



## That First Great Commandment

BY GEORGE DOLE

In the talk I gave at last year's annual convention (September 2015 *Messenger*: <http://tinyurl.com/h23ufcm>), I spent most of the time on matters directly concerned with the second great commandment of love to the neighbor; and when I turned

to the first, the commandment of love to the Lord, I focused on the subject of divine providence. At the end of the last of my "lead-in" *Messenger* articles, I suggested that we might give more attention to that first commandment, and that we might be-



gin by giving serious attention to the phrase, "to behold the beauty of the Lord" (Psalm 27:4), but I made no such beginning. As a result, nowhere in that talk will you find the word "worship."

*Messenger Readers may recall the series of articles that George Dole wrote (January–June 2015 Messengers (<http://tinyurl.com/h23ufcm>) that culminated with his 2015 Convention keynote address, "A Call."*

*When asked if there was one idea that he wished to carry forward into 2016, George replied, "In that series of articles and in my remarks at Convention, I spent a lot of time on the second great commandment (love to the neighbor). I wish now to talk about that first great commandment."*

*As for "love to the neighbor," participants in the educational program at our convention had an experience of "translating Swedenborg's generalities into the concrete specifics"—good and true into caring about you and understanding you clearly.*

*With regard to "love to the Lord," George now reminds us that on Sunday mornings, generations of Swedenborgians have heard the words, "to behold the beauty of the Lord."*

*In this article, the reader will find many timely ideas. I was especially taken by a gem from our theology, paired with an image of listening to music, which evoked a moment of being touched by the kind of beauty our world so desperately needs.*

—Rev. Gard Perry

en to love the neighbor. We must be drawn; and ultimately, what must draw us is an inspiring sense of the beauty of the Lord. Nothing else is as perfect. Nothing else is infinitely, eternally trustworthy.

That's not as serious a defect as it might seem. *Secrets of Heaven* (§8254) says emphatically that "The quintessential worship of the Lord consists of a life of charity, but not in a life of piety apart from that"; so the essential "likeness" of the two commandments makes it impossible to put them in separate compartments—except in the shallower regions of our minds. "Charlie Baker went to church—he never missed a Sunday. Charlie Baker went to hell for what he did on Monday."

All the same, when you consider that our church buildings have been designed for worship services and that the Sunday morning service has been the mainstay of our church programs, when you consider that we seem to evaluate

the health of the church by its attendance records, when you consider the countless times people have found meaning in church services, "the life of piety" surely deserves attention. Swedenborg did remark that people who "make worship from love and charity essential likewise do these things [of formal worship] . . . very earnestly and diligently, but they do not locate the essential of worship in these acts" (*Secrets of Heaven* 1175:2). The earnestness and diligence are rooted in their everyday living, and those roots go deep.

We can be "driven" to good behavior by such "external bonds" as fear of punishment, but we cannot be driv-

**We can be "driven" to good behavior by such "external bonds" as fear of punishment, but we cannot be driven to love the neighbor.**

The phrase came to my own mind because I grew up with General Convention's First Order of Service,

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**The Editor's Desk**



**Doctrine Divides**

Emanuel Swedenborg defined the New Church (Church of the New Jerusalem) as the culminating era of religion, when denominations fall away and a universal understanding of the inner meaning of the Bible leads people's spirituality. Early readers of Swedenborg's works were inspired, and attempted to bring his revelations into the doctrines of their churches. But, of course, religious denominations are by nature conservative and do not respond positively to radical changes in their doctrines. Eventually, individuals coalesced to form religious groups: societies; congregations; associations; and, eventually, denominational organizations.

Three denominations in the United States inform their Christian beliefs and doctrines with Swedenborg's writings: The General Convention of the New Jerusalem (aka the Swedenborgian Church), the publisher of *the Messenger*; The General Church of the New Jerusalem; and the Lord's New Church.

In this issue of *the Messenger*, we have an article from Dawn Potts explicating some of the spiritual basis of the Lord's New Church (page 6). Differences between the Swedenborgian/

New Church denominations can seem arcane to the casual reader, but there are important differences that keep them separate. For example, Ms. Potts makes reference to something General Convention does not recognize: the inner, spiritual meaning of Swedenborg's book *Conjugal Love (Marriage Love)*.

These kinds of differences in doctrine and belief highlight a difficulty in finding agreement within all religious communities. Christians believe in the same holy book, as do Muslims, but both divide into sects or denominations that keep them apart in worship and community, in extreme cases vilifying or, in the most extreme case, killing one another.

An example of the extremes of those differences are highlighted in Jane Siebert's article "A Few Thoughts on Terrorism (page 4)."

There is much discussion in America about the extent to which Islam-

ic extremism permeates the Muslim community. Rev. Siebert explores the definition of extremism and terrorism and their presence and causes in Islam.

These articles and subjects may cause us to contemplate the inner conflicts that pervade our thoughts about moral choices and our attitudes and actions in response to them. We must decide, in every aspect of living, what orthodoxies, authorities, doctrines, and moral hierarchies we accept, which we reject, which we parse to pick and choose from, and how we arrange the hierarchy of conflicting claims on our beliefs and behavior. The task is difficult but necessary.

—Herb Ziegler

**Correction**

The photo of graffiti on page 151 of the November 2015 *Messenger* is located in London, not Stockholm.



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**Church Calendar**

- **January 15–18, 2016:** SPLATZ Retreat (10–13 year-olds) • LaPorte New Church, Indiana
- **April 16, 2016:** General Council Conference Call meeting
- **April 22–23, 2016:** CSS Board meeting • Berkeley, California

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## Letter from the President



*2015–16: The Year of Spiritual Uses:  
The Call to Be a Blessing*

Dear Friends,

It is a new year! The Advent Season has come and remains, continually re-emerging in the hearts and minds of those who honor God by doing unto their neighbor as they would have their neighbor do unto them. Such a simple concept and, yet, so demanding to consistently do! But what a precious gift to give one another. It costs nothing but a little self-discipline and perhaps giving up our tendency to indulge in self-righteous emotionalism. I don't know about you, but I can certainly afford that.

So, looking ahead to another year, as I have been saying for the past five years, change is happening all around us. And now it is most certainly happening among us. A number of our churches are going through what Swedenborg calls "vastation." While this is a rather unpleasant sounding word with ominous overtones, it refers to the process undergone within a chrysalis when what was once a caterpillar disintegrates and reforms, only to emerge with the changing season as a butterfly. So it is with a kind of regret and sadness yet, at the same time, with a sense of expectation and excitement, that I report that the San Diego and Cleveland Societies are selling their houses of worship. In their own ways, each is experiencing a kind of death yet, at the same time, looking to re-emerge in a new form. In other places, a similar process seems imminent as several other congregations continue to dwindle and are looking at what seems to be an inevitable transformation in outward form. Yet out of these vastation processes, who knows what creative forms of "church" may emerge?

On the positive side, at its last meeting, General Council took action on a proposal that was submit-

ted and appointed a committee and budgeted funds to develop a Convention-level online presence. This committee will begin its work and, with diligence and divine guidance, have something very exciting to present at our annual convention this June. Speaking of vastation and reformation: this year's convention will be taking place in Ohio at Urbana University, which has a long history with the Swedenborgian Church. Urbana underwent its own vastation process and, with the presence and support of Franklin University, has emerged, renewed and enlivened, as an institution dedicated to higher learning and the development of the whole person. While attending the annual convention, we will be able to witness and participate in the dedication of a new on-campus worship site dedicated to the first woman ordained by General Convention and long-time professor and chaplain at Urbana, the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey.

It is a new year, and it is a new time. As we release and say goodbye to the past, so too, we greet and look forward with expectation to the future and all its possibilities. It is a challenging and exciting time to be part of this church. May the future be for us all an Advent of the Holy Spirit in all things, and in all things may we find blessings in being of use.

At the recent meeting of the Maine Association, the subject of our participation in the Maine Council of Churches came up. The Swedenborgian Church in Maine has been involved in this organization since long before I entered the picture as minister of the Portland Church back in 1989. Both Sue Turley and Robert McCluskey, as ministers of the Portland Church, had been active members before me. So as I got involved, even back then, I was made aware that I had big shoes to fill and a well-worn path to follow. Nonetheless, I was warmly welcomed and very much valued my involvement in a group that has proved to be a dynamic and effective presence in political and social activities in this state.

So now I find myself re-engaging with this organization that is still going strong. It is operating under new leadership, and yet I was pleasantly surprised to find a number of familiar faces of people who actually remembered me from "the old days." And the

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# A Few Thoughts on Terrorism

REV. JANE SIEBERT

*This article was written before the terrorist attack in San Bernardino in December.*



I was visiting my 96-year-old mother when Paris was attacked on November 13. We watched the carnage and terror until we could take no more. My mother kept asking, “What would make a person do that?”

By this time ISIL was already proudly taking credit for the devastation and killings. I tried to explain Islamic jihad to her; I realized that I did not understand it either. I could not explain why someone or some group would kill innocent people in the name of God or rather, in the name of their understanding of God.

So when I got home I began to read what I could find and I came across some interesting information. There is nothing to justify this horrific act, but I found some things to think about as we ponder this situation and what it means to us as Christians. First, let me assure you I am not an expert on this subject. I am just someone like you or my mom trying to understand this unfathomable attack on diners, sports fans, and music enthusiasts, in Paris.

## So, What is Jihad?

The word *jihad* is Arabic and means struggling or striving to be a good follower of Islam. It has come to mean “Holy War,” in the popular consciousness, but that is more related to how it is portrayed in our media, not the Quran, which is the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, who originated the religion of Islam in the seventh century AD. Jihad can refer to internal struggle as well as external striving to be a good Muslim.

Military jihad is acceptable if it is re-

quired to protect the Islamic faith against others. But there are strict rules of engagement, and innocents, such as women, children, or invalids, must never be harmed. The prophet Mohammed led his followers into battle, and when they returned, he advised them,

“This day we have returned from the minor jihad to the major jihad,” which meant returning from armed battle to the peaceful battle for self-control and betterment. “Jihad” in its inception is not a violent concept or declaration of war against other religions. The Islamic Supreme Council affirms that most calls for violent jihad are not sanctioned by Islam.

It is helpful to compare Jesus’ teaching from Matthew 7: 4-5.

How can you say to your friend, “Let me take the bit of sawdust out of your eye?” How can you say this while there is a piece of wood in your own eye? You pretender! First take the piece of wood out of your own eye. Then you will be able to see clearly to take the bit of sawdust out of your friend’s eye.

The difference Jesus taught was to look at our own shortcomings first, work to become a better person, before we attempt to correct others. It is easier to see what we perceive as wrong in someone else, or some other religion or government, than to look at the shortfalls and wrongdoings within ourselves.

## What is an Islamic Extremist?

The problem with Islam is not that Muslims are bad people—that’s obviously not true; it is the growing number of disenfranchised young people who are being drawn to Islamic extremism and recruited to join.

Islamic extremists believe that their

religion, Islam, should be at the center of the world. Some extremists, often called Salafis, are pursuing a purely religious idea based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam; and some, often called Islamists or political Islamists, want to create a worldwide Islamic state. They believe that Islam is the only true religion, and must therefore become a world government, replacing all other religions and secular beliefs. A small subset of extremists are terrorists, who believe any means, including deadly force, is sanctioned by Islam in this quest.

Terrorist groups are easily recognized, as their terrorism pervades the news. ISIL (ISIS, Daesh), Al-Qaeda and other groups have caused the name of Islam to become synonymous with terrorism and violence in the minds of many, but they do not represent the vast majority of Muslims.

## What about Christian Extremists?

I remember my embarrassment when I traveled around the country and mentioned I was from Kansas, and people would ask about the Baptist minister Fred Phelps and his followers, who picketed funerals of soldiers and led anti-gay rallies. I don’t think they ever killed anyone, but they certainly killed the reputation of Christians with many people. They were extremists in their interpretation of the Bible, and there are others that do it more quietly but with just as much hatred.

There is another group called the Hutaree Militia who believe in defending themselves against the current state of the world and often cite prophetic verses that refer to the end times and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There are similar groups, such as the Christian Identity, who, with strong racist undertones, profess a belief in defense of Christian values that sometimes leads to violence.

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### What Fuels Extremism?

Many Muslims feel stuck between inadequate choices for identity: copying the West or embracing fundamentalist Islam. They often feel that choosing Western cultural norms separates them from their Muslim identity and that embracing fundamentalism makes them pawns of dictatorial leaders stuck in the seventh century. Organized extremist groups can reach many of these Muslims through social media and the internet, offering them an alternative path to authenticity. They offer them a way to be authentic through indoctrination into a

**What the extremist is really saying is “I am great. I am special. I am favored in God’s sight. I’ve got it all figured out.” It is self-exaltation and the idolatry of corrupt power.**

self-contained logic of thought and action, taken step-by-step. The potential recruits feel listened to, a powerful lure to adopt the newfound ideology. The group leaders use the age-old demagogic tactic of blaming “the enemy” for their problems, engendering feelings of aggression. Some take the next step of adopting the moral universe presented by the group leaders, which includes terrorism. Some then take the step to a rigid us-versus-them world view. A tiny number proceed to engaging in terrorist acts. As the recruit moves up the extremist ladder to terrorism, his freedom of choice becomes more and more proscribed, until he has moved to a place where the terrorist act is the only choice left.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing is a psychological ex-

planation of a process that can be exploited by any terrorist group of any religious or political stripe.

### There Is a Wide Variety of Extremists who Turn to Violence.

Our world is not terrorized only by Islamic extremists. We have witnessed many home-grown extremists in our country: white supremacists; anti-government fanatics; and yes, even Christian extremists. When individuals are not content with quietly pursuing their beliefs and they become displeased with the state of political or social affairs, they often choose violence as an expression of their discontent and as a device with which to draw attention to their cause. Abortion clinics frequently receive some of this violence as shootings and bombings.

Patrick Mahoney, director of the Christian Defense Coalition, explained that there are “extremists in every movement. . . . I think that extremists opposed to abortion got frustrated, felt they were losing the battle, and felt it was incumbent upon themselves to resort to violence.” Mahoney offers one view of extremists: they are unwelcomed groups within larger, peaceful religious organizations. Extremists range from suicide bombers to murderers of doctors who perform legal abortions, with a variety of religions at the source.

We remember all too well the violence in our own country with the truck bombing at the Federal Building in Oklahoma City some two decades ago. Initially the news media speculated that it had been carried out by Muslim militants, but it was a local, Timothy McVeigh, who lived in Kansas, an antigovernment extremist, who killed 168 people, including nineteen children.

And we remember the slaying of nine African-Americans in a Charleston church this past year, as they invited the shooter to pray with them. They

reached out to this white supremacist, and he returned their Christian brotherhood by savagely murdering them.

But religions and their cultural contexts are different when it comes to extremism. They differ in beliefs about how to handle opposition to their faith and in the percentage of adherents who are strict fundamentalists. We cannot excuse terrorism by equating them with Christian or secular extremists or by looking back at the Crusades. We must seek a way to understand and act in a way that helps Islam find a better road to authenticity.

### What Does the Bible Have to Say about Extremism?

I recently came across a verse in the book of Acts that caused me to stop and think, “God has no favorites.” The full verse is from Peter when he is surprised that “The truth that I have now come to realize is that God has no favorites” (Acts 10:34). This is the disciple Peter, the rock upon which the Lord says he is going to build his church. And yet, Peter proclaims that he has come to realize that God has no favorites.

All of us can learn from this verse. God loves us all the same, no favorites. We do not do “good deeds” or “horrific deeds” to make God love us more or to earn rewards in heaven. We do good deeds because we are people of God, and the love of God radiates through us and makes us want to help others. We don’t follow the Golden Rule to be seen by others as holy. We love one another because God first loved us.

Some good advice on the subject is found in 1 John 2:9–11.

Whoever declares himself to be in the light, and yet hates his brother, is in the darkness even now. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause of offense in him. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness, and in darkness he walks, and he does

<sup>1</sup> Moghaddam, Fathali M., *Terrorists’ Point of View: What They Experience and Why They Come to Destroy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006)

# The Focus of the Lord's New Church

BY DAWN BARNITZ POTTS

The Messenger, as the newsletter and journal of the Swedenborgian Church (General Convention) is committed to a free exchange of ideas concerning Christianity, the Bible, and the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. In that spirit, we present a view from a member of a denomination guided by the same texts as we are, the Lord's New Church. The author is sharing Swedenborgian spirituality from the viewpoint in the Lord's New Church.



**T**he Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma (LNC) is the smallest branch of the New Church but very much alive and looking with energy to the future. LNC just celebrated a positive and productive four-day assembly: seventeen African ministers; ministers from Sweden, Serbia, and Croatia; and two priests

from the Ukraine attended the clergy meetings, and guests from around the world came for the assembly.

When we get to the other world

we are not going to be asked, "what branch of the New Church did you belong to?" We are told that the Lord loves variety and that every society in heaven is unique, yet, the different societies make one heaven.

It is a positive thing that the branches of the New Church are increasingly communicating with each other. It is, in part, the fruit of the women's biennial Gathering Leaves retreats, which include women from all branches of the New Church. Swedenborg's Writ-

ings that state that when charity reigns, doctrinal differences do not divide, inspired them to reach out to each other. All can celebrate this accomplishment of outreach. In the Lord's sight, the Church is one, regardless of organizations. It is our love for Him and for each other that matters.

## Where is the Focus of LNC?

In order to develop spiritually, we obviously have to step back and become aware of our own thinking. But how often do we consider where our focus is and where our thoughts are directed, especially when we are reading and studying the truths of the Second Coming? How often do we observe where our mind is focused? Is our focus on the Lord when we study or are

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## A Few Thoughts

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not know where he is going. For the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And 1 John 4:20–21

If anyone says that he loves God, but hates his brother, then he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he does see, in what way can he love God, whom he does not see? And this is the commandment that we have from God, that he who loves God must also love his brother.

When we move to any kind of violence to prove our love of God, we are not worshipping God. What the extremist is really saying is "I am great. I am special. I am favored in God's sight. I've got it all figured out." This is self-exaltation and the idolatry of corrupt power. This is a very dangerous place to be, both for the extremists' salvation and the safety of the rest of the

world. They think they are unstoppable because they believe they are killing innocent people as a service to God and thereby earning a higher reward in heaven. But they are wrong. They are operating in deep darkness.

## What is next?

The other thing my 96-year-old mother said, as we sat glued to the television watching the news media piece together the events in Paris, was "I am glad I have lived when I did, because I wonder what this world is coming to."

I said, "Oh Mom, you lived through WW II, the killing of all those innocent Jewish people. You lived through the mob violence of the twenties and thirties, the Dust Bowl, and the Great Depression. There are difficulties and evil in all generations."

What the Islamic terrorists want is to create fear in our hearts. Because fear drives out love. The events of Par-

is are terrifying. We will never forget 9/11. But we cannot let them win by living in terror and fear of traveling and gathering and living in this great country, a country based on freedom. We can be vigilant without standing in fear. We can grieve the loss of life and not lose the love that opens our hearts to refugees.

God is on the side of love and goodness, not hate and evil, and it is not about favoritism, it is about the truth. "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Hold fast to God's Truth as Jesus lived it and taught us.

"Goodness holds life from the Lord within it; truth does not possess any life except what comes through goodness, so that goodness is the soul of truth" (*Arcana Coelestia* §3863:2). ☩

Rev. Jane Siebert is the president-elect of the Swedenborgian Church. She lives on a farm in Pretty Prairie, Kansas.

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we leaving the Lord out? It is of utmost importance that we observe that the Lord is our focus when we are studying the Word. Especially because the Writings can appear to be just plain teachings: a non-poetic natural, rational revelation on a scientific level, and thus not seen as divine truth and not approached in holiness.

Why is it of utmost importance that we lift our mind to the Lord when studying the Word? Are we aware that our focus has a consequence? Yes, because when we are looking to the Lord, He is present. And only when the Lord is present is there enlightenment.

The Word explains to us how everything in the natural world relates in some way to the spiritual world. In the long history of mankind, through all the thousands of years people lived on this earth, microscopes did not exist, and surprise, the invention of microscopes corresponds to the revelation of the spiritual sense of the Word. Only then did we learn that there are things we cannot see with our eyes. We discovered the swirling circling atoms and electrons that compose all matter. Everything material that looks and feels solid to us is not solid—it is full of moving energy. We are told that the spiritual world and the natural world act as one. Isn't this a perfect image of the Lord's Word and an image of how the Divine is hidden within the external letter of the Word.

With a microscope, we are able to see deep beyond the surface of our external world almost into the energy of life that makes up our very existence. We also have come to see and understand how the Lord can open our mind and lead us to see spiritual truths within the external letter of the Word.

People, for centuries, saw the truths in the letter of the Word of the Old Testament but did not see the spiritual, divine truths within. The Lord

spoke in parables because spiritual truths must be clothed with the letter. We can read and understand the Word naturally and scientifically, but we are taught that it is The Lord who is the microscope for seeing the spiritual within the letter of the Word. The *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* §26 says, "No one can see the spiritual sense except from the Lord alone." From *Arcana Coelestia* (AC) §6362:

There is an internal sense of the Word that does not appear in the letter, nor to anyone, unless he knows the correspondences of natural things with spiritual things and not at all to him who does not know what the spiritual and what the celestial are."

No one can know spiritual truths or what is spiritual or celestial without looking to the Lord in everything of his or her life and shunning evils. Nor can anyone see what is celestial without struggling within themselves and fighting against every natural and sensual love—from the Lord.

The interior growth and reception of the Divine in the Church depends on continually recognizing the Divine as something higher than our own thinking. The first day of our personal creation is the acknowledgement that the good and true are something higher. Each of us must come into that spiritual awareness—the innocent morning light of the first day of creation—and actively bring that first state of regeneration into life and keep it living. This means becoming aware of what is from the self and what is of the Lord. When we come to a deep consciousness that the Writings of Swedenborg are divine truths and are the Lord himself in our midst, we can be sure we are not leaving the Lord out.

In *Conjugal Love*, there are beautiful descriptions of marriage. We know that the conjunction of the Lord with the Church is called a marriage and that the conjunction of the Divine and

the human is called a marriage, but our minds do not immediately think of these meanings when we hear the word marriage; we do not automatically think of the conjunction of the good and true as a marriage. And when we read a sentence such as, "All joys from first to last are gathered into this love," don't we automatically think of the relationship between a husband and wife? Do we ever think these sentences are about the joy of loving the Lord or about our conjunction with Him?

We don't usually think of ourselves as being married to the Lord. But these are the joys of conjugal love when we focus on an understanding of marriage and an inward realization that it is the Lord who is our bridegroom to us—to the Church—and that marriage is within us. We, all of us, are the bride and the Lord is our bridegroom, although for a man to think of himself as a bride, he must lift his mind above the letter to what is spiritual.

We must struggle to let the Lord open our sight. It is of utmost importance that we understand how, first, conjugal love has to be a marriage in our mind in order to understand regeneration. But this is the marriage the Lord calls us to.

Much is yet to be understood concerning the interior meanings in the work *Conjugal Love* in relation to our regeneration. For example, in AC §895e, we read that the church is called the bride when it is being established (*instauratur*) and called wife when it is established (*instaurata*). These are separate states of the Church that must be formed within each of us.

We must develop our understanding of these interior states. There is much work ahead, especially in coming to understand how repentance is paramount to opening our minds to the Lord. We battle with our *proprial* selves to conjoin what is good and true, both in our minds and in our lives—

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## First Great Commandment

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which begins,

*The Lord is in his holy temple: let  
all the earth keep silence before him,*

and goes on to say,

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life:

*to behold the beauty of the Lord  
and to inquire in his temple.*

Having grown up a bit more, I have come to regard it as sad (to say the least) that in that order of service, this is the last we hear of that incredibly intense phrase, “to behold the beauty of the Lord.” Here in Bath, I have tried to remedy that failure by regularly opening services with either the transfiguration scene or the vision of the risen Christ in the first chapter of Revelation; but I’ve done so burdened by an awareness that mere words, even the words of Scripture, are no guarantee that the beauty is actually felt. In my own experience, Rev. Emily Jane Lemole came closer when she opened a service with that exquisite articulation of the beauty of the Lord, the twenty-third Psalm. Let’s face it, though—if we actually *did* “behold the beauty of the Lord,” we would be wordless. We would choke up completely. We would be overwhelmed. We would never again use the adjective “awesome” casually, because that would feel like taking the Lord’s name in vain.

Think for a bit about the encounters with a “being of light” related in Raymond Moody’s classic, *Life After Life*. Those who have encountered that being and come back to tell the tale are unanimous. The light is indescribably brilliant. It does not hurt the eyes. Moody writes, “It has a very definite personality. The love and warmth which emanate from this being to the dying person are utterly beyond words,

and [the dying person] feels completely surrounded by it and taken up in it, completely at ease and accepted in the presence of this being.”<sup>1</sup>

It is in that spirit of warmth, love, and acceptance that the dying person undergoes a kind of wordless life review. “It is often obvious,” Moody writes, “that the being can see the individual’s whole life displayed and that he doesn’t himself need information. His only intention is to provoke reflection” (p. 64). Warm, loving, thoughtful—this is a “last judgment” scene that bears no resemblance whatever to the grisly terrors sometimes attached to “the rapture.”

“Almost everyone,” Moody writes, “has stressed the importance in this life of trying to cultivate love for others, a love of a unique and profound kind. One man who met the being of light felt totally loved and accepted, even while his whole life was displayed in a panorama for the being to see. He felt that the ‘question’ that the being was asking him was whether he was able to love others in the same way. He now feels that it is his commission while on earth to try to learn to be able to do so” (pp 92f.). The second commandment follows seamlessly from the encounter with the first.

In the September *Messenger* (page 124: <http://tinyurl.com/h23ufcm>), Gard Perry described the event that followed my talk.

In an experiential exercise of conversation between two people (or in a small group) we practiced . . . “caring about you and understanding you clearly.”

What a difference an experience of what is good and true makes! A number of participants spoke to me about how much they had learned about the teachings of the church and becoming a newer church in that conversational time.

It sounds to me as though Gard was leading genuine worship experiences, brief tastes of the marriage of love and understanding, little glimpses of “the beauty of the Lord,” experiences of the second commandment that embodied the first.

Our traditions and our church buildings offer opportunities for people to have “mini-near-death experiences”—to rise above their entanglement in everyday affairs and see them—and themselves—in the Lord’s loving light, with startling clarity and deep appreciation. They should know and feel that they are both loved and understood. Worshipers should find themselves effortlessly obeying the most frequent commandment in the Gospels—“Fear not.”

To the extent that this happens in a worship service, the congregation is brought to the brink of something *truly* awesome. Beauty (as any advertising executive will tell you) is powerful stuff. The beauty of the Lord is powerful on a truly cosmic scale. I dream of having such experiences offered in a sanctuary that is flooded with images of the universe as seen from the Hubble telescope, perhaps alternating with images of earth as seen from outer space,

***We need that kind of sense of proportion.***

I recently ran across a revealing comment by one physicist. Speaking of snowflakes, he wrote, “. . . no one but the most ardent fundamentalists would suggest that each and every such object is lovingly and painstakingly and, most important, purposefully created by a divine intelligence. In fact, many laypeople as well as scientists revel in our ability to explain how snowflakes and rainbows can spontaneously appear, based on the simple, elegant laws of physics.”<sup>2</sup>

*Continues on page 9*

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Moody, Jr., *Life after Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, p. xxi. Kraus, however, offers no such explanation.

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What an ego trip! Look how smart we are! We don't need a God. We don't want a God, for then we couldn't revel in our own wondrous ability to explain. Einstein was far more intelligent when he described the universe as revealing "an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."<sup>3</sup> That is the kind of humility that opens the mind to discovery. It is highly recommended by none other than Swedenborg, who wrote, "If we do not realize that there are infinite things we do not know beyond what we do know, we cannot experience the holiness of ignorance that angels enjoy."<sup>4</sup>

This kind of holiness is just as remote from the know-it-all fundamentalist as it is from the know-it-all atheist, incidentally; and when intellectual pride infects religion, it attacks the very heart of true humility. I find myself thinking that we should pay less attention to the theologians who have written about God and more, far more, to the silent architects who have designed cathedrals of awesome proportions and surpassing beauty, doing their best to immerse us in beauty.

The present article was on the verge of being sent to *the Messenger* when in close succession I ran across a fascinating statement in *Secrets of Heaven* (§4334:6) and a wonderful little parable by the eighteenth-century Hasid Baal Shem Tov.<sup>5</sup>

The first was an explanation of the spiritual sense of Matthew 24:38, where it says that at the time of Noah,

3 Einstein, Albert, *The World As I See It* (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1999), p. 29.

4 *qui non agnoscit quod infinita sint quae non novit, prae illis quae novit, is non potest esse in sanctitate ignorantiae in qua sunt angeli.*

5 Cited in Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), p. 12.

## The Lord's New Church

Continued from page 7

the conjunction that is a marriage.

We can all experience the interior joy of *conjugal* love when we love bringing to life the truths that we see and when we love to love our neighbor. This is the Lord's marriage within us. "Everyone who is in faith in the Lord has an idea of the Lord according to their capacity of elevating their thoughts" (AC §6380). The Lord is reaching out to every person in whatever state they are in. AC §1059 says, "A sign of the Lord's presence is charity, not only with a person of the Church but also with those outside the Church."

The Lord came into the world, and His message was to love one another, to be forgiving of each other, to show mercy to each other, and to trust in

"they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them away." Swedenborg wrote that at the time of the final judgment,

. . . the people of the church will not then know that they are flooded by what is evil and false, since the evil and false things to which they are devoted make it impossible for them to know what the "good of love to the Lord" is, and what "the good of charity to the neighbor" is.

The little parable:

[really resolute atheists are like] a deaf man who for the first time comes on a violinist playing in the town square while the townspeople, moved by the lilt and rhythm of his playing, dance in joy. Unable to hear the music, he concludes that they are all mad.

Can we hear the music, the music that would incline us to dance in joy? Are we *listening*? I find myself thinking that we should recruit poets to bring more beauty to our discourses and artists to bring at least touches of loveli-

ness to our worship spaces. We cannot afford to build cathedrals, but we might bring to our little spaces an intimacy and intensity of beauty of striking clarity and power and depart from formal worship knowing that we are commissioned while on earth to try to learn to be able share the love and light of the beautiful Being of light.

Lao-Tse brings the urgency of the commission home to me:

If there is to be peace in the world,  
There must be peace in the nations;  
If there is to be peace in the nations,  
There must be peace in the cities;  
If there is to be peace in the cities,  
There must be peace between neighbors;  
If there is to be peace between neighbors,  
There must be peace in the home;  
If there is to be peace in the home,  
*There must be peace in the heart.* ☩

Dawn Barnitz Potts recently published *Twelve Qualities of the Spiritual Mind*, which her brother, Harry Barnitz, started and she finished. She is treasurer of the Philadelphia Society of the Lord's New Church. She sculpts and writes, and she and her husband have twenty-one grandchildren.

Rev. Dr. George Dole lives in Bath, Maine, with his wife Lois. He is adjunct faculty at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

# Eric Allison: A Continuing Journey of Healing

Rev. Eric Allison suffered a debilitating stroke in 2008, from which he continues to struggle for improvement in both physical and mental function. The "Eric Angel Team" reports on his progress (November 2008 Messenger, p. 131: <http://tinyurl.com/h23ufcm>).



Rev. Eric Allison turned 66 in December, and he would love to hear from friends, acquaintances, and fellow Swedenborgians; he loves to receive phone calls. (Email the Angel Team [[email4EricAllison@gmail.com](mailto:email4EricAllison@gmail.com)] for his phone number.) It's been another active and productive year for Eric as he continues on his healing path, and several friends want to share stories of his strength and determination from their experiences.

## From Ruth:

Eric continues to brighten Ballard Landmark (his home) with his fresh spirit, and other residents enjoy helping him out when they are able. He attends t'ai chi classes twice a week, personal fitness training twice a week, and swimming four times a week, all at Ballard Landmark. He walks to speech therapy and other weekly medical appointments in his neighborhood and gets there on time with no reminders needed. He is very pleased with his new skill of riding a public bus on his own to a local medical facility when the weather prevents walking. He manages his daily medications mostly on his own and keeps his room in admirable order. Eric keeps track of his library materials and gets them back on time. It is heartwarming to see him with the librarians at his neighborhood library, who help him reserve the DVDs

he wants or help him pick out DVDs from the shelves. They are greatly inspired by the patience and determination he displays as he tries one way after another to communicate his wishes.

He is loved by the staff at his local bank, who really enjoy helping him

whenever he comes in to withdraw money.

He is a valued and grateful member of his church, Amazing Grace. This year, with the help of his minister, he recited parts of his poem "The Universe Says Yes" to the congregation.

Eric is up for anything that can speed his recovery. He can say all of the words on the cards of the game Spot It and enjoys the games Jenga and Rush Hour, and he plays a mean game of Air Hockey. He is getting better control of his emotions and will sometimes suggest stopping to breathe or listen to a Tibetan bowl as a way of centering. He walks and walks on a regular basis, as he realizes it is one of the best things for his mind and body. According to his fitness trainer, another big Eric fan, he has gone from zero percent of normal to fifty percent of normal grip strength in his right hand, and always shows up ready to give one hundred percent. He is strong and healthy and has keen intuition regarding foods that are helpful for his recovery. His ability to read has not yet returned, and this is frustrating for him. He's a delightful, perceptive companion and is game for any adventure. Gratitude, generosity, humor, and faith in God are a big part of his life and recovery. Eric welcomes friends old and new to be a part of his

continuing healing miracle.

## From Diana:

Eric is so smart and remembers so well. He remembered where the statue of Quan Yin was in my yard and numerous other things, even though he hasn't been here in a long time. No matter where or when, Eric pulls out his homework sheets to practice different mental and physical exercises, always trying to improve himself—and he has! He is so alert and bright and loving. His soul shines through any limitations.

## Appreciations

Eric is so very blessed to have wonderful helpers in his life, especially those from the Swedenborgian Church and the Angel Fund Team. Ruth continues her care and focus on helping Eric with his growing independence. She is a constant helper with healthcare coordination, transportation, and cognitive-enhancement activities. Diana continues her dedication and friendship to Eric with her regular visits and special outings. Michael is a regular helper especially with Eric's computer needs. Lisa oversees the management of Eric's living situation, his health care, and his financial needs.

We give special appreciation to the Retirement Committee of the Swedenborgian Church for its support through the years. And a heartfelt thanks to all of the Angel Donors for the continuing support.

Eric is blessed to have the love and support of so many. Please feel free to contact someone on the Angel Team at any time to offer your help or to share an inspiring story.

—Blessings,

Eric's Angel Team Leaders:

Diana, Ruth, and Lisa

[email4EricAllison@gmail.com](mailto:email4EricAllison@gmail.com)

## Passages

### Baptisms

**Mason Allen Jones** and **Averi Rose Jones**, children of Sara Cain and Trevor Jones, were baptized on December 13, 2015, by Rev. Kit Billings at the LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, Indiana. Mason's godparents are Wayne Allen and Shaylynn Ann Rogers. Averi's godparents are Aaron Moelich and Paige Potucek. ☩

### Letter from the President

*Continued from page 3*

other thing that had not changed was finding that these representatives from a variety of Christian denominations were effectively working together to be a positive presence in our communities and in the political process in our state capital.

Two issues were foremost on the Council's agenda. First, not unexpectedly, was counteracting the social and political knee-jerk reaction to recent tragedies that would, in an unthinking and emotionally driven, blatantly racist, and discriminatory manner, treat the refugees from war-torn Syria as if they were all terrorists. After speaking to a friend who works in the security aspect of our own government, I have been reassured that any danger of terrorism is not coming from Syrian refugees, who must go through a long and extensive vetting process before they ever see American soil. There are other means of access to the United States that need to be addressed, but Syrian refugees are not the problem. Through our various church communities we are able to address the fears and concerns of our members and even take further steps to be of positive assistance to refugees facing the many problems they encounter in finding and making

a new home. There is no doubt that many of our own citizens need assistance with understanding these very things, and yet, this is a society begun and built by and for immigrants. The only people who can claim this as their ancestral homeland are those we now call Native Americans. And, ironically enough, in the most painful of ways, they are a culture that has suffered and continues to suffer more than any other at the hands of the descendants of European immigrants, of whom the majority of us are.

The second issue on the agenda of the Maine Council of Churches is promoting civil discourse at every level of the political process in Maine. We have addressed and challenged our politicians to commit to a covenant of civil and courteous speech and action based on the simple premise of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." We ask for this in the election process but, perhaps even more importantly, in the entire political process. Our hope is that while respecting and encouraging open and vigorous debate of the many important, and often personal, issues dealt with in legislation, that interactions be respectful and retain integrity and not descend into personal attacks and distortions of the truth. What is more, we are encouraging people at all levels of society to hold to the same tenants and not let media-driven sensationalism, emotionalism, and win-lose mentality destroy the effectiveness of the democratic process on which this country was built and which has served to preserve liberty and justice for all. That is said knowing full-well that the reality falls far short of the ideal, and yet, even with the failures and problems of our situation, we have a system worth preserving and promoting in the way that it was originally intended to function.

So, while your local issues may be different, I strongly encourage both ministers and laypeople to get involved

### Rev. Sue Turley Named Professional of the Year

Rev. Susan G. Turley was named Professional of the Year for 2015 by the International Association of Who's Who.

Rev. Turley is a chaplain with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Maryland Healthcare System. She developed and manages the Clinical Pastoral Education program, a multi-cultural, interfaith training program in chaplaincy leading to board certification in professional chaplaincy or ordination.

Rev. Turley lectures on and teaches suicide prevention, employing the documentary she produced called "Broken Hearts Lifted Spirits: Mothers of the Fallen Speak Their Truth," a film about mothers who have lost their children in the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) wars.

To read more about Rev. Turley, see the September 2014 *Messenger*, page 116 (<http://tinyurl.com/h23ufcm>). ☩

in ecumenical activities at both local and state levels. Most states have a council of churches. Most communities have ecumenical gatherings, where actions can be taken that have a greater impact than can be accomplished by churches acting individually. While there are always the more rigid Christian groups who do not work with others, there is a growing openness in the ecumenical spirit within mainline Christian churches as it is discovered and acknowledged that however we may differ historically and theologically, we have far more in common than in difference. And, in truth, wherever two or three are gathered together in the Lord's name, there is a vibrant and powerful spirit at work. It is a joy and an inspiration to be part of it.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

### 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.

### Forever Blessed

Slow to anger, rich in mercy, always ready to forgive . . .  
Like the Father to the Son and the reason that I live.  
I have travelled many roads and more than once . . .  
I've lost my way . . .  
Still to come back to this welcome,  
I can't find the words to say.  
Where can hungry souls find reason?  
Where can broken hearts find peace?  
Love, Strength, Courage,  
Wisdom . . .  
Lead me to the source of these.  
As I continue on my journey . . .  
From this world into the next,  
Know that I'm forever thankful  
Because I've been forever blessed.

—Paul Deming



Paul Deming is lay leader at the Garden Chapel / Church of the Open Word in Creve Coeur, Missouri. He teaches music and performs as a professional musician.