



## Charles Carroll Bonney, Visionary Swedenborgian

BY GEORGE DOLE

*A version of this article was presented as a lecture at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, in Maine, in 2007.*

At some point in the nineteen eighties, I began to pick up mentions of plans for a Parliament of Religions, and at a meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago, an elderly man in Hindu garb introduced himself to me as Swami Sarveshananda, spoke of his hopes for the event, and said, “And we have to get the Swedenborgians involved because we owe you so much.” I had no idea what he was talking about, but as time went on, I began to find out. The proposed Parliament was to celebrate the centennial of one held in Chicago in 1893, and the Vedanta temple in Chicago was one of the first and most devoted advocates of the centennial because it traced its own origin to that event. Where did the Swedenborgians fit in?

In his history of American Buddhism, Rick Fields writes,

The World Parliament of Religions, which took place in Chicago in 1893, is usually considered the beginning of the introduction of

Buddhism—and Eastern religion in general—to America. But the Parliament could also, I found, just as easily be seen as the culmination of a movement that had begun much earlier.<sup>1</sup>

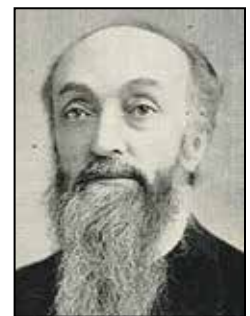
Whether beginning or culmination, though, the Parliament was a significant event. Fields proceeds to offer an overview of the contacts between East and West, noting that the intent of Columbus’ voyage is reflected in the fact that native Americans are still known as “Indians” and that one of the events that precipitated the American Revolution involved the British East India Company—the tea that was pitched into Boston harbor had come from

Canton, China.

In London, a linguist named William Jones had argued passionately against “the military solution” to the American problem, and his studies of Oriental languages and culture mark the beginning of serious Western interest in that fascinating field, with the founding of the Royal Asiatic Society. During the Revolution, his interest in a negotiated resolution led to protracted

contact with Benjamin Franklin. At one point after the Revolution, Jones seriously considered emigrating to America but wound up spending the remainder of his life in India, immersed in the study of Eastern religions and sending a constant supply of scholarly studies back to England. One of these, a translation of the *Saddharapandarika* (or *Lotus of True Teaching*) Sutra, was translated into French, and in that form came to the attention of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; and thereafter the two devoured everything Eastern they could lay their hands on. Emerson’s Aunt Mary once described him as “confused and dark—a mixture of heathen greatness—pantheism—Swedenborgianism and German rationalism,”<sup>2</sup> surely a hint that there is something distinctively Swedenborgian lurking in the wings.

Fields covers two other phases of the history of Buddhism in America before coming to the 1893 Parliament, both fascinating in their own right. The first is the influx of Chinese labor and the so-called “opening of Japan,” and the subsequent increase



Charles Bonney

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of American Buddhism* (Third Edition) (Cambridge, MA: Shambala Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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**The Editor's Desk**



**The Noisiest Authorities**

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,*

*it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."*

Thus, famously, began Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. And, of course, we can see our present time in the passage.

Most people don't have the time or the inclination to delve deeply into history, and who can be expert in the history of all peoples in all epochs? And even if we read history, we can never know completely the flavor of the times, what people from all of the different walks of life thought and talked about, how history affected them and how they moved history forward. But, I think, the world has *always* looked

somewhat like Dickens described it in *A Tale of Two Cities*. And, of course, our views vary according to our vantage points.

As if in response to Dickens's words, Rev. Rich Tafel asks, "Why Are We so Angry?" on page 118. If "the noisiest authorities" insist on "the superlative degree of comparison only," then how can we expect that people will not gather in their corners, protecting what they perceive as theirs and denying or denigrating "the other side"? Rev. Tafel suggests that we look to our religious beliefs to quell our anger—to check our impulse to react and rather consider the Lord's way for us.

Rev. George Dole reminds us in the lead article, "[Charles Bonney, Visionary Swedenborgian](#)," that the 1893 Parliament of Religions was the brainchild of Charles Bonney, a Swedenborgian of keen intellect, fine character, and broad interests and knowledge. He is almost forgotten to history, but his contributions to human understanding and his openness to hearing and thinking about the beliefs of others was rooted in his Swedenborgianism, yes, but also in his understanding of the entire fabric of human interaction. Rev. Dole says that for Bonney, "The world of religion was illusory if it did not express itself in the worlds of 'government, jurisprudence, finance, science, literature, [and] education.'"

And so, in the face of an onslaught of demagoguery from many of our national leaders urging outrage and anger in place of thoughtfulness, understanding, communication, and compassion, we must resist the urge to follow their lead, to give up on where the Lord leads us, that is toward love and wisdom—truth and understanding.

Rev. Jane Siebert, in her "Letter from the President" ([page 117](#)), has some thoughtful suggestions on how we might better understand and get along with each other. She closes by quoting Zechariah 8:16,17, reminding us that the Bible leads the way.

—Herb Ziegler

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**Church Calendar**

- **November 9–10:** General Council Fall Meeting, Swedenborg Library, Chicago
- **December 27–30:** SCYL Winter Retreat, Almont Retreat Center, Allenton, MI

**the Messenger**

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## Letter from the President



*The Year of the Lord: 2018–19*  
—*The Primacy of Spirit*

Dear Friends,

A friend asked me how to talk with people with whom she totally disagrees. It is a common problem and seems to be getting worse as the lines are drawn deeper between us. Mostly we try to avoid the difficult conversations. We talk about the weather, sports, food. We stay away from messy discussions. I know I do this both to spare others' potential hurt feelings and my own deeply held beliefs.

Once again, a book has come into my purview that has opened my eyes and drawn me into looking for a better way than just unfriending someone on Facebook or ignoring people in a crowd.

*Turning to One Another, Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, by Margaret Wheatley, was written in 2009, almost ten years ago. The problems we are facing today are not new; they just seem to be getting bigger and uglier.

She writes, "We don't have to let go of what we believe [to have civil and constructive conversations] but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes." We have to relearn how to listen. "It's not differences that divide us. It's our judgements about each other that do."

We are living with more cynicism, impatience, anger, defensiveness, and fear. We react and judge quickly without examining why we feel and believe the way we do and why others may think differently than we do. We need to calm down, reflect on our beliefs and assumptions, and work to

be aware of what riles us and engages us and enrages us. When we get so entrenched in our view, we stop thinking and analyzing. We are immobilized and stuck, digging in deeper and deeper.

We have given up on conversations and tend to jump to conclusions rather than taking time to talk to one another and to listen with openness and not just to change another's mind.

God made us all in God's image. God didn't make some of us right and some of us wrong. God gave us freedom to choose and that freedom also entails choosing to listen and freedom to be rational.

Margaret Wheatley gives six principles to use before we begin to engage in a formal conversation. Whether we plan to use them or not, they are worth thinking about, as we value relationships and connecting with all God's people.

- We acknowledge one another as equals.
- We try to stay curious about one another.
- We recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners.
- We slow down so we have time to think and reflect.
- We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together.
- We expect it to be messy at times (Pg. 33).

I understand the desire to just avoid the conversations, associate with people who think like us, and watch the news we agree with, but that doesn't seem to be getting us anywhere. It is hard to listen to someone who thinks differently than we do. We have to know why we believe the way we do, so we can calmly explain our feelings to our neighbor, while calmly listening to the feelings of our neighbor, without the intention of changing the other, only broadening our own outlook.

These are the things you are to do: Speak ye everyone the truth to your neighbor; execute the judgement of truth and peace in your gates; and let none of you imagine evil in your heart against your neighbor (Zechariah 8:16,17).

—*With care and a look to the future,*  
Rev. Jane Siebert

## Op Ed

## Unpacking the Internal Sense

BY DAVID J. FEKETE.

I was raised in the Swedenborgian Church and was taught a disturbing way to interpret the Bible. I say that it was disturbing now, but didn't know it growing up. I was taught that the internal sense of the Bible could be discovered in the books of the Bible that Swedenborg did not interpret. I was taught what I now call the "this-means-that" method of Bible interpretation.

That method is to take a Bible passage and translate the images from their literal meaning into their "correspondence." *The Dictionary of Correspondences* is a prime example of this method. So one reads about the sun and calls it "celestial good;" one reads about water and calls it "truth;" one reads about the moon and calls it "truth;" one reads about silver and calls it "spiritual truth;" and so on. Then, one attempts to compile these correspondences into a meaning. One may conclude that the passage means natural truth becomes spiritual truth which becomes faith and finally celestial good. But such a method strikes me as stilted, artificial, and actually tearing apart the text in question.

Emanuel Swedenborg revealed the internal sense of only three Bible books: Genesis, Exodus, and Revelation. My current understanding is that we cannot know what the internal sense is of the other books of the Bible. The this-means-that method takes correspondences from the three revealed books and applies them to other books which are not revealed, imagining that one has thereby "decoded" the internal sense of those books.



Such a methodology is misguided. If a horse means reasoning from sensual memory-knowledges in Swedenborg's exposition of Exodus, does it mean the same thing when a horse appears in Isaiah? What new theology do we gain from a reading of Isaiah if we take a correspondence from Exodus and apply the same correspondence and meaning in Isaiah? To do so is merely to reduplicate Exodus in Isaiah.

Now, when I approach a passage from a book that Swedenborg hasn't interpreted, I use a different method than the this-means-that method. Now I look at the primary images in a given passage and see how they function in the plot, consider the

leading characters—what they are like (big, small, foreign, Israelite, fighting, peacemaking) and how that character functions in the narrative, and how all the symbols and characters relate to each other in a story or poem. I derive meaning from the interaction of these images within the story. I do not consider deriving meaning in this way to be unpacking the inner sense of Scripture. I consider it exposition or exegesis—not revealing the internal sense.

The Bible is a rich body of literature with infinite meaning. We diminish the Bible's depths if we let the symbols of three books determine how we will interpret the rest of the Bible. Each new interpretation is a new encounter with the text and its symbols, where we are in our own regeneration, and what we know of doctrine. Such a vital encounter with revealed Word cannot happen with a static reshuffling of symbols which come from only three books of the Bible. ☩

Rev. David J. Fekete, Ph.D., is pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Alberta.

## Op Ed

## Why Are We So Angry?

BY RICH TAFEL

The recent funeral for Sen. John McCain, with eulogies from leaders in both political parties, seems to mark the end of an age.

The respect for differences in ideology is slowly ebbing away. Today, we seem to be in a perpetual state of anger toward each other. Many churches appear to be mirroring this anger instead of working for peace.

The Book of James 1:19–22 gives us some timeless advice:

. . . let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for

your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

One of the teachings of Swedenborg that surprised me at first was his statement that God is never angry. In fact, he points out that God sends no one to hell in anger, but allows people whose

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# Farewell and Thanks to Dr. Robert E. Reber

BY JIM LAWRENCE

With the completion of his term limits on the Board of Trustees at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies as of July 2, 2018, the well-known Methodist scholar and conference center director, Rev. Dr. Robert Reber, concluded fifty years of journeying with Swedenborgians in various capacities. He served two long terms at the seminary, the Swedenborgian School of Religion, that included chairing the full board for a few years and chairing the year-long study on the future of the seminary in the late 1990s that led to its move to the west coast and reincarnation as the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion (SHS). Before his long service on the seminary



Rev. Dr. Robert Reber

board, he was an early board member of the Temenos initiative, having spent several years in the 1980s developing the Thompson Center in St. Louis into one of the country's premier continuing education and spiritual life retreat centers.

Robert's longtime journeying with Swedenborgians began in the 1960s and continued in the 1970s, while he pursued two advanced degrees in theology and education at Boston University, when he met a number of Swedenborgians either studying at the seminary or involved with the denomination in the churches and Central Office. Along

with his wife, Wendy, he formed deep friendships with Rev. Randy and Millie Laakko, Rev. Erni and Perry Martin, Rev. Jerry and Susan Poole, among others, and in recent years with John and Bev Titus, often taking international trips with John.

In a quite amazing way that is probably unique in the modern history of the General Convention, Robert shaped a realm of spiritual friendships with Swedenborgians, which he valued and out of which he contributed powerful gifts of insight and leadership to Swedenborgian institutions through his volunteering of service.

Robert Reber enjoyed a professional journey that included a long teaching career at Scaritt College and as Dean of Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City, where he helped to revolutionize that seminary into the foremost program for continuing education for clergy in the country. Along the way he was a regular professor in summer schools programs and institutes at Hartford Seminary and

Candler School of Theology, as well as an adjunct teacher at Union Theological Seminary (NYC), Lancaster Theological Seminary, Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.

Dr. Reber also published many articles, chapters in books, and education workbooks. His lifelong dedication to Christian education for laity and continuing education for clergy was capped by *A Lifelong Call to Learn: Approaches to Continuing Education for Church Leaders* (Abingdon Press, 2000, co-edited with D. Bruce Roberts).

Since retiring with Wendy to his native Ohio environs, in addition to his many years of service on the SHS/CSS board, he has been active in the advocacy of lifelong learning programs for clergy and laity at the Centre for Applied Christian Leadership at Methodist Theological School in Columbus and as an educational consultant to the Clergy Leadership in Alabama, the Indiana Clergy Peer Group Study Program, and the Peer Group Program of the Akron (Ohio) Area Association of Churches, as well as serving as the evaluator for the Sabbath Renewal Project at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Thus, as Robert Reber termed off the CSS Board this summer, having served overall a combined twelve years on our seminary boards, we can behold a nearly fifty-year journey with Swedenborgians that has involved thoughtful and productive contributions to our church life and an uncommon richness of spiritual community. ☩

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is the dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.



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greatest love is themselves to throw themselves into a community of others like them. Swedenborg says, "He casts no one into hell and is angry with no one" (*Heaven and Hell* §545).

This is a life long challenge for each of us. As we look to the future of our church, let us become a place where people listen first and are slow to anger. Let us be a place that builds peace. ☩

Rev. Richard L. Tafel is the minister of the Church of the Holy City in Washington, DC. He has been involved in political and entrepreneurship conversations for many years.



## Charles Bonney

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of Japanese immigration, accompanied by an exploitation of the immigrants and an anti-Oriental backlash that could be virulent. The second is of a very different order, the theosophical movement inspired by the charismatic Madame Blavatsky.<sup>3</sup> It may be argued that each of these developments contributed more to the misunderstanding of Eastern religion and culture than to their understanding.

While Fields suggests regarding the Parliament as “the culmination of a movement that had begun much earlier,” then a strong case can be made for regarding it as a radical reversal of the basic tenor of that movement, at least in the public eye. The intent of the Parliament was stated with unmistakable clarity in its opening address: “We meet on the mountain height of absolute respect for the religious convictions of each other.”<sup>4</sup>

Where did this sentiment come from? Fields offers one account, which I should like to cite at some length.

To the men who organized it, the World Parliament of Religions represented the culmination of a great vision. No one, said Dr. John Henry Barrows, liberal Protestant minister and chairman of the Parliament, could claim the idea as his own, for its roots went back to the days of Paul and Jesus. It was the modern missionary movement, whose origins Dr. Barrows traced to the founding of the British Empire in India, that provided the spark for this Parliament. Their work had “opened a new field for evangelization, and a

new field for scholarship.” As Barrows pointed out, it was only about a hundred years, since the time of Sir William Jones, “that the mother tongue of all the languages of modern Europe—the Sanskrit—had been added to the list of ‘the learned languages’ cultivated by scholars.” Yet, in that time, most of the scriptures of the world’s great religions had become available, and the growth of what Barrows called comparative theology had brought about nothing less than “a larger conception of human history, a new and more religious idea of divine providence through all ages and lands.”<sup>5</sup>

### **The first seed of the Parliament was sown not by Dr. Barrows but by Bonney, a Swedenborgian lawyer from Chicago.**

The problem with Barrows’ explanation is simple and immense. While it seems true that there had opened up “a new field for evangelization, and a new field for scholarship,” evangelization and scholarship were often scarcely on speaking terms. Scholars may have been fascinated by the depth and subtlety of Eastern religions, but evangelists for the most part went forth from the realms of Christian light with the mission of rescuing benighted souls from the hell that awaited all who did not accept Jesus Christ as their savior. True, the missionaries did learn the languages and compile dictionaries and grammars, and some of them were open-minded enough to recognize wisdom in unfamiliar forms, but for the most part, the goal of the missionary movement remained conversion, and there is clear evidence that many loyal Christians saw the Parliament as undermining this vital cause.

The editor of a periodical entitled *Unity* wrote in the issue of September 21, 1893,

To use a word which now, in Chicago at least, is well-nigh emptied of its meaning, the “pagans” have carried the sympathies of the vast audiences. Mozoomdar, with his masterly eloquence. Nagarkar, his scholarly and refined associate in the Brahma-Samaj, the white-robed Dharmapala, who represents the propaganda of Buddhism in its most vital and universal form; Ghandi, with his modest and clear thought, representing the Jain community. Dvivekanandi, the orange-robed priest of Brahminism; Chikravarti, the representative of the Indian Theosophists, and others, are all of them university men from India, using elegant English with scarcely a foreigner’s accent. They are men better versed in modern history and science; far better prepared to understand and appreciate the Occident than we are prepared to enter into the life of the Orient.

So much for “the benighted heathen.”

Fields seems oddly unaware, also, of what is undoubtedly the primary source of information about the genesis of the Parliament, Charles Carroll Bonney’s article in the January 1984 issue of *The New-Church Review* entitled, most appropriately, “The Genesis of the World’s Congresses of 1893.”

The first seed of the Parliament was sown not by Dr. Barrows but by Bonney, a Swedenborgian lawyer from Chicago. A little background information is necessary at this point. As the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’ discovery neared, a movement gained strength to hold a world’s fair celebrating the progress made since that event, and after much congressional debate it was decided to hold it in Chicago. It seems, in fact, to have been the relentless vigor of the Chicago proponents’ oratory rather than the climate of the city that gave rise to the nickname, “The Windy City.” Incidentally, the fact that the exposition was

<sup>3</sup> Blavatsky was a co-founder of Theosophy. She was championed by supporters as an enlightened guru and derided as a fraudulent charlatan and plagiarist by critics. Her Theosophical doctrines influenced the spread of Hindu and Buddhist ideas in the West.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Carroll Bonney, “The Genesis of the World’s Congresses of 1893” in *The New Church Review*, January 1894 (hereafter cited as “Genesis”), p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Fields, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

## Charles Bonney

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held in 1893 rather than 1892 was due solely to the inability of European participants to get their exhibits together in time.

In 1889, once Chicago had been chosen, a letter was printed in a respected monthly known as *The Statesman* that began as follows:

To Editors of *The Statesman*:

The crowning glory of the 1892 World's Fair should not be the exhibit then to be made of the material triumphs, industrial achievements, and mechanical victories of man, however magnificent that display may be. Something higher and nobler is demanded by the enlightened and progressive spirit of the present age.

In connection with that important event, the world of government, jurisprudence, finance, science, literature, education, and religion should be represented in a congress of statesmen, jurists, literati, teachers, and theologians, greater in number and more widely representative of "peoples, nations, and tongues" than any assemblage which has ever yet been convened.

The letter went on to list possible benefits of such gatherings as laying the groundwork for better international understanding and improved international law, leading to "the general substitution of arbitration for war, in the settlement of international controversies."<sup>6</sup> It was signed by Charles Carroll Bonney and seconded by brief letters from six other worthies, including the Rev. John H. Barrows.

The fair itself made an immense impression. The setting was "The White City," a set of classical buildings

designed by Swedenborgian architect Daniel Hudson Burnham, illuminated by the new miracle of electricity, and like nothing else anyone had ever seen. It seems in fact to have been so "other-worldly" that it inspired L. Frank Baum's Emerald City of *The Wizard of Oz*. In an article entitled "Sell the cookstove if necessary, but come to the Fair" (taken from an actual letter home), Phil Patton wrote,

No World's Fair before or since has captured the national imagination as completely . . . . The Exposition was one of the epochal events of its time. It is hard for us today to grasp the impact a simple world's fair could have on the nation—an impact combining the appeal of a moon launch and the bicentennial celebration. In its half-year of existence, it drew 27 million visitors—a number approaching half the American population.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after the fair closed, the White City lay vacant and was occupied by the homeless—Chicago was in desperate financial straits—and before long, it burned to the ground. A century later, there seems to be no recollection of the industrial and scientific exhibits that attracted such attention, or to the results of the congresses on agriculture, law, government, education, and the like. The one gathering whose effects are still felt was the Parliament of Religions.

Bonney's role in that Parliament was recognized at the time of his death, and perhaps the quickest way to introduce him is to quote the obituary published in his hometown paper, *The Hamilton* (New York) *Republican*.

Having commenced reading law when but seventeen he continued his interest in legal affairs, and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1852, and to that of the United States Supreme Court in 1866. He was elected President of the Illinois State Bar

Association, and Vice President of the American Bar Association in 1882. He removed from Peoria to Chicago in 1860, practising law and reporting cases in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Nebraska, New York, New Jersey, California, and the United States Supreme Court.

Bonney's zeal for the law was based upon his patriotism and his love of order and justice. He was one of the originators of the law and order movement, which was started in 1872, and later spread over other states, especially New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. He advocated, and to some extent successfully carried, a great number of reforms in constitutional politics, in the national banking system, railroad supervision by State authority, the establishment of a permanent international court of justice, now realised in the Hague, a national Civil Service Academy, a system of Civil Service pensions, state Boards for the adjustment of differences between capital and labor, etc., and developed an unusual activity as an orator in speaking for these several questions when opportunities arose.

In 1887, Mr. Bonney's name was mentioned for appointment as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, on the ground that he was a man standing in the very front rank of Western jurists, of high literary culture, and of judicial temperament and if he was not chosen, it was mainly due to his vigorous attitude in matters of reform. And perhaps the decision was just, for a judge of the United States Supreme Court should be absolutely impartial and even the zeal for improvement and for the moral elevation of the people, be it in matters of politics, temperance or social conditions, might easily become a disturbing element, in the establishment of general juridical principles.

Most remarkable of all was the realisation of a Parliament of Religions, heretofore, deemed impossible on account of the exclusive

<sup>6</sup> *The Statesman: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Problems of Practical Politics, Co-operative Industry and Self-Help*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (October 6, 1889), pp. 1–3. Cited in George F. Dole, *With Absolute Respect: The Swedenborgian Theology of Charles Carroll Bonney* (West Chester, PA: The Swedenborg Foundation, 1993), pp. 45–47.

<sup>7</sup> In *The Smithsonian*, Vol. 24 (June 1993), pp. 38–51.



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nature of the leading and most powerful church organisations.

This Religious Parliament was the first truly ecumenical council of religion, and its realisation is due mainly to the tact of Mr. Bonney, to his impartiality toward all; his reconciliatory spirit in the clash of opposed interests, his conservatism, his circumspection, enabling every speaker to come and go uncompromised by the general tendency of the Parliament simply as a preacher and representative [*sic*] of his own faith, and finally to his choice of officers, among whom the Rev. Dr. John Henry Barrows must be specially mentioned as a chairman of rare ability.<sup>8</sup>

The list of professional accomplishments is surely impressive, and the thought that the main reason he did not become Chief Justice of the Supreme Court may have been his lifelong efforts toward reform is only slightly less striking than the statement that the realisation of a Parliament of Religions was “most remarkable of all.”

There is a kind of confirmation of this from a surprising source. In 1900, arguing against the assumption that the more cultured nations ought to dominate the less cultured, the brilliant Russian theologian Vladimir Solovyov wrote,

Were the Americans, when they rose against the English to win independence, in any way distinguished in culture? . . . And yet, even Lafayette sympathized with them, and he was right, because now, for instance, in Chicago, they have managed not only to unite all the religions, but they have exhibited them into the bargain. Nobody has ever seen such a thing before. Paris wanted to gather together its religions for the coming exhibition but nothing came of it, as you doubtless know. . . . Then

our own Nepluiev also tried, and ended by becoming disappointed in every religion.

However, the Americans managed very well indeed. Each creed sent them a clergyman. A Catholic bishop was made chairperson. He read them the Lord’s Prayer in English, and the Buddhist and Chinese priests and idolaters responded to him with complete courtesy. “Oh yes! All right, sir! We wish no one evil. We ask only one thing: keep your missionaries as far from our countries as you possibly can. Your religion is very good for you—and if you do not observe it, it is not our fault—but our religion is the best for us.” The exhibition finished so well that there was not even a single fight! Now you see how good the Americans have become!<sup>9</sup>

**The world of religion was illusory if it did not express itself in the worlds of “government, jurisprudence, finance, science, literature, [and] education.”**

Bonney himself clearly agreed. In his account of the genesis of the Parliament, he wrote, “During the organization and conduct of the World’s Congresses of 1893, I was led to feel that all my life had been a preparation for this work . . . .”<sup>10</sup>

What did all his life accomplishments in the fields of law and government have to do with the Parliament? Note first of all that the sentence I just quoted refers not to the religious parliament but to the “Congresses,” plural, of which the religious parliament was one. The vision in *The Statesman* was that “the world of government, jurisprudence, finance, science, literature, education, and religion should be represented in a congress of statesman,

9 Vladimir Solovyov, *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ* (originally published in 1900), Alexander Bashky, tr. (Hudson, NY: Lindesfarne Press, 1900), pp. 110f.

10 Bonney, “Genesis,” p. 19.

jurists, literati, teachers, and theologians,” and that is what happened. In the words of one observer,

Of the various people brought into prominence in connection with the World’s Fair, there are few who are more interesting in their personality than Mr. C. C. Bonney, the originator, manager, and President of the World’s Fair Auxiliary, with its multitude of congresses touching upon almost every phase of intellectual development. Mr. Bonney is a man of slight build who would never attract particular attention. He has been known by a limited circle for many years as a quiet, unassuming lawyer, noted for nothing in particular, unless it be a broad catholicity which kept his interest alive in the most diverse men and opinions. A Swedenborgian by religious profession, he did not mingle greatly with men of other denominations, so that he was by no means widely known; and when it appeared that it was through his persistency, tact, and indomitable energy that such a unique enterprise had not only been conceived but actually carried through, his neighbors in Chicago were not less surprised than those from other parts of the land. His addresses of welcome and introduction have been singularly appropriate, seeming to catch the central thought of all, whether missions or evolution, education, labor, or socialism.<sup>11</sup>

Bonney was no ivory-tower, arm-chair theologian. He knew what was going on in all the fields covered by the various congresses and could hold his own with their specialists. His professional career had been full of efforts to combat corruption and abuse in an era of shameless exploitation of child and immigrant labor, teen-age alcoholism nurtured by alliances between city government officials and saloons, and a prevailing philosophy that economic

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11 Cited from a publication known to me only as *The Independent*, in *The New Jerusalem Magazine* (December 1983), pp. 749f.

8 *The Hamilton Republican*, Thursday, October 1, 1903.



## Charles Bonney

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might make economic right. We may look back at the Victorian era as one of high moral standards, but as any thoughtful reader of Charles Dickens might suspect, things look very different indeed when we take a peek under the carpet. Bonney was devoted not only to the Parliament of Religions but to the whole package of congresses. The world of religion was illusory if it did not express itself in the worlds of “government, jurisprudence, finance, science, literature, [and] education.”

This conviction rested on solid theological grounds. The commentator who identified Bonney as “Swedenborgian by religious profession” seems unaware of how significant that identification is, taking it only to suggest that he was out of the mainstream (which, in fact, was not really the case). It seems that Bonney had been interested in world religions from his Sunday school days in Hamilton, New York, when newspaper articles on different religions were subjects of class discussion. In his article on the genesis of the Parliament, he wrote,

This first stage of preparation was followed by another of still higher significance. At the age of nineteen I removed to Peoria, Ill., and there, for the first time, saw a New-Church Congregation and heard a New-Church sermon. My previous information of the system of Swedenborg had given me the impression that it was a religion for literary and scientific persons, and I was therefore surprised to find that this congregation had no member eminent in scholastic attainments, excepting the pastor. I soon began to read the Church writings and collateral books, and to attend, occasionally, the Sunday services and the social meetings. In the course of a few years I became satisfied that the New Church does indeed teach “the True Christian Religion”—“the Religion of

Common Sense”—and avowed myself “a receiver of the heavenly doctrines of the New Jerusalem.” I became convinced that the doctrines of this Church will finally prove the reconciliation and crown of all the religions of the world. Acting “in freedom and according to reason,” I accepted the matchless creed of “The Divinity of the Lord, the Holiness of the Word, and the Life that is called Charity.”

In this Church I was taught the fundamental truths which made a World’s Parliament of Religions possible; upon which rested the whole plan of the religious congresses of 1893, and which guided the execution of that plan to a success so great that only the coming generations can fully comprehend and estimate its influence.<sup>12</sup>

At the 1993 Parliament, I did give a talk on Bonney, attended by perhaps thirty of the thousand or more people who came to the plenary sessions. To the best of my knowledge, his name was never mentioned in those sessions, though the then pastor of the General Church group in Chicago (I think it was Grant Schnarr) did give one of the opening prayers. I cannot resist the observation that while a representative of *New Church Life* who visited the 1893 Parliament reported that he found nothing New Church about it, his 1993 successor was at one point seated on the main stage and engaged in a cordial conversation with a priestess of Isis.

One scholar, Richard Seager, has recognized both Bonney’s pivotal role and his winsome character,<sup>13</sup> but other than that, Bonney seems to have disappeared from view. Like Sampson Reed,<sup>14</sup> he did not make it into *The*

<sup>12</sup> “Genesis,” pp. 20f.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Seager, *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1993) and “American Religious Pluralism and the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions” in *Chrysalis: Journal of the Swedenborg Foundation*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 2–11.

<sup>14</sup> For more on Reed: <https://swedenborg.com/>

## Women’s Companion to Conjugal Love

Rev. Julie Conaron and Chaplain Roslyn Taylor are planning a *Women’s Companion* to Swedenborg’s *Conjugal Love*. Their aim is to reinterpret the text and what it means for women today.

They invite Swedenborgian women from around the world, including those who have experienced themselves as female, to contribute their responses over the next two years. If you want to be part of this project, please contact Julie ([julieconaron@hotmail.com](mailto:julieconaron@hotmail.com)) or Roslyn ([hrtaylor@temple.edu](mailto:hrtaylor@temple.edu)). You can respond to the entire text, or just to specific sections that interest you. Feel free to share this invitation with other Swedenborgian/New Church women.

Listen to Julie & Roslyn discussing their *Conjugal Love* project at the Swedenborgian Online Community (<https://tinyurl.com/y77gqpll>). ☩

*Encyclopedia Britannica*, and it probably would not have bothered him in the least. I concluded my earlier talk on Reed with the thought that he might be regarded as a catalyst, “a substance that modifies and especially increases the rate of a chemical reaction without being consumed in the process” (*American Heritage Dictionary*); and I find myself thinking that the same could be said of Charles Carroll Bonney. He is eminently worth rediscovery. ☩

Rev. Dr. George Dole is a retired Swedenborgian minister and professor emeritus at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. He lives in Bath, Maine with his wife, Lois.



[product/sampson-reed/](https://swedenborg.com/product/sampson-reed/)

# Swedenborg Chrysalis Retreat

## A Long-Time Swedenborgian Space in Need of a Facelift

BY CAROLYN SALYER

*"The nature of heaven is to provide a place there for all who lead good lives, no matter what their religion may be. (Emanuel Swedenborg" Divine Providence §330:3-4).*

The Swedenborg Chrysalis Retreat in Deland, Florida, has been a spiritual haven for soul growth and renewal for many years for myself and others. Rev. Skuli Thorhallsson, our beloved minister for about thirty years, has been ill for the last ten-plus years. His health made it necessary for him to retire this past spring. We miss him greatly.

Right before the Annual convention, Rev. Dick Tafel and Linda Tafel came up from Ft. Myers on June 17 and conducted a service for us. They saw the many maintenance needs that we have.

Our group has had limited resources for supporting the Retreat. We tried several different means to meet financial needs and maintenance. In the process of contributing to maintenance, I knew that I could paint exteriors, as I had painted our own house.

In 2015, I painted the exterior of the Retreat's main house. In 2016, the estimate to re-roof the main house was about \$16,000. This amount was staggering to us. Being a retired school teacher, I believed I could learn roofing. With online support and Lowe's, I roofed the south side of the building in the spring of 2017. The hurricane last fall proved it worthy: no tile was lost and no leaks! So this year the north side is getting a new roof also.

Attending the Swedenborgian Convention in San Jose, California, in July was inspiring for me. Rev Thom Muller from Hillside, an Urban Sanctuary gave the opening, "Welcoming

Yourself to Convention." He quoted from Emanuel Swedenborg's True Christianity §365: "All things are full of God, and take their portion from that fullness." I listened to Rev. Muller describe his Hillside Sanctuary in a mini-course at the convention; his ministry is unique. From his work, I felt the power of our loving God and I also felt humbled.



Recently Transformed Worship Space at Chrysalis Retreat Center

General Council asked me to give them an update on what is happening and what the needs are for our spiritual group at Chrysalis and they suggested I write this article for *the Messenger* so others will know about our ministry and may be willing to offer support in our hopes and plans for the future.

Upon my return, I gave a report of my convention experience at our retreat Sunday Service on July 15 and used the Swedenborg quotation, ". . . all things are full of God and take their portion from that fullness" (*True Christian Religion* §304 [3]). All participated in the discussion that followed. Our attendance included people from ages three to eighty-plus years. We felt the fullness of God, as we had come together in the space we are blessed with in our Deland Retreat.

We are reaching out to the Convention of the Swedenborgian Church for help. We have grounds outside with needs. The main house has needs. Three apartments on the property may also be able to be restored.

Our vision is to be a facility that can be available and used by our Swedenborgian Convention people, as well as our own church and community. Our Chrysalis Retreat energy is flowing in our Sunday services and weekly volunteer work. There is much to do.

Vice-president of General Convention, Tom Neuenfeldt, has agreed to be a contact person for people who have suggestions or offers of assistance for organizing a group to take a mission trip to do volunteer work at the Chrysalis Retreat, probably in the early part of next year.

Come join us!

If you have suggestions or are interested in being part of such a mission work group, please contact Tom Neuenfeldt at [vp@swedenborg.org](mailto:vp@swedenborg.org).

Carolyn Salyer is president of the board of the Swedenborg Chrysalis Retreat in Deland, Florida. She can be reached at [carolynsalyer@cfl.rr.com](mailto:carolynsalyer@cfl.rr.com)

### Passages

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participated in some Swedenborgian Church annual conventions.

Survivors include his wife Crystal, son William, daughter Elizabeth and sisters Betsy Bazell and Gretchen LaGodna. Memorial contributions are suggested to The Edward Bohlander Scholarship Fund, WKU, or to the Kentucky Innocence Project, 5 Mill Creek Rd., Frankfort, KY. ☪

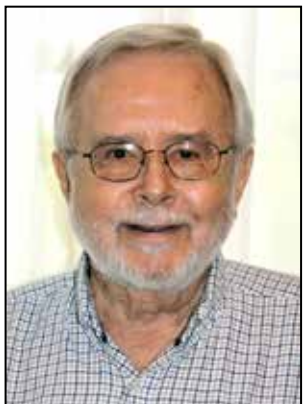
## Passages

### New Members

On September 16, 2018, **Nikiar Ahmadi**, **Maria de Los Angeles**, **George Economy**, **Skyler Schubert**, and **Robert Spoer**, and on Sept. 23, 2018, **Dell Rose**, and **Jon Umstead**, became members of the Church of Holy City in Washington, DC, Rev. Rich Tafel officiating. Church president, Dr. Malcolm Peck, gave welcoming gifts to the new members.

### Deaths

**Rev. Robert David (Bob) Leas** entered the fullness of the spiritual world on September 15, 2018 in East Tawas, Michigan. He will be greatly missed in the General Convention. He served multiple terms on the Board of Trustees for Convention's theological school from 2000 to 2013, a tenure that spanned its last year as the Swedenborg School of Religion and its first dozen years as the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. He volunteered for several years



to take on the considerable job of clerk of the board and he also served as vice-chair for a year that required his serving as acting chair for part of the year.

Beyond his warmth, humor, and skillful collegial style, his service on the seminary board was especially useful for several aspects of his professional expertise. Though he became extensively involved in the Swedenborgian Church through his wife, Marjie Leas, Rev. Leas never left his Presbyterian faith and world. Out of that professional formation and career, he brought valuable perspectives from a major mainline denomination to the

seminary's new setting among mainline denominations at Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union.

Having successfully led congregations for a number of years, Bob was intimately familiar with the wide range of skills and training necessary for ministry with groups of people. But it was especially due to Bob's passion for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), required for Swedenborgian ministers, that he contributed a focused expertise as a trustee. In mid-career, he had pursued his deep interest in pastoral theology and pastoral care by becoming a certified supervisor in CPE. By the time he joined the seminary board he had shepherded scores of future clergy in their pastoral care formation through the 400-hour clinical program known as the Basic Unit of

CPE as well as scores of future chaplains through the advanced units of CPE. He could be counted on for warm and vocal support and counsel for this requirement for Swedenborgian clergy training.

In retirement, Bob continued his devotion to CPE by becoming history manager for the National Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. In that endeavor, he struck upon the idea to write what has become the only book-length biography of Anton Boisen, the founder of CPE, who was also a professor of practical theology and an American theologian of note. Published by The Journal of Pastoral Care Publications in 2009, *Anton Theophilus Boisen: His Life, Work, Impact, and Theological Legacy* offers a well-researched story of Boisen's life and work.

During research for the book, Bob was fascinated to learn that Boisen had taken interest in Swedenborg. After

persevering through three crises that landed him in a mental health institution, Boisen studied the significance of such episodes in the lives of people with strong spiritual commitments. Separating wheat from chaff among religious claimants who appear by conventional standards to have suffered a break from "normal" reality, Boisen selected Swedenborg for a category of "successful explorers" who came through a personal crisis involving hallucinations to emerge with an integration of their personality onto a higher spiritual plane. Swedenborgians will generally not agree that Swedenborg was hallucinatory, but they will appreciate Boisen's assessment of Swedenborg as a potent spiritual pioneer.

Beyond this connection, Bob took great interest in Swedenborgian thought, owned a number of Swedenborg's works, and always enjoyed discussing (and at times testing) Swedenborg's critique of traditional Christian doctrines. In addition to the seminary trustee meetings twice a year, Bob frequently joined Marjie in church and denominational activities, such as the annual convention, Almont summer sessions, the annual Johnny Appleseed Festival in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and association gatherings. His joy in Swedenborgian fellowship was obvious, and he delighted not only in its community life but its deep spirituality as well.

—Jim Lawrence

**Edward William Bohlander** (born in 1945) died on July 1, 2018, following an injury while traveling in Vietnam. He recently retired as professor emeritus from Western Kentucky University, where he taught for thirty-five years after earning his Ph.D. from Ohio State University. As a teenager, Edward attended the Cincinnati Swedenborgian Church. He studied at Urbana Junior College and

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### 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 questioning 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.

In his theological writings, Swedenborg shared 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.

## DC Church Hosts Peace-Making Event

**O**n September 17th, the Church of the Holy City in Washington DC hosted the first of a series of peace-making discussions with religious leaders in the politics of peace.

For the first event, Venerable Pomnyun, considered to be South



Korea's leading Buddhist monk, held a dialogue with Rev. Rich Tafel and a dinner audience. They discussed the future

of the Korean peninsula's peace process. The event itself was broadcast on Facebook live to South Korea, where thousands also watched. ☸

## Swedenborg's Last Judgment / Supplements

*"Let them now know that the heavens we see above us are not going to pass away, and neither is this earth that we are living on. No, both of them are going to survive. And let them now know that the 'new heaven' and 'new earth' mean a new church both in heaven and on earth"* (Last Judgment §1).

**L**ast Judgment / Supplements is a New Century Edition volume, translated by George F. Dole and Jonathan S. Rose, available from the Swedenborg foundation and Amazon for \$6.99. It contains two short works, originally published separately, both of which concern the Last Judgment.

In *Last Judgment*, first published in 1758, Swedenborg explains that the Last Judgment, as foretold in the book of Revelation, has already occurred in the spiritual world and was effected by the Lord in order to restore the balance

between good and evil in heaven and on Earth. In *Supplements*, Swedenborg introduces his understanding of the connection between heaven and earth and how that connection has played out over the course of human history.

In a recent episode of "Swedenborg & Life" on YouTube, titled "Why Don't People Believe in Life After Death?" (<https://tinyurl.com/ybw3csw5>), co-hosts Curtis Childs and Jonathan Rose discuss excerpts from *Last Judgment / Supplements*.

Also, the OffTheLeftEye production team created a satirical "movie trailer" for *Last Judgment* as part of a larger effort to promote *The Shorter Works of 1758* New Century Edition when it was released in April of this year. View at <https://tinyurl.com/yakrylhr>. ☸