

Candela



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

DECEMBER 2025

ISSUE 122

I hope that you and your loved ones enjoy every level in the meaning of Christmas and the season of summer, relaxation, and being a bit out of normal routine, which surrounds Christmas Day on both sides! May it renew you.

I remember going around parts of New South Wales, giving various Swedenborg-based talks and exhibitions in libraries which was all part of the work of the Sydney Swedenborg Centre way back in the 1990s. That decade basically introduced technology and all that has since unfolded, changing nearly everything in the management of our lives. So, back then, we travelled several hours to various destinations, often staying in a motel overnight.

One motel, perhaps in Gundagai, was called "Poet's Corner" and it had about twenty-five rooms each with a brass plate

on the door, labelling a poet's name and a short quote. Tennyson, T S Eliot, Robert Burns, and so on. Our motel room had the ancient Roman poet Virgil (also spelled Vergil) 70 BC – 19 BC (please note that...) and a quotation from one of his major poetry sets called the Eclogues. Here it is:

.... Continued on page 2...



Photo by James Coleman on Unsplash

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Please note: the views expressed in this Newsletter are those of each contributor and do not necessarily reflect any particular position of the S.A.A. or its committee.

NEXT ISSUE - March 2026

I wish all our readers a very Happy and Blessed Christmas and New Year, I hope you have meaningful time spent with those you love. The next edition of Candela is in March 2026, please have any material to me by 24th February.

Ruth

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

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"Now the last age of the Cumaeon song has come; the great order of the ages is born anew. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation is sent down from heaven. The child by whom the iron age shall cease and a golden race arise throughout the world."

I couldn't believe my eyes! And I checked his dates after I got back home and yes, they are correct. How did Virgil know about God's incarnation through a virgin giving birth to a special child? He was a Roman, not a Jew, who might have known the passages in the Old Testament about 'a virgin shall conceive' and 'unto us a child is born'. But the language is a long way from all of that, and it has words like Cumaeon and Saturn which seem to lock it into Roman ideology.

I found I couldn't explain the peculiarity that this seemed to be creating. I went through all kinds of 'supposes'... suppose Virgil in writing, inadvertently opened up an image of something in

himself which even he didn't understand. Suppose God used this man to reveal something in advance of it. Suppose there is, in every religion, and possibly in every human heart, a sense of God coming into our realm of consciousness. There is, for sure, a very ancient Mesopotamian idea of the dying and rising God, Tammuz, who is basically linked with the agricultural year cycle but is a divine being who returns. Other religions touch on the divine intention to come (in whatever way that might mean) but Christianity is the one religion which enshrines the point that God has actually come as a human.

And Virgil seems to have caught the gist and the mechanics of it a few decades before it took place, that first Christmas, and all the meaning which derives from that, whether historically and/or spiritually and personally for us.



I don't actually think it is very good for us to have explained everything away in a rational "there you are" way. Human life is full of inexplicables, thank goodness ... thank God! Art, music, love, the spirit, and all words speak to us, convey to us, something of which

we can only get a part. I reckon that 'part' is important for us – reflect on your own experiences – because it wows us and leaves us with a something we can't unravel, which intrigues and humbles us, pointing to things we can't have yet ... but we know they are there, wherever. Thank you, Virgil !

*My greetings and good wishes
at this time of a birth,*

Julian



Our Part in the Christmas Story: Even the parts We'd Rather Not Play by Howard A. Thompson

Photo by MChE Lee on Unsplash

This year, our church Christmas readings have centred on the theme of "Our Part," a reminder that while the Lord is our Saviour, He calls on each of us to cooperate with Him in shaping our eternal future. He gives us hearts to love, minds to think, and hands to serve. Yet, we are reminded by the Doctrines that while this capacity to cooperate comes entirely from the Lord, we are called to use these gifts and act as if of ourselves. We are partners in the process, invited to use our freedom and rationality in kindness toward others and devotion to Him.

The Christmas story is rich with examples of people doing their part. We look to Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men, and we see the reflection of something noble within us—faithfulness, humility, alertness to truth, and patient hope. We naturally want to identify with these figures. But there is another figure in the Christmas narrative whose part we would prefer not to acknowledge, yet he is as much a part of the story as the angels.

That figure is King Herod. And if we are brave enough to look closely, we must admit that at times, he is part of us too.

Herod represents a profound spiritual lesson wrapped in a sinister package. While his behaviour certainly displays hypocrisy, the specific spiritual correspondence goes deeper than mere deception. In the internal sense, as the Writings teach, Herod represents the love of self and the world—specifically, the love of ruling from self-love. This is a love that feels violently opposed to anything that threatens its control. His response to the news of the Lord's birth is a masterclass in this protective ego.



When he tells the wise men, "Go and search carefully for the child... so that I too may come and worship Him," his smooth words mask a murderous agenda. He feigns piety, but his will is to dominate.

This internal violence is not random; it is a specific reaction to the Lord's presence. The inner sense of the Christmas story is not just about a historical event in Bethlehem; it is about the birth of the Lord's Divine Human—Divine Truth—within our own minds and hearts. Whenever a new insight of charity, a fresh resolve for truth, or a stirring of genuine innocence begins to be born in us, the "Herod" within wakes up. The selfish ego realises that if this new spiritual life is allowed to grow, the ego can no longer sit on the throne.

We see this dynamic projected onto the world stage with frightening clarity. The Herodian spirit is alive today, manifesting in public leaders who invoke Christianity for credibility but enact policies rooted in dominance, injustice, and exclusion. We see figures who preach about family values yet enact policies that harm families; who speak of "righteousness" while showing no mercy



to the vulnerable. Like Herod, they use the language of faith to protect their power, presenting agendas that are supposedly divinely ordained but bear the bitter fruit of division and cruelty.

It is easy to point the finger at these modern Herods. However, while the Writings acknowledge that religious and political leaders often misuse religion for worldly ends—and while this misuse has devastating societal consequences—they consistently direct the primary application of scripture to the individual's inner life. The warning is not only for "them"—it is for us. The transformation of the world begins with the regeneration of the individual spirit.

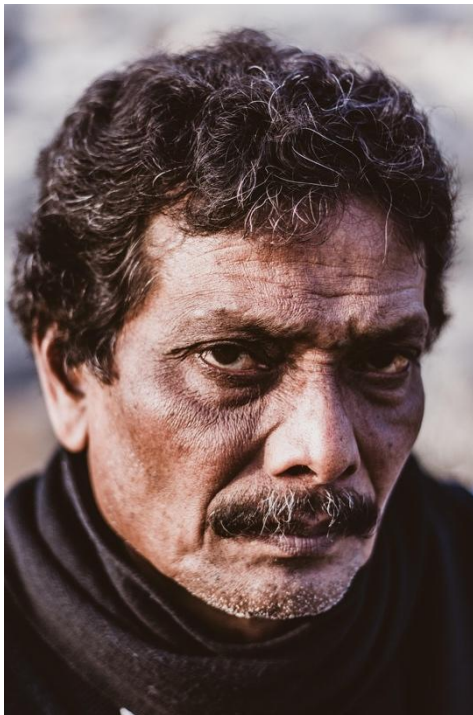


Image by [Rahul Pandit](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Christmas therefore invites us to ask gently but courageously: Are there moments when I say I follow the Lord, yet cling to old, selfish patterns? **Is there a Herod in me that feels threatened** by the demands of true charity? When I am called to forgive, to serve without credit, or to choose truth over comfort, do I feign willingness while secretly protecting my pride? To welcome the Lord with sincerity, we

must cooperate with Him not by pretending all is well, but by admitting what needs His healing touch.

This cooperation requires a specific kind of action. If we wish to reject the Herod within, we must look to the example of the Magi. When they realised the truth, they did not return to Herod; the scripture says they "went home another way."

In the spiritual life, "going another way" is not simply a change of outward strategy or behaviour. It represents a profound internal shift. It signifies a turning away from falsity and evil at a deep level, once we have been enlightened by the truth. It is the hard but rewarding work of repentance, reformation, and regeneration. It means recognising the "Herod" impulses—the desire to rule, the envy, the defensiveness—and actively shunning them as sins against the Lord.



When we resist the urge to rule and instead choose to serve, something beautiful happens. We begin to offer the Lord a place of genuine welcome—an open heart where Divine love can be born anew, free from the fear and resistance of self. Let us not just speak of worshipping Jesus; let us live a life that worships Him. May our part in this year's story be one of honesty, humility, and courage, leaving the Herodian spirit behind to walk the new path of genuine love.



Welcome to our new member

Wishing our newest member a warm welcome. Joanna Switserloot from Victoria, we hope you enjoy your journey with us.



Spiritual but not Religious?

By the staff of New Christian Bible Study

It's common for people to describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious". What do you suppose that means?

It might mean that they think it's likely that there's some sort of spiritual "stuff" that exists, and that the physical universe isn't all there is. But they don't take it much further than that.



It might also mean that a person has rejected, to some extent at least, the explanations offered by the familiar religions — Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese traditional religion, etc.

It might be more of a rejection of ritual — of attending regular services, or of observing certain practices — than it is a rejection of a thought-structure.

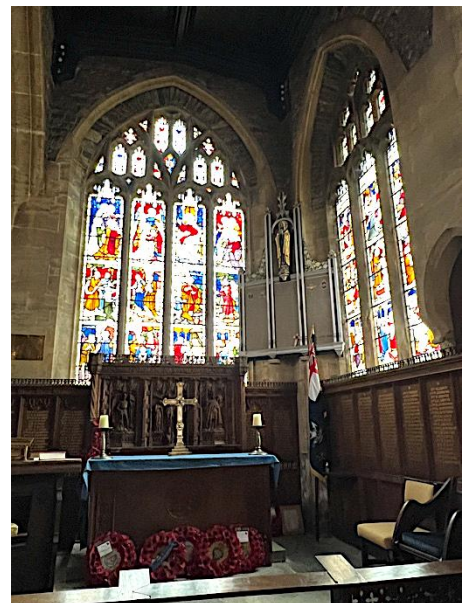
It might mean that someone has thought deeply, and explored hard, and hasn't yet found an organization, or an organized body of thought, that is convincing.

Or, it could just mean that someone hasn't thought much about it, but thinks that it sounds "deep" to say it.

Let's take a close look. The word "religion" may come from the Latin word

"religare", which means to bind or connect, or to have an obligation to. It's also possible that it comes instead from the Latin "relegere", meaning to heed, or have a care for. They aren't dissimilar origins; in both, there is a connotation of commitment.

Constructively, religion can be a commitment to learning truth, and trying to be good, and of connecting with the



spiritual love and wisdom of God. So can spirituality. Religion might imply more structure, and more of an active approach, in learning and practicing. Spirituality sounds a little looser, and a little bit more passive, but there's still an appreciation for higher things, and an openness to influx.

External ritual and observance can be empty if they lack internal love to the Lord and the neighbour. That doesn't necessarily mean that they're useless; sometimes you need to "fake it till you make it". You're going through the motions, but even that fairly empty action can make space for genuine love



and wisdom to flow in. But if they're empty, and just being done to look good — they can stay empty. On the other hand, though, they can be full, too... full of love, and deep thought and emotion, creating space and time for seeking God's love and wisdom.



There's a memorable parable in Luke 18:10-14

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.'

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

For sure, the people in any given church aren't going to be perfect; they're hopefully trying to be good — trying to love God and the neighbour, but are there going to be failings and flaws? Yes. But, professions of spirituality are also empty, if there's no effort to learn truth and actively shun evils as sins.

At bottom, religion and spirituality may not really be very different. They are the way that human beings try to figure out what's true, and what's good, and then to start living better lives.

Before we start...

Imagine there is a competition about catching the whole essence of Swedenborg's spiritual output in as few words as possible. The prize is ... well, you can come up with something great for yourself, but for me, I'd quite like a quill pen and a bottle of ink. So, you start thinking that Swedenborg covers a lot of major things, ranging from God ... to eternal life, to the work of regeneration; ... all those correspondences, much about revelation, the purpose of creation, true marriage, our need to be useful, and then not forgetting all that is good and evil... so, where to start with all of that to include?

For me, my submission would be just five words: "know it and live it." So, let's put them as the heading, and take a look at them.

Know it and live it by Julian Duckworth

Maybe here and now, see if you think this is a worthwhile entry for the competition. It looks like it is pretty short, very clear, involving us in being told to know things and to live these same things. Notice how this short statement is about two things, knowing something *and* living what you now know in your life. I could perhaps have said, "Know it and do it"



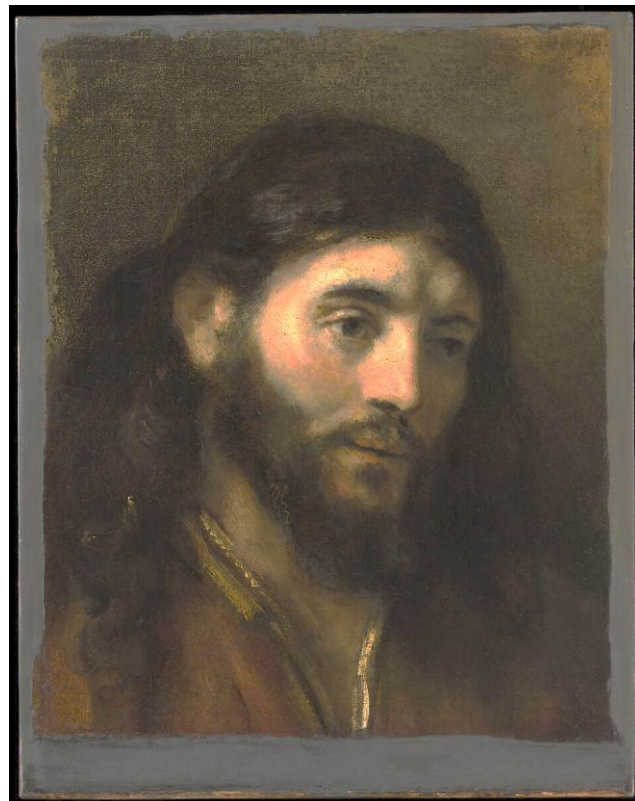
(even shorter!) but I don't believe that's the right way to put it, because subconsciously 'do' carries the idea of action out there in the world, like 'Oh, let me help you stack those chairs'. 'Living it' might include that of course, but it also reaches back and down into our heart, will, mind, thoughts, and intentions, which aren't visible nor are they physical helping.

A good number of years ago, I suggested to people that a helpful way to work with the Bible or any spiritual text is to read a statement or verse and then ask yourself two questions about it: first ask "What is this saying to us, and specifically to you?" Let that question open up for a while. Then ask, "What is this asking of us, and specifically, of you?" And let that also suggest something or a few things, whatever comes up. I believe this is a very valid way of working with any text or scriptural verse, even any idea or thought. And note that this method is using the idea in the words about knowing it and then living it, in a progressive and real way that is relevant for you now.

When people ask me what my favourite bible verse is, I'm very tempted to say, "Well, all of them really". But if I was pushed for just one, I would readily come up with Luke 11:27 and 28 (sorry, it's two verses...) *"And it happened, as he (Jesus) spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which nursed you!' But he said, 'More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.'"*

Notice that, like my title, both the woman and Jesus say two things together - 'womb and breasts', 'hear and keep'. I also get the impression that this woman who is singing Jesus' praises is trying to acknowledge in her own wonderful way, as a woman, perhaps as a mother, the greatness of this man for her and what he has been saying, with deep gratitude for him, like she couldn't help herself speaking

out. In paraphrase... "You are the best speaker I have ever heard!"



Head of Christ by Rembrandt 1650

But Jesus isn't into this at all. He almost rounds on her, but it's not from annoyance but to use it to make a point; it is for every single person in the crowd who's been listening, "More than that ... blessed are those who *hear* the word of God and *keep* it." I can almost think that Jesus was grateful for this woman's outburst, allowing him to be able to point out the whole purpose of words and teachings, to hear them and then keep them ... to know and live it."

That idea is such an obvious truth that we can easily overlook the necessary carry-through from knowing something to living what we now know. It's almost too obvious to be worth bothering with, but THAT is precisely the danger! Just knowing something - especially those many spiritual and personal things we know - feels powerful, beautiful, perfect, deeply satisfying, and many other wonderful effects from hearing and knowing deep and important teachings. We can caress them



and keep coming back to them in ourselves and marvel at their sublime truth. The subtle danger is that we leave it as that delightful experience, and miss out finding ways to integrate it more and more into our life, of actually "walking the talk" in "being what we're seeing".




The Good Samaritan by Vincent van Gogh


Of course, we can't find a specific outlet in our life for each and every thing we hear about in spiritual ideas, but we should try to. I would offer us the suggestion ... that when we hear or come across something spiritual, we don't simply revel in its beauty but use it to ... once more ... firm up in our wish to live our life in the way we believe God wants us to live it.

Swedenborg at times, touches on the point of people who can only repeat what they have heard their minister, priest or speaker come out with. He implies this is a rather poor situation. It's something known, perhaps even loved, but it isn't something that has come to life in them yet. It's almost as if it has been "borrowed", supported by the idea that in

themselves they are just an ordinary person, incapable of any real understanding, and therefore dependent on those who've studied and now share it.

I'd like to share a powerful illustration of the 'attractiveness' of merely knowing things. It comes from Jewish understanding of things in their own long history. The Old Testament part of the Bible, back fairly near the beginning, tells the events of the Jews going down into Egypt, being invited and welcomed to come and live there, then becoming enslaved and set hard tasks, then leaving Egypt. Egypt was *the* greatest civilisation at that time, a renowned centre with a very-developed culture and belief-system and a royal dynasty of powerful pharaohs, its kings.

The Jewish or Hebrew word for Egypt is "Mitzraim" and the word's basic meaning is "two of something" which is quite fascinating, considering the topic we are working with in this article. I'd like you to notice, though, that the word Mitzraim begins and ends with an 'M' – MitzraiM. So, the Jews say that the letter M in their Hebrew Alphabet has two shapes. When it begins a word or is in the middle of a word it is written 

but when it ends a word it is written  Notice that the first shape has a gap in it but the other shape is completely sealed with no gap.

The Jews say that the temptation of being 'in Egypt' is very powerful. It is to be in a great place with a wide, flowing river, and an abundance of all that is good to eat, know and feel as we live in such plenty. But "Watch It !!!" because if that is your happiness, you will become slaves of worldly living, and end up with the last and final M of the MitzraiM shutting you in, entrapped.

I imagine that a lot of things in life run the risk of being a Mitzraim, a "two of something" ...the delight of being in something – a place or a state of mind –



that brings us many pleasant feeling and indulgences, but which closes us off from what we might learn from it, or even just feel grateful for it. I remember a lady who told me that every holiday we take is really the way to get ourselves ready to go back to work. At the time, I could have slapped her, as I lived for enjoyment. But the point is a valid one, especially about our spiritual work. But it has taken me a few decades to realise it.



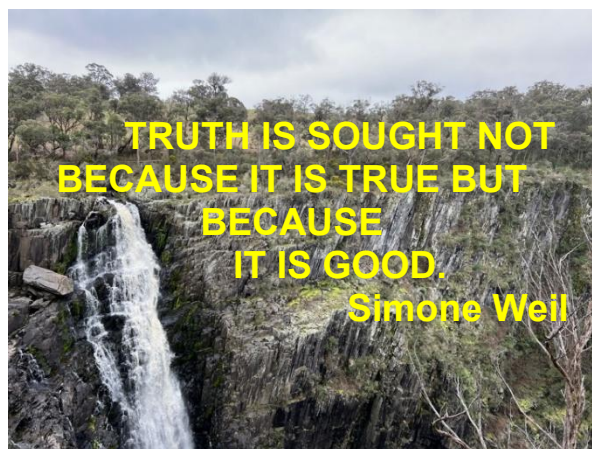
The MitzraiM also fits the “knowing it but never quite getting round to living it” situation in life. That is not only an attractive way of living for us, it also misses the point that for us to start to live what we know is true out there in life is hard, complex, and asks a lot from us.

I want to end this first section with a reminder to us all. We can know in ourselves some of the extent to which we are staying in just knowing things and not going further in actively living them. Hopefully the extent of that is on the small side, and we do think of going further and adapting a principle into specific things in the way we live our life, including what we will say and what we won't be part of, and so on.

But we can't know about nor should we judge any other person in their apparent (to us) limitations of turning something know about into incorporating that into their life or not. They may be living a more dedicated life than we are. They may love how the truth they know, read, or hear, reminds them, reconnects them warms them in the thousand and one things going on for them and their earnest wish to live faithfully. The principle of “know it and live it” stands; the percentage or not of those who act on it we have to leave alone, or we will be going in the opposite direction!

What I am going to move on to now is to share some of Swedenborg's emphasis

on the importance of 'know and live it'. Basically Swedenborg drives home the need to keep them together because each one by itself is incomplete. Swedenborg is always doing that, joining two things mutually together into a fulness. Love and wisdom, faith and charity, and so on. You might have come across the common saying that 'love is blind and truth is cold' which is in fact saying that each thing by itself is likely to fail. Put them together - 'a loving truth', 'true love' and we begin to feel their power and completeness.



Let's start with just knowing. 'Know' is a remarkable word. We can know something and we can really know about something. I know tomorrow comes after today; I know that love changes everything. We also understand that knowledge and wisdom are mind-things which are on two entirely distinct levels.

Swedenborg, handling the place of knowledge in our spiritual life, advocates both its vital importance and its great dangers. Let's just quote two passages as examples:

"During our infancy, adolescence and later, we are trained in knowledge, secular and religious. If we are the kind of people who can be reborn, heavenly dimensions — aspects of love and charity — fill out both kinds of knowledge. In this way the knowledge is grafted onto the heavenly gifts that we have received from infancy up till adolescence and early adulthood. In this process, our outward self unites with our inward self. First the knowledge is grafted onto the heavenly gifts we received as



young adults, next onto those we received throughout adolescence, and finally onto those we received in early childhood. Then we become little children, of whom the Lord said, "To such belongs the kingdom of God"."

Secrets of Heaven 1616

"These people by nature could not help turning religious knowledge into a matter of memorization. The knowledge of spiritual and heavenly realities and even the mysteries of faith become nothing more than objects of memory when the people who are adept at them have no love for others.

Memorized details are dead objects to us unless we live according to them as a matter of conscience. When we do, then as soon as something becomes part of our memory it also becomes part of our life. That is when it first becomes something in us that remains useful to us and our salvation after physical life ends. Neither secular nor religious knowledge means anything to us in the other life — even if we have learned all the secrets that have ever been revealed — unless it permeates our life."

Secrets of Heaven 1197

Each of these two opposite passages makes its point well. The first one points out that what we come to know about everything as we move from birth towards adult maturity is latent in us, for when we become aware of the spiritual level in our life. Then, these early knowledges can be infilled and transformed, and we then have direct access to living things becoming the important things they are, filled with spirit, heaven, and God's grace. What is not said but is inferred is that without knowledge we have no receptacle or application for the life of God in us.

The second one is just as powerful, in pointing out that if we do not give life to what we know of spiritual matters, we reduce things to mere memory, we do not bring them into any love for others, and after we die, our vast knowledge of so much simply evaporates because we

haven't brought it to permeate our whole life.

To bring something known into wanting to live it is a kind of wonderful warmth that comes to us.

Here's a graceful passage about this –

Each of us has an earthly mind and a spiritual mind, the earthly mind for this world and the spiritual mind for heaven. We have access to both in our understanding but not in terms of our will, until we turn our backs on evils and reject them because they are sins. When we do this, our spiritual mind is opened with respect to our will as well, and a spiritual warmth from heaven flows into our earthly mind. Essentially, this warmth is caring, and it brings to life our knowledge of what is true and good, a knowledge that is in our earthly mind, and forms a faith out of it.

Faith 32

Lastly, here is a passage about what we can call love acting just by itself, without the vessel of some knowledge in us to keep us loving in an informed way.

When we do good things in order to be paid back, our good actions do not come from the Lord, but from ourselves. We mainly look out for ourselves, because we are looking out for our own good. To us, other people's good — the good of our fellow citizens, human society, our country, and our religion — is merely a means of achieving our goals.

So behind good things that we do to get credit for them is hidden the good of our own selfish and materialistic love. This kind of goodness comes from ourselves, not from God — and any goodness that comes from ourselves is not really good. In fact, as much as selfishness and materialism are hidden behind it, it is harmful.

New Jerusalem 152

So, to wrap all of this up, let's finish by visualising this principle of our need to 'know it and live it' (which I am asserting is the whole essence of all Swedenborg's vast spiritual teaching) and see it as a colour.



I'm going to choose yellow because it is bright and it's like the sun which is like God who brings light and warmth into our lives. See it in a picture, see it in nature, see it wherever it is, and you have this amazing presence where yellow brings life to everything else.

Because we can know something, we can live in that knowing and bring it into every part of our life. Find your own examples. I will share my version which kind of says everything for me ...

"Because I know that God gives me everything in my life, and is my life, I will live my life peacefully and fully in that."

Julian Duckworth



Disease – What causes bodily healing? **By Stephen Russell-Lacy.**

Anyone can fall ill. Medical science reveals natural causes of disease such as genetic predisposition, toxic environments, and microbes. Like the rain and hail, sickness can fall on anyone. But what about factors that make us better? What causes healthy recovery, healing, and cure?

Universal power of healing

According to many spiritual thinkers, there is a life force within the mind and body. A universal healing power that can work through people.

Hence the old medical adage 'vis medicatrix natura', (the healing power of nature). According to this ancient idea, left to themselves, most disorders will run their course and the body will get well naturally. Hippocrates believed that an organism is not passive to injuries or disease but rebalances itself to counteract them.

Many people, who suffer from chronic persistent conditions, might hotly dispute this attitude. Nevertheless, it does seem to apply at least to many acute less serious ailments.

It has been long established that a healthy diet, sufficient sleep and physical exercise, bolster our defences against physical illness. The body sets up a process to repel the virus or bacterial invader and, after illness, recovery can set in. Medicine and other therapies can help this process.

Spiritual healing for disease

Orthodox doctors use pills and surgery to treat the body directly. All healers in complementary medicine encourage sufferers to make a conscious act of turning towards, what they see as, a natural healing energy in life, that can restore the body. Healers may use 'laying-on-of-hands' or working just above the surface of the body to activate this natural healing force. The state of illness is not seen as a malady but an effort of the body to overcome a disturbed equilibrium.

Effectiveness of complementary medicine

Conventional science still regards the effectiveness of the work of healers as unproven. However, a good deal of sound research using controlled studies has now accumulated. Sometimes healers fail but this can also be true of any medical treatment. For many observers who have looked more closely at the evidence, results support the reality of spiritual healing beyond reasonable doubt, e.g. causing improvements in enzyme levels, fungal growth, rate of wound healing. Sceptics claim that often benefits are due to the so-called placebo effect.

"As every surgeon has witnessed, even a positive attitude about the outcome of a major operation can lead to better recovery, while negativity and pessimism on the patients part is often accompanied by complications such as lowered resistance to infection and more frequent complaints." (Eugene Taylor, professor of psychology)

However, according to psychiatrist Dr Daniel Benor, who has reviewed the research findings, spiritual healing can occur when psychological factors, which may manifest as the placebo response, have been eliminated or allowed for in the analysis.

Hindering the natural healing process

According to spiritual philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, there is a general influx of the power of healing into nature



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

To become a member of the Swedenborg Association of Australia, check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au and click "Contact" in the top menu, which has details on benefits of **membership** and an application form listing current membership rates.

Also check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au for details of **group events** which are held online, but you can also be physically at various locations around Australia. Follow the "about → contact" menu items on the website for a list of locations and contact info of your nearest group convenor, and see the "events" menu item for Zoom links so you can join online events.

Our new website is continually being updated with new study material and latest news and information.

from its divine creative Source. I would suggest this is shown for example by the naturally occurring healing of grazed skin, and recovery from the common cold.

However, we can unwittingly hinder this flow of healing energy by creating disorder in our bodies by making wrong choices in life. We make ourselves more at risk of disease if we fail to wash, live in unsanitary conditions, have an entirely sedentary life, smoke, drink immoderate amounts of alcohol or eat food to excess. Likewise, emotional stress reduces the body's ability to resist disease.

Unblocking healing of disease

The function of conventional medical treatment seems to be to remove anything that blocks the power of healing. One example is the surgeon's skill in removing disorderly obstructions in the body. Another is the psychological therapist's help to the patient to uncover and deal with the emotional turmoil that had caused ulcers or high blood pressure. Take away the psychological problem and the body will heal itself.

Disconnection with the essence of life

Another block to healing is to do with a sense of isolation from the essence of life. Instead, a walk in nature, losing oneself in music, gazing at works of art – have triggered positive emotions boosting our immune system.

Some healers use guided visualisation. Those patients who regularly practise it, show lowered heart rate and blood pressure. These changes can persist over the long term and have beneficial effects on health. Is this because the technique induces a higher state of consciousness and thus openness to healing?

Negative reactions to disease

One block to healing is the so-called 'second arrow' referred to in Buddhism. Getting upset, worried and feeling distraught often visit those with persistent pain. Craving for relief and distraction from the pain starts to fill their mind.

Recognised teachers of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) use this approach to meditation, not to eliminate pain but, to teach a new way of relating to pain. To reduce the considerable degree of stress with which most people usually respond to pain.

We feel calmer during meditation after we learn to neglect alarming thoughts and distracting worries. Practitioners report an increased ability to dis-identify with the disharmony one experiences both within and around oneself. This results from a sustained meditation practice.

Disconnection from a healing presence

From a religious perspective, healing is hindered if people of faith neglect to open their hearts to the presence of their idea of the Divine Being – perhaps an envisioned holy face of compassion.

I don't believe God miraculously heals everyone's diseases, no matter how genuine their faith or how sincere their prayers. What is provided for us may not be what we ask for. But, if we open ourselves to the Divine, in an attitude of humility and respect, then we experience a deep sense of feeling accepted. I cannot prove this, but I would say in this way we can receive a healing presence into our minds and bodies.

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." (John Muir, Scottish-American naturalist)

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