you are praying in your churches for people who are or who know people who are. We are seeing a new earth.

And then, of course, there's the technology! When I became chair of the Council of Ministers, I got myself a tablet computer. They were jokingly referring to it in the office as my "new best friend." It was a mixed blessing. There would be times when I had my list of things to do that day and I would be sitting my office, and there's my desktop computer, and there's my laptop, there's my tablet, there's my smart phone, and I'm thinking, "I have all these things to do and all the files I need are . . . somewhere . . ." I've had moments of brain freeze. I didn't know what to do! Or I'd be working on my desktop, say, and the message comes up that I have an email. I read the email, I start to answer it, the phone rings. I answer the phone. Then someone comes to my office door to ask a question. One of the not-so-wonderful things about

the new technology is that the interruptions to our interruptions to our interruptions can be interrupted. I have just accepted it as a fact that, when it comes to new technology, I am going to be lost and confused for the rest of my life.

Or again, a big part of my job these days is done via phone calls and emails. With the ability to connect through cellular service, I can park in a shady spot with a beautiful view, sit in the passenger seat of my car, and do my job. The other side of that, however, is that my job follows me everywhere I go, 24/7. It is indeed a new earth.

There is a deeper side to that as well. There are new ways of doing seminary and new ways of doing church.

Spiritual seekers are out there with all this new technology. It's an amazing thing—I carry around in my pocket a device that will link me to all of the world's information, everywhere, all the time. Spiritual seekers have—at least online—access to the full richness of human spiritual traditions and religions. It's all there for them, all the time. Maybe there are fewer opportunities for the face-to-face—it depends on where you live—but it is all out there.

Recently we have been finding with spiritual seekers that they come to our ministries, they benefit from them, they get what they are looking for, and they move on. As a minister at Wayfarers Chapel, I have come to think of everyone as a wayfarer. People may stay for a day, they may stay for an eight-week course, or they may stay for years, but everyone is a wayfarer—they're pausing for a while, and then they're moving on.

When people leave our ministries, most often they are not leaving angry, they are leaving grateful. Sometimes I say to my Angels in Training group that someone who just "graduated" sent me a very grateful email, saying he or she had gotten the support and help needed, and now that person is doing something else on Wednesday evenings. These folks are leaving grateful, but they are moving on. That is a reality of the current world. It is a new earth. And at the seminary and on the ministry placement committee, we are changing. And we are going to continue to change. It's not whether we are going to change, it's how we are going to change. We are living in a new earth, and

we are going to become—whether by planning or by just letting things unfold—a new church.

In planning this sermon, I wanted to talk about the spirituality of embracing change. The more I thought about it, the more I came to feel that the way to handle change is to focus on what does not change. In our readings this morning there is common thread and a common word. That word is dwell. In the opening of Psalm 91, we read, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." And in Revelation, "Now God's home is with all people. God will dwell with them. They will be God's people, and God will be with them and be their God." Swedenborg didn't use the word "dwell," but it is implied in the end of our reading from him. He's promising us that there is always a church on earth. He's promising us

There is always going to be a church, and we can always be part of it. . . . Whether there will always be [this church] is up to us and Divine Providence.

that we can always be part of that church. And indeed, the church he is speaking of is "a place where the Lord is known and where the divine truths are to be found which enable people to be united with him" (*The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* §5). In other words, church is a place where people dwell with God.

Rev. Ken Turley, in his presidential address, came to us as a prophet. I like what Rev. Steve Sanchez said in his ordination address: that Ken not only named the elephant in the room, he stomped on it too. Like a prophet, Ken told us some hard truths and issued a dire warning. But like a true prophet, he also offered us hope.

Swedenborg promises us that there is always going to be a church and that we can always be part of it. What no one is promising, however, is that there is always going to be a General Convention of the New Jerusalem. I agree completely with Ken's assessment. I've been on the Placement Committee—I've seen the same data. There will always be a church, but it remains to be seen whether there will always be a General Convention of the New Jerusalem. That is up to us and the Divine Providence.

This is an invitation to think about what church is in its essence. I think one way to approach this is simply through the word "dwelling"—not the noun but the verb. A church is a place of dwelling. In my ministry, I've seen that one of the great hungers in this world—where we are so busy and so fast and so connected—is for the deeper conversation. I've seen this many times at Wayfarers Chapel: we have

Sunday service; I'm talking to people afterwards at coffee hour; I get called away to a baptism; I come back, and they are continuing the conversation; I go do a wedding, come back, and they are still talking.

I've realized that once you break through the polite get-to-know-you, the "How are you doing?" "I'm doing fine . . ." Once you get beyond that and punch into something deeper, people do not want to let it go. There is a great hunger for it. If I say a class is an hour, it goes an hour and a half. If I say to myself, "Really, an hour is not enough," and make it an hour and a half, it goes two hours. If I say, "C'mon, guys, it's nine o'clock; the staff needs to go home," we close up, we're driving out—they're standing next to their cars, continuing the conversation. People hunger for the deeper conversation.

People want to be known. But to be truly known, that is a scary thing. Because when you offer from your deepest thoughts, your deepest feelings, your deepest desires, when you offer from that, you're vulnerable—and it's scary. I was going to say that we're vulnerable to judgment, to being looked down upon, to being criticized. But when I was preparing this morning, I thought that really what we are more afraid of than any of that is being misunderstood, or even of not being understood at all. If we share from our deepest thoughts and feelings, and the response is "Huh? What?," that's a very lonely place to be.

When you find the place where you can be known, where it is safe to be known, where you're held with compassion, where you're held as just who you are, where you are, how you are, that is church. Wherever you find it, that is the dwelling place of the Lord. When people are held that way, that's when they open up to looking within, to questioning their hearts, to discerning the changes they need to be making in their lives, and to finding the insight and the courage that allows change to unfold. Wherever you find that in your life, that is the dwelling place of the Lord, that is church.

In November, I was back in my native eastern Massachusetts for General Council meetings, but it was also my dad's seventy-ninth birthday, in which I got to participate. But part of that trip also was bittersweet: I attended the last worship service of the Elmwood New Church in their historic building. Elmwood New Church is still there, and they're still worshipping, but not in that building. That was the place where I became a Swedenborgian many years ago. It was Rev. Ken Turley's first pastorate. He was the one that convinced me that—despite what I thought—I was a Christian after all. Once I understood Christianity

through the lens of Swedenborg, I realized I was a Christian, and that was a good feeling.

So obviously, the Elmwood New Church, that building, was a significant place. That place on that day was packed, and many people shared what the church had meant to them. But what I took away from that event were the ironies. Many of the people who came back and were missing the church and were angry and upset that the building was going to be torn down hadn't set foot in that building for years or even decades, and hadn't contributed anything for years or decades. And I also remember the irony that Rev. Donna Keane, pastor of the Elmwood Church, pointed out: that all of the sharing in the end wasn't about the building; it was about the people remembered. It was about the relationships.

The church is the dwelling place of the Lord where we are known and held and are given the insights and the courage to make changes in our lives. The church is not a building—though certainly it can take place in a building. It is not any one particular order of worship—although, to be sure, it can take place in the worship experience. It is not any particular form of meditation, or prayer group, or class or workshop—though church can happen in all of those places. Church is the dwelling place of the Lord where we are known and we are given the insights we need to move forward in our lives. Wherever we find that, we have found church.

I am going to propose a couple of quotes from Paul as a spirituality for facing a future where there's always going to be a church, but maybe not always the General Convention of the New Jerusalem. I pray that there always will be, but I agree with Ken: it is an open question. Paul in Romans says, "If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." And in Galatians, he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, Christ lives within me."

Now as a Swedenborgian theologian, when Paul says "I have been crucified with Christ," I am not understanding that, of course, through the lens of atonement; I'm not understanding that through the lens of substitutionary sacrifice. Rather, if I am committing myself to following the path that Christ has opened up to me—relying not on my own strength but on the strength of the Christ that lives in me and in all of you—if I try to follow the path that Christ opens up to me, relying on Him for the wisdom and the strength and the courage I need, even maybe to the ultimate temptation, then I have been crucified

with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me.

The last couple of years, I've gotten back—selectively—into Paul. There's a lot there that doesn't need to be—shouldn't be, I think—read in terms of atonement theology but a theology of living the life that Christ lived. If there was a person who had the right to say "It is no longer I who live, Christ lives in me," before Paul said it, that person was Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus died so that Christ would live within him. That is his path for us.

My greatest and eternal gratitude to the Swedenborgian tradition is, as I said, that it allowed me to self-identify as a Christian again. I think growing up there was one thing I never lost, and I swear this, I never lost my reverence for the actions of Jesus, the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, the path that he asked us to follow. I never lost that. But Christianity seemed like an obscene mistake in many ways. How could anyone imagine for a moment that this is what He was asking of us?

But then the Swedenborgian tradition gave me Christianity back again. It gave me the Bible back again. Being a Swedenborgian, for me, is first and foremost being a Christian, as I've come to understand being a Christian through Swedenborg's writings and theology and as I have come to experience it through involvement in Swedenborgian gatherings. But it is all about following the path that Christ is leading me down. The word "Swedenborgian" is secondary. The Swedenborgian tradition is a means to an end.

There will always—*there will always*, the Bible promises us; *there will always*, as Swedenborg promises us—be a church. There will always be a church—it will always be open to us to be a part of that church. I pray for all of us that we dedicate ourselves to finding that church, wherever it appears in our lives, putting aside all of our preconceptions of what a church is, what it looks like, what it does externally, what is worship, what is prayer, what is meditation. Wherever you find that dwelling place with the Lord and especially in deep conversation and in community with your fellow human beings, that is church. There will always be that church. My prayer is that together we live into that church and that as we live into that church, the Swedenborgian Church will be one of the many places, and indeed a very powerful place, where the Lord dwells, one of the places where church powerfully happens. I pray that the Lord so guides us. Amen.

Monday, October 14

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." *2 Kings 2:1-3*

Omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence belong to divine wisdom acting on behalf of divine love, not to divine love acting through divine wisdom.
True Christian Religion 50

Tuesday, October 15

Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."
2 Kings 2:4-5

God is omnipotent, because he has all power from himself. All others have power from him. God's power and his will are one. Because he wills nothing but what is good, he cannot do anything but what is good.
True Christian Religion 56

Wednesday, October 16

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. *2 Kings 2:6*

God sends forth a heat and a light that pervade the universe from beginning to end. That heat and that light give life to humankind and to every animal. They also produce the plant soul that every plant in the world possesses. *True Christian Religion 63*

OCT 20 AS A RANSOM FOR MANY

Rev. Dr. Calvin E. Turley

Thursday, October 17

Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. *2 Kings 2:7-8*

Before creation, God was love itself and wisdom itself. That love and that wisdom had a drive to be useful. Without usefulness, love and wisdom are only fleeting abstract entities, and they do indeed fly away if they do not move in the direction of usefulness.

True Christian Religion 67

Friday, October 18

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." *2 Kings 2:9-10*

God created the universe so that usefulness could exist. Therefore the universe could be called a theater of useful functions. Because we, the human race, are the principal reason for creation, it follows that absolutely everything else was created for our sake. *Ibid.*

Saturday, October 19

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. *2 Kings 2:11-12*

The more we follow the divine design in the way we live, the more power we receive from God's omnipotence to fight against forms of evil and falsity, because no one can resist evils or the falsities that go with them except God alone. *True Christian Religion 68*

Mark 10:32-45

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

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

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

Sermon

It may seem strange that a minister of our General Convention, which places so much emphasis upon reason, would begin his Convention sermon with a reference to feeling. But this is what I want to do. It is my very deep feeling that this, the one hundred and thirty-eighth gathering of our church, may well prove to be a turning point in the history of our church—a turning point toward the increased relevance of our church.

For a decade, we have been involved in the very painful process of self-examination. For a decade, we have been trying to face the facts about ourselves—the fact of frequent interpersonal stress and strain; the fact of numerical decline in a period of population explosion; the fact that the average age of a relatively young church is rapidly growing older. But also, I believe, we have come to appreciate some positive facts in our midst—the fact of an astounding devotion and loyalty to the church on the part of both laymen and ministers; the fact of a deep conviction that we do have a precious heritage; the fact that as stewards of that heritage we can never rest with the status quo.

In our decade of self-examination, we may not have always found agreement, but I do believe we have found a better appreciation for the honesty, the integrity, and the sincere devotion of our fellow churchmen with whom we seem to differ. On this foundation of mutual trust and respect, undergirded with a love for the Lord and a sincere concern for the neighbor, we can have a church relevant to these changing times. Not all of the facts we have had to face about ourselves are pleasant. Indeed, some of them have come as bitter pills to swallow. But swallow them we must and we shall! And we shall reverse the results of past errors.

We, as a Christian body, have had our dark days of temptation and sin. We have nagged at one another. We have falsely questioned the motives of one another. And we have smugly looked down upon one another and upon our fellow Christians. It is with deep shame that I confess to my God and to you that I have been a party to this sin of self-righteousness; believing like a fool that my way and my approach was the only right way, and lamenting the “hard-heartedness” of my brother churchmen who refused to “rally ’round my flag.” Too many of us have been a party to this sin—if not asserting that “my way is the only way,” as I did, at least acting as if every alternative was obviously wrong and that its proponents really did not care what happened to our beloved church.

I sincerely believe we are on our way out of this valley of the shadow of death. At least, I feel I am ready to ask your forgiveness, and I feel a growing sense of repentance throughout our church family. I believe we may well be ready to build on a foundation of mutual trust and respect, undergirded with a love for the Lord and a concern for the neighbor. Indeed,

facing the facts, there is a demanding urgency that we so build!

As we look toward the goal of becoming a more relevant church, we note that new voices of honest conservatism are being heard. They are needed and have a real contribution to make, as long as they sincerely guard against irresponsible reaction. At the same time, renewed voices of honest liberalism are being heard. They too are needed and have a real contribution to make, as long as they sincerely guard against irresponsible radicalism. And, in the matters of the church, these voices need not only to be heard, but they need to be heard by all. For I have an abiding confidence that, in the act of listening, we shall discover that the many voices speak with one tongue; that the many are one in the fundamentals of a real love of our Lord—an honest, though often confused, concern for the neighbor—and a sincere longing for the effective advance of our church.

*If it takes courage
to be in the service
of the Lord, then
let us glory in that
requirement.*

Further, I believe that through the act of listening one to another, the many voices shall find that they are one in their acknowledgment that the basic, fundamental purpose for which we exist as a church is to minister in the name of our Lord. There is no other valid reason for our existence. The instructions which our Lord gave to his disciples so many years ago as they turned toward the Holy City Jerusalem are the same instructions He would give us this day as we seek to turn toward the Holy City New Jerusalem. Listen to our Master’s words:

“You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

“. . . To give his life as a ransom for many!” This is the mission of the church. To give itself—to expend itself—to exhaust itself as a servant to man, just as the Lord commanded his original disciples so many years ago. No other purpose is sufficient reason for the existence of our church! And I honestly believe that, if we will push the examination of ourselves hard enough and deep enough, if we will listen to our fellow churchmen silently enough, we shall discover that we are one in our sense of the mission of the

church. To give our life as a ransom for many is a basic, Biblical, commandment.

What we must come to recognize, however, is that in the pursuit of this mission we shall walk many paths. We shall vary in the manner and in the emphasis in which we seek to fulfill this mission. I do not overlook the seriousness of these differences. And I do not assume that all approaches are compatible one with another. But I do assume that we, the people of this Church, can become big enough, charitable enough, and understanding enough to respect the honesty, the integrity, and the sincerity of those with whom we differ. For after all, we have before us the challenge of the greatest definition of Christian love and charity of which I know: love, the finding of joy in the happiness of another; the finding of encouragement in the success of another; the finding of satisfaction in the accomplishments of another. And, "by this," said our Lord, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The church exists to serve. And the relevant church must serve in many and diverse ways as it ministers to the needs of its day. There is no one way, one method, one emphasis that is the right one. The tragedy of seeking a panacea in finding the "right gimmick" lies in the failure to comprehend and to appreciate the variety of movement that is required for the full body of performance, be it in the symphony or in the life of the church.

I do not know what the church of the future will be. But of this I am sure; historically the Christian Church has always adapted and adopted as it sought to remain relevant to the eternally changing times. Sometimes this adapting and adopting has been to its sorrow and shame. But just as often it has been to the glory of God. And if the church is to remain relevant, it must continue to adapt and adopt.

The dynamics of Christian stewardship demand a degree of iconoclastic zeal within every disciple. The practices of the past are not holy just because they have been practiced. The methods, the program, the structures of church life are not holy just because they are ancient. Holiness is of the Lord and is found only in His presence, and the church, if it is to remain relevant by remaining in the presence of holiness, must be sufficiently free of tradition (note I do not say devoid of tradition) to enable it to critically examine itself, its practices, and its program without the deadening balm of sentimentality.

Somewhere I heard someone say that the small group will be the sacrament of the future church.

At first hearing this sounds a bit heretical. But we have been blessed with enough of the therapy of the small-group experience at least to take the suggestion seriously. The church of the future may well find here, within the intimacy of the small group, an instrument of salvation amid the impersonal bigness of our changing world.

Those of us in the clergy become increasingly aware of the impossibility of our fulfilling all the multitude of opportunities and needs before us. In one of our group meetings we discovered that in one year's time, we had been called upon to act with competence in twenty-eight different fields of recognized specialty. I do not propose that the members of the clergy become a staff of limited specialists—this would only further isolate us from our people—but I do suggest that there may well be a better way for the clergy to serve the Lord and the congregation of his people than by being the pastor of a specific congregation. It is up to us to be free enough of the traditional pastor-congregation relationship to enable us to explore and to experiment in other possible arrangements.

As for the laity in the church of the future, I am convinced that there must be an accelerated return to an active role in the "priesthood of all believers"—a Christian aggressiveness as "ambassadors of God" in their daily associations—an aggressive infiltration of labor, management, politics, business, and social life. The layman has before him a thrill and exhilaration beyond his greatest expectation when he discovers, recognizes, and practices the power of his own witness to the neighbor who may have lost his way. The Lord can use every man in his eternal efforts to save men from the hell of indifference and the chaos of purposelessness.

The challenge before a changing church in a changing world is not an easy one. But then, the Lord has never promised "cheap grace" to His disciples of any age. If it takes courage to be in the service of the Lord, then let us glory in that requirement. We can well afford to throw security to the four winds if we believe the promise of our Lord that "whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."

What we choose to become in the service of our Lord is our choice to make. The way may not always be clear as we work to be a relevant church, but may it please the Lord to use us, and may we be led to give our lives as a ransom for many.

Monday, October 21

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! *Revelation 4:1-2*

Goodness is the essence of truth; truth is the form of goodness. What has no form can have no quality. Goodness and truth are no more separable than the will and the intellect, or (to say the same thing in another way) than a feeling that relates to some love and the thinking that goes with that feeling.

True Christian Religion 753

Tuesday, October 22

And the one seated there looks like jasper and cornelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. *Revelation 4:3-4*

The Lord is present with each and every human being. He exerts insistent pressure on us to receive him. When we do receive him, which occurs when we acknowledge him as our own God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, his First Coming occurs [in us], which is the twilight before dawn. *True Christian Religion 766*

Wednesday, October 23

Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Revelation 4:5-6a

From then on, we begin to be enlightened intellectually in spiritual matters and to grow into deeper and deeper wisdom. As we receive this wisdom from the Lord, we move through the morning into midday. *Ibid.*

Thursday, October 24

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. *Revelation 4:6b-7*

The day continues into our old age until we die. Then we come to the Lord himself in heaven. There, although we died old, we are brought back into the morning of our lives, and the rudiments of wisdom that were planted in us while we were in the physical world grow and thrive to eternity. *Ibid.*

Friday, October 25

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever.

Revelation 4:9-10

If we have faith in the Lord and goodwill toward our neighbor, we are a church in miniature. The church as a whole is composed of such churches-in-miniature.

True Christian Religion 767

Saturday, October 26

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Revelation 4:11

All individuals are their own love and their own understanding. Whatever they say and whatever they do carries with it an essence that is drawn from these two essential properties of their life. Therefore angels can recognize the nature of our unique essence on the basis of nothing more than a brief conversation with us. *True Christian Religion 778*

OCT 27 ANOTHER TRAIN

Rev. Andy Stinson

Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Arcana Coelestia 10143.5

In short, acting in accord with the Lord’s commandments constitutes true worship of Him, indeed constitutes true love and true faith, as may also become clear to anyone who stops to consider the matter. For there is nothing that a person who loves another, and who believes in another, would rather do than to will and to do what that other wills and thinks; his only desire is to know his will and thought, and so what is pleasing to him. It is different in the case of one who has no such love or belief. The

situation is similar with love to God, as the Lord also teaches in John, “He who has My commandments and does them, he it is who loves Me. But he who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:21, 24). And elsewhere in the same gospel, “If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love. This is My commandment, that you love one another” (John 15:10, 12).

Sermon

A young man named Gordon was with his parents, and they were taking refreshments in

the bar at a train station when they heard a whistle. They rushed out of the bar onto the platform, only to discover that they had just missed the train.

“The next train is in one hour,” intoned the stationmaster. The three went back into the bar. The parents had another drink; Gordon had a Coke. Again they heard a whistle, rushed out, and discovered the train pulling away.

“Next one is sixty minutes from now,” grunted the stationmaster.

An hour later, Gordon, with his mum and dad, raced out onto the platform, and his parents leaped onto the train as it pulled away. The boy was left standing on the platform and began to laugh uproariously.

“Your parents just left you,” said the stationmaster. “Why are you laughing?”

The boy smiled. “They only came to see me off.”

It seems funny that a couple might run after a train that was never theirs, but I would submit to you we run after trains that are not ours all the time. Not only are we captured in the “busyness” of the world, but we, in our churches and in our lives, may never know the difference between the train meant for us and the train meant for another. We live in a world of millions of trains going here and there—ideas, emotions, actions—all of them prepared to take us someplace.

When Swedenborg lived, most of the information in the world could fit into the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*. Today, information is expanding exponentially. It’s not a bad thing, but it does require us to know who we are and where we are going at a level that we as a church and a people have never been called to before.

So . . . what does the Lord require of you?

To carry our judgment, to love mercy, and to walk with your God so you may know humility. These

are our trains! These are the things that will take us where the Lord would lead. But long before we get there, we find in Micah this sarcastic tone.

“Shall I come before Jehovah with burnt offerings? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams? He has shown you what is good; and what does Jehovah require of you but to carry out judgment, and to love mercy, and to humble yourself by walking with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8)

I mean, it almost sounds like Dr. Evil from *Austin Powers*: “I want a *million* dollars!” What is it going to take, Lord? Ten thousand rivers of oil?

We are the Dr. Evil of our own sphere so often—or, at least, I am. When I can’t figure things out or I come up against the pain and discomfort of my own life, I get snotty with God too. “Really, Lord, what do you want from me? What? What? What?” And, I would guess, you do too.

But the Lord’s invitation is these three: justice, mercy, and humility. In *Heavenly Secrets* §10143.5, Swedenborg offers us an image of a loving God and of God loving us that we all have encountered at one point or another when in love: “Whatcha thinkin’?” “There is nothing that a person who loves another, and who believes in another, would rather do than to will and to do what that other wills and thinks; his only desire is to know his will and thought, and so what is pleasing to him.” Just as people in love will offer “a penny for your thoughts” or ask, “What are you thinking?,” to worship in its truest form is to worship seeking to feel something of what God feels and think something of what God thinks and to have God bestow that on us.

Saint Teresa of Avila said that the most powerful prayer she ever prayed was to ask that she might “see as God sees.”

God sees so much rushing and running and moving, but what of all of those trains that are pointed at the eternal? What of the things of our church that are pointed toward the eternal, the lasting, and the true . . . or do we often find ourselves aboard a train worrying about stuff or scarcity or loss? . . . Let’s look now to these three trains that take us toward “seeing as God sees.”

The first is . . .

To Carry Out Judgment

If Swedenborg offers us anything that places our human status as precious and unique, it is our freedom to discern: our ability to “carry out judgment,” to

discern what we will call true and make it a part of our lives. It is not that we should judge this person and that person for their transgressions, or even ourselves for our own shortcomings, but that we should decide what we discern as the greatest truth to be lived out in this world.

Let me give you an example. If you take someone with no exceptional talent, say in music or art, and you have them practice exceptionally hard to get better, they might become 200 times better than when they originally began to cultivate the talent. But if you take someone with true God-given talent and have them practice at the same intensity, they can become as much as, say, 3,200 times better.

The Gallup organization has researched this phenomenon extensively, Andy Stinson will never be as good as Yo-Yo Ma on the cello; it doesn’t matter how much I practice. But there is within me, and within you, a talent that can be cultivated to be 3,200 times better. Will I carry out judgment in my life to discern what that may be and cultivate it? Will we as a church carry out judgment in our institution and stop doing the things, stop chasing the trains, that we were never called to do or chase in the first place?

Swedenborgianism, as a movement, as a church, can do a better job of discerning exactly what we do better than any organization on the globe; and we can do *that*, cultivate *that*, because here is the truth of our Gospel lesson. If we are to love one another, as Jesus commands, we don’t get to leave our best selves at the station.

We don’t get to check our greatness and just let it wither; if I am going to love you, I need to do it with the best of me—because as children of God, do we not deserve that? And if you are going to love me, does not the divinity that shines through me demand that we not offer obnoxious promises of oil and rams but our greatest and best selves? When the Hindus say “Namaste,” they are not saying, “The mediocre in me salutes the mediocre in you.” They are saying, “The God in me salutes the God in you.” It is ours to do the work of carrying out judgment in our movement and in our lives, that we might shine like the angels.

To Love Mercy

Swedenborg is particular in his definition of the Lord’s mercy. In *Heaven and Hell* §522, he defines the Lord’s mercy as “[God’s love, which is] constant toward every individual, never withdrawing from anyone. This means that everyone who can be saved is saved.” In short, we are to love the things that bring love and save people, love the things that bring us

closer to God, love the *Love!* The great channeling angelic spirit Abraham-Hicks constantly uses the rejoinder, "Choose the better feeling thought." Give energy to the thing, love the thing, that brings love and that saves—and forget about the rest! If we look at the time we spend in our church and in our life, how often are we really doing this?

For example, everyone in this room has had some kind of transformational experience with Swedenborg, or at least with scripture, but do we love it? Do we cultivate it? That thing that came alive in us when we first read the Writings—do we celebrate it? Do we share it and give light to it? Do we set goals around it? Do we develop our angelic love?

We so often spend our time drunk, and we can be drunk on so many things in this world (alcohol is probably the least of them)—on ideas, on feelings; they can, in the true meaning of drunkenness, have us see the world in a skewed way.

To love our neighbor as ourselves is to offer our neighbor our greatest talent, our greatest light, our sincere and full effort of being.

To Humble Yourself by Walking with Your God

A *shammes* is a guy who takes care of handyman tasks around the temple and makes sure everything is in working order. He is at the bottom of the pecking order of synagogue functionaries, and there's a joke about that:

A rabbi, to show his humility before God, cries out in the middle of a service, "Oh, Lord, I am nobody!"

The cantor, not to be bested, also cries out, "Oh, Lord, I am nobody!"

The *shammes*, deeply moved, follows suit and cries, "Oh, Lord, I am nobody!"

The rabbi turns to the cantor and says, "Now look who thinks he's nobody!"

I think we often get caught up in what humility is and what we must be like in humility. Humility is not self-effacing "nobodiness"; rather, it is knowing and acting as though we are absolutely equal, no better or worse than any other person on the planet. It was said of the great Abraham Lincoln that he could talk to anyone, from cabinet ministers and foreign heads of state to illiterate woodcutters. Lincoln knew that he was not special, because every soul in creation is special.

This part of the Micah passage is often translated, "to walk humbly with your God," which I just dislike. Translated that way, it is just another thing that I

am doing wrong on the long list of things I'm doing wrong, but I don't think that is what the Lord is trying to say. The way Swedenborg translates this phrase, it is much more about our seeking to walk with God and finding ourselves humbled by doing so. We are led into humility not through some superhuman force of will, but through the desire to follow the Lord's leading, which is inherently a humbling act. How often in my life has following God's call meant setting down the ideas and wants of my smallness for a greater, more wondrous good that I might not even see at this time? In following the Lord's leading, we might discover again and again the paradoxical truth that it is not all about us, and yet without us something precious and unique and beautiful is lost.

The Way We Worship

In being led to live shoulder-to-shoulder with every soul in creation and with our very creator, we discover that it is impossible to love another from a place of subservience or mastery, and that we can only love another from a place of service. And service requires us to be in a free and equal relationship with the other—in short, grounded in the humility we gain by following God. Our exploration of Micah, in a way, is all just a prelude to remind you of the simple and glorious fact that if the truth of the resurrection and the truth of eternity tell us anything, it is that there is always another train.

It does not matter what train we think our lives, our church, our tradition are on, because there is always another train; there is always another chance to live out the vision of the Holy City. Because the fields are ripe with harvest, goodness and mercy will go with us.

I know that in my life, in your life, in your ministry, and in your churches—and in this church—there are trains we have missed. There have been moments when we have raised our voice and lost our way down a track of our own choosing, rather than the track the Lord shares with us.

And my hope for you is simple: there is another train, waiting at the station of your life and your church. There is another train waiting to take you to the new and wondrous promise of a life filled with justice, mercy, and humility. Set down your hurried lives and see, for there is another train.

Monday, October 28

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
Psalm 146:1-2

As for the human spirit, however, that too has been created from things that are finite. What is the human spirit but a vessel for the life that the mind possesses? The finite things of which it is made are spiritual substances. *True Christian Religion 470*

Tuesday, October 29

Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish. *Psalm 146:3-4*

It is unreasonable to think that the Infinite could create anything other than what is finite; and that human beings, because they are finite, are anything other than forms that the Infinite is able to bring to life from the life he has within himself. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, October 30

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever; *Psalm 146:5-6*

What is life except the inmost activity of the love and wisdom that come from God and are God? It could also be called the living force itself. Someone who sees this can also see that life cannot be transferred into anyone unless it is transferred along with love and wisdom.
True Christian Religion 471

Thursday, October 31

who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free; *Psalm 146:7*

To the extent that we do not accept love and wisdom, or goodwill and faith (which are the same thing), we do not receive life from God (which is life in itself) but from hell, which is a completely inverted form of life called spiritual death. *Ibid.*

Friday, November 1

the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous. *Psalm 146:8*

Free choice originates in the spiritual world, where our minds are kept by the Lord. Our mind is the spirit within us that lives after death. Our spirit is continually in contact with people in that world who are similar to us. *True Christian Religion 475*

Saturday, November 2

The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
The Lord will reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord! *Psalm 146:9-10*

It is different for us if we absorb the spiritual teachings of the church and restrain our free choice accordingly. We are then led by the Lord away from cravings and evil pleasures and our native eagerness for them, and we strive for what is good and turn away from what is evil. *Ibid.*

Our Daily Bread is a ministry of the General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem

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.

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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.

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