



Issue Theme ~ *"Jesus - The Man in Our Midst"*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Public opinion about the authenticity, meaning and purpose of the life and teachings of Jesus varies widely.

Scientific analysis easily uncovers historical inaccuracies and inconsistencies which surface when comparing the various narratives of Jesus' life to each other or to independent historical sources. Usually these findings arise as part of a literal interpretation of the material. Such analysis raises doubt on the truth and authenticity of details of the story when taken as purely historical fact. Sometimes such claims of inaccuracy do, by implication, also seek to ridicule any other uses of the material too - throwing the baby (Jesus) out with the bath water, so to speak.

On the other hand, there is the approach of avoiding logic as the basis of a belief, appealing instead to anecdotal accounts of the power of believing, and the positive consequence it brings. This form of "proof" is, after all, much older than science...

On the third hand (what, three hands?) are the reconciling approaches of psychology, aiming to keep the story relevant by proposing the material as myth but yielding its usefulness to an individual by viewing things symbolically. An indirect contribution toward this discipline was made by Swedenborg through his spiritual writings when they were read by Carl Jung. Thus, the crucifixion of Christ can be regarded as the crucifixion of the ego, the perceived and selfish self, to allow the greater self to be born from its potential. Here, the cross represents the opposites which must be reconciled, inner and outer, light and shadow, in order to achieve this pivotal growth point. Jung regarded dreams as God's forgotten language, and myths as collective significant dreams.

In my early years, I was raised in church circles which taught me to bury my reasoning and instead

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Two copies of this Newsletter are being sent to members as usual, the second for giving

adopt a belief in whatever the bosses of the religion taught. Unfortunately, this also meant I needed to accept the limitations of their understanding: "don't ask, just believe!"

Eventually, through sheer intellectual hunger, I decided to abandon organised religion when I discovered the intellectual satisfaction of my new guide, science. Its reasoning processes and many branches of knowledge seemed limitless and rational. But science closed my gates to belief, as it teaches to begin with unbelief, while systematically (and ever so gradually) attempting to confirm what can be accepted as truth and so be believed. Anything illogical was out.

In the longer term though, neither of these alternative approaches provided the complete and satisfying view. In my twenties I found science inadequate in dealing thoroughly with the personal here and now, e.g. the significance of my dreams and synchronicity of my waking experiences. I found it frustrating to suspend my belief in so many things while waiting for the scientific community to publicly confirm and peer-review knowledge externally.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (contd)

Later I discovered psychology. It seemed scientific, yet free enough not to prescribe whether to believe or to suspend belief. University studies in psychology seemed very focussed on statistics (being the mathematics of generalisation) and so didn't satisfy my hunger for personal meaning. It was not until encountering Swedenborg that I realised there existed a "glue" which held biblical material together in a meaningful whole, including the Jesus narratives in the New Testament Gospels. I realised scientific analysis of the material (Swedenborg himself was a distinguished scientist) was not enough to reveal the full value of it. Nor was it necessary - with the aid of this superglue - to suspend the rational as it revealed a great internal harmony and cohesion between all details so that they reinforced and confirmed each other.

This glue is the language of "correspondences", without which the material is utterly dead to all its potentials as a guide for spiritual growth. What are correspondences? All things in the natural world correspond to the way in which spiritual things work. Swedenborg details many correspondences in his writings and I urge anyone who wishes to more fully grasp the internal significations of the Bible as well as of the natural universe and our place in it to study them.

Initially my view of religion had been exoteric, an outer view - adopting what others taught. Religion was then for me only a policeman. Swedenborg opened up a new way of belief and understanding and rendered it useful again by revealing the true nature of Jesus' teachings through its inner sense, revealed through the language of correspondences. This helps find the esoteric, the internal, and the personal, assisting growth toward consciousness (yes, consciousness is more than that annoying time between naps).

Wishing you an illuminating Easter.

Joe Vandermeer

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Please Note: The views expressed in this Newsletter are those of each contributor and do not necessarily reflect any particular position of the Swedenborg Association of Australia or its Committee.

Membership of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc. is open to anyone who wishes to pursue an interest in Swedenborg, the man, his science and his spiritual teachings.

For details on how to join, please refer to page 12.

What is Love?

*Love is a meaningful glance or remark
A touch that is tender with care---
Love is a letter, read and re-read*

*Love is a smile or a prayer
Love is a trust, a faith, a concern
Love is a dream that's come true
Love is a glory and beauty of Spring---
Love is the wonder of YOU.*

Lucille Boesken



Jesus Today by Othmar Tobisch

Despite the continuous assault on Christianity, particularly the institutionalised churches, the central figure of the biblical New Testament - the Jesus of history - is still the most studied man in history. Two great world religions, Christianity and Islam, consider him the greatest prophet that ever lived. Through missionaries, his life and teaching have penetrated to the most remote places on earth.

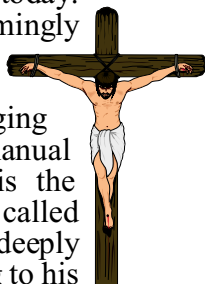
In the West, even the theologians who have written the books on "God is dead" could not ignore the man whose teachings and life inspired the Gospels of Jesus Christ. To this day there is widespread interest in this personality, which his contemporaries called "Rabbi" and "Master".

Every reader of the Gospels faces this enigmatic personality, who puzzles so many. There is the human being, the Jesus of flesh and blood, born of the virgin Mary. There is the divine in the human, the Holy Spirit of God that overshadowed the virgin and made her bring forth her firstborn son, whom Joseph called "Jesus" (from the Hebrew - *Jehoshua*) by divine command.

Something in Jesus continually attracts people because it is so human, so down to earth, so very 'today', because it is the same as you and me. It cries, it rejoices, it mourns, it is delighted. It is righteously indignant at the bankers in the temple defiling the House of Prayer to God, driving them out with zeal. We respond instantly to this human image and likeness. We love this Jesus. He is so much like us, only better. More courageous; more filled with faith and consciousness of God.

There is some 'independent' group's today who are seeking to get back to this immediate experience of God that Jesus had. They gather in little groups in homes. They study the life of Jesus. They meditate on it. They crave to have an ecstatic experience of the Father who is in heaven. Some succeed like the mystics of medieval times, who have written about these conjunctions with the divine and confessed that it is impossible to describe. Perhaps only in the Gospel of John do we find any records of this in-depth experience of Jesus.

There are many *externals* of the man from Galilee that attract people to him today. There is his humble birth, so charmingly told in the Gospel of Luke, and the basis for our Christmas celebrations. There is his upbringing in Nazareth, his training as a manual worker, a carpenter: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" (Matthew 13:55). We are deeply moved by the tragic events leading to his



crucifixion, when as a young man of thirty he gave up his life to an aroused hierarchy, fearing for its very existence - though he never moved a finger to destroy it.

The externals alone in the life of Jesus make him a central figure in the world's religions. He alone among all founders of religions gave his life to the purpose for which he had come: to give life to as many as received him (and this is why the cross is never out of sight when contemplating his life).

But it is the experience of love that separates the secular student of Jesus from the believing disciple. This is the difference between the 'externals' of the life of Jesus and the 'internals' in him, which can be seen by the eye of faith in him and from him. Jesus never said in so many words, "*God is love*" but he described continuously divine love in action. From his preaching, his parables, his proverbs, it appears very clearly that the Father in heaven is pure love.

It is out of this perception, while reading the Word, that Emanuel Swedenborg could say so firmly, "God alone - the Lord - is love itself" (Divine Love & Wisdom, paragraph 4). This love continuously flowed into the human Jesus, to give him the words of wisdom we admire so much. It was not the human brain of the carpenter; it was the divine mind of the incarnate God who spoke as never a man spoke before nor after. "Where did this man get all this?" (Matthew 13:56).

How the loving heart of God shines through every sentence! And how the human of Jesus is now filled with the love of the Christ! The divine shines through the immortal thoughts of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are . . .".

Swedenborg clearly demonstrates that *the human of the divine* is the Jesus of Nazareth. But *the divine of the human* (that is what makes Jesus so enduring, so immortal, of such inextinguishable power over the souls of human beings) is very hard to define or describe. This is the thing that must be experienced - and this experience must be sought after by every searching Christian. The Lord put his experience of love into words. These words in turn can arouse in us a great love for him. Love lies at the depth of our being. When this is aroused we have the experience of God in the depths of our soul. We should not lightly pass over his commandment "to love one another as he has loved us".

In themselves, words are dead. But they are containers or vessels into which thoughts can flow to make them alive. The words of Jesus can become divine wisdom because the divine light flowed into them and made them luminescent with eternal truths. The Word became flesh and began to shine in the world.



Examples may help. Would we even today know what true piety is? Could we correct our own misconceptions of prayer? Could we repent of our overemphasis on material goods without his admonitions that physical property, lands, houses, barns, cattle and sheep, stocks and bonds, are really nothing when compared to the riches of the spirit? That the first will perish but the latter will endure to life everlasting? He gave us this wisdom of life:

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? . . . But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”
(Matthew 6:25, 33)

Isn't this as relevant today as it was then? People instinctively know it. Some even follow this path literally, seeking to escape the trappings of our civilization, to buy land in the wilderness and live in tents.

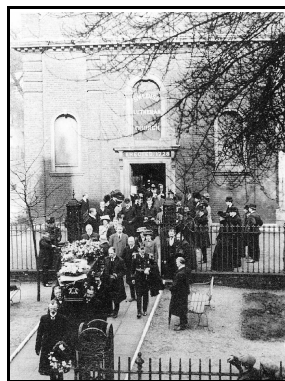
Another example: Nothing is easier than to condemn the neighbour for his sins. What was Jesus' stern admonition? “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). How much happier would we all be if we could throw off this pernicious tendency! Mainstream psychology has even picked this up: judgmental attitudes are taboo; they reflect only our own weakness and insecurity.

Some may have tried to convince people that God is dead. But my conviction is that Jesus is very much alive today, more so than ever. His influence is working in the minds of people, east and west, north and south. And by him, the ‘Father in heaven’ is alive in us, and coming into us.

The divine in the human is forcefully pressing outward and downward. A veritable revival of Christian life and faith is in the offing and is even becoming visible and there already, that is in the hearts and minds of individuals rather than via institutions. And Jesus promised to come again. If we look carefully, we can see him now, coming again in the clouds of heaven - the heaven of a human race more peaceful than before, more loving of the neighbour than before, more concerned with the needs of fellow human beings, high or low, learned or illiterate.

Jesus today is very much alive among all who seek the blessings of pure love.

Othmar Tobisch was a Swedenborgian Minister in the USA until his death. The above article is a digest of one published in the USA Journal, *Our Daily Bread*.



100 Years Ago

Swedenborg's Casket leaving the Swedish Lutheran Church, London in 1908

When London's Swedish church was being threatened with demolition, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences arranged to have Swedenborg's remains, which had rested there since his funeral on 5th April 1772, returned to his native homeland.

Following a stately Church service, the remains were transported by train to Dartmouth and the coffin then delivered aboard the awaiting Swedish warship, *Fylgia*. The various dignitaries present participated in a brief and simple ceremony, with music provided by the ship's band. A Latin ode was read by a Swedenborgian minister, the translation being:

*Now to the Swedish land that proudly owns
Her great departed, we commit thy bones.
Sadly we stand, and silent seek in vain
Fit words to laud thy mighty heart and brain
The Heavenly Secrets do we seek, or stray
Through inmost Nature? Thou dost light the way.
But hark, a call! Sails flap; the ship of war
Glides forth; while sounds a farewell from the shore;
Though now'tis tight to grant thy people's claim;
Still in our hearts we'll guard thy honoured name.*

Following the laying of wreaths, one being from the Swedish Vice Consul inscribed “A tribute to the memory of the great Swedish philosopher and theologian”, the ship slipped anchor and departed for home. These events were well reported in various newspapers throughout Britain.

On 18th May, with solemn rites, Swedenborg's coffin was deposited in Uppsala Cathedral near that of Swedenborg's famous contemporary, Carl Linnaeus. That Cathedral is also the resting place for a number of Swedish monarchs. Both outside and inside the Cathedral, his homecoming was marked in various festive activities.

Two years later, there was a dedication to Emanuel Swedenborg, graced by the presence of the Swedish King and Queen, of a magnificent granite sarcophagus made at the expense of the Swedish government. This is viewed by many visitors today.

Neville Jarvis



ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

During our last committee meeting we were excited to note how many new members had signed up and it reminded us that it is only through your membership and support that the SAA can remain such a dynamic and interesting organisation. In a world where very few people any longer profess to be 'joiners', it is refreshing to see that so many of you have seen the importance of creating and maintaining a community of like-minded spiritual travellers. All of us are on the most wonderful journey, and it is my sincerest hope that the SAA will always be around to encourage and help us along that journey.

So a really big welcome to our new Members:

Kathy Downs (QLD)
Joseph Hamamen (VIC)
Lillian King (NSW)
Helmut Lopaczuk (VIC)
Adam Okienko (VIC)
Malcolm Page (NSW)
Roberta Page (NSW)
Dianne Trethewey (NSW)
Angela Cartland (ACT)

and to Stella Chapman (WA) who has decided to reinstate her membership.

With all of the blessings of technology available to us, we are determined to put it more and more to our own good use. For those of you with email access who are not already on our emailing list, I would encourage you to sign up. It is free and a wonderful way to be kept up to date with what's going on. Don't worry, we won't be spamming you – it's normally only one email a month, so extremely manageable, even for the most recalcitrant of email procrastinators! Another, and not unimportant, benefit of maintaining a full email list is the enormous cost-savings involved for the Association, so it really is a win-win situation. Naturally you will still continue to receive your glorious hard copy of *Candela* in the regular post – something tangible that will see you through on the train or on your bedside table. As always, it remains essential reading!

Speaking of things technical, Joe Vandermeer and Neville Jarvis are working on a screensaver that will display beautiful images on your computer, accompanied by inspirational quotes from Swedenborg. That means we need never be without the inspiration of the Master - even while away from our desks! There have been various technical details to iron out, but images have been purchased and we are very close to launching this wonderful - and quite

novel – new resource. We're not sure yet how it will be distributed, but keep an eye on the next *Candela* for more details.

The season of Easter is one of spiritual renewal, and the Lenten period has been a truly profound time of reflection, prayer and renewed commitment to spiritual living. I pray that you all find yourselves renewed in this season, and re-energised to pursue a year of spiritual education and good works.

Much Love,

Walter Mason
Hon. Secretary



GROUP'S NEWS

Melbourne:

As we do not hold meetings in January our first meeting for the year was on 29th February when our speaker was **Andrew Rooke** from the Theosophical Society. The title of his talk was *A Road Map for Spiritual Paths*. Andrew's material was very interesting outlining how many mystics and religious/spiritual traditions had provided templates for spiritual paths and how followers or readers of their writings use them as a guide for their life. To show the similar structures of all spiritual paths, he used a series of twelve pictures originally given by a Chinese Buddhist in the 12th Century and used by Zen Buddhists to explain the progression. Each person present was able to relate to them and capture elements of their own journey in the pictures. A thoroughly enjoyable presentation.

Chris Skinner

*thought from the eye closes the
understanding but . . .*

*thought from the understanding
opens the eye*

It is worthwhile to realise that this Swedenborg quote resonates with what other writers have expressed. Sydney member, Michael Chester, picked up another connection:

*Love is a heavenly wisdom that lights
our inner and outer eye so that we may
behold all things even as the gods.*

Kahlil Gibran.



Future Issues

June 2008

Theme: *Sacred Space*

We will be taking up the importance of geography, architecture, etc. - natural and spiritual - in relation to our life's pilgrimage.

- ▶ *How we find ourselves in the place which is just right for us.*
- ▶ *Our special places.*
- ▶ *Your place or mine?*

Please do reflect on this topic right now and start thinking how you might be able to contribute for the benefit of everyone who reads this newsletter. The Newsletter Co-ordinator will gratefully receive any contribution you wish to make, either by yourself or something you have seen that strikes a chord with you. It can be on the issue theme or anything else which is spiritually based. The deadline for the June issue will be 30th May. Please direct it to the registered office (page 2).

And you can even start meditating now on later issues in 2008:

September

Theme: *Living for the Sake of Others*

December

Theme: *Going Within*

To be a lively Newsletter, your contributions are needed.

The Aftermath of Modern Communications

A Minneapolis couple decided to go to Florida to thaw out during a particularly icy winter. They planned to stay at the same hotel where they spent their honeymoon 20 years earlier.

Because of hectic schedules, the husband left Minnesota and flew to Florida on Thursday, with his wife flying there on the following day. The husband checked into the hotel. There was a computer in his room so he decided to send an email to his wife.

However, he accidentally left out one letter in her email address and, without realising his error, sent the email.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, Texas, a widow had just returned home from her husband's funeral. He was a minister who had a heart attack and died. The widow decided to check her email, expecting messages from relatives and friends. After reading the first message, she screamed and fainted. The widow's son rushed into the room and saw the computer screen which read:

To: My loving Wife
Subject: I've Arrived
Date: October 16th

I know you will be surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send emails to your loved ones. I've just arrived and have been checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was. P.S. Sure is very hot down here!

Prayer of St. Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.*



Jesus died for our sins and has washed us in his blood

by **Julian Duckworth**

Introduction

In this brief article, I'm going to try and explain these words so that we can understand them. They're words that people say and believe. They're words that puzzle and bother many people because, I think, they can't understand them, yet they feel there's truth in them somewhere. They're also biblical; well, each of the two phrases is, but the statement itself isn't. 1 Corinthians 15:3 says "...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" and Revelation 1:5 says "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood". It would be easy to say these words don't really mean what they say; they don't mean this, they meant that instead. I think that's not on, although clearer explanation takes us a bit that way. I don't think the Bible is written erroneously but I do think it is written to 'catch' a profound idea that otherwise is hard to put into words.

So I happily go along with both of these phrases on one level. Yes, Jesus died for our sins. Yes, Jesus has washed us in his blood. But now we have to think how that works.

Too simple?

Let's begin with the thought that people tend to get offered a shortcut to happiness and security and fall for it. It's like the advertising slogan, 'Get this and it will change your life!'. Something of this seems to have come into the common understanding about Jesus, and the church didn't help things either. The result, over a long time, was the idea of the Atonement (meaning "at one"). Disobedient people fell away from God, so the need to bring people back to God arose. How? Jesus, Son of God, offered himself to be a substitute on their behalf, to mediate and be a sacrifice. By doing this, by coming and dying, those people who make this their deep belief will be brought back to God through Jesus dying for their sins.

A caution here. Try not to react unhelpfully to the word 'belief'. Try not to see it as only intellectual or mental belief. I don't think the traditional Atonement idea is based on that simplicity. Yes, there may be some who think like that, and sometimes you get the idea put out that that is all you need to do, but if you really do believe something it will make a deep difference to you in your life, or should do.

The problem is more in seeing Jesus as the sacrifice. It's in the rather crude idea that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore someone separate from God. If you can get past that idea and think that God came into the world himself as Jesus, you keep the oneness of God and you remove the offering Jesus made to God to be the sacrifice.

The other problem is with the word 'sins'. This is sometimes taken to mean that people became bad, so bad that something just had to be done. It tends to load badness too far and leads to the idea that people will end up in hell. I'd rather say that we are all sinners in the sense that by being in this life we tend to misinterpret things and put ourselves first. We might not, but we do tend to do that. So, it's not an accusation but a fact.

A more helpful meaning

If we can get past the oversimple ideas that I've run through and still keep the essence that they are true as they stand, then we can move into better understanding. I'm going to try to do that. It all hangs on keeping the idea that God himself came as Jesus. He knew he would die. He knew there wasn't another way. He knew too that by dying it would bring people back where they needed to be. He also knew that he would die because he would be hated. He knew that he would be hated if he spoke and did the truth, with love. And he knew as well that in becoming a man he would have to lose his sense of being God and do all this as if he was just a man. And yet at times he felt his own Godness which didn't guarantee success, as we might think it would, so much as fill him with the enormity of what he was doing.

This hopefully helps us see what Jesus dying for our sins really means. It's about God loving us so much that he is prepared to die for us. And just a bit more deeply, try and see that dying, while it was real enough, also carries the idea of loving others so much that you lose all thought of you yourself. Put like that, we need to die in God as well as physically die at some point.

We now need to bring in the second phrase, that we are washed in his blood. Again, try to keep hold of all the ideas we've looked at. Dying, or rather, being killed, usually involves blood. So I think it is quite legitimate to see the pain and suffering as part of everything. Jesus would have hurt. But it isn't only the hurt that achieved the result. It involved that, but God's love and his life is the spilling of blood. Blood is more to do with life than with death because blood literally keeps us alive. So, try to see the balance here. We know that hurt and pain are inevitable in life but what we do about them is more important still. In doing what he did and does, God washes us in his love-blood so that we are clean, or even more accurately, so that we are free to grow to overcome whatever holds us back and become the person God knows we can be.

Julian Duckworth is on the Committee of the Swedenborg Association of Australia and ministers to a New Church (Swedenborgian) congregation in Sydney.



Correspondence s Column ~ Part 9

... reflecting on
THE HOLY CITY
appearing as a
Golden Crystal



In the film “The Wizard of Oz”, one beautiful image has always stood out for me - the first sight of the gleaming Emerald City in the distance. Such images of shining fairy castles or cities set in the distance or on hills or mountains rarely fail to stir something inside one; they arouse a sense of excitement, joyful anticipation and, could it be, nostalgia!

The Bible itself ends, in the Book of Revelation, with a vision of a gloriously shining city, the New Jerusalem, appearing from out of the sky and descending nearer and nearer to the earth.

In Sacred Scripture, the sky, or the heaven above, is a symbol or correspondence of that deep, inner part of our spirit that is closest to God. In short, ‘height’ corresponds to depth of spirit, and ‘descent’ corresponds to emergence from this God-centre within. The Holy City, then, is a Divinely structured dwelling place which can emerge out of our inmost depths at the end of our soul’s journey back to God.

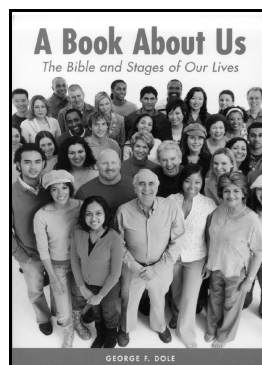
In the vision of St. John, the City is seen looking like a four-square golden crystal “*Shining with the glory of God*”, and utterly pure through and through - for “*nothing impure will ever enter it*”. It does, in fact, represent God’s dwelling place, and He is the glorious Light that shines in it and from it.

Unlike the old earthly Jerusalem, this City is not made by the hands of man, but emerges fully and perfectly constructed ‘from above’. The old ‘Jerusalem’ represents our own carefully and painstakingly built up religious life and philosophy, of which Jesus prophesied to his disciples that “*Not one stone will be left upon another*”. Such a falling apart, as when leaves fall in autumn, is necessary to make room for the descent of the New Jerusalem - for God’s rebuilding of our spiritual life to emerge into prominence. It is as it has been written in the Psalms, “*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain*”.

In a general way, the Holy City with its pure crystal-clear, warm, golden Light, symbolises the spiritual power and beauty that exist potentially within each and every person - an **Ideal** of perfect purity and brightness of soul that stirs and attracts one’s spirit onward and upward - the final gift of a dwelling place where one day we can be with our God for ever more.

Written by Rev. Dr. Michael Stanley for the newsletter of the Swedenborg Movement (UK)

NEW PUBLICATIONS



A Book About Us

The Bible and Stages of Our Lives

by Rev. Dr. George Dole

84 pages, paperback \$22.00

Swedenborg Foundation, USA
ISBN 0 87785 326 6

This newly arrived small book is authored by a very well-known Swedenborgian writer and translator. However we read the Bible, with its bewildering twists, turns and inconsistencies, the most important outcome must be to see that it directly parallels our own lives. The pages of this book link us with many of the much loved biblical stories; they are packed with pointers on what steps we can take to reshape our own lives in to ones which are orderly and God-centred. Each of its eight chapters concludes with six very helpful questions to contemplate.



the white horse

by Emanuel Swedenborg

42 pages, paperback \$18.00

The Swedenborg Society (UK)

ISBN 978 0 85448 148 4



First published in 1758, this short work by Swedenborg is an interpretation and exposition of the significance of the White Horse as described in the last book of the Bible - John’s Revelation. It is considered by some Swedenborg scholars as a kind of brochure serving to introduce his major work *Secrets of Heaven (Arcana Caelestia)*, especially among the so-called educated clergy. If you want to understand the biblical imagery of horses, chariots and riders, you will find this book helpful. There are also chapters focussed on how the biblical Word should and can be understood - from its spiritual meaning contained within the literal text - and its connectedness with the angels in heaven. Fittingly, for this issue, it finishes with a chapter ‘*The Lord is the Word*’.



**Our September 2007 issue carried the following letter
from Queensland member, Ken Cross.**

GOD

I feel obliged to posit this question to readers of Candela "Did GOD create man in GOD'S image" or did "Man create GOD in man's image?" This is a question which I believe to be worthy of serious consideration.

What is GOD? God is LOVE, COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS etc. etc.

YES, all of the above, but this is NOT GOD; these are attributes of GOD but are not GOD.

What is GOD? I have no idea, suffice to say "GOD IS" and carry on with "THE WORK", and work there is, for all of us.

Organised Religion presents GOD as a separate entity that must be obeyed, worshipped, suffering to be endured in GOD'S name, in the hope of some reward or salvation at time of passing. I do not accept this as GOD and believe it smacks of Super ego and as GOD has NO EGO, it presents as a contradiction. Carry on the good work, You are needed.

Readers were challenged to respond to what Ken was asking and we are now pleased to include these thoughtful comments from Wayne Kasmar, SAA member and longtime reader of Swedenborg.

Can we legitimately think of God as being a person? This seems to be the question Ken Cross wants us to ponder with his set of questions and statements. I must say it took me quite a few times reading through what he wrote before I could see the common thread in all the different things he mentions.

If I'm reading it correctly, the underlying belief is that if we are to limit the Godhead to within the confines of a person, then we limit him (or should I say it?) both preposterously and outrageously. Assuming God is infinite, how can he/it be limited to being just something like you or me? Surely, the thinking goes, we can't possibly even comprehend God, let alone in any way package him up, and if we are prepared to pronounce that he is fully within a single person, then it can only be really for our own convenience and ease, or we're just fooling or flattering ourselves.

To begin with, I think Ken is right when he says God has NO EGO. Whilst Swedenborg is very definitely in the camp that believes God is in fact a person, he also says something else about him that is pertinent - albeit indirectly. Swedenborg says that all persons have a ruling love, a love which is nothing less than their very life. Now with us human beings there are four basic types of ruling loves, one of which we all get to choose for ourselves during the course of life. Two, love of self and love of the world, are hellish, whilst the other two, love of God and love of others, are heavenly.

If we put together the two separate statements that Swedenborg makes, firstly, the one that God is a person, and secondly, everyone having a ruling love, we are left with the conclusion that God, too, has a ruling love. And really, in a sense, there is only one of the four ruling loves that is appropriate for God. Obviously God's ruling love is love of others. The only interest in, or love of himself that he has is only to the extent it allows him to better bless the lives of others. As to his life, he has utterly no interest in anything except other persons. He

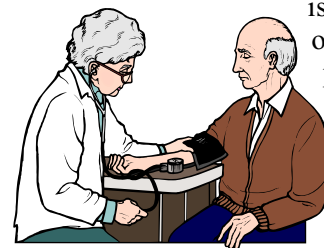
lives totally to provide for their happiness, that is, our happiness.

So if we are told that God would have us worship him, what in effect we are worshipping is the love of others, the pure Spirit of Heaven. Anything good and true we seek to give God is automatically returned to us, purified and accentuated.

Now the need for us to obey God is likewise not an ego trip on his part. The 'need' for us to obey is there only if we wish to fulfil the reason for which we are created, namely, that we experience true happiness and fulfilment in life. But this can only happen if we follow the way of life that he prescribes. He will not and cannot force this happiness and fulfilment upon us. We have to choose it freely.

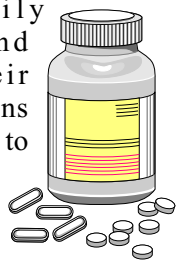
And to that end we come into this world with a complete set of selfish and self-centred instincts. When we become aware that just going along in life and allowing these instincts to lead us does not deliver us true happiness and fulfilment, we become aware of God's promise that we will find these things if we should live the life he prescribes.

Faith in God is really no different than faith in your doctor. If you believe your doctor knows what he or she is on about, you follow their orders. You take what they prescribe. You don't



necessarily understand how their prescriptions are going to heal you, and

sometimes you'll find yourself doing or taking something strange and unfamiliar. But if they are a good doctor you find yourself back in good health.





It's the same with our relationship with God. His prescriptions can seem strange and unfamiliar. When we begin to live the life of selflessness that he himself leads, it feels all wrong, familiar as we are to the natural life of self-interest. But if we persist with his help and encouragement, we eventually come to find our lives are set aright and we become whole.

Ken also mentions "suffering to be endured in God's name". It does not in any way please God when anyone suffers. In fact, if anything, it's quite the opposite. We do well though to have trust in God. This means that at times when life is difficult, we understand that God does not allow illness and misfortune to befall us and others unless there is a very good reason for it. We can't always know everything that is happening within and around us, but we can be assured that he has everything under control and is constantly working to ensure our ultimate salvation from all the different forces of evil that would harm and destroy us.

In order to become fully aware of the extent of the close personal attention that God pays to us and our lives, we have to once again refer to Swedenborg. It is quite amazing that something Swedenborg says about the nature of creation and existence lies unexplored even though it has huge implications for the way we fundamentally see things. This particular statement of his is to the effect that God creates all things from moment to moment, and if he were to withdraw his creative power from a single thing, even for just one instant, it would immediately cease to exist.

Now this is most definitely not the way we see things. Our notion of creation is that at a particular point in the past everything was made in a single, forever-standing act such that it all continued to have an ongoing existence altogether independent of God. An obvious reason for us to have this way of thinking is the great influence that the creation story in the Bible has traditionally had on our wider cultural thinking. But even when modern science persuaded us to stop believing literally in the Genesis story in the Bible, we still retained a past-based view of creation. All we did was adopt a more up to date, scientific version of it rather than the present-based one that Swedenborg promotes.

I think that modern Western man is so much the observer-cum-controller of the world that he automatically assumes that God is by nature the same as him. Whether it's creation in seven days, as per Genesis, or in an instant, as according to the Big Bang theory, he sees God as having concocted a Cosmic Science Experiment out there in front of him and then sits back to observe what happens. If you believe the Genesis story, it's as though he even has time to go off and make a coffee because by the time he comes back, Adam and Eve have eaten of the forbidden fruit and hid themselves from him somewhere in the Garden of Eden.

This all presents God as having a rather impersonal hands-off relationship with his creation. It's rather an artificial one too, I think, because in his original state man would have naturally held the present-based view of creation. Before becoming 'civilised' and realising there

were laws of nature which you could discover and use to control the world, humanity felt at one with the creation. People, and this would apply today to those 'primitive' peoples that still exist, would have felt the ever present spirit of God all around them and within them.

I don't think we can ever go back completely to that pure state of living, as appealing as it may be. In fact I don't think we're meant to. But we can, indeed we now must, get a much stronger sense of the personally intimate role that God plays in our lives. I find this is possible by thinking of God as being what I call the Cosmic Author. Rather than thinking of him as a detached, objective Cosmic Scientist, I believe he is more in the way of an artist when he creates. He creates stories, with each of our lives a separate one, but of course they are intersecting and interweaving all the time. This is a far more personal and involved way for God to go about doing what he does.

As far as I can work out, there really isn't an alternative model to this as a way of picturing creation and at the same time accommodating Swedenborg's assertion that it is sustained perpetually by God. This notion of God as a story-maker is not a new one. It has been proposed often enough before. But I believe there is a solution to the usual objection raised against it, the fact that there seems no room for free will if God is creating the whole story, including the action and not just the hardware as it were. It involves Charles Dickens, perhaps the author with the most prodigious capacity ever for creating living, breathing characters and their stories. He said that before he put them into his stories his characters actually came and introduced themselves to him. And at the time when he came to write the episode in his book which featured the death of his much loved character, Little Dorrit, he was literally grief stricken.

Talented writers of fiction commonly report that their characters and the stories that encompass them take on a life of their own. Obviously to Dickens, even though he knew full well his characters were entirely figments of his imagination, they still seemed quite real to him, quite independent from him. From his viewpoint they had all the free will in the world. And I think if someone who has a finite mind can have that experience, what must it be like for God whose creative imagination is infinitely powerful.

Far from being impersonal, his creation is actually inside him and he in it, which is very much how people from their own viewpoint experience God. Creation is humanised when we see it in this way. It's much less mechanical and hard.

There is much, much more that can be said on this topic, but it would require a book to properly discuss it. To finish off, I'll mention the idea that God as writer shouldn't seem so strange to us. After all, the biggest ever best-seller by far has him as the Author. And he gave us a picture of what sort of person he is by writing himself into the big story of Creation, that individual human story about the carpenter from Nazareth, being the single most influential personal story in history.

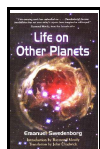
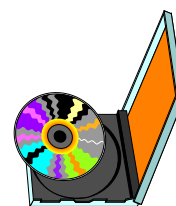


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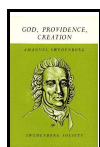
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- Melbourne (Chris Skinner on (03) 9432 0322; email: cskinner9@optusnet.com.au);
- Perth (Trevor Moffat on (08) 9470 9775; email: trevorm@ic-net.com.au;)
- Sydney region (Michael Chester on (02) 9944 0497; email: mchester@accsoft.com.au);



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Details of programmes will be advised by leaflet as soon as they are known. Our website is updated when new information comes available - www.swedenborg.com.au

Brisbane: New Church Hall, 21 Agars Street, Rosalie. **2008 Programme** being determined

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28th March ~ *Applying Swedenborg's Spiritual Principles to Drug & Alcohol Rehabilitation*

Speaker: **Patrick Morahan**

25th April ~ *Spiritual & Psychical Research of Donald Carr* Speaker: **Geoff Forster**

30th May ~ *Creation and Evolution* Speaker: **Chris Skinner**

Sydney: Swedenborg Centre, 1 Avon Road, North Ryde commencing 7.45pm.

March ~ No meeting

11th April ~ Kwan Yin - Bodhisattva of Compassion with **Walter Mason**

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Meditation Evenings - First Monday of month. 6.30 - 7.30pm

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