

LOGOS

Newsletter about the SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION'S PUBLICATIONS
& PROGRAMS ON THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF LIFE

SPRING/SUMMER 2014
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Swedenborg and Buddhism in Dialogue: An Interview with David Loy

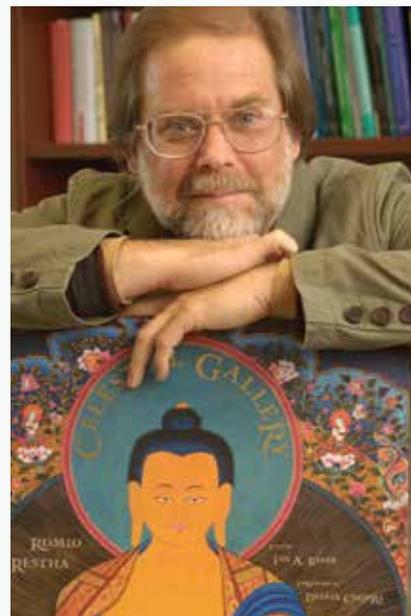
David Loy is a professor, writer, and Zen Buddhist teacher. He is the author of nine books and numerous articles that offer a Buddhist perspective on Western culture. He has also lectured on Buddhism at the university level in the United States, Japan, and Singapore, among other countries. One of his many areas of interest is the similarities between Swedenborg's writings and Buddhism, which will be the subject of his talk at the Swedenborg Foundation's annual meeting on May 16 (see page 8). We asked him for a preview of his thoughts on this topic.

Logos: You've done academic research into the early history of Buddhism in America and how it intersects with Swedenborgianism. As you dug into the history, did you learn anything that surprised you?

DL: I was surprised to learn how much D. T. Suzuki [who popularized Zen Buddhism in the West] was influenced by Swedenborg, and more generally by how many other important figures have been influenced by his work. His writings are like an underground stream that has watered many great trees.

Logos: Were you looking for parallels between Swedenborgianism and Buddhism when you began your research, or was it something you discovered later?

DL: My sense of the similarities developed gradually. I remember being particularly excited by two parallels: the way that Swedenborg's description of postmortem judgment was consistent with my understanding of Buddhist karma, and the ways that it corresponds with what *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* says about what happens to us after we die. More generally, Swedenborg's account of God avoids the usual theistic "Big Daddy" notion and seems much closer to what some nontheistic traditions, including Buddhism, say about a more nondual Absolute. He seems to offer an intermediate understanding halfway between theism and nondualism.



Professor, author, and Zen Buddhist teacher David Loy will be speaking at the Foundation's annual meeting on May 16, 2014.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

In This Issue

Online Growth Continues / 2

Thank You! / 3

Eben Alexander in Bryn Athyn / 4

The End of an Era / 5

Swedenborg's Surprising Sabbatical / 6-7

Order Form / 9

Donation and Membership Form / 11

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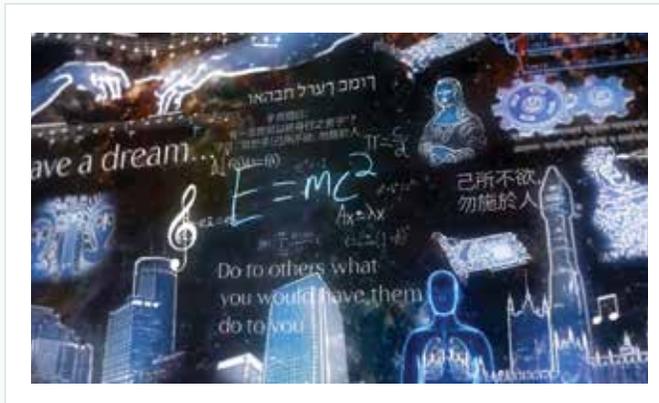
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Who's Watching Swedenborg Online?

Boom continues on our YouTube and Facebook pages



“You Are the Lungs,” our most popular video on YouTube to date, has been seen and shared nearly 200,00 times.

The Swedenborg Foundation’s Heaven and Hell page on Facebook and our Off the Left Eye channel on YouTube both passed major milestones this past winter.

On YouTube, Foundation team members Curtis and Matthew Childs regularly create and post short videos that illuminate aspects of Swedenborg’s thought. These range from the short “Swedenborg Minute” series to longer videos (usually six to eight minutes) that go into more detail. As of the end of January, visitors had spent more than one million minutes watching videos on the channel. That’s nearly two solid years of Swedenborg!

The channel’s most popular video to date, called “You Are the Lungs,” vividly portrays the Universal Human as all of humanity working together in concert. Launched last May, that video—just one of dozens posted on the channel—had been viewed more than 195,000 times as of this writing in mid-March. By the time you read this, the count will be well over 200,000.

Speaking of growth, our Heaven and Hell Facebook page, an online community where we share daily quotes from Swedenborg or related thinkers, is also steadily expanding its audience. By fall 2013, the page had become so popular that Facebook began promoting the page for free to people with related interests, and that promotion sparked an enormous growth spurt. The number of people who “like” the page went from 75,000 last fall to 150,000 by the beginning of February and 165,000 as of mid-March. That’s how many people have chosen to see our quotes in their daily feeds—and we get comments from these fans daily, telling us how much they appreciate the insights we post and sharing their personal stories.

This remarkable growth tells us that more and more people are finding Swedenborg’s ideas to be just as relevant and compelling for the modern world as they were in the time he wrote them. 

Thank You!

We had a wonderful response to our annual fundraising drive in 2013, and we'd like to express our gratitude to all of our members and friends for their enthusiasm and support this year. We're looking forward to another great year!

Some of our donors gave money in honor of a loved one, whether in this world or the next. They are:

Robert Grappone in memory of **Oskar Ernst Bernhardt**

Donna Humes in memory of **Isaac and Clara Ens**

Philip Alden in memory of **Bob Schoenberger**

Ronald E. and Ronnye Sands in memory of **Robert W. Gauzens**

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Memorial donations can be made at any time by filling out the form at the back of this newsletter (see page 11) or by visiting our website at www.swedenborg.com.

William Clark Vance

In 2013, the Swedenborg Foundation was blessed to receive a substantial bequest from William Clark Vance of Burlington, Iowa, who crossed into the spiritual world on December 28, 2012. Vance had a varied career: he served in the U.S. Army, received a master's degree in education in his mid-thirties and worked as a teacher, then left teaching to become a truck driver. According to those who knew him, he enjoyed lifting weights, collecting model tractors, and attending the Old Thresher's Reunion, a local farm festival.

We are honored to have inspired Vance's interest in Swedenborg and are deeply grateful for his support.

Eben Alexander Visits Bryn Athyn

Talk highlights the spiritual side of near-death experiences

A Guide for Deeper Exploration

In connection with Eben Alexander's visit, Swedenborgian associations around the Philadelphia area are sponsoring discussion groups that explore the connections between Alexander's near-death experience and the afterlife as Swedenborg described it. In collaboration with these groups, the Foundation has developed a four-week study guide that highlights key themes, offers questions for discussion, and gives some examples of parallels between Alexander's experiences and Swedenborg's.

If you're interested in hosting a group of your own or in studying on your own, you can download a copy of the discussion guide for free:

- 1) Go to www.swedenborg.com
- 2) Click on the "Emanuel Swedenborg" link
- 3) Then click on "Learning Resources"

Eben Alexander, the neurosurgeon whose near-death experience (NDE) became the basis for the bestselling book *Proof of Heaven*, spoke to a packed audience in Bryn Athyn on April 6.

He started by mentioning that Swedenborgians were among the first spiritual groups to contact him after his book was released to talk about the common ground between his experience and theirs. But during the course of his talk he emphasized that people of all religious backgrounds have had experiences like his, and that this points to a deeper common ground shared by all human beings.

In November 2008, a rare form of bacterial meningitis left Alexander in a coma that lasted for seven days. During that time, his brain was completely inactive—as he describes it, he was as close to brain dead as it was possible to be without actually dying. Yet during those seven days he had a remarkable experience of traveling through the afterlife and encountering a being of infinite love and wisdom, a being he would later identify as God. His recollections bear a remarkable resemblance not only to other near-death experiences but also to Swedenborg's descriptions of the afterlife. Like Swedenborg, Alexander was left with a need to share what he had learned.

Until his NDE, Alexander had always believed what he had learned from neuroscience: the brain creates consciousness. During the talk, he said that his experience taught him otherwise. "Our consciousness is liberated when it's freed from the shackles of the brain," and in fact the world of spirit is much more real than the physical one. "Our body is what's illusory; it's our consciousness that is real."

Alexander shares Swedenborg's conviction that God's love exists at the core of our consciousness, and that if we serve as a conduit for that tremendous force, it can lead to transformation and healing not only in our life but in the lives of those around us.

Before and after the talk, the Foundation gave away free copies of *Our Life after Death*, a short, standalone volume excerpted from the "World of Spirits" section of *Heaven and Hell*. While *Our Life after Death* was originally released last fall, for this event the editors of the New Century Edition prepared a new, abridged version that simplifies the language of the original translation for a broader audience. This revised version, which will replace the first one, is currently available for sale. To purchase a copy, use the form in the back of this newsletter or visit www.swedenborg.com. 

The End of an Era

Foundation auditor remembers forty years of places and personalities

Alan Thierman, who has been the Foundation's financial auditor since 1974, retired from practice this year.

The function of an auditor is to review an organization's finances and to ensure that everything is reported accurately and in accordance with state and federal law. But Thierman, who has worked continuously with the Foundation for longer than anyone still alive, has also been a trusted advisor. He offered guidance on IRS rules governing public foundations and encouraged the board to establish a fundraising program in the 1980s in order to establish a broader base of public support. He also helped the board set financial policies that allowed the Foundation to receive a multimillion-dollar trust-fund donation.

As leadership in the Foundation has changed over the years, Thierman's encyclopedic memory of the organization's history has been—and today remains—an invaluable resource for both board and staff.

He still vividly remembers his early days at the Foundation. "In 1974, the Swedenborg Foundation had a storefront on East 23rd Street in New York," he said. "In the front was a small bookstore and reading room, and in the back were the Foundation offices. The second and third floors were rented to unrelated parties. The books were stored in the basement. Tomas Spiers, the executive secretary, and Virginia Branston, the manager, were in charge of operations. Tom was about ninety and hard of hearing, and he claimed never to hear Virginia. So Virginia would have to shout in Tom's ear, and he would always tell Virginia to stop shouting. This went on all day."

When the Foundation moved from New York to Pennsylvania in 1993, Thierman made the trip down from New York to continue serving as the association's auditor, staying on hand for weeks on end during the annual audit. Since his retirement, he and his wife have moved to Boynton Beach, Florida, but he often returns to New York to work part-time or visit family and friends. In his spare time, he has taken up genealogical research, and has identified about three thousand people in his family tree.

"When I look back to 1974, much has changed in the location and the people involved [in the Foundation], but I see the same enthusiasm and dedication to advancing the works and thought of Swedenborg," he concludes. "I thank the board and staff of the Foundation for always making me feel a part of the Foundation. I can truly say that I enjoyed every minute of our long association." 

Thierman's encyclopedic memory of the organization's history has been—and remains—an invaluable resource for both board and staff.

Swedenborg's Surprising Sabbatical

By Jonathan S. Rose

Series Editor, New Century Edition

Current New Century Edition Titles

Divine Love and Wisdom

Divine Providence

Heaven and Hell

Secrets of Heaven, volume 1

Secrets of Heaven, volume 2

True Christianity, volume 1

True Christianity, volume 2

Emanuel Swedenborg:

Essays for the New Century

Edition on His Life, Work, and

Impact

Forthcoming Titles

Works originally published in 1758:

New Jerusalem

Last Judgment

White Horse

Other Planets

Works originally published in 1763:

*The Lord**

*Sacred Scripture**

*Life**

*Faith**

Supplements

*These works have been traditionally published together under the title *The Four Doctrines*.

We tend to think of Swedenborg publishing his theological works without pause from the time the first volume of *Secrets of Heaven* appeared in 1749, when he was 61, to the time he issued *True Christianity* in 1771, a year before his death at age 84. After all, these twenty-five volumes total 3.6 million words of Latin, a sum that doesn't include the many voluminous manuscripts he wrote but left unpublished.

Given this impressive output, it is surprising—and it has not been much noted—that Swedenborg took something of a publishing sabbatical in the middle of this twenty-three-year sprint: he published nothing at all between 1758 and 1763.

Of course, a sabbatical, properly speaking, is a period when a scholar takes time off from teaching duties to research and write. And Swedenborg was in fact very busy during his publishing sabbatical. He wrote an extensive rough draft and a fair copy of *Revelation Explained* (also known as *Apocalypse Explained*). He composed drafts for the published works we now call *The Four Doctrines*, though in an intermittent fashion: the first draft, on the Lord, was written in 1759, and the three others were all written in 1762. He drafted an incomplete commentary on the Athanasian Creed. He produced a fascinating study in outline form of the inner meaning of the Prophets and Psalms. During 1760 and 1761 he wrote and circulated seven brief memoranda on financial and political issues facing Sweden at the time. He also wrote a short paper for the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences on techniques involved in inlaying marble, which he went on to publish in a slightly different version in 1763.

But the gap of four years between 1758 and 1763 marks several changes in Swedenborg's publishing career, some striking and some subtle but intriguing. For example, all the volumes published during the period before his sabbatical were printed in London, whereas all but one of those published during the remainder of his career were printed in Amsterdam. The Dutch Swedenborgian scholar and editor Guus Janssens offers the most compelling explanation for this shift. Swedenborg published several of his early scientific works in Amsterdam and had spent much time there; therefore (Janssens points out), the question is not why he moved to Amsterdam for the works of the last nine years, but why he left Amsterdam for London to publish the works of the first ten years. The probable reason is that he wished to preserve his anonymity by publishing in a place where he was less well known. Later, when preserving his anonymity was no longer possible, he reverted to publishing in Amsterdam.

And Swedenborg's anonymity, which he carefully protected during the years before his sabbatical, was indeed compromised during his "time off." The first breach in it may have occurred in July 1759, when he revealed in a public setting that a tremendous fire had just broken out some three hundred miles away in Stockholm. As a result of this incident, his clairvoyance became an object of international knowledge and interest. Then, in early 1760, he began talking openly to his friends and acquaintances about his interactions with the spiritual world. One of these acquaintances mentions in a letter of March 1760 that "thousands" of people in Sweden were aware of Swedenborg's claim that he was having such experiences. He himself abandoned his anonymity around this time by applying in writing to the Swedish censor of books to import some of his own titles to Sweden.

His sabbatical also marks some changes in authorial tactics. The works in the last nine years of his publishing career were generally smaller: before his sabbatical, the average size of the Latin volumes he published was 395 pages; after his sabbatical, the average fell to 180 pages. Of his ten largest published theological volumes, eight were published before his sabbatical. The works after the sabbatical can be said to be more forcefully argued, to the point of being confrontational. If we look for the reason for this shift, we find hints in two of the manuscripts from 1759. It seems he may have felt some disappointment in the response his works had received, particularly in England. In his draft of *The Lord* he notes that though "the way to salvation has been revealed" by his previous works, "still the church pays no heed." In his unfinished commentary on the Athanasian Creed, he notes that in his publications the Lord's revelations "have been written out in the Latin language, and they have been sent to all the archbishops and bishops of [Great Britain], and to some of the nobility; and still not a word has been heard—a sign that [these officials] have no inward care for the things of heaven and of the church."

All these changes suggest that although Swedenborg was not idle during those "sabbatical years" from 1759 to 1762, he did take something of a break to reflect on and adapt his publishing program.

As it happens, the next titles forthcoming in the New Century Edition series were originally published in 1758 and 1763, the years on either side of Swedenborg's surprising sabbatical. 

The New Century Edition

is a modern-language, scholarly translation of the theological works of one of the world's most extraordinary visionaries. The series' easy-to-read style retains the dignity, variety, clarity, and gender-inclusive language of Swedenborg's original Latin, bringing his thought to life.

This translation project is the first to be undertaken by a single publisher and team of translators employing unified standards of translation and scholarship.

Introductions and annotations by eminent international scholars place Swedenborg's writings in their historical context and illuminate obscure references within the text, enabling readers to follow Swedenborg's thought as never before.



Swedenborg and Buddhism

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Swedenborg Foundation Annual Meeting 2014

May 16, 2014

7:00 p.m.: Business Meeting

8:00 p.m.: Featured Presentation
by David Loy—“Uncanny Parallels:
The Problems and Possibilities that
Swedenborgianism and
Buddhism Share”

Location:

Mitchell Performing Arts Center
800 Tomlinson Road
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, 19009

This event is **free** and open to the
public. Please join us afterward for
a dessert reception, which will also
be held in the Mitchell Center.

For More Information:

610-430-3222, ext. 19
info@swedenborg.com
www.swedenborg.com
www.mitchellcenter.info

Logos: In your essay “The Dharma of Emanuel Swedenborg: A Buddhist Perspective,” published in *Swedenborg: Buddha of the North*, you highlight a number of concepts that are found in both Swedenborg and Buddhism. One of them was the concept that what we do intentionally makes us who we are, and that our mental habits can be hard to break in this world or the next. How does the Buddhist approach to this compare with Swedenborg’s?

DL: By the time of the Buddha (400–500 BCE) many Indians already believed in the doctrine of karma, but it was usually understood in a mechanical fashion: if you sacrifice in precisely the right way, you would get what you sacrificed for. The Buddha revolutionized this teaching by emphasizing intentionality: what’s most important is whether we are motivated by the three poisons—greed, ill will, and delusion—or by generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. Our usual sense of self is composed of mostly habitual ways of thinking, feeling, acting and reacting, etc., but the most important determinants of how we relate to the world are our motivations. Just as my physical body is composed of the food I eat, so my character is basically composed of my habitualized intentions. So karma isn’t something the self has, it’s what the sense of self *is*. And both Swedenborg and Buddhist tradition emphasize how important that is—how much our habitual motivations determine what happens to us, here and perhaps hereafter.

Logos: What are the most important things that Swedenborgianism and Buddhism have to say to each other?

DL: Well, come to the lecture! Perhaps the most important insight they share is that religion is really about personal transformation at our innermost core. It’s not about believing in some dogma or “qualifying for heaven” in some legalistic way—following the commandments or precepts—but opening up to our true nature. One important issue is how to do that. Is it enough to understand and accept what Swedenborg wrote, or do we also need contemplative practices, such as Buddhism emphasizes? 

You can learn more about David Loy at his website, davidloy.org.



Order Form

Following is a selected list of titles available from the Swedenborg Foundation. If you're looking for a title that you don't see listed below, please call us at **610-430-3222, ext. 19**, or check our online bookstore at www.swedenborg.com.

Members receive a 20% discount. If you are currently a member, please enter your discount code in the space provided on the form or have it ready when you call in. If you need a reminder of the discount code, contact us at info@swedenborg.com.

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___ 481-4	Divine Love and Wisdom, Dole trans. pb	14.95
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___ 475-3	Heaven and Hell, Dole trans. hc	29.95
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___ 504-0	Secrets of Heaven, vol. 1, Cooper trans. pb	14.95
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