

TRANSACTIONS OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SECOND ANNUAL MEETING

The meeting in the Cairnwood Village Dining Room, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, was called to order at 5:40 PM on May 1, 1999, by President Gregory Baker. Board members present were Dr. Gregory Baker, Dr. James Pendleton, Mrs. Aubrey Odhner, Dr. Allen Bedford, Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose, Dr. Dan Synnestvedt, and Rev. Alfred Acton.

President Gregory Baker welcomed SSA members and guests, and then turned the program over to moderator Kurt Simons, who gave a short introduction to the program. The idea for a special issue of *The New Philosophy* devoted to the problem of Swedenborg's sanity came to him, he said, because of the recurrent nature of insanity claims over the last two hundred years. He told of his experience of reading two papers, by Talbot and Johnson, claiming insanity as the source of Swedenborg's inspiration, and then the recent paper by Smith and Foote-Smith, suggesting temporal lobe epilepsy as the mechanism. Never, it seems, have these claims been systematically addressed or refuted by New Church scientists. With this goal in mind, the special issue began to take shape.

The program for the evening was a taste of the offerings in that issue, in summaries of their articles by Kurt Simons, Reuben Bell, Thomas Keiser, and James Pendleton.

Dr. Kurt Simons described three themes present for him in New Church evangelization: 1) *a mandate* (the Lord says to do it, in the Word, in AC 9351 and elsewhere), 2) *the need* (there is a "screaming need" for the New church in the present world), and 3) *the means* (the General Church has the assets to do the work). But how might we go about it? New Church Education is good, he said, because it is organized; it has a curriculum and a plan. Evangelism is not organized, and it badly needs to be. One solution? The media as our audience: let the message out, he said, and the media will be all over us. But the problem is that we must be ready when they come. The issue of Swedenborg's sanity is ideal for this purpose. It has media and popular appeal: it is timely and even controversial. With this issue as our doorway into the popular consciousness of

spirituality, we might seize (and save) the day with our clear and rational beliefs.

Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell opened his talk with a question: “Revelation or insanity? You decide.” He closed it with the same question, bringing home the point that both religion and science operate from specific philosophical points of departure, and both disciplines are based on belief. What was the nature of Swedenborg’s revelation? Something between the poles of the “natural revelation” of scientific facts gained from experience, and the channel-like instrumentality of the Old Testament Prophets. It was a “rational revelation” coming through the mind of a man, from his personal experience of the spiritual world. And what of the mechanism of this “experience?” Vision, or temporal-lobe seizure? There are good arguments for seizure in the article by psychiatrists Foote-Smith and Smith. And there are good arguments for revelation (revealed truth from the spiritual world) as well. But the important fact here is that neither of these positions can be proved beyond a reasonable doubt. Both positions, when reduced to their elements, are based on belief: 1) there is a spiritual world, from which may come revelation in some form, or 2) there isn’t. Both are religions - belief systems upon which we order our experience. Seizure or vision? You decide.

Dr. Thomas Keiser chose to analyze Foote-Smith and Smiths’ paper according to methodology. Psycho-history, or the diagnosing of historical figures from selected behavioral data, has long been a popular activity for armchair psychiatrists. The important issue in the most recent case of Foote-Smith and Smith is that of psychology vs. religion, leading to a false dichotomy of normal vs. pathological. From this point of view, analysis of Swedenborg’s revelation must be either “scientific” or made from “spiritual judgment.” The final approach to the problem can only be made from facts of Swedenborg’s life, not his Writings alone. Does he meet the “criteria?” Are his Writings useful? What do they do? What is at issue here are not isolated facts, but the sum of their parts: is there transforming power in Swedenborg’s revelation of a new spiritual paradigm? That is a yes or no, for every individual who reads them. No amount of “science” can lay this important question forever to rest.

Dr. James Pendleton spoke of his article entitled *Diagnosing Swedenborg*. A retrospective diagnosis of mental illness is flawed, he said, by subjectiv-

ity on the part of the investigators. A diagnosis cannot consider religion: "natural science" necessarily excludes religion in its sense-based methodology, and post-modern philosophy completely excludes religion as a means of interpreting reality. From this starting point, there is simply no place for the possibility of spiritual transcendence to stand; the analysis is loaded with bias from the start. Science seeks simplicity, but in the arena of the human mind it finds huge complexity, an argument *for* God, not against Him. The big opportunity here is evangelization, Pendleton said, since every person must confront the issue of Swedenborg's sanity at some point. We must work on this problem until we have a rational, working model for Swedenborg's (or any) transcendence, that we can present to the waiting world. From this psychiatrist's point of view Swedenborg exhibits none of the definitive symptomatology for any of the disorders with which he has been labeled over the years. But the lack of a powerful model makes the New Church point of view less effective in answering such charges than it might be. He calls New Church scientists to the task.

Following this program was a dinner at 6:30 P.M. after which the SSA officers' reports were presented.

Publisher's Report

Dr. Erand Brock reported that SSA books are now available from a variety of book distributors, including the General Church Book Center, the Swedenborg Society, the Swedenborg Foundation, the Swedenborg Association, and amazon.com. The association also receives orders directly.

A set of all SSA titles were recently shipped to Beijing University at the request of SSA member, Mr. Charles Witzell, who generously funded this gift to the university. The librarian subsequently expressed gratitude for the gift, and expressed interest in receiving more such works.

Norman Newton's new book (*Listening Threads. The Formal Cosmology of Emanuel Swedenborg*) on the *Principia* is finished. Galleys are being prepared, and publication is expected in the fall of 1999. We were fortunate to have had this book reviewed by Francesca Maria Crasta, a scholar

from University Degli Studi di Cagliari, Italy. Her review will appear in the next issue of *The New Philosophy*.

Stocks of some SSA publications are dwindling. Some are out of print. Simply reprinting these is not enough: we need scholars to prepare new front material (introductions, prefaces, etc.) to make them more attractive and comprehensible to contemporary students and scholars.

We have a new scanner and it is staying busy. The goal is to have all *New Philosophy* pages scanned, as well as all the pretheological works. Some 5,000 pages of a total of 16,000 of *The New Philosophy* have been scanned, and we also have the text of *The Brain, Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, and *Animal Kingdom* on disk, thanks to earlier efforts by Prof. Charles Cole. *Cerebrum* is next. We are on our way, but we are not there yet.

We are fortunate to have the expert and devoted services of Kirsten Gyllenhaal, Ned Asplundh, and Kurt Nemitz as we continue our publishing efforts.

Treasurer's Report

Dr. Allen Bedford reported that thankfully, there are no surprises this year. The endowment fund is up and running, and we have sufficient proceeds from this going to different internal funds, such as operating expenses and publication.

There has been a good return on our invested funds: 17.1 % growth overall for the last year. (See details below.)

President's Report

Dr. Gregory Baker reported that we are losing two officers this year, Board member Dr. Kristin King, and Secretary Dr. Reuben Bell (who is not leaving, but moving to another position).

Ample book storage has been provided at a company facility in New Jersey. Hopefully this arrangement will last for a considerable length of time.

He thanked Dr. Erland Brock for the continued high quality of *The New Philosophy* over the last year.

The Swedenborg Scientific Association is poised at this time to do some good things. The endowment fund is in place and promises to provide a stable base of publishing operations for years to come. The SSA committee structure is in good form, and the Newsletter has become a regular, positive organ of the SSA. Publishing is on track, and the SSA is in position to enjoy a new and mutually beneficial relationship with the Swedenborg Foundation as it embarks on its ambitious *New Century Edition* of Swedenborg's books.

In parting comments, Dr. Baker offered his best wishes to SSA officers, members, and board.

Nominating Committee

Aubrey Odhner reported that there are three openings at present in the SSA administrative structure: board member, secretary, and president. The recommendation of her committee was to nominate Rev. Kurt Nemitz for Board member, and Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell for president. These people were elected by unanimous vote of the membership.

(After the meeting was adjourned, the board members assembled and voted unanimously to elect Mrs. Rae C. Friesen to the office of Secretary, that office having been vacated by Dr. Reuben Bell.)

Following these reports and the election of officers, Dr. Brock rose to commend Dr. Baker for twenty years of service to the Swedenborg Scientific Association, as board member, research secretary, vice-president, and president from 1996 to 1999. He then presented Dr. Baker a two-volume set of Swedenborg's *Principia*, as a token of appreciation from the SSA board.

No further business being transacted, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted
Rev. Dr. Reuben P. Bell, *Secretary*

TREASURER'S REPORT

for year ending December 31, 1998

OPERATING FUND

BALANCE DECEMBER 31, 1997	\$12,553.31
Plus Receipts	
Annual Appeal	7,364.74
Book Sales	2,635.05
Dues	2,422.35
Interest	65.30
Miscellaneous	<u>29.40</u>
Total	12,516.84
Less Expenses	
<i>New Philosophy</i>	2,431.44
Book Publishing	2,499.36
Wages	2,146.25
Editorial Expenses	1,400.00
Office Expenses	747.56
Accounting	275.00
Special Event	131.00
Annual Appeal	216.77
Travel	200.00
Newsletter	157.84
State Registration Fee	100.00
Postage	361.95
Computer	253.99
Marketing	<u>283.00</u>
Total	11,204.16
BALANCE DECEMBER 31, 1998	\$13,865.99

TREASURER'S REPORT

OPERATING FUND ALLOCATION

First Union Checking Account	\$8,800.69
Vanguard Fund #30—Prime Money Market	\$5,065.30

ENDOWMENT FUND

BALANCE DECEMBER 31, 1997	\$204,135.30
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Plus Receipts

Dividend	4,504.65
Capital Gains	1,611.60
Fund Price Gain	<u>37,872.37</u>

Total	43,988.62
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Less Expenses

Payout to Publication Fund	<u>9,000.00</u>
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Total	9,000.00
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BALANCE DECEMBER 31, 1998	\$239,123.92
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ENDOWMENT FUND ALLOCATION

Vanguard Group Investments

Fund 9—Index Growth	\$50,480.33
Fund 29—High-Yield Corp. Bond	\$22,549.41
Fund 40—Index 500	\$46,696.14
Fund 59—PrimeCap	\$47,012.06
Fund 84—Total Bond Market	\$23,520.63
Fund 114—Horizon Aggressive Growth	\$48,865.35

PUBLICATION FUND

BALANCE DECEMBER 31, 1997 \$17,900.36

Plus Receipts

Payout From Endowment 9,000.00
Donations 9,689.00
Dividend 1,419.86
Capital Gains 2,004.11

Total 22,112.97

Less Expenses

Fund Price Loss 763.78
Book Publication 0.00
Research 0.00

Total 763.78

BALANCE DECEMBER 31, 1998 \$39,249.55

PUBLICATION FUND ALLOCATION

Vanguard Group Investments

Fund 21—Wellington \$26,981.60
Fund 33—Federal Portfolio Money Market \$12,267.95

Respectfully submitted
Allen J. Bedford, *Treasurer*