
Editorials

RICK WARREN AND THE SADDLEBAGGAGE OF SADDLEBACK

Apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon tell us, "[Emanuel] Swedenborg engaged in regular spiritistic and necromantic contacts; many members today accept this possibility if certain conditions are met."

So who would have ever thought that a long dead mystic and cult leader from the 1700s would make a huge comeback? We have also discovered that his church, once called The Church of the New Jerusalem, is now simply called The New Church. Swedenborg (1688-1772) is still revered by his followers today and his writings taught side-by-side with the Bible.

Swedenborg was the son of a Swedish Lutheran bishop. In late 1744 he was struck with severe illness and delirium. In the spring of 1745 he was stricken to the point that he believed he could see his walls covered with ugly horrible creatures of some sort. At the close of that delusional (or demonic) period, it is claimed that an anonymous man appeared to him to tell him he was directly commissioned by Jesus to have an open door to the unseen world and that he was to write of his experiences.

Like all cult leaders, the Bible was not enough for Swedenborg. He believed himself to be the inspired

initiator of a brand new dispensation. New dispensations are an old lie because the dispensation of grace will continue until Jesus returns (Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:26).

In fact, Swedenborg who was a contemporary of Franz Mesmer (the father of hypnosis) was a trance medium himself which was a popular fad in those days. One author tells us, "In his *Journal of Dreams*, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist-mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg fondly recalled one of his early trance states: 'I had in my mind and body the feeling of an indescribable delight, so that had it been in any higher degree, the whole body would have been, as it were, dissolved in pure joy.'"

In that the religious writings of Swedenborg are so old, so bizarre, so obscure, and so out of date, who would have thought he would make a come back via a television personality and a surgeon no less?

They tell of Swedenborg's entering and communicating with the world of angels and spirits and learning the very secrets of the cosmos. The universal secrets discovered by Swedenborg included a denial of the Trinity and the assertion that fewer than 66 books should be in the Bible. Today, followers of this arcane belief system embrace all the writings of Swedenborg as absolute truth.

Long before Harold Camping and C. Peter Wagner, Swedenborg declared that the Church age had come to an end in 1757 and that his insights and revelations

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4. See David McCasland, "Pursuing Hospitality," *Our Daily Bread*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Radio Bible Class, Monday, Sept. 27, 2010.

5. For more thoughts along the line of deception by investment, see G. Richard Fisher, "What is Behind the 'Energizer Bunny' Syndrome?" *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2010, pp. 2, 22-23.

6. Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

7. Nouwen cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*. Silverton, Ore.: Lighthouse Trails, 2007, pg. 90.

8. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 161.

9. *Ibid.*, pg. 71.

10. Henri Nouwen, "Being the Beloved." Sermon posted on Google Videos and accessed at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3701709082567809182#>. This video is also posted on YouTube.

11. Nouwen cited by Debbie Dewart, "The Contemporary Theology Of Henri Nouwen - Wounded 'Healer' ... or Deceiver?" Hubert, N.C.: Christian Discernment Publications Ministry Inc., pg. 5, emphasis

added by Dewart. Document accessed at: www.christiandiscernment.com under the "View and Print Publications" tab.

12. Ron Nash, "Is Jesus the Only Savior? - Critiquing Evangelicals Who Have Lost Their Way." Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 2004, audio recording, CD-0428.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 51.

15. Henry Clarence Thiessan, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, pg. 330, italic in original.

16. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

17. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.

18. *Ibid.*, pg. 51.

19. Nouwen cited in *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 24, ellipsis in original.

20. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 5, italics in original.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25.

22. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, pg. 14.

25. See Gerhard Kittel, Editor, *Theological*

Dictionary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, Vol. 2, pp. 900-901.

26. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 19.

27. *Ibid.*, pg. 28.

28. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pp. 122-123.

29. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 27, emphasis added.

30. See further, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994, pp. 625-626.

31. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 66.

32. *Sabbatical Journey*, op. cit., pg. 65.


33. *Ibid.*, pg. 171.

34. *Ibid.*, pg. 162.

35. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 109.

36. See further, Michael O'Laughlin, *God's Beloved*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Arbis Books, 2004, pp. 134-139.

37. *Wounded Prophet*, op. cit., pg. 111. See also Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary, Report from a Trappist Monastery*. New York: Doubleday, no date.

38. Ron Rhodes, *5-Minute Apologetics for Today*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishing, 2010, Day 363. 

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constituted a new dispensation. The claim that true Christianity was somehow lost over the centuries and had to be rediscovered is a myth called "Restorationism" and is the foundation plank of many cults and isms.

Some of Swedenborg's declarations border on the downright silly. He makes the claim, for example, that during one of his out-of-body experiences (while visiting heaven), he was able to convince Martin Luther to renounce his old Reformation ideas and convert to Swedenborg's views.

Also, Swedenborg claimed that during his astral travels he met with and took instruction directly from angels. But the Bible reminds us that false teachers have been corrupted by the one who "transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 1:3, 13-14). And we must never forget Paul's warning in Galatians about an angel with another gospel (Galatians 1:8-9).

Researcher and writer Bill Alnor reminds us, "Swedenborg rejected Christ's vicarious atonement on the cross for the sins of the world, calling it an 'abomination.'" And that, "He is one of the first to widely disseminate the unbiblical notion that following death, humans evolve into angels. His stories of heavenly society contain wild tales of sexual experiences, bizarre accounts of angels' sexual practices, their writing styles, and even of male angels' beards. Some angelic communities, he went on to say, are similar to primitive African culture where people are carefree and walk around naked!"

It is also helpful to remember that claimed angelic appearances and angelic messages launched Islam and Mormonism, and are so much a part of the faulty and heretical messages of extremist Word-Faith teachers.

The most famous adherent of Swedenborg's religion was Helen Keller. But there is a follower who has helped put Swedenborg back on the map today: Dr. Mehmet Oz, who *AARP The Magazine* calls, "America's hardest-working doctor." And he is a friend of Oprah Winfrey. It seems that pop religions and show business have become handmaidens. There is no gainsaying Oz's tremendous popularity and enormous influence.

Mehmet Cenjiz Oz, who turned 50 just last year, is a cardiothoracic surgeon, author, and television personality. He is of Turkish descent, speaks both Turkish and English, and has parents who are Muslim. He has written numerous books and hosts a daily television show, *The Dr. Oz Show*. Oz has been called a global leader, as well as being designated one of the most influential men of the 21st century by *Esquire* magazine.

Oz is a devoted follower of Swedenborg, an outspoken member of The New Church, and a lover of Transcendental Meditation, which proves that intelligence and discernment do not always go together. One can have secular knowledge and education without any real spiritual insight.

Another frightening thing about Oz is his endorsement of a New Age practice called Reiki, meaning life force energy. His wife is said to be a devout practitioner of Reiki. It is a massage technique which is not neutral or benign. The claim is made that as the therapist lays

hands on and begins the massage, he or she can be joined by astral divine beings called Reiki guides who assist with the massage. Those receiving treatments have claimed distinct feelings of numerous hands on their bodies. The Reiki practitioner can pray for assistance from the Reiki guide before, during, or after the massage.

In Reiki literature, it is alleged that once the guides show up, they are with the person receiving treatment forever and will assist if called upon. Reiki was developed by a Japanese Buddhist in 1922. However, clinical studies conclude it has no real benefit except for a possible placebo effect. The forms of it promoting spiritual guides amount to historical spiritism. While some would argue it is just meaningless, imaginary bunk and a racket, others would insist it is a very dark force. Whatever it is, one should not toy with it. It certainly has no place around a church.

While Reiki is not an official part of The New Church, it has been embraced by Oz in addition to his other false beliefs. It was probably an easy transition because Swedenborg believed in the nearness of the dead.

So what does all this have to do with Rick Warren and his Saddleback Church? Recent headlines reveal the strange pairing of Warren (and his church) and Dr. Oz. Up until now, many people have tried to be gracious to Warren despite all his goofs, blunders, and questionable alliances — but apparently no more. Earlier this year, Warren engaged Oz to be his weight loss guru for the entire church. This certainly projects the message that Oz is an acceptable mentor spiritually, and worthy to be approved by the church as a teacher of some sort. It is certainly not a match made in heaven.

The Prophet Amos asked the relevant question, “How can two walk together except they agree? (Amos 3:3). The Apostle Paul asked the question, “What part has a believer with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:15). Of course, Paul was not talking about witnessing, but yoking (v. 14) with unbelievers. This certainly means that we should not get entangled in alliances of any kind with cult leaders. They should be denounced and refuted, not promoted and encouraged.

Saddleback solicited in the “community blog” on its Website: “Be part of this transformational debut to be a healthier you! ... We’ll hear from world-renowned doctors on a plan to get healthy and stay that way in the new decade. Join Orange County in becoming the healthiest county in the nation on this one year plan that starts NOW!” And the megachurch pastor was out in front on this one. According to *Christianity Today* magazine, “Rick Warren pledges to lose 90 pounds during a 52-week church fitness plan, developed by Dr. Oz and two other medical experts.”

As the program kicked off, news reports about Saddleback’s “The Daniel Plan: God’s Prescription For Your Health,” began appearing in mid-January. And it was not just Oz, but a troubling trio of doctors. Saddleback advertised the “OC Health & Fitness Seminar

with Dr. Mehmet Oz, Dr. Daniel Amen, Dr. Mark Hyman, & Pastor Rick Warren.” One report, published on ChristianNewsWire.com, noted that, “All three [of the doctors] have Eastern spiritual connections.” Noting that Oz is a follower of Swedenborg, the report went on to state, “The other two speakers are Dr. Daniel Amen and Dr. Mark Hyman. Dr. Amen teaches tantric sex, a Hindu mystical approach to sex. He teaches Eastern religion meditation and energy-based Reiki, a New Age practice. Dr. Mark Hyman promotes mystical meditation based on Buddhist principles.”

According to Christian Investigator President Steve McConkey, “It is troubling for a top pastor in the United States to promote false teachers. We are living at an all-time low spiritually in the United States with weak leaders. We need to teach basic Bible principles without legalism.”

Warren, when pressed, might say he does not believe everything Oz and the others teach, but there is no disclaimer anywhere offered and no refuting of the teachings of Swedenborg, Reiki, or mysticism. This is more like one big happy family. Warren may say he is using this to evangelize Oz and the others, but one can witness to a person without inflicting that person on their entire church. The Apostle John, on the other hand, commands against such activity (2 John 10-11). And Acts 20 speaks of elders guarding the Church against wolves and false teachers who come in among the flock and from those among you who rise up (vv. 29-30).

This is yet another Saddleback disaster, one of huge proportion setting a course which will not only blur but also obliterate doctrinal lines and massively confuse. We were hoping for better from the one called “America’s pastor.” Warren is an embarrassment to thinking, discerning Christians. It would be a blessing if he just closed his mouth to food and to teaching. Because of him people are being led down a dark maze of error, confusion, and heresy. May God help us!

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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the fastest declaration of sainthood on record, surpassing Mother Teresa’s 2003 beatification by several days. It will also mark the first time ever in which a pope has beatified his immediate predecessor.

Just weeks following John Paul’s death in 2005, Benedict placed the late pontiff on the fast track to beatification by waiving the five-year waiting period required before beginning the process.

Benedict announced the date for the ceremony after it was declared that a French nun claimed she was healed of Parkinson’s disease because of John Paul, who himself