



\$25,000 Donation Establishes The Tafel Fund

BY POLLY BAXTER

General Council, has established a new fund called the Tafel Fund. Its purpose is twofold: to raise new funds for the Swedenborgian Church and to honor Tafel ministers past and present. It will also honor other Swedenborgian ministers for whom a minimum donation of \$10,000 has been made. The fund is a permanently restricted endowment, income only to be used to advance the mission of the Swedenborgian Church. It will be invested in General Convention's Common Fund under the name, the Tafel Fund.

The Tafel Fund will be directed by a board of trustees, three to be appointed by General Council and others from the church and community who contribute a minimum of \$25,000 to the fund. Funds will be solicited from the church at large and from relatives and friends of church members as well as from the Tafel family. General Convention has accepted the first donation



The Rev. Dick Tafel

to this fund from the Rev. Dick Tafel, who has endowed the fund with a \$25,000 contribution and, in doing so, becomes the fund's first trustee.

Donations of all sizes will be recognized. This new fund is an effective way for donors to

contribute to the denomination and to see how the income from their contributions is used. The \$25,000 donation, carrying an automatic seat on the board, is intended as an incentive

to raise significant funds quickly and to recognize these donors with a voice in approving fund expenditures. Donations may be made over time, and

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To Survive or to Serve: That is the Death or Life Question

BY LEE WOOFENDEN

Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35). The future of our church depends upon which of these choices we make.



We must face it. The Swedenborgian Church is dying. No, I don't mean sick-but-we're-going-to-get-better. I mean dying.

The numbers tell the story. If we graph the total Convention membership figures (as published in the Convention Journal) since our organization's peak in the late nineteenth century and extrapolate them into the future, the resulting line predicts that we will run out of members about 2042. That would be our moment of death.

This death by attrition has already happened to dozens of our local congregations over the past century. There is no divine law saying that it will not happen to the church as a whole.

In fact, I don't think God gives two hoots whether the Swedenborgian Church lives or dies as an institution. The life and death of both individuals and institutions is part of God's plan for continually renewing human society. God's work in renewing the church on earth is much bigger than our little organization.

In the entire vast body of Emanuel Swedenborg's theological writings, not once is "the new church" defined as a human institution. Instead, Swedenborg always defines the new church by the hearts, minds, and lives of those who will be a part of it. Here is a typical example:

This chapter and the next [Revelation 2 & 3] are about the seven churches. These churches describe all the people in the Christian

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More Inside:

The Pure Goodness of God and the Gap in Our Psyche that Causes Us to Miss It
Book Review: The Hidden Levels of the Mind
SwedenborgianCommunity.org Is Well Received According to Survey

The Editor's Desk



Church Health

Since President Ken Turley's sober assessment of the state of the Church at the 2011 Convention (September 2011 *Messenger*), *The Messenger* has carried several articles and letters with differing takes and different conclusions. Lee Woofenden weighs in this month on page 1 with a prediction based on a statistical trend and recommendations for a different way to envision the future church.

Good and Evil

It seems to me that one of the thorniest issues not only Swedenborgians but all Christians deal with is the existence of evil. Although many major religions of the world wrestle with the subject of good and evil, some do not, and none is more concerned with explaining their existence than Christianity.

One thing that drew me to the Swedenborgian Church was Swedenborg's clear interpretation of the Bible through its inner meaning. In my understanding, evil is not created by God, rather He allows it to exist so that human beings can choose between good and evil. Humans make their own choices

and create their own evils. Otherwise we would not have freedom; we would be as automatons for God to play with. This leaves the question, "How does evil exist if God created everything?" unanswered. Thus the good-evil dilemma exists for theological debate and nuance of interpretation in Swedenborgian Christianity as well. Not being well versed in Swedenborgian theology and lacking the intellectual skills of a theologian or religious scholar, I cannot address the issue well for the *Messenger* reader. Fortunately, there are such Swedenborgians and non-Swedenborgians to elucidate.

Over the years there has been much writing about good and evil by Swedenborgian ministers and scholars, including numerous articles in *The Messenger*. Most recently, in the December 2010 *Messenger*, Erni Martin wrote "Reflections on the Price of Freedom: A Critical Review of Three Writers on Hell" and in the February 2011 *Messenger* David Fekete gave us "God, Hell, and Regeneration."

In this issue, . Steve Sanchez shares

his views on "The Pure Goodness of God and the Gap in Our Psyche that Sometimes Causes Us to Miss It" (page 4), where he makes the first point and then looks at how psychological damage can block an individual's ability to see that goodness.

Intro to the Gospels

SHS is launching its new lay education distance education program (page 12). For an affordable fifty dollars it offers "Introduction to the Gospels (with Swedenborgian Theology in Mind)," taught by Rev. Dr. David Fekete. This is a wonderful opportunity to become better acquainted with the Bible and Swedenborg.

—Herb Ziegler

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Letters to the Editor

Charity and Leadership

I am writing in response to the December 2011 *Messenger* cover article on the Rev. Dr. Fekete's experience at the National Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission. I was delighted to read of Rev. Dr. Fekete's work and felt pride in his representation of our tradition. And, in the spirit of dialogue presented in the article, I wanted to touch on a few points.

In the article Rev. Fekete stated that the church's struggle comes from looking inward rather than looking outward. This is the view of many, and I am sure there is truth in it, but I do not hold this opinion (though I used to). I am sure there are many competing the-

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the Messenger

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Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

Here we are in the dead of winter, and all the promise and challenge of the New Year is before us. I find it remarkable that the birth of Christ and all the joy and merriment and light and new life that we celebrate with this event occur in the dead of winter, with the bleak months that are the darkest and coldest still to get through. And the death of Christ, with all the death and betrayal and the suffering and ultimate aloneness of Christ on the cross is celebrated in the first flush of spring with days warming and flowers blooming and the promise of new life celebrated even as we observe it all around us! It just seems rather paradoxical to me.

So as I sit here on this cold, dark and rainy day, my travelling done for the time being, the wood stove crackling and warm. I am feeling pulled in and withdrawn. The reports of steadily declining finances, deficit budgets, the cutting of funds and services on all sides, the worries and concerns for the well-being of our church and our churches tend to settle over me in a kind of dark and gloomy harmony with the weather outside.

It is definitely a hard and challenging time. There are certain activities that cannot be done simply because the outside circumstances will not allow it. There are kinds of work and kinds of fun that simply must have already been completed or remain on hold. Yet even so, there are still chores that must be done. In my situation the wood shed had best be full of wood, cut, split, and stacked; and it must be regularly carried in, and the wood box filled.

As I sit here today, I think about our church. It is in one sense a kind of dark and gloomy season in which we find ourselves. Given the general climate it would be easy to settle into a hopeless,

helpless kind of depression. The financial wood box is nowhere near as full as we would like, and lately we have been emptying it faster than we have been able to fill it. But even with all of the good reasons to do so, I simply refuse to settle into a depressed kind of mind set.

The thing is, I rather like winter. There is enough to keep the home fires burning if we continue to do the work. And there is nothing like sitting by a warm wood stove on a cold day. It is a small thing in the greatness of the world, but it is wonderful nonetheless. Just as a beautiful service and the warming companionship of our rather small but active spiritual communities seem inconsequential compared to the wide world, they yet serve important and at times even powerful purposes in the lives of those who gather together. It is the cold and darkness outside that adds a level of poignancy and appreciation for the warmth and light that we are able to generate and share together inside. The activity itself of keeping the home fires burning and making our houses of worship ready and welcoming tends to warm and lift one's spirits. The fact that, as a result of the technological advances that are manifesting as part of the Lord's Second Coming, we can talk with one another and, in some cases, communicate face to face, in so many ways and in spite of the many miles between us, means that creating and enjoying spiritual community is no longer bound by geography and physical buildings.

It is the time of birth. In the quiet and out of the way manner of the birth of Christ, seeds of change and of new life have been planted. There are certainly visible things to be celebrated even as they are tended and nurtured through their infancy. Yet for the most part, the dramatic changes and expressions of new life and transformation that are to come remain poised in a kind of dormant, preparatory state of waiting. Even as the trees look bare and grim yet extend and deepen their roots, even as the compost gets covered with snow and frozen on the outside yet cooks underneath with a surprising heat in preparing itself to be the stuff from which new life will draw its sustenance, even as the cold rain and snow is forcing us to change and adapt our life styles and so causes

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The Pure Goodness of God and the Gap in Our Psyche That Sometimes Causes Us to Miss It

BY STEVE SANCHEZ

Is God capable of doing anything that is not good? The question of God's goodness has profound implications for pastoral and practical theology. My view is that it is vitally important to understand that God is good itself, He wills only good, and all the transformative and redemptive power of the Word originates from, and depends upon the foundational view that God is good itself. I will offer some theological-metaphysical arguments upholding this position, but primarily I want to address the consequences of the view that God may inflict evil in practical theology, in particular the disastrous psychological effect it has on those who are in the throws of crisis, and asking existential questions.



The True Nature of God

God is love and wisdom to an infinite degree, and in this love and wisdom there are infinite particulars. He is the one indivisible source of life and goodness. Love and wisdom generate from the marriage of His divine soul and His divine body; this marriage is the fundamental source reality of all reality. In this marriage there is an infinite momentum toward love and wisdom, which renders any willing within Him toward harm or evil a total impossibility. For the Lord to will evil to any degree would be to extinguish the infinite fire from the holy marriage. The very freedom we as human beings enjoy, which is the essence of our life, is entirely a gift from the Lord. Can any one of us create a flower? No. There is

not the least thing in me that knows about creating a flower. I can water it, I can nurture and weed it, but I have nothing to do with creating it. If we think of the soul of a woman or man as a flower, we see that God generates the good within us, and humans generate all evil.

There is no possibility of harm or evil from the Lord by reasoning from Swedenborg's principles about the spiritual world and the glorification. In the spiritual world everything is in the form of its ruling love, or its state of affection. Therefore heaven and hell are utterly separate because they are opposite loves. For a hell spirit to approach the heavenly realm is impossible because the atmosphere of heaven is a flame-like love and is utterly untenable and breathable to a hell spirit. According to Swedenborg's witness, the highest angels possess latent hereditary evil, but the Lord utterly removed all evil from His human in the process of the glorification. The entire integrity of Christianity rests on the principle that the Lord, during His life on earth, purified himself of all hereditary evil, thus engendering the resurrection. By gradually purifying his body of all inherited tendencies toward evil, he made his human divine, and His human essence merged with his divine essence. Only that which is divine can merge with the divine. This process of His purification is the glorification (read Gard Perry's article in the December 2011 *Messenger*). So there is nothing in him that could will evil because it has been entirely removed in the glorification.

How Does Evil Exist?

This brings up the question: if God is good itself, and life itself, then how does hell exist? To begin to an-

swer this it is invaluable to wrestle with Swedenborg's conception of the universe existing as equilibrium between heaven and hell. If indeed the structure of the universe is equilibrium between the forces of heaven and hell, then it is plain that the purpose of the universe is to serve human freedom. This is why the human form is a universal form in every way. The equilibrium exists because human freedom of will is sacred. Freedom is the very the essence of what it is to be human, because the affections and awareness of our heart only have meaning and delight if expressed in freedom. Freedom is the only means of bonding with each other and with God, and thus is the only means of salvation. By the same token, freedom of will is also the cause of hell, because, for freedom to be real, the consequences of it must be real. In other words God himself cannot stop people from rejecting him and choosing hell.

Furthermore, it is implicit that there is a duality between heaven and hell, but this duality is contained in an overarching oneness. The overarching oneness can be defined in this way: The Lord is the one source of life and is love itself. Even though heaven and hell are opposing forces, there is still oneness; because in the higher sense, heaven is life, and hell is anti-life, or spiritual death. That is different than each having its own source; if that were the case, it would be a true relativistic duality. But the Lord is the only source of life for heaven and hell; hell is an inversion of his life; hell's reception of his life is in a perverse form. The duality is real, but it's effects only manifest on the natural plane. In the natural plane it is possible to be in emotional/spiritual duplicity but on the spiritual realm

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of heaven and hell everyone has a singular love, whether it be love or hate for the Lord. Either way, everything that exists is defined by the quality of its relationship to the One—the Lord.

Every spirit and angel gravitates to, and can only live in, the spiritual atmosphere that their love is kindred to. Gravity is the perfect word in this case, because gravity corresponds to the pull of the spiritual atmosphere on the soul of an angel or spirit.

Pastoral and Psychological Implications

What pastor has not heard the question in time of crisis, “Why did God allow this to happen? Why did this happen to me? Is God punishing me?” I asked a patient recently how he expressed his sense of spirituality. He said, “I guess I don’t. My wife has Parkinson’s and I blame God for it. I am angry at God for it.”

The feeling is understandable, but this is reasoning from emotion. The questions above are a first response when the shock of tragedy begins to set in, and one has to deal with it. Often, as people begin to talk further about their feelings and beliefs, they reveal that they do not really believe God is punishing them, but they are still angry. It is normal and healthy to feel so; in fact, it is very Biblical. In the book of Lamentations, the response to deep suffering is modeled for us; the people wail with complaints at God and wrestle with what He is doing, but they are taking their feelings *to Him*. Lamentations shows how God is big enough to handle all our anger and despair, and that these feelings are safe with Him. When we open and witness our feelings to each other and to God, they are shared and gradually transformed into thankfulness and love.

When people get stuck in their anger, they reason that God is punishing them by inflicting evil on them—that

is how it appears and how it feels. A pastor helps a person discover the root of the anger in the emotion that drives this belief, first by acknowledging the emotion and offering deep compassion. At the appropriate time it may be possible to help the angry person from the place of a loving God. There are times, however, when a person sticks to the anger and his or her belief that God is responsible.

A person described to me how his wife is so emotionally attached to her family and their drama that she can’t bond with him. He has tried to help his wife’s family with their many compelling dysfunctional issues, even inviting some of them live in his house. When he stood up to certain issues, he got a lot of grief, not only from his wife’s family but—to his dismay—from his wife. He said he suffers because his wife’s love-hate relationship with her family prevents her from being able to fully bond with him. She is psychologically consumed in battling with and trying to prove herself to her family. She suffered a lot of trauma in her youth, and the unresolved anger around it engenders self-protect mechanisms against dealing with the pain. He said that she has even let go of her relationship with God and refuses now to talk about God. This is a hardened place for her.

I met with a woman who was born in the Eastern Orthodox Church and has attended services her whole life. She was in process with the adoption and invested a lot of time and effort in traveling and meeting with the woman who was going to give the baby up for adoption. When the biological mother finally had the baby and held it in her arms, she changed her mind. The adopting mother was devastated. At first she felt God was punishing her, and then she felt nothing for God. She said she had lost her faith and described this feeling as liberating. She told me that her faith was in her DNA,

and had been for many years. But now she felt an identity crisis. It appears that her faith was very external in character. It had not become a living relationship in her soul. When I suggested that this might be a trial or stage of change, that perhaps something new could grow from here, she said, “No, I don’t feel it. It is gone.”

With the first shock of trauma we react from a default place of emotion and think from appearances. The natural reaction is felt in this way: if no one cares about me, then I don’t care about you, or me. This can lead to the feeling that “God is punishing me. These feelings are not necessarily bad. As stated above, often after the first shock of trauma, people are put in a position to wrestle with God and are able to incorporate a more spiritual perspective. They redefine and deepen their connection. At other times the pain of trauma is too deep, people have erected hardened barriers around it and will not let their position be budged. Swedenborg gives us a great framework for understanding this subject. He writes,

To think and conclude from the internal is to think from ends and causes to effects, but to think and conclude from the external is to think from effects to causes and ends. The latter progression is against order, but the former is according to order; for to think and conclude from ends and causes is to think and conclude from goods and truths clearly seen in the higher region of the mind. Such from creation is the nature of human rationality itself. But to think and conclude from effects is to conjecture causes and ends from the lower region of the mind where are the sensual things of the body with their appearances and fallacies (CL §408).

Feeling God is punishing us is an example of coming to a conclusion from external thinking. We see the evidence of, let’s say a stroke; we appro-

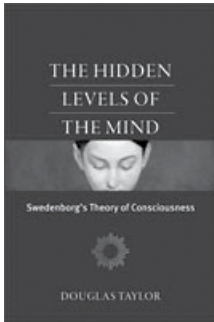
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Book Review

The Hidden Levels of the Mind

The Hidden Levels of the Mind: Swedenborg's Theory of Consciousness.
By Douglas Taylor.
Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2011.

REVIEWED BY EUGENE TAYLOR



This is an important read for Swedenborgians who desire a clear, concise exposition of Swedenborg's psychology of consciousness

embedded in a theological context. At the same time, it is a major contribution to the academic field of the psychology of religion from the standpoint of Swedenborg's contribution to that endeavor.

In other words, whatever you wanted to know about Swedenborg's theory of consciousness, here it is. We tend to habitually live in the material world of the senses and the rational ordering of sense data alone, meanwhile struggling with the vagaries of our emotions and often times unquenchable thirst for sense gratification, power over others, and our attempts to constantly accumulate wealth. In fact, we live so thoroughly in the natural world it is often easier to conclude that spirituality is just another thought or belief that we have, while the center of the universe is thought to be the natural world and the cognitive capacities of our own mind. We live as if the domain of the intellect is the highest state that we can attain and the spiritual is derived from the natural, and not the other way around.

In reality, Taylor tells us (after all, what is reality?) Swedenborg maintained that the natural is derived from

the spiritual—we are just ignorant of that fact. According to Swedenborg's revelation, we live at once in the natural world, the spiritual world, and the celestial world, each one separated by discreet degrees. The natural world can be equated with waking rational consciousness, the state we find ourselves in most of the time. The spiritual world is our experience of self-knowledge, understood by only a fraction of humanity, which leads to the actualization of all that is ethically highest in the person, which culminates in love of the neighbor—living for the sake of all others, not merely ourselves alone. Beyond that, the celestial world is our conforming to the tenets of monistic theism, our love of the Lord, which is the absolute highest state that we can attain. Taylor proceeds to further break down the different levels of consciousness within these three worlds, or states of consciousness, there being more categories for the natural and the spiritual and only one for our love of the Lord as the living source for those states at other levels.

The crux of the matter, nay the very turning point in the evolution of personal consciousness, for Swedenborg as for Taylor, is the opening of the internal spiritual sense. At what point does the individual become aware of the universe in which we live, not just in the outer natural world, but in worlds within worlds? In those worlds, by our choice to do good, we are able to actualize the highest and best that we can become, rather than cultivating evil through our thoughts, words, and deeds. After all, Swedenborg said, "Heaven is created by the Lord, while Hell is created by man through the misuse of the capacities of rationality and freedom" (DLW).

The turning point comes, Taylor says, echoing Swedenborg, when the merely rational intellect becomes the rational, which is not merely intellectual cognitive thought alone, but thoughts and emotions transformed through intuitive insight into wisdom and love, which come from the Lord, and through the cleansing of one's soul find their actualization in the Doctrine of Use; that is, a life of service to the neighbor.

We may think of various circumstances in which we might experience this opening of the internal spiritual sense. It might be the death of a loved one, when no answer suffices except the highest and inmost One. It might be the influence of a significant other human being—the lone boy or girl raised in terrible and tragic circumstances who might have an aunt or uncle who, despite all that occurs, always carries that young person around in their heart, an act that makes regeneration possible because it comes from the impulse of higher consciousness. The young person always knows that they are always being loved somewhere. The opening might come through recovery from a serious personal illness. It might come from inward meditation or prayer that leads to a visionary experience. All these things become understandable according to our reading of Taylor's model of Swedenborg's theory of higher spiritual consciousness.

Regarding the contribution of this work to the formal discipline of the psychology of religion, it is important to understand first that there are two disciplines called the psychology of religion. The one in modern scientific psychology is based almost solely on the measurement of religious behavior

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SwedenborgianCommunity.org Is Well Received According to Survey

BY CHRIS LAITNER

In charting the future of SwedenborgianCommunity.org (SC.org) with its members (registrants), we conducted a survey during fall, 2011. We are pleased that eighty-eight (almost 15% of the registrants) responded—a high response rate for this type of survey. And the respondents generally reflect the profile of our 633 members—about half of the survey respondents and registrants are isolated Swedenborgians.

We highlight here some of the quantitative results and later will describe the written comments and our direct contacts with about a third of the respondents who accepted our invitation for individual interviews on the future of SC.org. The survey shows registrants:

- Come frequently to the Website. About half (55.6%, 48/86) attend at least once a month, with one-third (34.7%, 30/86) attending once a week or several times a month.
- Come for a variety of activities, in

order of frequency: Discussion forums (Messenger, Worship, Chats) and a variety of other reasons.

- Learned of the Website about equally through search engines and social media, reading *The Messenger*, or personal contact with a minister or someone else.

About thirty-five respondents offered to volunteer to support SC.org in some way, such as welcoming new registrants, responding to email inquiries, working with the prayer minister, planning new programs, editing or proofreading, posting materials, and outreach to social media.

About two-thirds are very or somewhat satisfied (66.2%) overall, and even more so with content quality and quantity. However, about 17% were very or somewhat dissatisfied with the ease of navigating and registering as a member. This partially reflects challenges with the simple Website architecture we are using and the reality that the SC.org minister serves half time, performing both the ministerial and all of

the Website functions. Improvement will require more resources.

While we will report on the written responses later, a couple of responses to, “What do you like best about SwedenborgianCommunity.org?” are “The fact that it feels like a real congregation for those of us who are miles from a traditional church.” and “. . . the Website is my main form of access to people who share my view of the value of the Swedenborgian tradition.” These indicate the importance of this ministry in members’ spiritual lives.

Please contact the SC.org Oversight Committee (Chris Laitner, Page Morahan, Jonathan Mitchell, Wilma Wake) for more information or to be interviewed.

It is important to note that about 20% of the responding registrants reported they have contributed to support this ministry, through Paypal on the Website, or check or credit card through the Convention office. Many who had not contributed explained they are on a limited a fixed income or are contributing to bricks-and-mortar churches. Increasing financial support from members will be a key goal in charting the future of SC.org.

Contributions to SwedenborgianCommunity.org can be made several ways:

- via the Website using PayPal
- checks made out to the Swedenborgian Church, sent to the Central Office with the memo line indicating SC.org (send to: ATTN: Renee Hellenbrecht, 11 Highland Ave., Newtonville, MA 02460)
- credit card donations, stock donation, or other special contribution methods by contacting Renee Hellenbrecht at (617)969-4240 or email: manager@swedenborg.org.

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ior. Religion is almost always confused with spirituality where to be spiritual, psychologists think you have to be a member of a particular religious denomination or creed. There is no provision for spontaneous religious experience within the individual independent of the structures of an organized church, such as the ones Swedenborg experienced. The problem is, however, that even there, psychologists know practically nothing about the world’s religions except the denomination in which they themselves were raised. To them, spirituality is just a thought or belief, or better yet just a mere by-prod-

uct of cognitive thinking. The other discipline is psychology of religion defined more experientially within the field of religious studies. There is a significant focus on the phenomenology of religious experience within the individual and what that means to the thought and life of that person. It is a narrative-oriented, literary psychology of spiritual transformation. It is here that we find the greatest relevance for Taylor’s fine little book on Swedenborg’s model of consciousness.

We may further remark in this regard on the rather seamless way in which Taylor tastefully integrates

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To Survive or to Serve

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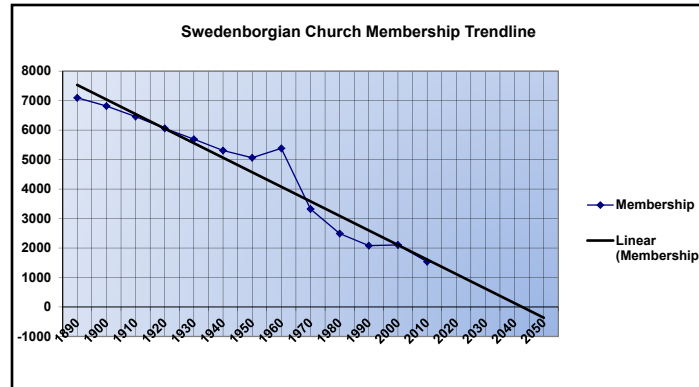
church who have religion. These are the people from whom a new church can be formed—the church that is the New Jerusalem. And it is being formed from those who turn to the Lord alone while engaging in repentance from their evil actions. (*Apocalypse Revealed* §69)

Swedenborg makes clear just how broad his conception of the Lord's church is. Here, he explains one meaning of the commandment "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12):

In the heavenly meaning, "father" stands for our Lord Jesus Christ, and "mother" stands for the communion

of saints, meaning his church that is scattered throughout the entire world. (*True Christianity* §307)

And of course, in many places he states that people of all religions have a place in the Lord's church in the



broadest sense.

This broad, pluralistic, non-institutional view of the new church has been perceived by many readers of Swedenborg from the earliest days. The Rev.

John Clowes, rector of St. John's Anglican Church in Manchester, England, became a full believer in Swedenborg's teachings shortly after Swedenborg's death. Unlike Robert Hindmarsh, the founder of the institutional

New Church, Clowes felt no need to separate himself from the wider Christian world. In his *Dialogues between Sophron and Philadelphia* (originally published in 1794) he summed up his views this way:

I apprehend that by the term New Church, is not meant a mere new Sect, or particular denomination

of Christians, as Quakers, Moravians, Methodists, and the like; but that it denotes a Dispensation of universal grace, mercy, and truth, to the whole human race, without exception or limitation of time, place, or sect.

He goes on to say:

Nothing, therefore, can be plainer, than that the New Jerusalem Dispensation is to be universal, and to extend unto all people, nations, and languages, on the face of the earth, to be a blessing unto such as are meet to receive a blessing. Sects and Sectarians, as such, can find no place in this General Assembly of the ransomed of the Lord.

B.F. Barrett extended these sentiments to book length in his *Catholicity of the New Church and Uncatholicity of New-Churchmen*, published in 1863 in New York.

As these gentlemen understood, the new church that is symbolized by the New Jerusalem in Revelation is a spiritual communion of all good souls throughout the world. Whether our little collection of sects that take the names of "New Church" and "Swedenborgian" live or die, the New Jerusalem will continue to come down from God out of heaven (Revelation 21:2) until it

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The Tafel Fund

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the gift will accumulate. Thus, a gift of \$5,000 given yearly will accumulate until the \$25,000 level is reached, when a seat on the board will be awarded. In the event a donor's gift reaches another \$25,000, a second seat (and vote) on the board will be given and so on.

The is solely to benefit the Swedenborgian Church. For example, a percentage of income might be allocated for common denominational expenses another percentage for matching funds for new congregational programs or such other uses to benefit the Swedenborgian Church as the trustees determine. The board of trustees will publish a report annually in the *Swedenborgian Church Annual Journal* showing the distribution of the funds for the preceding year and a list of all the ministers whose service to the denomination is honored by the fund.

In our past, seven Tafel ministers have faithfully served this denomina-

tion for a total of 213 years: Rudolph Leonard Tafel (25), Louis Herman Tafel (40), Leonardt Tafel (9), Winfred W. Tafel (1), Leonard Immanuel Tafel (47), Immanuel Tafel (40), and Richard H. Tafel (51).

Five living Tafel ministers are serving the Church at present: Richard H. (Dick) Tafel, Jr. (49), F. Robert (Bob) Tafel (47), Harvey A. Tafel (44), Richard L. (Rich) Tafel (23), and Jennifer (Jenn) Tafel (4), adding another 167 years of ministry to the Swedenborgian Church. This makes a grand total of twelve Tafel ministers who have given 380 years of service to the Swedenborgian Church.

It is altogether fitting that these Tafel ministers be recognized and honored. What better way to do this than to establish a permanent fund to help our Swedenborgian ministries be more effective fulfilling the New Evangel in today's world? ☩

Polly Baxter is the treasurer of the Swedenborgian Church.

God Is Good

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propriately feel anger, pain and loss; and from appearances conclude that God is punishing us. But as we process the situation spiritually we can see that our experience is part of the human condition, and that God is the foundation stone that we can trust in our hearts. Healthy anger springs from the desire to find, establish, and reclaim our identity. When we feel grief there is an opening up, because grief is a form of love; it is love when there is the pain of loss. Bitter, hardened anger concludes that “no one cares, and therefore I am not going to care.” (Although this is, of course, never true; it is either defiance, or crying out for help).

It is my experience and observation that, quite often, the cause of the stuck place is unresolved emotion from trauma. The unresolved emotion drives a wedge between our selves and

our loved ones, between God and us. To maintain the wedge requires dissociating from what we really need to deal with, which manifests in all kinds of addictions and evasive behavior. It also causes us to use ideologies as dissociative tools, such as using relativism to justify any position we want so as not to face ourselves, or using the dogma of religiosity to avoid vulnerability and pain. If the dissociation becomes chronic, it causes a distancing from the foundation of our being—God. The anger and pain don’t go away, and the wedge *displaces* our ability to receive the Lord in our hearts. This phenomenon of displacement is significant. Swedenborg says it this way, “to the degree we harbor evil we cannot receive good.”

Many people have suffered trauma in their youth. The trauma could be at the hands of religion, parents, political organizations, schools, relatives, or any number of sources. Trauma due to abuse causes a deep emotional imprint in the heart and in the neuronal networks of the brain. It can also be added to by one’s own behavior, which compounds self-inflicted hate and poor self identity. These experiences cause disillusion, suffering, and despair. People learn strategic ways to protect themselves against these emotional scars. Even those who do a lot of processing work around an issue often don’t get to the core of it. Intense emotional experiences of injustice become internalized, held in a place where they can’t cause further pain. If this kind of emotional hiding persists, the “underground” emotion can displace our reception of good. The stuck emotion feeds off polarized feelings from childhood that habitually and reactively dart between helplessness and omnipotence. We regress to these intensified childhood feelings as a default strategy. Self-protection around the underground pain has been made a matter of survival. When emotions are triggered, we regress back to this place and

react from it, unconsciously employing tried and true self-defense mechanisms or escaping through some form of dissociation. The stuck person protects this emotion at all costs, even if he or she unconsciously hurts others. It sometimes doesn’t matter how much psychological or religious information a person has gained in life; in fact the more he or she has, the more sophisticated the self-protection mechanism and the more elaborate the intellectual framework that is used to mask it.

In this condition, deep down there is anger at others and even deeper anger at God—inevitable because God is the foundation of our being and the true source we eventually need to humble ourselves toward resolving it. Providentially, God is always working to prevent these ill feelings from becoming trapped and unseen, where they become like poison in the blood. This is the essential meaning of the Biblical phrase “to be hot or cold, not lukewarm.” We are to let our love or hate of God, and each other, see the light of day where it can be worked out and removed.

To say that God inflicts evil is not only a theological falsity, but what is worse it inflames the negative and self-destructive impulses in the suffering person. Imagine telling someone who is struggling with the feeling that God is punishing them that God is the one who inflicts evil. If they really believe that God is against them, then there is nothing that can help—end of story. Such a notion arises from external thinking. God never causes evil, but allows evil for the providential purpose of removing evil. The Lord is the redemptive force in our hearts and minds. He is the comforter, and his love is closest when we are most ill and suffering. It is irrational to blame God for the evil that happens, because God is good itself. ☩

The Rev. Steve Sanchez is a chaplain in Northern California.

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fills the whole world. This is a process we can see happening in the world all around us.

Our little church institution is no more special to God than any of the other thousands of religious bodies that exist throughout the world. God does not look at outward appearances as we humans do. Rather, God looks at the human heart (1 Samuel 16:7). And all people who have a heart to love God and serve their fellow human beings are part of God’s universal new church.

The question is whether our church organization will be a living, growing part of that universal new church. Right now, it looks like the answer is “no.”

And there are specific reasons for this. Yes, we can talk about wider trends in mainline Christianity and how the decline of our denomination

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To Survive or to Serve

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mirrors the wider decline of the liberal Protestantism in whose image our church has been created.

But I believe there is a much more specific and fundamental reason for our steady decline: We are focused on saving our own life as a church. And as long as we remain focused on saving our life, we will continue to lose it.

I can't tell you how many meetings I've attended at our local congregations, on the association level, and on the level of the denomination as a whole in which the underlying question being discussed is, "How can we get more members and more funding so that our church can survive?"

The way we spend our funds reflects our focus on our own survival. The bulk of our money on the denominational, association, and local level goes toward paying our ministers and operating and maintaining our buildings. And both the buildings and the ministers on our payroll are primarily serving existing members of the church. Very little of our money goes into any form of outreach, let alone service to people outside of our congregations and our denomination.

However, we do have one ministry that is truly successful. It is no small coincidence that this ministry was originally chartered to serve people outside the Swedenborgian Church, and has continued to do so to this day. I'm talking about Wayfarers Chapel, whose mission is "to nurture the spiritual journey of wayfarers." In pursuing this mission, Wayfarers has built up its ministry to the point where its annual budget is equal to the rest of the denomination's budget combined. There is no concern about building membership because Wayfarers has no membership. Though it does offer Sunday services, and there are people who consider the Chapel "their church," its budget, including staff salaries and

building and grounds maintenance, is devoted almost entirely to serving people in the wider world from our unique Swedenborgian perspective.

This dedication to serving others is, I believe, a more fundamental reason for Wayfarers Chapel's success as a ministry than the beauty of its architecture, grounds, and location. Yes, Wayfarers has its financial and organizational struggles like everyone else. But its long-term financial solidity and stability as a ministry is based on the many services it provides to the hundreds of thousands of non-Swedenborgians who pass through its buildings and grounds each year.

Though there has been occasional talk of replicating Wayfarers Chapel elsewhere, I believe this misses the point. Wayfarers Chapel is successful because instead of focusing on its own survival, as so many congregations do, it focuses on serving people in the wider world. In other words, it focuses on serving non-Swedenborgians and the unchurched.

"How can we get more members and more funding so that our church can survive?" is the wrong question to ask. The question we should be asking is, "How can we as a church serve people outside of our church?"

This service can take many forms, from community service projects to local event planning to renting out our buildings at a reasonable cost for religious, non-profit, and self-help groups that need meeting space. Most importantly, one service we can uniquely provide is to reach out to the people in our communities with the beautiful, broad, comforting, and exciting spiritual perspective that means so much to us. How many people out there need the kind of spiritual roots and branches that we almost take for granted in this church? I believe that searching out ways to present our theology in a way that is attractive and understandable to people of all walks of life is part of our

primary commission as a church.

I can hear the question now: "How can we do that?" I am confident that the people in each of our churches and ministries has the ability to search out and engage in its own unique answers to the question of how to serve the people in its surrounding community. But this will never happen until our focus shifts from survival to service. We may think that if we don't focus our energy on keeping the church doors open and keeping the minister paid, everything will go to rack and ruin. But when we stop focusing on these issues of our own institutional survival and start focusing on what we as a church can do for others, that is precisely the point at which we pass from death to life.

Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For the Gentiles strive after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:31-33). ☩

The Rev. Lee Woofenden serves as annotations editor and writer for the New Century Edition of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg published by the Swedenborg Foundation.

Letters to the Editor

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ories on the waning of the church that focus on shifts in culture and society. Elements of education, entertainment, philosophy, medicine, capitalism, consumerism, family, society, etc. all have played a role in how we got here. And, in my opinion, these reasons while important, will not shed light on where it is we need to go.

It is much harder for us to say, as Walt Kelly (through Pogo) said, "We have met the enemy and he is us." I do not mean to sound alarmist, but the

Continues next page

Passages

Deaths

Just before Thanksgiving, **Lillian Bichil** passed into the fullness of the spiritual world. Lillian was a supporter of and frequent visitor to Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel, making many friends there. She is survived by her son, Cliff Siegh, a member of the Cambridge Society, who took care of her in her declining years. ☩

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issue is critical. As Rev. Dr. Fekete explained to the NCCCUSA, we are in a position where we need to respond and act to the Lord's call. We learn from our tradition that the decline of a church is caused by one thing—lack of charity. Our understanding and faith are dependent on our will and charity; truth is dependent on love. As President Turley stated in the same issue, we must find what empowers us. We need to re-connect with a life changing faith. We must rediscover exactly how it is this tradition transforms our lives.

The handing over of our power and agency to other groups, be it the General Convention or the Swedenborgian House of Studies has most affected the growth of our churches. A fundamental belief for our tradition seems to be that the denomination should pay for our ministers and our ministries, build churches, write pamphlets, provide music resources, and somehow make us grow.

We as people of faith must rise to the occasion in a way similar to some of the founders of our denomination. Take for instance John Glen, who brought books and lectured on Swedenborg's writings to an audience of complete strangers or Francis Bailey, who as a printer spent his life's energy printing Swedenborg so that people throughout the Americas could read the transfor-

Letter from the President

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us to build strength and practice new ways of coping, so too the financial winter we are in the midst of, is forcing us to strengthen, adapt, re-think, and find new ways of doing things. The externals present one picture, but the very harshness of the climate is cause for a kind of inner work and development that is going to bloom and blossom in the coming seasons as certainly as the dead remains of the daffodils and irises are the stuff which feed the bulbs below which will in turn bloom and become the beauty that they contain within themselves now but do not show.

Winter offers us the opportunity to transform and grow, to get efficient and responsive to what is going on around us, to be grateful and joyful with a deeper appreciation for the warmth and life-giving energy that we draw from our love of God and one another. It is perhaps a time of turning in-

mational works. One might claim that this is a looking-outward rather than inward statement, But it is a finer point than that. We as a church need to embrace the life changing and empowering message of the New Jerusalem. We need to talk about that which gives life rather than focusing on the business of doing church. By saying this, I am not saying we do not need to tend to our business, but we need to look at properly ordering the why. If we come together as a church at annual conventions only to do the business of church, we have failed. If we come together to celebrate the power of our life changing message and do the business that needs to be done to facilitate our living the Lord's truths . . . that is the proper order—faith following charity.

—Kevin Baxter,
pastor of the Cambridge,
Massachusetts, Church

ward, but even as in the outside world, what appears to be death and dying externally is in fact, only the covering of an inner process of transformation and renewal.

So keep the home fires burning in your churches and you will find them burning in your hearts. Do the work that hard times require and you will find your spirits warmed and lifted by the work itself, as well as the results. Take the opportunity provided by the demands of the seasons, to get clear about what is of real value and long-term importance and what you have accumulated and carried simply out of convenience and habit. Every crisis is an opportunity, and we are in the midst of a time of great opportunity!

May the celebrations of the seasons be merry and bright, and may your response to the challenges of the seasons fill you with the bright light and warming love of the Lord's Second Coming.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

Hidden Levels of the Mind

Continued from page 7

mainly references to the New Testament into his text, corroborating the unspoken relationship between Swedenborg's writings and the principal text of Christianity, the Bible, and its internal spiritual meaning. It's just a question of what came first, and whether or not The Word according to Swedenborg constitutes a third testament of the Christian tradition. It is a rather orthodox view of Swedenborgian theology, but the short, concise, and well-written way it is presented is probably its greatest power. ☩

Eugene Taylor, Ph.D., is vice president of the Massachusetts Association of the New Church and a Member of The Cambridge Society,



About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death.

American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches. As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questionings and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

Swedenborg shared in his theological writings a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.



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