

JULY/AUGUST 2011

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD

God in Creation

Prayer

Be thou then, O thou dear
Mother, my atmosphere;
My happier world, wherein
To wend and meet no sin;
Above me, round me lie
Fronting my froward eye
With sweet and scarless sky;
Stir in my ears, speak there
Of God's love, O live air,
Of patience, penance, prayer:
Worldmothering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast fold thy child.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

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Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky, 1864

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Dear Readers,

Summer takes us outdoors. Our adventures in the sun (slather on that SPF!) make us feel more closely connected to the Lord as we enjoy his creative handiwork. In this issue, we focus on elements of the grand design of creation, which blossoms out of the Lord's love.

This summer's sermons and readings depict how the Lord's providence is embedded and expressed in every aspect of our world, from the night sky to the very real spiritual forces that act upon us (and to which we respond) to help lead us into the fullness of our humanity.

Our tradition tells us that God is fully present in every aspect of creation. The beauty, transcendence, and sometimes terrifying power of the physical world reveal the magnificent, mysterious goodness of God's work.

We hope this issue will inspire sublime reflections on the glory of the created world and the beauty within every person. May your summer be full of revelation.

Many blessings,
Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

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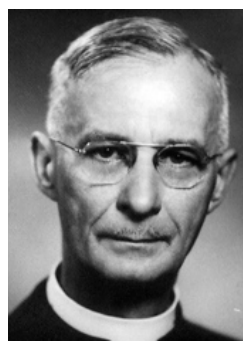
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JUL 3 CREATION & CATASTROPHE

Rev. Andy Stinson

Genesis 1:1-2:4

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and

multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Heaven and Hell #493

Our first state after death is like our state in this world, since we are then similarly involved in outward concerns. We have similar faces, voices, and characters; we lead similar moral and civil lives. This is why it still seems to us as though we were in this world, unless we notice things that are out of the ordinary and remember that angels told us we were spirits when we awakened. So the one life carries on into the other, and death is only a passage.

Heaven and Hell #318, 328

The general opinion is that non-Christians cannot be saved because they do not have the Bible and therefore do not know the Lord; and without the Lord there is no salvation. We can know, however, that these people, too, are saved simply from the fact that the Lord's mercy is universal, meaning that it extends to all people. Non-Christians are born just as human as Christians. . . . No one is born for hell. The Lord is love itself, and his love is a desire to save everyone. So he provides that everyone will have a religion, an acknowledgment of the Divine Being through that religion, and an inner life. . . . The Lord's church extends throughout the whole world. It is universal, and consists of all people who live in the virtue of thoughtfulness according to the principles of their religion.

Sermon

This week 200,000 people entered the spiritual world in the wake of natural disasters: 130,000 in Burma from the cyclone and another 70,000 in China. My figure may end up being off, but the loss is no less profound for that.

I have been plagued by these events, as I am sure many of you have, whether it was the choked voice of a reporter's grief and horror at the devastation or the simple picture from *Time* magazine of the body of a child floating face down in swollen river water, a blue cord tied around her ankle—that blue cord speaking of the lost love of a parent trying unsuccessfully to save a beloved child's life.

It has plagued me, this incredible loss and devastation, perhaps even more intensely because it is so profoundly juxtaposed against our reality. It is a beautiful spring, my first spring in Maine in a lot of years, and it is a powerful and wondrous testimony to the life that courses through all of us when it bursts forth in the world in the form of apple blossoms and a million shades of green erupting from the brown death of the winter.

But as life erupts around us, there are places in the world where death is the meditation of the day. This pains and confounds me. And yet even in this cruel-seeming contrast I can see the creator's hand and the reality of faith and spirit that dominate our existence.

Kahlil Gibran says that "pain is the breaking of our shell of understanding." None of us escapes this life without our shell being cracked now and again. But in this pain, in the universal wails of the mother crying for her dead child, "deep," as Scripture puts it, "calls out to deep"—and we in our own pain and understanding are challenged by the grief we see in pictures and hear through distant microphones.

In the scripture reading we are reminded of how good God says the creation is—that new abundance comes and is good, a goodness of profound magnitude, that all of creation was good. The deaths in Asia this past week speak to us of what seems an even more fundamental betrayal because it seems to flow from that very goodness of which we all partake. How can the very earth and sky betray us if they are good in God's sight? And I think that is the heart of the challenge of these extreme days: to lift our sight closer to God's sight, to see beyond ourselves to the wider vista that is in store. In this, I believe, we must begin to understand one of the fundamental truths about what evil really is: evil always takes the form of the personal, never the impersonal.

There is nothing malevolent or wrong or evil in the blowing of the wind or the shaking of the earth. Wind is just not that powerful. No matter how hard it blows, it may destroy houses and bodies, but it does not shape a person's character or being. It does not come to do harm or bring joy. The earth does not shake with the intent of destroying buildings or lives. These natural processes exist so that larger processes that we may never see can be worked out, and in some ways we can't know why they happen.

We cannot know the "why" because we still get a vote as to what the "why" will be. We still get a vote as to whether heaven or hell will become manifest on this earth in the only way that it can be: as a result of what we do and who we are, what we open ourselves toward. Grief and loss can make us bitter to the world and those around us, or it can make us more tender and caring because of the very pain we have experienced. The shaking of the earth and the blowing of the wind that took so many lives this past week cannot do the thing that is most necessary: find the meaning in these events. Only we have the power to do that, and in doing so we bring into the world the very power of night and day.

We see examples of this being played out in China. There are workers right now, this very instant, who are risking their lives by being at the base of damaged hydro dams to rescue the people trapped in the rubble. They escaped this tragedy with their own lives and now dare to put their own lives at risk for others. This is the heavenly act—"no greater love has a person than to lay down his life for his friends"—and that is happening, right now.

At the same time, in Burma, we see a military junta so terrified, so afraid of losing control, that they are allowing people devastated by this storm to die of disease and hunger by not allowing international aid to reach them. I was struck by one interview with Admiral Keating, the head of the U.S. military effort to bring aid to Burma. He mentioned how, in meeting with the generals of the country, he was continuing to try to "sell" the aid of food and water and medicine that would save the lives of the Burmese citizens. The Burmese government's attitude is an example of the hellish mindset: that at all costs we must not lose control, we must not be open, we must not allow people into our sphere, no matter how much it might cost us and how much it might harm others.

The biblical creation story is so rich, as is Swedenborg's treatment of it as a map of our own process in this world, that there is too much to say here. So I simply want to note two of the basic truths to which the creation story points.

First, this life, this existence, even on into the next life, is about process. It is about an unfolding of the hope that God has for us and is desperately trying to bring into our lives and the actual life we are living. The experience we are living out is not going to end. It isn't going to be interrupted as we enter the next life, either. It is only going to be refined and deepened. And so in all of this we come to the very simple and profound truth that there are worse things that can happen to us in life than dying.

As George Dole is fond of saying and I am fond of stealing, the death rate in Bath has hovered around 100 percent for some time. No one here gets out alive. Well, actually, we do—we get out more alive than we have ever been. And so when we see the death of a child, yes, we mourn for the pain of the loss and that little person's unrealized experiences and brief life, but we also must live out of the knowledge that she will go on to be raised to have exquisite experiences in the spiritual world and to become someone quite beautiful in her own right. Our process in this life is one that goes on into eternity.

This realization empowers us to step into the fullness of the next point: that at the end of every day during the creation of the world God declared that it was good. Many have accused the Christian faith of being otherworld-oriented, of spouting the idea that yes, it may be bad now, but in the sweet by and by everything will be OK, and that we just need to hold on until we get there. And while I do believe that this is true, I also believe that falling back on such a belief is a perversion of the gift of life that God has given us and the real call that God has for us in our lives and our world.

God labels every stage of the creation good, and we have it upon us to accept that reality and be a part of making it manifest. That is what "calling it good" means in the creation story. But how do we call the loss of 200,000 lives good? Even more personally, how do we call the injuries and attacks we have suffered in our own lives good?

By opening to the good that is somewhere contained within them, even if it is nothing more than an opportunity to love more deeply. Tragedies like the ones that have occurred this past week offer us profound opportunities to love and care for the survivors. Evil done to us offers us the opportunity to defeat that evil. Insult offers us the opportunity to bring heaven in so that hell may be defeated.

God's creation is our creation in microcosm. For us to step more deeply into the realms of our own existence we must be able to look back at the stage before and say, "It is good." It is a tall order, but one I believe is possible to fulfill if we remember constantly that this flesh-and-bones meat sack, this physical life, is not all there is, and that the grand task is really the task of the gospels—going forth and baptizing all the nations in the fullness of God. There are aid workers out there baptizing every person they meet with the love of God, and there are tin-pot dictators out there using their own fear and arrogance to channel the very depths of the hells. This is a dramatic moment on the world stage, and the suffering is unimaginably huge, but the questions being asked of those aid workers and those dictators are no different from the questions being asked of us, the questions we are commissioned to go out and live answers to.

So live in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; live in the fullness of God on every level of being. Live out of love without fear or concern for the next life. Be a channel of heaven! Baptize all the nations. Sanctify and bless the world where you are. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 4

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. *Psalm 40:1-2*

Love is our life. For most people, the existence of love is a given, but the nature of love is a mystery... Even though the word "love" is so commonly on our tongues, still hardly anyone knows what love is.

Divine Love and Wisdom n. 1

Tuesday, July 5

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.
Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. *Psalm 40:3-4*

We cannot know what our life is unless we know what love is. If we do not know this, then one person may believe that life is nothing but sensation and action and another that it is thought, when in fact thought is the first effect of life, and sensation and action are secondary effects of life. *Ibid. n. 2*

Wednesday, July 6

You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted.
Psalm 40:5

We can get some idea that love is our life from the warmth of the sun in our world. We know this warmth acts like the life shared by all earth's plants because when it increases in the spring, plants of all kinds sprout from the soil. *Ibid n. 3*

Thursday, July 7

I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.
I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. *Psalm 40:8-9*

Love works the same way in us because love and warmth correspond to each other. This is why love makes us warm. *Ibid.*

Friday, July 8

I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.
Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever. *Psalm 40:10-11*

God alone—the Lord—is love itself, because he is life itself. Both we on earth and angels are life-receivers.
Ibid. n. 4

Saturday, July 9

Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me.
Let all those be put to shame and confusion who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt.
Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"
But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the Lord!"
As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God. *Psalm 40:13-17*

The Lord, who is the God of the universe, is uncreated and infinite, while we and angels are created and finite. Since the Lord is uncreated and infinite, he is that essential reality that is called Jehovah and is life itself or life in itself. *Ibid. n. 4*

Genesis 8:13-22

In the six hundred first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

Then God said to Noah, "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

John 16:1-11

"I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the

Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned."

Divine Love and Wisdom 270

The earthly mind, with everything in it, turns in spirals from right to left, while the spiritual mind turns in spirals from left to right. So the two minds are turning in opposite directions—a sign that evil is resident in the earthly mind and that on its own, it resists the spiritual mind. Further, turning from right to left is turning downward, toward hell, and turning from left to right moves upward, toward heaven. I have been shown this by experience, that evil spirits cannot turn their bodies from left to right, only from right to left, while good spirits find it hard to turn from right to left and easy to turn from left to right. Their turning follows the flow of the deeper levels of their minds.

Sermon

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. – Genesis 8:22

If that were all there were to it, we'd never get anywhere. It would just be the same thing over and over and over again. This would be another spring just like the last one, and all we would have to do to find out about tomorrow's weather would be to check what the weather was like on April 27, 2008—or 2007, or 1907, or 1353, for that matter—which experience tells us is utter nonsense. Each season is a generalization that has fairly definite boundaries but includes a generous measure of variety in detail. No seedtime is exactly like any other, but they are all times for sowing seeds.

The years differ in another and more significant respect as well. One of the clearest indications of this is the growth rings of trees. Every turn of the seasons adds another ring. There is a home movie taken at the Fryeburg Assembly in 1934, and the white pine saplings along Route 302 are not all that much taller than the three-year-old who is running across the lawn. They now tower over the telephone poles, the buildings, and, of course, mere people, even very tall ones.

Here and there in mountain streams in the White Mountains there are "giants' kettles"—fairly deep, smooth, circular hollows in solid granite formed by pebbles in whirlpools during the glacial period. I have no idea how many centuries it takes to create one, but if there are "sermons in stones," these are

eloquent sermons on the power of persistence and of an intimate relationship between constancy and change.

What we have, then, is an underlying constancy, a repetitiveness, that has two dimensions of variability. There is the variety in detail, and there is the cumulative effect of the repetition. This latter is, in a sense, what our third reading is talking about when it speaks of our minds moving in spiral patterns. They go round and round, yes, but they never come back to the same place.

Turning back to our text, it takes us one step further than the seasons when it promises that “day and night” will not cease. There are three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter of these cycles in every single cycle of the seasons. It is a pattern of cycle and epicycle, and what is true of the cycles is true of the epicycles as well. There is an underlying constancy, a repetitiveness, and there are two dimensions of variability. There is the variety in detail, and there is the cumulative effect of the repetition.

As for the constancy, most of our days begin with waking and end with going to sleep. Most of them involve eating three meals. Most of them involve tasks that we do over and over and over again. As to detail, though, they are never precisely the same. It is not always equally easy or hard to wake up. Sometimes meals are rushed or omitted. The dishes have to be done time after time, but every once in a while something has been left on the stove too long and extra elbow grease is called for. Still the basic sequences are necessarily pretty much the same. Dirty dishes get wet, clean, and dry in that order and no other.

As for the cumulative effect of repetition, dishwashing will do very well for an example. If we derive satisfaction from it, it provides a kind of constant reassurance. When everything is cleaned up and put away, it is a symbol of domestic stability. If, however, it is nothing more than an unwelcome task, it becomes increasingly tedious, and resentment builds and builds. We can develop a magnificent martyr complex that then spills over into our relationships with others. I suspect we are all familiar with the feeling that “nobody appreciates me” and the way it inclines us to blame others not for what they have said but for what they have not said. Would anyone care to make a list of things not said?

*It is expedient for us
that our contentment
go away, because
we need to move to
the place where it is
waiting for us.*

This brings us to the brink of a most essential cycle. Most simply put, we have our ups and our downs. Taking the Lord’s glorification as establishing the fundamental paradigm of our own regeneration, we read in our theology of his alternating states of “glorification” and “exinanition” or emptiness—times when he was conscious of his identity with his inner divinity and times when he felt its absence. He could say on the one hand, “The Father who dwells within me is doing the works” (John 14:10) and on the other hand, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34).

We have our times when we are effortlessly conscious of the beauty of heavenly community, times when those we love feel particularly dear to us, times when gratitude wells up within us. We have other times too, times when we feel sorry for ourselves, times of resentment or anger, times when all we can see in others is their worst. This happens over and over again, and little by little, we gravitate toward the one side or the other.

That is what we might call the mechanism of our freedom to choose between heaven and hell. The only way we can get into either heaven or hell is by choice, and the only eternally significant thing we are ultimately compelled to do is to choose. It is essential that we be presented with genuine alternatives. In his discourse at the Last Supper, Jesus put it this way: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). We need to experience the absence of God. We need to discover what it is like to feel alone.

Object relations theory is built on a very similar premise. It holds that what we would call our spiritual growth is fueled by the tension between our need for autonomy and our need to belong. We need both company and solitude. We enjoy company until we feel engulfed by it and need some solo time, some time to reflect and discover who we are, so to speak. We enjoy solitude until we begin to feel lonely, and then we go in search of companionship.

This cycle, like those of the seasons and the days, is not a circle but a spiral. We sort things out in solitude and come back into company with a clearer sense of our identity. In company we discover what we have to give and to receive, and we depart into solitude with more experience of ourselves and others to process.

There is no fixed proportion between these two states that can be prescribed for everyone. Some of us need more solo time than others, some more constant companionship. There are strong indications that women in general are more at home in relational situations and men more at ease in solitude, but both genders need both states, and there is wide variety within each gender.

To digress for just a moment, it is vital to recognize that the only use of any such generalizations is to aid in understanding. As soon as they are used to prescribe, they become destructive. "I see that you are more comfortable in solitude, and I can understand that because you are male" is one thing. "You ought to be more comfortable in solitude because you are male" is quite another.

In this discussion of the interaction between differentiation and integration, we are talking about a process that gets somewhere; and obviously it would help if we had some idea of where it is supposed to get. There is a quite extraordinarily pertinent definition of the goal in *Divine Providence* 4.4, a definition that most of you have heard more than once already. It reads as follows: "A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different and yet united. Put in more human terms, a community makes a unity more perfectly as its members are distinguishably different and yet united."

We can add to this the following image from *Last Judgment* 12:

"Heaven's perfection increases with numbers. This follows from its form, which determines the patterns in which people associate and the ways communication flows there.

"This is the most perfect form of all, and in the most perfect form the more constituents there are the more people are involved in attention and agreement and the more intimate and unanimous is the union. The agreement and consequent union increase with numbers because each individual there comes in as a congenial intermediary between two or more others, and whatever comes in strengthens and unites."

It appears that love is what unites and wisdom is what distinguishes, but this is an oversimplification. Love is acutely sensitive to differences, and wisdom can see how they complement each other. At times we do find our hearts pulling us in one direction and our heads pointing us in another, but these are times of instability, times when things are being rearranged. When we are at our best, when we are most completely ourselves, we are wholly absorbed

in what we are doing. We can see from experience what needs to be said or done, we spontaneously want to do or say it as well as we can. This is different from doing something good because we believe we should. It is doing something good because it just feels right, and because that feeling is accompanied by a particular clarity of mind. There is an unspoken sense of being the right person in the right place at the right time, and there is nothing else quite like it.

Such moments do not last forever because we are never standing still. They bring us a little further along the path, to a point where we can see a little further ahead. Whether that point is in the direction of companionship or in the direction of solitude, the effect is a sense of instability. In some small sense, "it is expedient for us" that our contentment go away, because we need to move to the place where it is waiting for us. Amen.

Prayers

O Holy Spirit, whose presence is liberty, grant us that freedom of the spirit which will not fear to tread in unknown ways, nor be held back by misgivings of ourselves and fear of others. Ever beckon us forward to the place of thy will which is also the place of thy power, O ever-leading, ever-loving Lord.

- G. A.

Fire of the Spirit, life of the lives of creatures,
spiral of sanctity, bond of all natures,
glow of charity, light of clarity, taste
of sweetness to sinners, be with us and hear us . . .
Composer of all things, light of all the risen,
key of salvation, release from the dark prison,
hope of all unions, scope of chastities, joy
in the glory, strong honor, be with us and hear us.

- St. Hildegarde of Bingen, 12th century
freely translated by Charles Williams, 1886-1945

Lord, let me be yours. Let me not draw back, neither from heaven, nor from your divinity, nor your cross. Let me be yours, you to whom I owe both my creation and my redemption. Touch my heart and sanctify it, and consecrate me in your service forever.

- Lucy Herbert (1669-1744)

Monday, July 11

My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever. *Psalm 45:1&2*

The Lord does not let anything remain divided. This means that things must be focused either on what is both good and true or on what is both evil and false.

Divine Providence n. 16

Tuesday, July 12

In your majesty ride on victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right; let your right hand teach you dread deeds.

Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you. *Psalm 45:4-5*

The first of the goals toward which the Lord's divine providence works is that we should be engaged in what is good and what is true together. That is our "good" and our love and that is our truth and our wisdom, because that is what makes us human and images of the Lord. *Divine Providence n. 16*

Wednesday, July 13

Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad; *Psalm 45:6-8*

Since it is better for us to be engaged in something evil and something false than in something good and something evil at the same time, the Lord lets the first of these pairings occur. He does so not from intent but from an inability to prevent it because of the ultimate goal, which is our salvation. *Ibid.*

Thursday, July 14

Daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir. Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him. *Psalm 45:9-11*

It is because of these two factors—our ability to be engaged in something evil and something true at the same time, and the Lord's inability to prevent this because of the goal, which is our salvation—that our discernment can be lifted up into heaven's light. *Ibid.*

Friday, July 15

The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people with all kinds of wealth. The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes; in many-colored robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her companions, follow.

Psalm 45:12-14

This means that we can be in heaven in our discernment and in hell in our love; and we cannot be denied this possibility because we cannot be deprived of the two abilities that make us human and distinguish us from the beasts, the two abilities that alone make our rebirth and salvation possible, namely, our rationality and our freedom. *Ibid.*

Saturday, July 16

With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king.

In the place of ancestors you, O king, shall have sons; you will make them princes in all the earth.

I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever. *Psalm 45:15-17*

These two abilities, that is, are what enable us to act in keeping with wisdom or to act in keeping with a love that has no wisdom. These are what enable us to look down from wisdom on our love below and therefore see our thoughts, intentions, and feelings, to see what is evil and false and what is good and true in our life and our beliefs. *Ibid.*

JUL 17 AN UNLIKELY LOVE SONG

Ms. Leah G. Goodwin

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

Sermon

Maybe Isaiah got the words wrong.

After all, this is not how love songs are supposed to go. Love songs are supposed to make us feel warm and beautiful and blessed, and sometimes teary. They are supposed to remind us of life's goodness. Whether remembering the past or hoping for the future or just reflecting on the exquisitely tangible pleasures of the moment, love songs are supposed to be about the presence of joy, or at least the possibility of redemption. Love songs are supposed to have lines in them like, "I can't help falling in love with you," and "Our love is here to stay," and "There is nothing for me but to love you." If you go back a few millennia to the Song of Solomon, there are lyrics like this ravishingly beautiful line: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

So it seems to me that maybe Isaiah got the words wrong—or, more likely, maybe the prophet got the genre wrong—because this passage, my friends, does not come off as a ballad of divine love. "I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard," says the Lord. "I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and

thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting."

As it turns out, Isaiah may have been copping an attitude about the love-song thing—making a prophetic point with a little well-deployed irony and a dash of rhetoric. This text responds in no uncertain terms to the terrible social injustice and temptation to warfare that Isaiah witnessed among the eighth-century Judeans to whom he prophesied. It calls Isaiah's audience to be a faithful vineyard, to respond to the ministrations and investment of a loving God. The passage is a poetic masterpiece, effective precisely because it uses language and mixes genres to such jarring effect. It is a love song laced with the language of the law court, a declaration of love that turns into a verdict of guilt, a ballad that bends abruptly toward bitter disappointment. The text may not be a "love song" at all.

But "a love song" is, in fact, what Isaiah calls this passage, and I would like to believe that there is something more to his reference than bitter irony. I would like to believe that this brief introduction to so violent a passage means to point us to a truth embedded more deeply in Isaiah's words, to something more than a powerfully peevish God who forcibly extracts retribution from the wayward vineyard of his chosen people. I desire, beyond all else, to believe in the goodness of a God whose ways are not our ways, and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, and who therefore sometimes confounds our human abilities to perceive truly the intentions of his actions and the hand of his providence. And so, I want to spend a bit of time this morning taking seriously Isaiah's claim, ironic and rhetorical and poetically adroit though it may be, that this little story of love invested and disappointed, along with the ensuing rage so vividly described, is, in fact, a love song.

Now for a little correspondential background. The vineyard, according to Swedenborg, represents "the Church with a person," or the way that God's love and truth is understood and expressed by an individual within his or her larger community. As the plantings in a vineyard require cultivation and good weather and change from year to year, so does a person's perception of God. And this perception, because every individual is unique, is subject to change as a person's time of life and state of being changes. It is precisely because our understanding of the Lord changes, because the plantings and condition of our

spiritual vineyards are fluid, that we are able to be transformed and regenerated throughout our lives. It is why we can grow in love toward one another and God, why it is possible to make heaven from humanity.

Of course, it is also because our understanding of the Lord can change that it is subject to devastation, and that is quite starkly the image with which Isaiah confronts us. Our responsive psalm this morning gives plaintive voice to the vineyard, to Israel, and to every one of us who has ever felt abandoned or undone by life and by God: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land . . . why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? . . . Turn again, O God . . . have regard . . . Restore us."

So what of the devastation so vividly, almost gratuitously, depicted in the Isaiah passage? How are we to respond to such a depiction of the Lord's righteous anger, especially when we hear Israel's plaintive cry in the Psalm?

Where, as the late Peter Gomes used to ask his preaching students when they got a bit too full of brimstone, is the Good News here?

* * *

There is in this text one tiny detail, one frisson of hope that glitters like a tiny ray of sun in an otherwise stormy passage. For, you see, the hill on which Isaiah's beloved Lord has his vineyard is *fertile*. And not only fertile, but *very fertile*—it is, both literally and correspondentially speaking, fat with goodness. The word translated here as "fertile" literally means "full of oil" (olive oil in ancient Israel, not the oil we in the U.S. worry so much about)—and oil, according to Swedenborg, corresponds to the goodness of truth and love, to essence, to that which is essential in something's being.

The fertile hill upon which the Lord had his vineyard, then, is a hill full of life, rich not merely because it is well-cultivated but because it overflows with God's inflowing being. Whether one is speaking of agriculture or spiritual formation, there is a lot you can do with a fertile hill. If the hill is fertile, this passage does not mark the end of the story. Fertile land, even fertile land laid waste and parched with drought, can be made fertile once again. In fact, it can be made more fertile than before, because the very weeds that choke back the goodness can be turned into the soil to nourish it.

Swedenborg's account of our spiritual regeneration process provides an illuminating way in which we might interpret this "fertile hill." This hill upon which the doomed vineyards sits can be read, I think, as representing each one of us. The "very fertile hill" is our soul, our inmost spirit which receives life from the Lord, and from which the Lord shapes our being. Swedenborg tells us that these things that are the Lord's are called "'the remnants' in the Word and are primarily insights of faith that have been learned from infancy. These are stored away and do not surface until the person reaches the second state of regeneration, which rarely happens nowadays without trial, misfortune, or depression, which deaden the physical and worldly concerns that are typically human . . . The primary purpose of this depression and loneliness is that the second-hand faith they have tried to maintain for their self-image may be broken . . . and that they may accept some perception of what is good and true . . . No one can grasp with full sensitivity what is good, what is blessed and happy, without having been in a state of not-good, not-blessed, and not-happy."

The monk and mystic Thomas Merton puts it another way, saying that our true identity is "a point untouched by illusion, a point of pure truth . . . which belongs entirely to God, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point . . . of *absolute poverty*," he says, "is the pure glory of God in us." Poverty, as is so often the case in the Bible, paradoxically reveals glory, whether in a manger, or on the cross, or in our own souls.

Even as I stand in this pulpit, having done my research on this scripture, having reflected theologically and prayed a good bit, I have to admit that what I have just said, and am about to say, seems somehow inadequate. I offer an interesting and, I hope, somewhat unique perspective on this challenging passage, a viewpoint that at least puts a chink in the armor of this passage's rage. I can express my conviction—or maybe it is only my desperate hope—that there is a redemptive point to the ruin that Isaiah describes. I can interpret this frightening passage in good faith, probe it for its internal sense and believe that, encoded in this passage as in every passage of the scriptures, is an expression, not always easy to comprehend, of God's abiding love for us. I can believe—or want to believe—that what Swedenborg and Merton say is true, that regeneration brings us into loneliness and hopelessness and breaks down our protecting walls for a good reason—so that in our spiritual poverty, at "a point untouched by illusion,"

stripped bare of any ability to lie to ourselves, we are at last able truly to know and receive God's glory and goodness.

What I cannot do, and wish I could, is explain why this particular part of our spiritual rebirth, this second stage that opens us to God's love, has to be so painful. And it is painful, sometimes devastatingly so, to a degree that cannot be abstracted if you have ever felt the degree or kind of suffering that Isaiah attributes to the vineyard.

I wish I could really know and explain why the vineyards of our souls have to be laid waste, why the nature of our spiritual being is such that regeneration must of necessity pare us down, stir us up, break apart our certainties, and otherwise botch things up so that we can see the reality of God's love and wisdom. But I cannot.

I wish that I could explain why we have the freedom to produce the wild grapes of mistakes and falsities and self-deception in the first place, instead of the grapes of truth and right life. But I, despite much wrestling with the angelic paradox of free will, cannot. Nor can I pinpoint the quality that makes this process of baptism—which is, in a very “dunk ‘em under the water and bring ‘em up spluttering” kind of way, what Isaiah is describing—something other than drowning, this spiritual refinement something other than a holocaust.

Nor, for that matter, can I really say I believe without ambiguity that God could possibly have an adequate reason for setting up the universe and human nature the way he did, so that this painful emptying out that Isaiah describes would be necessary. I can only say that faith is hope in things unseen, and that faith involves a certain amount of trust. And I can quote yet another wise soul and say this: Antoine de St. Exupery, the French writer whose novel *The Little Prince* suggests that he knew something about love and loss, puts it this way: “Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.”

Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away. We can only know what completeness is when we feel, or have once felt, that we have nothing left. And then it is possible to begin again, to take stock of our surroundings, to realize that we, like Isaiah's vineyard hill, may be ravaged—but we are still fertile, still full

of goodness, still full of understanding about the good and the true, still sustained by the Lord from whom we cannot ever be separated and whose being flows through us in times of challenge or devastation as surely as it does in joy.

The hedges that shore up our lives, that make our lives fruitful and fulfilling—those hedges may be devoured. The walls that protect the fragile structures of our lives may be broken and trampled. The weeds of grief, or misfortune, or bitterness, or rotten choices, may choke back the vines of loving truth and hope in our hearts. Our souls may gasp for water, we might seek for God and not find him in the places we know to look—but in all the desolation, in our deepest vulnerability, we can know this: the hill is still *very fertile*. The ruined land still holds promise. The inmost of our being still vibrates with the life of God. The weeds of our sorrows can be turned back into the soil of our souls to nourish it, our tears can be

rain to water parched land, the vines can be restored to flourish again, the walls and hedges of our world can be fashioned anew.

The hill is still fertile. And when—not if, but *when*—our vineyards are rebuilt, their beauty will be brighter for the darkness they have suffered.

Isaiah's dire tale of the vineyard is an unlikely love song, indeed—but after all, the Lord has never specialized in “likely,” or reasonable, or obvious. And this passage is, remember, only a part of the story. It represents one crucial step, a painful but transformative stretch on the road to regeneration. And years later, speaking to an exiled Israel, another prophet will add his stanza to the song, his vision of the rebirth that comes out of a desolated vineyard. He will show us the end of the ancient story of rebirth, if in fact the story can be said to have an end:

“Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob; he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you... you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.” (Isaiah 43:1-2, 4a)

So, you see—it really *is* a love song.

Amen.

This passage represents one crucial step, a painful but transformative stretch on the road to regeneration.

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 18

“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. *Matthew 12:33*

Faith and life are distinct from each other, like thinking and doing; and as thinking has relation to the understanding and doing to the will, it follows that faith and life are distinct from each other, like the understanding and the will. *Doctrine of Life n. 42*

Tuesday, July 19

You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. *Matthew 12:34*

Man possesses two faculties, one of which is called the will, and the other the understanding. They are distinct from each other, but are so created that they may be a one, and when they are a one they are called the mind, so that the human mind consists of these two faculties, and the whole of man's life is in them. *Doctrine of Life n. 43*

Wednesday, July 20

The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. *Matthew 12:35*

Just as all things in the universe that are in accordance with Divine order bear relation to good and truth, so do all things in man bear relation to the will and the understanding; for the good in a man belongs to his will and the truth in him belongs to his understanding, these two faculties being their receptacles and subjects; the will, of all things of good, and the understanding of all things of truth. *Ibid.*

Thursday, July 21

I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; or by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” *Matthew 12:36-37*

The goods and truths in a man are nowhere else, and so therefore neither are the love and faith, because love is of good and good is of love, and faith is of truth and truth is of faith. *Ibid.*

Friday, July 22

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but it finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ When it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. *Mt. 12:43-44*

It is of the utmost importance to know how the will and the understanding make one mind. They do so in the same way that good and truth make a one, for there is a like marriage between the will and the understanding to that which exists between good and truth. *Ibid.*

Saturday, July 23

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” *Matthew 12:46-50*

A man may know, think and understand many things, and yet not be wise; and since it is of faith to know and to think, and still more to understand that a thing is so, it is possible for a man to believe that he has faith, and yet not to have it. *Doctrine of the Lord n. 44*

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Short Thought #1

Ian Barbour, a professor emeritus at Carlton College who held faculty positions in both religion and in science, technology, and culture, is widely regarded as the most influential shaper of the science and spirituality conversation in recent decades. He is especially known for his taxonomy identifying the four fundamental paradigms of the interface between science and religion:

Conflict: In this interface paradigm, each side sees the other as basically wrong-headed and not reliant upon a truth methodology that can be trusted. Conflict is especially in place in the creationism-versus-evolution argument, but can be seen in other ways historically in terms of a derisive view of the truth claims of the other side. The stories and contexts of Galileo, Darwin, Dawkins, and the Young Earth creationists characterize this stance.

Independence: Stephen Jay Gould is a significant voice for this stance, which sees each conversation as

discrete from the others, addressing different issues entirely. Religion pursues morals, ethics, meaning, and purpose questions, whereas science investigates empirical analyses of the material world.

Dialogue: This perspective notes that science raises questions its methods cannot answer; religion seeks to address those questions. Each possesses resources with which to answer the question “What is?” and has contributions to share with one another through which each might be amply enriched.

Integration: This perspective asserts that there is enough overlap between each field’s endeavor for truth such that not only might a genuine search for truth in one illuminate the quest for truth in the other, but also an integration of knowledge systems from both realms could very well yield the superior approach to “what is?”

Historically, Swedenborgians have been integrationists, and so was I for the past twenty-five years. But during the last year, I have changed my sense of things on this issue and now put myself in the dialogue room. I don’t believe I know science well enough to be an integrationist, and I know of only one Swedenborgian scientist who is working hard to be in on this conversation. I feel more humility and restraint is needed from religious enthusiasts, because there is no integrity in spouting conclusions that you don’t actually understand. We should all care about the truth, whatever that proves to be. However, I feel I have contributions to make from the theology side, and I believe strongly in the subject area as a potential place for personal and collective spirituality. My contribution comes in the form of this sermon: taking some science precepts and trying to find the dialogue points with theology and spirituality as I understand it.

Here’s a question: Do you think what we learn in science relates at all to your spiritual life? Are understandings about the material universe pertinent to your inner spiritual world?

Sermon

More than Darwin, more than Einstein, Isaac Newton is viewed by historians as the thinker who forged the most significant paradigm shift in the way we understand the cosmos in which we find ourselves. Newtonian physics involved both the discovery of and considerable mastery over the great forces which govern the physical universe—forces which are invisible to the physical eye. And it is with Newtonian physics that we came to a deep

understanding that the cosmos operates with precise laws and order—and not with divine caprice.

A year before Swedenborg was born, Newton published his *Principia*—often pegged as the most influential science book in Western history—a book which laid out the physics of the three great laws of motion which led to his universal law of gravity as well as the whole framework of Newtonian physics.

There is a popular story that while Newton was sitting under an apple tree an apple fell on his head and—voilà!—he suddenly conceived the Universal Law of Gravitation. As in most such legends, this is almost certainly not true in its details, but the story contains elements of what actually happened.

Peter Ackroyd, who is the latest of several new biographers of Newton, believes that the Cambridge don did have one of those insight fusion moments while reflecting on the phenomenon of having watched an apple fall from the tree that produced it and land with a thud on the ground. He applied it to his second law of motion and concluded that there was only one explanation why the apple would accelerate in motion, and that is that some force was being applied to it. He was already thoroughly convinced that he had proven that motion *only* occurs through force. In a flash he realized that there is an unseen force—which he came to call gravity—that was acting upon the apple to cause its accelerated motion. And then he surmised that this unseen force had to have some extension in space in which it was operating, and it was clearly extending in space from at least as high as the tallest apple tree. But wait. That surely was crazy. You could go much higher on a cliff and drop an apple, and that force was being applied to it and causing an accelerated motion.

Next came Newton's truly brilliant insight: if the force of gravity reaches to the top of the highest places in the world, might it not reach even farther; in particular, might it not reach all the way to the orbit of the moon? Then the orbit of the moon about Earth could be a consequence of the gravitational force, because the acceleration due to gravity could change the velocity of the moon in just such a way that it followed an orbit around Earth. He was right in a very fundamental way: there is an unseen force acting upon everything in the solar system. And the rest is science history.

Now, one very important thing about Isaac Newton is that he was a deeply religious person, and he spent

fully half of his literary output working on matters such as alchemy (which he pursued as a science of transforming the physical world into spiritual energies and forces) and on secret number codes in the Bible. Many scientists who abhor all religion tend to be embarrassed that the father of modern science had so many religious and spiritual ideas about the Big Picture, because such scientists think the real Big Picture is physical science itself, which began with Newtonian physics.

In a sense, the father of the Swedenborgian Church is the other side of a coin from Newton. Swedenborg was also a great natural scientist who also wrote extensively in religion, but in Swedenborg's case, even though his contributions to natural science put him at the top of the class in Sweden's history for discoveries and inventions, he is mostly known today for his religious writings.

Both of these two men, who lived at the same time, saw that there was something important in the idea that the laws of physical science might have a parallel in something like laws of spiritual science, and forgive me if I say that though Newton must be acknowledged as the father of physical science mastery, Swedenborg can quite legitimately be regarded as the father of spiritual science mastery. As a scientist who became a clairvoyant mystic, Swedenborg writes like no other theologian regarding the nature of the corresponding relationship between physical laws and spiritual laws.

To be seriously playful or playfully serious, in the "dialogue" mode of conversation as a theologian and practitioner of Swedenborgian spirituality, I'd like to propose three Swedenborgian Laws of Spiritual Motion.

A Spiritual Gravity Acts Upon Our Souls Without Ceasing

Spiritual gravity is a process happening inside of us all the time, because we are unceasingly involved *in forces of attraction*. The center of our being is constantly withstanding a multitude, actually, of forces in the form of attractions and desires that exert a pull upon our will nonstop.

In a theosophy as old as time, Swedenborg sees the human soul as a place of a collision of values that are inherent in a growth process. Put more directly, he believes in good and evil, in heaven and hell, as forces that are every bit as real and as lawful as math and

*The more we
build our spiritual
muscles, the lighter
we become in
flowing with divine
providence.*

physics. The amount of unseen force would blow our minds if we could actually “see” it somehow as an illustration in action. But the fact is, we *are* feeling it, and we are so used to feeling it that for many people it is not something to be noticed. It is just life.

And Swedenborg might say, yes, it is indeed life—life, whose very essence is shaped through the forces of spiritual gravity as determined through our spiritual choice making, which is soul making, in our responses to these attractional forces operating upon us 24/7.

There’s good spiritual gravity, and there’s bad spiritual gravity, or upward spiritual force and downward spiritual force—or, to put it in the more common way, angels and demons tug at us all the day long. It is truly like spiritual isometrics. We build muscle or lose muscle strength due to how engaged we are willing to be with working against those forces that would suck us into lower-minded and lower-hearted actions, speech, and thought.

The Ten Commandments are essentially illustrations of positive and negative attractions. Envy, covetousness, adultery, murder, stealing: these are all broad categories of negative states of desiring, negative attractions. A tremendous emphasis is placed in Swedenborgian spiritual physics on squarely dealing with temptation toward negative attractions. Temptation is an old-fashioned word somewhat out of vogue, but its reality and essence is an ever-present feature of the human condition. In fact, temptation is the very gymnasium where we bring our hearts, minds, and souls into heavenly fitness. What force is fundamental in a gymnasium? Gravity. Gravity is what causes weight, and weight resistance is the primary dynamic or exercise.

Spiritual gravitational forces are exerted upon the essence of our being, of our consciousness constantly. We don’t have to produce all the force to succeed in the midst of these forces. All the power to do so will come from God, yet there is an absolutely crucial role of solidarity with our loves and attractions that connects or disconnects us with divine power. A Swedenborgian maxim is: “Pray as if it is all up to God, and work as if it is all up to you.” So become a gym rat, beloved, because it is a law of the cosmos that spiritual gravity is putting you in the weight room every day anyway.

Perception Alters the Gravitational Force in Spiritual Motion

Swedenborg himself laid tremendous emphasis on the power of the mind to alter our spiritual reality

for the better, and a whole lot of Swedenborgian theology can be summarized in a bumper-sticker truncation that says, “Truth leads.” We are designed to be able to see farther than we can actualize, and that makes complete sense, doesn’t it? You have to be able to see where you need to head, right? We all can envision much higher spiritual integration than we are currently able to pull off, and that’s by design: our spiritual sight is always out ahead of our capability, and the actual sight of what is needed is intrinsic to our being able to begin conforming to that which we see. That’s why we look at models, teachers, exemplars.

This works for us in so many ways. Cognitive restructuring is a famous psychotherapeutic school of counseling that works on changing belief structures in order to change life experiences. In cognitive restructuring, we deconstruct fundamentally false ways of thinking and replace them with belief structures that empower effective living. For example, it is easy for us to develop flawed assumptions and conclusions about life from our early life experiences that we never confront and transform—such as feeling that we are unlovely and unlovable. It’s very common, and no one is likely to be completely free from this sort of fear along the way. Low self-esteem forms a real prison around our consciousness, however, and severely limits our ability to see our potentiality. In cognitive restructuring one works systematically and with intelligent intentionality to rebuild a functional positive self-esteem that dramatically changes one’s energy for life and ability to see creative ways of expressing one’s loves and talents effectively in both one’s personal and social worlds.

Other examples abound from the schools of positive thinking, or, as Robert Schuller liked to call it, “possibility thinking.” My favorite illustration of this involves yet another Swedenborgian colleague, George Dole, who ran in the first four-minute mile race back in the year of my birth, 1954. The four-minute mile is one of the most famous milestones in the annals of sport, and runners had been stalking it for many years. But a funny thing happened after Roger Bannister broke the record that day. Suddenly, within months, a couple of other runners broke the four-minute barrier, and soon lots of runners were hopping over it. Were runners all of a sudden going through an axial leap in physical ability? No, they were breaking a psychological barrier. Runners perceived that it could be done, and it altered their actual energies for it. We are so designed that changes in our mind can produce significant changes in our abilities and capacities.

Or, to put it in some playful Swedenborgianese, perception alters the gravitational force in spiritual motion.

In Spiritual Motion Greater Mass Produces Lesser Weight

A final nugget about spiritual gravity is that the more we receive of God's life into our being, the more spiritual mass we have. Newton's Second Law of Motion says that Force equals Mass times Acceleration. Swedenborgian spiritual physics declares a correspondential law that says the greater our spiritual mass becomes in relation to the infinite mass of God's holy center, the more powerful the attraction—or force of gravity. That is why the burden becomes so light! It becomes less and less as if we are picking it up, and more and more as if we are being lifted up.

It is completely the opposite kind of gravity when we allow ourselves to be pulled toward God. Becoming inwardly conjoined in love for others and for the God in specific moments and situations is increasingly like being carried by some kind of current. We must make our efforts, yes, but then there is that miraculous uplifting force for which no lesser pleasure can substitute. I think that is what the Lord meant when he said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me . . . for My yoke is easy and My burden light" (Mt. 11:28-30). The more we build our spiritual muscle, the lighter we become in flowing with divine providence.

Let us listen to Swedenborg: "There is actually a sphere proceeding continually from the Divine, and filling the entire spiritual and natural worlds, which raises all toward heaven. It is like a strong current in the ocean which unobservedly draws a vessel. All who believe in the real presence of God and live according to true spiritual precepts enter into that current and are elevated" (*True Christian Religion* 652:3).

Short Thought #2

The number of people in history who have made contributions of celebrated distinction to both science and religion is very, very small—if the standard is not mere professional competence but historical significance such that the contributions in each sphere—science and religion—would make history books. Swedenborg abides among a tiny group of as few as three or four who have made such potent contributions in both spheres of discourse as to be recognized as historically noteworthy.

The principle that guided Swedenborg in his rather amazing journey of investigation, discovery, and interpretation was his search for what I like to call "deep causality." It was the pursuit of deep causality that caused him to cross over from being primarily a natural scientist into becoming a theosopher. One example of how seeking deep causes leads to powerful insights is how he came to affirm a deep-cause principle he called contiguity to how our solar system was developed. Nearly all science philosophers in his day were caught up in the Cartesian split between material and immaterial realities, and nearly all of the big names, such as Descartes and Malebranche and Leibniz, believed in a compartmentalized cosmos and reality schema. Swedenborg, however, felt he could see that a deeper reality was likely true: that everything connected. He called this his principle of contiguity. With this as his guiding insight, Swedenborg became the first person to figure out that all the bodies of our solar system originated from the same mass—that the planets were separated long ago from the original solar mass. He was able to theorize the solar system as one dynamic unit because he had come to a deep causality principle that everything connects, and it simply then made sense to figure out how the planets connected to the sun and to each other. They all were part of an original solar mass. He was the first one to figure that out, and he struck upon it because he was focused on deep causes.

Short Thought #3

Swedenborg's intensive anatomical research, especially on the brain, led to some historically significant discoveries, such as being the first to correctly deduce the function of the cerebrum and the first to correctly deduce that the brain undulates inside the skull in concert with the lungs, not with the heart beat, which had been the conventional position. In a recent book published by MIT Press called *Brain, Vision, Memory: Tales in the History of Neuroscience*, Princeton cognitive science scholar Professor Charles Gross presents Swedenborg as an unbelievably prescient intellect working in neuroscience 250 years ahead of his time. Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School, the author of the bestseller and classic work *The Relaxation Response*, confesses that Swedenborg understood the physiology of meditation two centuries ahead of his time. The fact that he also developed a raja yoga controlled breathing method of stilling the mind for concentration is not only another example of Swedenborg as a perceptive explorer of "deep causes" but also one that gave him greater capacities to perceive deep causes.

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 25

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. *Psalm 104:1-4*

God is not in space and is therefore omnipresent and Divinity is everywhere the same, but there is an apparent variation of divinity in angels and in us because of our differences in receptivity.

Divine Love and Wisdom n. 147

Tuesday, July 26

You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. *Psalm 104:5-6*

Since divinity emanates from the Lord as the sun takes place in light and warmth, then, and since light and warmth flow first of all into those universal vessels that are called "atmospheres" in our world, and since these are what contain clouds, it stands to reason that the way the deeper levels of angels' minds, or of our own, are veiled by such clouds determines how open we are to divinity as emanating. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, July 27

At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. *Psalm 104:7-8*

By these "clouds," I mean spiritual clouds. These are thoughts that are in harmony with divine wisdom if they are based on true perceptions and that disagree if they consist of false ones. *Ibid.*

Thursday, July 28

These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. *Psalm 104:27-29*

So when they are represented visually in the spiritual world, thoughts based on true perceptions look like bright clouds and thoughts based on false perceptions look like black clouds. *Ibid.*

Friday, July 29

When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works— who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. *Psalm 104:30-32*

We may therefore conclude that Divinity as emanating is actually within all of us, but that it is variously veiled by us. *Ibid.*

Saturday, July 30

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord! *Psalm 104:33-35*

The reason the Lord created the universe and everything in it by means of the spiritual world's sun is that this sun is the first emanation of divine love and wisdom, everything comes from divine love and wisdom. *Divine Love and Wisdom n. 154*

ASTRONOMICAL CORRESPONDENCES

Rev. Louis A. Dole

31 JUL

Genesis 1:1-19

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Revelation 6

Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!" When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed. When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Sermon

It is well known in the New Church that the opening chapter of the Bible treats of the stages through which we pass in our regeneration. In this divine allegory of the creation the heavens represent the internal or spiritual man and the earth the external or natural man. The first three days are the progressive states of regeneration in the natural degree. On the fourth day it is said that the sun, moon, and stars were created.

Spiritually interpreted, this marks the beginning of a truly spiritual development.

All things in nature were created by God and are in fact but the carrying out in the ultimate realm of nature of some divine idea or purpose. And because man is made in the image and likeness of God and is a world in miniature, every created thing corresponds likewise to something—some faculty, principle, or affection—in man. Because man perverted his faculties and brought them into disorder, the same natural object comes to have a double correspondence, a good and a bad. And as the Word treats of man in his evil as well as in his good and orderly states, the same terms are used to express either. But the context will always show in which sense they are used.

The sun warms, lightens, and vivifies the natural world as the Lord does the spiritual world. So it corresponds to and represents the Lord, and in our text the sun, with reference to the regenerating man, represents love to the Lord. The luminaries are to rule the day and the night and “to divide the light from the darkness.” When one comes into love to the Lord, this ruling love stands in the midst of all his activities and, like the sun in the center of its system, swings them around it as the center of all their movements. This ruling love gives to his affections all their warmth and to his thoughts all their light; it is the sun of his little world.

This state does not come at once or without effort. The three days of labor were necessary before the sun—love to the Lord—was created. This is the meaning of the statement that the sun was created on the fourth day. And when the Lord wishes to describe a church which has turned away from Him, He says that the sun has gone down.

The moon is the symbol of faith or belief. The moon does not shine of itself but reflects light from the sun. Our thoughts but reflect the quality of our affections. All our powers of spiritual perception depend upon the quality of the will. Hence the sun and moon are created on the same day. Such as our love is, so will be our faith.

“He made the stars also.” The stars are suns too distant to give us any heat, making themselves known only from their light. They represent neither the glowing affection of the sun nor the intelligent faith of the sun, but particular points of knowledge concerning spiritual things.

Before the time of the telescope it was thought that the stars were but a few thousand in number, but with the aid of the telescope the number has been increased beyond our ability to count them. So it is with the Word. A few of its truths were formerly known, but recent investigation, with the science of correspondence as the spiritual telescope, has multiplied them to infinity.

The sun is man’s state as to his love, the moon is his faith, and the stars are the knowledge which fill his mental sky.

We read in Jeremiah, “Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever.” This does not mean, as the Israelites thought, that Israel would remain a nation as long as the natural sun, moon, and stars should continue. Israel represented the Lord’s Church at that time, and Jeremiah’s words are a spiritual warning and mean that when the Church loses its love to the Lord, which is its sun, and corrupts its faith, which is its moon, and disregards the truths of the Word, which are its stars, then it ceases to be the Lord’s Church.

In Joel we read, “And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.” Peter on the day of Pentecost quoted this passage and declared that it was then fulfilled. The sun of the Church is turned into darkness when love of the Lord dies out of its affections. The moon of the Church is turned into blood when violence is done to true faith or doctrine, and the stars fall from the heavens of the Church when the genuine truths of the Word are perverted or disregarded.

But the Lord never leaves Himself without a true Church upon the earth. He foresaw that the first Christian Church would come to its end. In Matthew He describes its consummation as follows: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and

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they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." And in the book of Revelation we find these words, "I beheld . . . and lo . . . the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth."

It is clear to everyone that these prophecies refer to the Second Coming. Many have taken them and many even today still take them literally, forgetting that similar prophecies of the first coming were not literally fulfilled when the Lord came into the world. What is meant is that the time would come when love to the Lord would again die out of the Church, when the faith of the Church would become obscured, and when true knowledge of the Lord and of heaven would drop out of the minds of men.

One further quotation from Revelation may be cited: "And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood." This star, as in all other places in the Word, is a symbol of truth or falsity. By its being a great star is signified that it is a fundamental dogma of the Church. By its being called Wormwood is meant that it is a false principle, and its felling upon the rivers and fountains of waters means that it perverts and falsifies the truths of the Word. Before the Second Advent and the descent of the New Jerusalem the Church had adopted as fundamental to her faith a principle so false and deadly that it would turn in her all the rivers and fountains of water—the truths of the Word—into wormwood or bitterness, so that men would die of spiritual thirst by reason of those poisoned waters. The star did not fall upon the earth or the sea because these mean the external Church and its memory knowledges. The Church in its externals may go on for ages even after the internal has been killed out.

It was not by coincidence that the Wise Men were led to the Lord by a star. When they came to Herod at Jerusalem, they asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and we come to worship Him."

As the earth turns itself to the east, the sun rises to warm and lighten it. The east pictures the Lord as the source of spiritual light, and only those are wise who turn themselves to the Lord by loving Him. The truth in the Word is the star that leads us to the Lord. Only those who are wise can see this star. Amen.

Prayer

Lord, let me not be so removed
from the rhythm of natural things
that I fail to hear you speaking in the wind;
so cushioned by micro-chip comforts
that I fail to feel your power in the warmth of the
sun,
so bedazzled by the brilliance of human ingenuity
that I fail to see your light in a morning sky.
Lord, grant me the wisdom that befits my years
but let me never lose the wonder of a child.

- Frank Topping, *Lord of My Days*, 1980

Eternal God, whose loving power surveys all that
you have made,

whose tender mercy is disposed to the least of your
creatures,

and beyond whose care there is nothing that has
life or breath,

we bless you for your wisdom, we give thanks for
your loving-kindness,

we praise you for your providence,

and with patience and joy we rejoice in your perfect
will;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Queen Anne (1665-1714)

Blessed are you, God of perilous matter and violent
sea,

Blessed are you, God of untameable passion and
marching evolution.

Blessed are you, God of immeasurable time and
boundless ether.

Blessed are you, God of the abyss of stars and
atoms.

Blessed are you in the countless dimensions of
your glory,

World without end.

- Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

Monday, August 1

[Jesus said to the blind man], "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

John 9:35-38

Real faith is nothing else than an acknowledgment that the thing is so because it is true; for one who is in real faith thinks and says, "This is true, and therefore I believe it." For faith is of truth, and truth is of faith.

Doctrine of Faith n. 2

Tuesday, August 2

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. *John 9:39-41*

The reason spiritual things can be comprehended is that in respect to the understanding a man may be uplifted into the light of heaven, in which light none but spiritual things appear, and these are the truths of faith. For the light of heaven is spiritual light.

Doctrine of Faith n. 3

Wednesday, August 3

Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. *John 10:25-27*

Be it known that charity and faith make a one as do the will and the understanding, for charity is of the will, and faith is of the understanding. *Ibid. n. 18*

Thursday, August 4

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. *John 10:28-29*

19. Charity and faith in a man are related to each other precisely as are the motion of the heart called systole and diastole, and that of the lungs called breathing. ... For this reason the will and its affection are meant in the Word by the "heart," and the understanding and its thought by the "breath"... *Ibid. n. 19*

Friday, August 5

Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?"... If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." *John 10:32, 37-38*

The knowledges [*cognitiones*] of truth and of good are not matters of real belief [*fidei*] until the man is in charity, but are the storehouse of material out of which the faith of charity can be formed. *Ibid. n. 25.*

Saturday, August 6

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." *John 11:9-11*

This storehouse of material is in the highest degree necessary, because faith cannot be formed without it, for the knowledges [*cognitiones*] of truth and good enter into faith and make it, so that if there are no knowledges, faith cannot come forth into being, for an entirely void and empty faith is impossible. *Ibid. n. 28*

ABIDING IN THE LORD

Rev. Kevin K. Baxter

Isaiah 57:15-16

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not continually accuse, nor will I always be angry; for then the spirits would grow faint before me, even the souls that I have made.

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Sermon

Earlier this month, our friend Cliff stopped down at our house in Whitman to check up on the plants he had transplanted from his yard to ours. Much like a parent, he wanted to make sure that his flowers were off to a good start in their new home. One of the things he came to do in particular was to prune and stake the berry bushes. The art of berry cultivation escaped my attention growing up, so I was eager to learn the lessons of berry husbandry. He pruned the bushes and then tied each shoot to a stake. I inquired as to why. "So that the plant can put more of its energy into producing fruit," he said. Basically, when you prune, you stop the growth from becoming bigger than it needs to be. It no longer needs to concern itself with growing longer. When the fruit starts to grow, the shoot will become heavier. To keep itself supported and to get the sun it wants, it will put its energy into becoming stronger or thicker. If you re-channel the plant's energy away from growing and strengthening, all the plant needs to do is focus on flowering and growing berries.

I cannot help but think about this idea as a metaphor for our own growth. Imagine what our lives would be like if we could stop worrying about whether we are big enough and strong enough. Imagine what it would be like if we could just focus on our flowers and our fruit. It would be an ideal life, wouldn't it? Everything in the world would be about making beauty and being truly useful to all of humanity. In fact, we might even consider such a reality to be heaven on earth.

But alas, this world is about preparation for the spiritual reality that awaits us. In this world, we have things we desire, which are the things we strive for. We have an inbuilt drive to reach and reach and reach out, farther and farther. In general parlance, growing is considered a good thing. It is generally understood by humans to mean maturing. In a sense, to grow means to be advanced, but this is not always the case with fruit-bearing things. Without pruning, a raspberry bush, for example, can grow too big—so big, in fact, that it cannot support its own fruit. In addition, we are told that in heaven people grow to the prime of their lives. This prime is the time where you had your most vitality and use. One might say that you are pruned to your perfect fruit-bearing length.

Likewise, this world is full of things that can knock us down. We have to spend energy on protection and security. In heaven, people have been lifted into the place where they truly desire to be and are able to pursue their greatest joys. Those in the lower spiritual regions are so busy trying to best all the others around them that they have no time or desire to seek the beauty, innocence, and purity of heaven for themselves. The Lord has ordered existence in such a way that we have been given a safe and supportive environment to blossom into the people we were meant to be. But from our perspective, this is often not the case. In any given day we meet people who resemble angels, but we can also meet those who resemble demons.

In this world, we must embrace the biblical promise that the Lord is here to help us if we are going to flower and bring our sweet fruits to bear in this world. While the Lord makes us uniquely perfect when we awake fully into the spiritual world, he does not leave us abandoned here while we struggle in this world. We have been given the gift of scripture and the church to help us understand the true nature of our lives here.

Before I get to the reality of pruning and staking, I must first say that the Lord is the vine! Whether

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we acknowledge it or not, all things exist because of God. Divine energies radiate through all things, good and bad. This does not mean that the Lord's essence is embraced and fully used by all things for the betterment of the kingdom. After all, the life we receive from God could be spent trying to reach a goal embedded in the desires of this world. If a branch grows into the dirt, it will not bear fruit and will most likely meet an untimely end.

It is a given, then, that the Lord is the very essence of life, and yet he is also the gardener who is pruning and staking. How can that be? We experience the Lord as both love and wisdom. While the energy we receive from the Lord arrives in us first and foremost as love, it is our acceptance of that love that compels us to seek the truth and the form of that love. It is up to us to welcome that love so that the Lord can assist us in becoming better people. If it were not so, what would be the point of this existence?

We are given the Word, which we study. One might say that, as we grow toward a better understanding of who we are in this world, we are finding our perfect fruiting length. When we are short, we might get a bud or two and a little fruit. This is the early state of our understanding of what it means to be truly useful in this world, which often comes when we are children and learn what it means to help another. That joy, that reward of being neighborly, ideally compels us to lengthen our shoot and grow more buds. Eventually, when we reach maturity, we understand our roles in this world. We have skills and talents that we offer to the world so that it might better reflect the Lord's kingdom.

At the same time, we also have the church. The church might be viewed as a stake helping us and supporting us as we grow in our spiritual development. It is a community that we are bound to that helps regulate our growth. It binds us to a direction of understanding so that we do not grow willy-nilly but in concert with others. In the case of a vineyard, the stake is more akin to a fence that allows the vines to grow off the ground and stretch out into rows for more efficient harvesting. A community of believers does the same thing. They help direct our thoughts from going in every direction, especially when it comes to understanding the teachings contained in scripture.

Now, as we have learned from our Bible passage today, when we get it right, we grow and blossom

further, but when we do not, we are cut off. Every person has a blossom somewhere in their life. Every person can be pruned back to that first blossom that the Lord offers us as a compass for our life's direction. But we also know from the evils and selfishness we see in the world that there are many barren and sick branches extending beyond some of those early buds. It is out of the Lord's love that we do not receive true pleasure and joy from those activities. The more we try to grow without producing fruit, the more we are cut back.

We all have fruits that we bear in this world—spiritual children, whether they be our art or our writing, our hobbies or careers. Each of us should think about how we can nurture the fruits we are growing and bearing in this world, for they will shape us in the spiritual world as well. How do we make them their ripest?

Imagine what our lives would be like if we could stop worrying about whether we are big enough and strong enough and just focus on our flowers and our fruit.

While we are not fully in the spiritual world yet, this is the true business of our creation—to focus on our gifts and make them the sweetest and plumpest fruits of their kind. We do this with the Lord's love as the vine that gives us energy and life. We do this by focusing that love into our talents, which in this world are staked by our communities and pruned by our love of scripture.

Prayers

Lord, you have brought us near to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of the just made perfect. Grant us, during our earthly pilgrimage, to live in their fellowship, and in our heavenly country to become partakers of joy.

- William Bright (1824-1901)

O God of peace and infinite power, who silently enables the fruits of the earth to grow, and silently directs the planets in their courses: grant that we may learn, from you, to walk in quiet confidence on our pilgrim way; to the glory of your name.

- Daily Prayer, 1941

Lord of time, and God of all creation, forgive me for squandering time that should have been spent in your service, that should have been used in furthering your kingdom, that should have been given to loving those you have given me to love. In your mercy, gather up my misspent days, cover them with your love, and absorb them and me, finally, into your one, holy, and endless day which is life eternal, lived with and through you.

- Frank Topping, 2002

Monday, August 8

Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." *Matthew 19:16-17*

There are a great many people who do not know that they are involved in evil because they do not do evil things outwardly. They are afraid of civil laws and of losing their reputations, so by habitual practice they have trained themselves to avoid evil deeds as harmful both to their reputations and to their purses.

Divine Providence n. 117

Tuesday, August 9

He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" *Mt. 19:18-20*

However, if they do not avoid evil deeds on religious grounds, because they are sins and are in conflict with God, then the cravings for evils and their pleasures are still there within them like foul water that is dammed up and stagnant. They might examine their thoughts and intentions and discover these compulsions if they only knew what sins were. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, August 10

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Matthew 19:20-22

First, there is no way we can abstain from evils as sins so as to turn against them inwardly unless we engage in struggles against them. Second, we are to abstain from evils as sins and struggle against them in apparent autonomy. *Ibid n. 118*

Thursday, August 11

[Jesus asked] "Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Matthew 21:25-27

Third, if we abstain from evils for any other reason than that they are sins, we are not really abstaining from them. We are only preventing them from being visible in the world. *Ibid.*

Friday, August 12

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life." *Matthew 19:28-29*

The Lord cleanses us from the compulsions in our inner nature and from the evil practices themselves in our outer nature. The reason the Lord cleanses us from our compulsions to evil when we expel evils in apparent autonomy is that the Lord cannot cleanse us until we have done our part. *Ibid. 119*

Saturday, August 13

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." *Matthew 19:23-24*

Unless the evils are expelled, then, there is no opening. The evils block the way and close the door, a door that the Lord cannot open unless we cooperate.

Ibid.

Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.
For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.
How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep!
The dullard cannot know, the stupid cannot understand this:
though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever, but you, O Lord, are on high forever.

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he

interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Sermon

"O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep." - Psalm 92:5

To the truth so expressed our hearts can respond at once. No fact of existence is more impressive than the wonderful nature and variety of God's creation and the evidence of his far-seeing wisdom. Though men have been living on this planet for thousands of years, they have scarcely begun to learn the secrets of the physical universe. New marvels are constantly coming into view. Almost every day some fresh discovery is made, either of a natural force previously unknown, or of new ways in which a known force can be applied. No one knows what undiscovered blessings still lie hidden in nature's storehouse.

The longer we reflect on such things, the more our wonder grows. When we consider that the earth on which we live is but one among an almost infinite number, the endless possibilities are too much for any human mind to comprehend. What is just as wonderful, we are taught that the grand purpose of creation is the building up of a heaven from the human race. There is no man or woman anywhere who is not surrounded by conditions which, if they are used properly, lead surely heavenward. Toward the accomplishment of that result divine providence is ever giving all possible aid consistent with man's freedom.

No two men, even identical twins, are completely alike, nor do any two require the same circumstances for salvation. The Lord deals with each according to

his need. Before the foundations of the earth were laid, he was making provisions, not only for you and me, but for all others now living or yet to be born. Not one was overlooked or forgotten in the slightest particular. Truly may we say with the Psalmist, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand."

Whenever the Lord's thoughts are mentioned, the mind of a Christian turns at once to his divine Word, as well as to his works, and this with good reason. For the Bible, which is the great charter of Christianity and the one source of its light, is full of divine wisdom. The Lord is infinite, and so must be his thoughts. There is no escape from the conclusion that creation and revelation do not present two standards of different value by which to judge him. Both are equally divine and perfect. It would be wrong to assume that one displays a more profound and far-seeing wisdom than the other. On the contrary, the Lord's thoughts, however or wherever they find expression, are very deep.

Oddly enough, this fact is by no means generally accepted. Though most people believe that nature has many undiscovered secrets, not many acknowledge any such distinction for the Word of God. It is known that all of nature's treasures do not lie on the face of the earth, but it is not widely admitted that divine revelation also holds treasures which have not yet come to light. People take for granted that all that the Scriptures teach is fully known and understood by them. On the basis of this judgment many declare that large parts of the Bible are obsolete and useless. Some reject the entire Bible as a source of authority.

Directly opposed to these ideas are the teachings of the New Jerusalem Church. We believe that the Scriptures express God's thoughts, and are therefore divine truth itself. As such, they are infinite and inexhaustible. Their full meaning does not lie on the surface or come all at once to man's comprehension. Within the sense of the letter are higher senses with which it makes one by correspondence. Those senses are to the letter what man's soul is to his body; namely, the seat of life and power. From the same fountain the Scriptures derive their peculiar holiness.

They are the source of wisdom to angels as well as men. But angels read them in their higher meanings, while men on earth abide mainly in the sense of the letter. If ever we ascend to heaven and become angels ourselves, we shall read the Word of God as

they do. Our minds will be illumined by the light of higher truth, as theirs are. Unlike other books, the Word of God is wondrously adapted to all degrees of intelligence and spirituality.

It speaks equally to the elderly and to children; to the wise in their wisdom, and to the childlike in their untarnished simplicity. And after their earthly life is ended it still speaks to them according to the state in which they are. Is not this what we should expect of the Divine Author? Could we, indeed, expect anything else of him? The truth to which he gives utterance must, by its very nature, be suited to all ages and conditions and to men of all times. Remember the words of Jesus, "The words that I speak unto you are spirit and are life."

Jesus instructed his disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." They saw that the kingdom he came to establish was not of this world, but a heavenly and eternal kingdom. Thus they were led to see that his thoughts as expressed in the Word were not only "very deep" but far deeper than they had thought possible. And now a still further opening of the Scriptures has been granted to mankind, and deeper yet his thoughts are seen to be.

The spiritual and celestial senses within the letter reveal depths beyond depths, without end or limit. The time has come when those who seek to follow the Lord can bear the truth which Jesus promised. The Bible which generations of Christians have loved has not only been preserved as the guide to life but has been greatly increased in power and holiness. Nature and revelation are in a more complete unity, and join in singing, "O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep."

Prayers

O Lord, we pray thee, sow the seed of thy Word in our hearts, and send down upon us the showers of thy grace, that we may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and at the day of harvest may be gathered into thy heavenly garner, through thy mercy, O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, King of the nations.

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,

For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

- Revelation 15:3-4, 11

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 15

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. *Genesis 2:21-22*

There are two abilities within us, gifts from the Lord, that distinguish us from animals. One ability is that we can discern what is true and what is good.

Divine Love and Wisdom n. 240

Tuesday, August 16

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. *Genesis 2:23-24*

One ability is that we can discern what is true and what is good. This ability is called "rationality," and is an ability of our discernment. The other ability is that we can do what is true and what is good. This ability is called "freedom," and is an ability of our volition. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, August 17

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." *Genesis 3:1-5*

Because of our rationality, we can think what we want to think, either in favor of God or against God, in favor of our neighbor or against our neighbor. *Ibid.*

Thursday, August 18

Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. *Genesis 3:22-23*

These two abilities are gifts from the Lord within us. They come from him constantly and are never taken away, for if they were taken away, that would be the end of our humanity. *Ibid.*

Friday, August 19

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. *Genesis 4:1-2*

The Lord lives in each of us, in the good and the evil alike, in these two abilities. They are the Lord's dwelling in the human race, which is why everyone, whether good or evil, lives forever. *Ibid.*

Saturday, August 20

And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you." *Genesis 6:13-18*

However, the Lord's dwelling within us is more intimate as we use these abilities to open the higher levels. By opening them, we come into consciousness of higher levels of love and wisdom and so come closer to the Lord. *Ibid.*

OUR EARTH

Rev. Dr. George F. Dole

Genesis 1:26-2:15

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land

of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush.

The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

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Luke 12:32-48

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?" And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Secrets of Heaven 5173.2

Each and every thing in nature and its three kingdoms has something active within it from the spiritual world. If there were not this kind of [force]

within it, absolutely nothing in the natural world would actuate cause and effect, so nothing whatever would result. What is present in natural things from the spiritual world is called the force inherent from first creation, but it is an energy: when it ceases, action or motion ceases. This is why the whole visible world is a theater that portrays the spiritual world.

Sermon

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." - Genesis 1:28

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required. - Luke 12:48

Environmentalists wince at the first of these texts. This is surely understandable, given the negative connotations of the words "dominion" and "subdue," but wincing does not make facts go away. The fact is that we are far and away the dominant species on Earth. We do "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." In fact, environmentalists recognize this just as much as strip miners do. They do not blame spotted owls for their decline in numbers or organize polar bears to fight global warming. They hold human beings responsible, and the main theological justification for doing so is to be found in that controversial verse from Genesis. Like it or not, we have been given dominion.

The actual *extent* to which we do "have dominion" is currently under debate, though, particularly in the matter of climate change. For most of human history, we really made only slight impressions on our environment, but that started to change with the Industrial Revolution. William Blake's passionate poem "Jerusalem" contrasts England's "mountains green" and "pleasant pastures" with the "dark satanic mills" of his own time, the eighteenth century, and we seem to be not only continuing in the same direction but picking up speed.

Some of the effects of this are fairly short-term and obvious. Air pollution has immediate effects on our respiratory systems, for example, and when the trash collectors go on strike, citizens sit up and take notice within hours or even minutes. It does seem, though, that we are constantly playing catch up; and this too is understandable. The eminent Swedenborgian John

Bigelow wrote a little book entitled *Resist Beginnings: The Blinding Influences of Sin*, to call attention to the insidious ways in which little concessions to our principles can grow into major ones—the "slippery slope" of ethicists. We can be marvelously inventive when it comes to ignoring problems in their early stages. The first house Lois and I owned had a linen closet on the second floor. When we went to pull out the bottom drawer we discovered that it was only a drawer front, and we found out where the previous owners had been sweeping all the dirt. Multiply that by a whole city and you have a major problem.

Sooner or later, that is, the consequences of evading responsibility have to be faced. The bills have to be paid, so to speak; and for some problems the bills do come due quite emphatically. For example, in 1969 the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland caught fire. That was a wake-up call not only to Cleveland but to every community that had a polluted river flowing through it. You can't keep on in this direction. You have to stop. More than that, you've gone too far already. You have to turn around and move in the other direction.

Granted, it is hard to determine exactly what our own part is in a process as long-term as fundamental climate change, but if anything, that very uncertainty calls us to come to grips with the second of our texts. Yes, we have been given dominion, a dominion that seems to be increasing at an accelerating pace. It is an immense gift *and*—not "but," *AND*—"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required." When it says in the second chapter that the primal couple was put in the garden "to till it and keep it," the connotations of the Hebrew words are striking. The verb translated "till" also means "work," "work for," and "serve," and a closely related noun is the standard word for a servant. The verb translated "keep" might better be translated "watch over," "preserve," or "protect." It is the word used six times to describe the Lord in Psalm 121: "The one who *keeps* you will not slumber; the one who *keeps* Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your *keeper*, the Lord is your shade on your right hand . . . The Lord will *keep* you from all evil; he will *keep* your soul. The Lord will *keep* your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore" (Psalm 121:4-8).

If the omnipotent Lord is indeed our "keeper," then there is no inconsistency whatever between "taking care of" and "having dominion," no more than there

It is seductive to think of power in terms of rights and not in terms of responsibilities. But the two belong together.

is in the honored phrase “public servant.” We cannot take care of a garden unless we have the means to do so. The sequence in Genesis seems to be telling us that the Lord does not first tell us what to do and then give us the means but first gives us the means and then tells us how to use them.

The late Viktor Frankl, whose book *Man’s Search for Meaning* tells of profound meaning found in three years spent in Nazi death camps, was fond of saying that there should be a “Statue of Responsibility” on the West Coast to balance the Statue of Liberty on the East. It is surely a point well taken. Liberty and irresponsibility are a deadly duo. In a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887, Lord Acton wrote, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” adding also, “Great men are almost always bad men.”

If this were all there were to it, the solution would be simple—get rid of all “great men.” However, I believe our theology tells us that what power does is not so much corrupt those who attain it as remove obstacles to the expression of corruption that is already there; and that by the same token, the attainment of power can remove obstacles to the expression of unrealized good. After all, the fact that God is infinitely powerful does not mean that God is infinitely corrupt.

We in our own times can see at least as clearly as Lord Acton saw in his how seductive is the tendency to think of power in terms of rights and not in terms of responsibilities. At all economic and social levels, we seem much quicker to insist on our rights than to stand up for our responsibilities. If we do indeed believe in the folly of a combination of power and irresponsibility, then this imbalance is obviously foolhardy. The two, rights and responsibilities, belong together.

When we apply this principle to the biblical injunction to watch over and care for the garden in which the Lord has placed us, it calls for a major shift in our thinking. Rather than trying to prevent the worst we should be trying to nurture the best. Granted, we may have a lot of catching up to do, but simply reacting to things that are going wrong will steer us now in one direction, now in another, depending on the problem. What we gain on the roundabouts we may lose on the swings. Only a positive goal can give our lives a stable and consistent direction; and such a goal is at least outlined for us in the second chapter of Genesis with the statement that we are placed in this garden to serve it and to watch over it. Granted, this is only an outline, but an outline at least gives us a frame to fill in. It’s a start, and if we take it with

full seriousness, it is a very good start. The clearer the goals of an enterprise are, the more possible it is to develop strategies and to evaluate their effectiveness. This is as true of the individual and the church as it is of the nation, incidentally.

Our third reading takes this principle to a whole different level. When it says that “Each and every thing in nature and its three kingdoms has something active within it from the spiritual world,” it is saying that for everything “out there” in the world of nature there is something spiritual, something within us, that answers to it. That relationship of responsiveness is the essence of what our theology has called “correspondence”; and if we “look that term up in our own experience,” so to speak, it is not just an intellectual abstraction. Something within us does “answer to” the flight of birds, the beauty of flowers, the grace of a thoroughbred, the fury of a storm, the pulse of ocean waves, the stillness of a forest. When we think of the possible extinction of polar bears, something inside us hurts. If we do not let ourselves care about them, something inside us dies a little, no matter what happens to the bears themselves. We become a little more insensitive, a little more callous.

This does not dictate any specific strategy, but it does clarify the frame within which a strategy should be sought. We begin to see that frame, that affirmative goal, as a way of life that does not violate our own sensibilities because it brings our outer and inner worlds into accord. Nature is no longer a problem that we must solve or an obstacle that we must overcome. It is a garden designed for us, and part of its being “designed for us” is that we ourselves flourish to the extent that we let it into our hearts and care both about and for it.

One thing does seem highly probable, if not certain—if we try to overcome nature, we will lose, and we will lose on two fronts. No matter how sophisticated our technology becomes, the laws of physics and biology will not change to suit our plans. Perhaps we might look a little more intently at pictures of Earth taken from space just to see how very small we are. On the material front, then, we are very, very seriously outweighed.

On the spiritual level, we come to a matter of fundamental attitude. Will we insist on being in control? Will we accept the rules the Lord has designed for us, or will we write our own? The closer we get to this heart of the problem, the more we move beyond the material realm with its many shades of gray to that realm where things are truly black and white, where there is a great gulf, where there is a

holy city into which nothing can enter that defiles. In the last analysis, who's in charge here?

The words of a Woody Guthrie song come to mind:

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California, to the New York Island
From the redwood forest, to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

It was indeed "made for you and me"—but we didn't make it. It was made to suit us, so perhaps we should be careful about remaking it to suit ourselves. After all, our "selves" have a rather checkered résumé. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 22

Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. *Isaiah 60:5*

The ultimate purpose of creation is a heaven from the human race. *Divine Providence 323*

Tuesday, August 23

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines. *Isaiah 61:4-5*

Everyone is created to live forever in a blessed state.... Divine love cannot do otherwise than intend this and divine wisdom cannot do otherwise than provide for this. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, August 24

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. *Isaiah 61:10*

Since divinity has inexhaustible splendor, would it simply keep it all to itself? Could it keep it all to itself? *Divine Providence n. 324.2*

Thursday, August 25

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices. *Isaiah 65:1-2*

Love wants to share what it has with others, to give to others all that it can. What about divine love, then, which is infinite? Can it first give and then take back? *Ibid.*

Friday, August 26

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. *Isaiah 65:17-20*

Divinity gives what truly is, or what does not cease to be. This is what is eternal. *Ibid.*

Saturday, August 27

They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. *Isaiah 65:23-25*

When we arrive in the spiritual world, no one is forbidden to come up to heaven, but if we enjoy the pleasures of hell, then as soon as we get to heaven our hearts pound, we struggle for breath, our life starts to ebb away, we are in pain, tortured, and we writhe like snakes next to a flame. This happens because opposites actively oppose each other. *Ibid. 324.3*

AUG 28 IN THE BEGINNING

Rev. Sarah Buteux

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Sermon

This past summer I had the opportunity to visit Ireland for the first time along with my family. While we were there we visited a Neolithic tomb in a place called Newgrange. This tomb is five thousand years old. Just to give you an idea of how old that is, it was built by people we would consider primitive more than three thousand years before the birth of Christ. You can see the tomb from miles away. It appears to be a little hill with a white band at its base that sits on top of a larger hill. But the little hill is actually a grass-covered tomb of stone—stones, some of which weigh over eight hundred pounds. Some of the stones, namely the white ones that make up the lower rim, came from some eighty miles away. The stones are so cleverly fitted together that to this day (and keep in mind that this is Ireland) the tomb does not leak when it rains. You approach the tomb at Newgrange by foot and stand outside for a time when you get there while the tour guide tells you all sorts of fascinating things, much of which is conjecture because nobody actually knows anything about these people since they lived so long ago. But after the talk, they actually let you walk inside. There is only one little entrance, and the whole huge structure, which must be fifty yards in diameter, houses only a narrow passageway that leads to a tiny burial chamber about forty feet from the door.

The most fascinating thing about the tomb is that it is designed to catch the light of the sun in this rear chamber for just a few minutes, once a year, during the winter solstice. And what is really cool is that the tour guide takes you into the tomb, down the passageway (which is not for the claustrophobic), and into the burial chamber. Then they turn out all the lights (very eerie!) and have it rigged up in such a way that they can recreate the progression of the sun's

light on its way in and out of the chamber on that one important day of the year. The tomb is actually so old that, according to my guidebook, when the winter solstice occurs now, the sunlight is a few inches off because the rotational pattern of the earth has shifted since it was built. After the fake sunlight disappears they turn the lights back on and, in keeping with the local custom, let you out of the tomb and send you back to the gift shop.

Scholars have many theories about why a people would build such an elaborate structure. Some speculate that these people believed they were creating a womblike structure, allowing the sun to fertilize the womb and bring new life to the earth. Others think that the dead were cremated, their ashes placed in the great stone basin that still lies in the tomb, and that when the sunlight would appear once a year, it would take the souls of the dead to the next life. I myself have no idea what the makers of the tomb were trying to accomplish in building Newgrange, but I can tell you one thing. It took these people generations to complete the tomb.

Those who began the project were long dead when their great-grandchildren put the final stone in place. These people labored for years and years, taking time away from hunting, gathering, planting, and all the day-to-day activities that would have been vital to their survival, to build this structure. No one knows exactly why they created this tomb, but it is clear, at least to me, that the people who made this tomb were not making some sort of symbolic structure; they must have believed in the immediate power of their creation. If they believed that the light fertilized the depths of the earth, or that the light was meant to carry the souls of the dead to their next resting place or future incarnation, then I think they believed the light would actually do so. You would only engage in a project of that size and magnitude if you believed in its power.

I don't think the tomb was a symbol for them. I don't think the sunlight finding its way into the chamber was for them anything less than a truly cosmic event. The sun's light did not represent something in the minds of these people; it *did* something. Its power was real. If it was there to fertilize the earth or carry with it the souls of the dead, then that is exactly what they believed it was doing.

I think we have lost this sense of the holy and mystical in our day. Our sacred spaces are not, in and of themselves, holy, but representative of what is true and powerful and divine. We believe in the power of symbols, but symbols speak about what is holy rather

than constitute what is holy. They point to the source of reality, but they are not, in and of themselves, that ultimate reality. We are further removed from a sense of the holy now than they were back when Newgrange was built. What is real to us is what we can experience with our senses—what we can taste, see, hear, smell, and touch. This physical reality can help us be mindful of spiritual reality, but it is not the same thing. The angels on the altar behind me are stone. The Word is written in ink on paper and bound as a book just like other books. The verses, the paint, the carvings, the cross, all of it symbolizes that which we hold to be sacred, but it is not sacred itself, nor is it the source of the sacred. It stands before us as a particularly effective representation.

And those who designed and built this church labored long and hard to create such an effective space. But I know the people who built Newgrange labored longer and harder, and I think they did so because, whereas our church is a holy space because it represents what is holy, their tomb was a holy space because it was a holy space. For us the sunlight falling on the altar corresponds to aspects of the Divine. To them, however they would have understood it, the light on the altar was a direct agent of the Divine.

We are different now. Not wrong, not lost, just, according to the natural course of God's providence, different. We see and understand and process the sacred in a more removed way. I think the Lord knew this would happen, but in his divine love and wisdom, he created the world in such a way that it would always speak to us, even if now, in our later days, we need a translator to understand what it is he is saying. For us, that translator is Swedenborg. He believed that everything in the natural world corresponded to something in the spiritual one. And in his understanding correspondence is not just a symbol or representation: in some way it constitutes an intimate connection between a natural object and the spiritual truth it seeks to communicate. We may perceive correspondences as merely symbolic, but there is more at work than mere representation.

For example, one of the most accessible correspondences is the link between the sun and the Lord. The way Swedenborg explains it, the sun's light and heat is not just a convenient metaphor for the wisdom and love of God, it actively affects the world just as God's love and wisdom actively affect our souls. The sun falls on the earth and warms each seed, even as that seed lies beneath the soil in total darkness. The warmth coaxes it to sprout and reach its way up to the light. Once the sprout reaches the

light, a process begins that we call photosynthesis, utilizing the energy of the sun to promote new growth throughout the plant. God's love functions in much the same way—finding us deep in the midst of ourselves, coaxing us out of the narrow and dark limitations of our self-love into a brighter and more open existence that allows us to love others. As we love and receive love in return, we utilize the energy of that love to grow in spirit.

The power of light in the midst of darkness remains a powerful metaphor for us, but it is more than that. It is a powerful correspondence. We see how the power of light manifests itself in the context of darkness. The way light functions in our physical reality testifies to how God's light, his love and wisdom, functions within our own spiritual reality. Have you ever turned the lights on at dusk because you are having trouble seeing or reading, but you find that the light isn't really that helpful yet? You actually have to wait for it to get a little darker before the light can truly illuminate your surroundings. I also notice this with candles. If I light the candles here for a wedding, they seem so small and insignificant if the sun's light is still shining outside, and so vibrant and bright once the sun has set. The darker it is around you, the brighter even the smallest light appears. This is a physical reality we observe with our physical eyes, and it corresponds to a spiritual reality we can see with our inner eyes.

It is in times of great darkness that we become more aware of God's love and wisdom at work within us and around us. Our scripture reading is, perhaps, the most dramatic example in the Word of light at work in the midst of darkness:

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day." (Genesis 1:1-5)

In the beginning, there was something—but not nothing—but that something was formless and void, roiling and dark, seething with potential but lacking true life. In the beginning the "deep was not barren but pregnant, an emptiness teeming with the promise of life" (Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*, 35). But it took an act of God. A dramatic act. Not a whisper but a great cry, "Let there be light!" and there was light. And that light shone on the waters, it warmed the face of the

deep, it found its place aside the night and began its work of teasing life out of this great mass of earth.

Swedenborg believed that even this, the first great act of creation as expressed in the Word, represents who we are and who we are becoming—or maybe I should say how we are and how we are becoming. He writes, “The six days [of creation], which are successive states, [represent] the regeneration of man . . . as follows. The first state . . . immediately before regeneration . . . is called a ‘void,’ an ‘emptiness,’ a ‘thick darkness.’ And the first motion, which is the Lord’s mercy, is ‘the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters.’” That is to say, God’s mercy is present with us even in our deepest darkness, and it acts in much the way that God acted upon the earth, bringing light to our darkness, wisdom in the midst of our confusion, love in the face of despair. But he goes on:

“The second state is when a distinction is made between those things that are of the Lord, and those which are proper to man. The things which are proper to the Lord are . . . especially knowledges of faith, . . . which are stored up, and are not manifested until the man comes into this state. At the present day this state seldom exists without temptation, misfortune, or sorrow, by which the things of the body and the world, that is, such as are proper to man, are brought into quiescence and as it were die. Thus the things that belong to the external man are separated from those which belong to the internal man.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6-8)

Often it is in times of great need, of severe temptation, in times of trial or sorrow, that we most clearly feel the presence of God hovering near us. And God makes his light available to us, a light that guides us forward, even in the midst of our doubt and confusion, leading us toward new growth. We see the darkness for what it is and leave it behind in favor of the light. We leave the dim shadows of our understanding, like the puppets in Plato’s cave, and find ourselves confronting reality, confronting truth, confronting God. It is not a comfortable process. The light can hurt our eyes at first, the day can seem too bright, the solution not yet as appealing as was the problem. But just as our eyes adjust to light, so our souls adjust to the good, and gradually we feel more at ease in the presence of God, daring to love others as we once thought we could only dare to love ourselves.

It can happen because it has happened. It has happened in our world, and it happens in our souls. Wherever you find yourself this morning, whatever your struggle, whatever your doubt, whatever your

pain, know that the light shines and the darkness has not and will not overcome it. But sometimes we cannot fully see the light until the darkness is complete. For the people at Newgrange, the sun reached the height of its power on the darkest day of the year. For us it may be that God’s power is most potent and easily recognized in our darkest moments. We need never despair. And so I leave you this morning with these hopeful yet challenging words of John Donne, who wrote,

“He brought light out of darkness, not out of lesser light; he can bring thy summer out of winter, though thou have no spring; though in the ways of fortune, or understanding, or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintered and frozen, clouded and eclipsed, damped and benumbed, smothered and stupefied till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the Spring, but as the sun at noon.” (John Donne, from a sermon at Saint Paul’s Cathedral)

Prayer

O God, who by your son Jesus Christ has set up on earth a Kingdom of holiness, to measure its strength against all others: make faith to prevail over fear, and righteousness over force, and truth over the lie, and love and concord over all things, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

- War Prayers, *King’s College, Cambridge*

Lord our God,

you rule over all things that have been and ever shall be.

You are the hope of the tempest-tossed and refuge to the pilgrim.

Grant to us, your servants, minds and hearts ready to receive precious gifts from your hands;

this we ask through Christ our Lord.

- *Alcuin of York (735-804)*

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light, look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; carry out the work of our salvation; and let the whole world feel and see that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 29

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” *Jeremiah 1:4-5*

The premise is that for our salvation, divine providence begins at our birth and continues to the end of our life. *Divine Providence n. 333*

Tuesday, August 30

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” *Jeremiah 1:6-8*

To understand this, we need to realize that the Lord knows the kind of person we are and the kind of person we want to be and therefore the kind of person we will be. *Divine Providence n. 333*

Wednesday, August 31

Then the Lord said to me: Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land. For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says the Lord; and they shall come and all of them shall set their thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah. *Jeremiah 1:14-15*

Further, he cannot deprive us of the freedom of our volition if we are to be human and therefore immortal, as amply explained above; so he foresees what our state will be after death and provides for it from our birth all the way to the end of our life. *Ibid.*

Thursday, September 1

And I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands. But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. *Jeremiah 1:16-17*

He does this for evil people by both allowing and constantly leading them away from their evils, and for good people by constantly leading them to what is good. *Ibid.*

Friday, September 2

And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you. *Jeremiah 1:18-19*

So divine providence is constantly at work for our salvation; but it cannot save more of us than want to be saved. *Ibid.*

Saturday, September 3

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to fulfill my words against this city for evil and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in your presence on that day. But I will save you on that day, says the Lord, and you shall not be handed over to those whom you dread. For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have trusted in me, says the Lord. *Jeremiah 39:16b-18*

Since he foresees everyone’s state after death and foresees our place as well—in hell for people who do not want to be saved and in heaven for people who do—it follows that, as just stated, he provides places for the evil by permitting and leading them away and for the good by leading them to their places. *Ibid n. 222.2*

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The Swedenborgian Church bases its teachings on the Bible as illuminated by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish scientist and theologian. Swedenborg envisioned a new Christianity coming into being that was revitalized by the Spirit of the Lord.

We believe that there is one God, known by many names. We worship Jesus Christ as our Lord and our God, who made himself known to us through his life as the divine human Jesus of Nazareth, and whom we continue to know through his Holy Spirit, which operates through and around us.

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and that in its pages we find two parallel stories: the account of people, places, and events; and within that account a spiritual reflection of our individual and corporate journeys. The Bible, with its infinite depth of meaning, is truly a living Word, guiding us as we strive to make ourselves temples for the Lord by loving and serving others. We believe that, above all, "all religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." The Swedenborgian Church exists to help people be open to the Lord's presence and leading, and to facilitate their spiritual well-being. We invite you to participate with others who are seeking to deepen their inner life and pursue their spiritual journey.

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Our Beliefs in Brief:

- God is pure love, pure wisdom, and pure creative power.
- God became human in Jesus Christ and dwells with us.
- The Bible is God's Word, and has many levels of meaning.
- God loves and saves people of all religions.

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SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH
**OUR DAILY
BREAD**