

Candela

Newsletter of the
Swedenborg Association of Australia Ltd.

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Issue 18

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At the time of writing a young friend has died. She was 34 years old and died from cancer.

During the last two years of her life she found a profound peace with God and in a sense offered herself to Him to do his work. She said, some two months before she died, that she had seen the place she was going to and it was very beautiful. The work she would be doing there was exactly the work she was now doing to help the healing of others here.

This was the primary course her life took in preference to all the medical assistance that may or may not have been forthcoming to prolong her life.

At the time of her death, one of her friends made the observation that it was as if God came and simply took her breath in His hands.

How tempting it must be to try to resist dying and allowing that last breath to pass our lips. How do we offer ourselves into God's hands? It cannot be by thinking, through faith alone.

Swedenborg reminds us that the most ancient people had an internal breathing according to their state of love and faith in the Lord. I don't know what this is like but I have experienced a recurring dream in which I am very deep in the sea and I know I must return to the surface.

As I ascend to the surface I realise I cannot make it at the rate I'm going. I am consuming too much oxygen. I must slow my pace, conserve what oxygen I have, and then allow myself to breath from the water itself, like a fish.

At this point there is a feeling of supreme peace and there is no need to hasten. There is, in effect, a life in that environment which is without external needs like air.

When we try to appreciate what this would feel like we may recall the last moments of Christ on the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit": and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

The word *Espirit* comes from *pneuma* meaning air. Air means far more than the oxygen and carbon dioxide we breath. There are two kingdoms in heaven, the Celestial and the Spiritual; the Celestial pertains to the province of the heart; and the Spiritual to the lungs. Lungs, air and spirit are connected by correspondence. So we may see air as the vehicle for the transmission of spirit.

Death seems to lose its fearsome character when we can feel the spirit moving out of us instead of feeling the dead-end of all life. One does indeed spend the whole of life learning how to die.

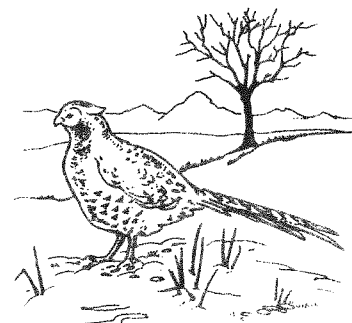
I trust that Easter was beautiful and meaningful Easter for you all.

John Brogan.
President

Food for Thought

- A Reflection on Winter

"..... Learning to understand reality is a process of exploration, of experiencing winters in order to find the renewed promises of springtime"



A Moral Minority

A moral life is the necessary foundation of a spiritual life. This is the consistent testimony of Swedenborg's theology. Currently, this principle seems widely ignored, and the field seems to be occupied by two competing views, one labelled "permissiveness", and one put forward by the self-styled "Moral Majority".

This, of course, is a radical oversimplification, and therein lies a significant cause of the problem itself. Individuals differ. No two members of the Moral Majority are alike; no two permissive people are alike. So we can work on such a large problem constructively only if we allow for this diversity.

Quantum physics offers us a model for making and maintaining such allowance. A pebble can be treated as a fact. It has a definite mass, and its behaviour can be described by strict Newtonian laws. But if we analyze the pebble into its subatomic particles, we find that each and every one of these is no more than a probability curve - something which is likely but not certain to have a particular mass at a given point in time and space.



So we can, I believe, look at aggregates of individuals and observe characteristics of that aggregate without passing judgment on any individual member of that group. If our observations are accurate, they will hold up. They will reflect a kind of constant sum of individual variances, individual probabilities.

With this in mind, then, let us look briefly at the two competing views - "majority moralism" on the one hand, and "permissivism" on the other. Majority moralism holds that there is a single and fixed code of behavioural laws which has been decreed by God and should be enforced by the civil state. It sees obedience to this code as essentially an end in itself - the consequences of disobedience are in the realm of civil disorder rather than in the realm of spiritual dysfunction.

Permissivism sees behavioural codes as obstacles to spiritual growth. It places an absolute value on human freedom, believing that the quality of motivation, the inner genuineness of an act, is all that matters. Destructive behaviour is seen as the consequence of an unjust society rather than as the consequence of personal inadequacy.

There is an inherent futility in the combat between these opposing views. Permissivism breeds irresponsibility, which is fertile ground for majority moralism; while majority moralism breeds tyranny, which is fertile ground for permissivism. Each, in the effort to defeat its enemy, nurtures its enemy.

This is another way of saying that the two positions are basically complimentary, that the resolution of the combat cannot come with the victory of the one view or the other, but only in their reconciliation.

The Lord pointed the way to this reconciliation in the Gospels. He dealt with the Moral Majority of His day - the Pharisees - and with the permissivists - the publicans and sinners. He dealt with them differently, attacking the pharisees directly, and extending forgiveness to the sinners.

Yet His objective in each case was the same, that they would change their ways, their attitudes, and become his disciples.

The reconciliation between majority moralism and permissivism is not so difficult as it may seem. One of the greatest disservices of polarization is its tendency to obscure the middle ground, to present things in "either-or" terms so deafeningly as to drown out the sound of "both-and".

Our simple way of expressing the reconciliation is to urge that we use our behaviour to affirm our moral standards, and our words only to explain our standards. Or to put it another way, we can recognise that our own moral worth rests on how we live, not in how consistently we disapprove of people who live differently.

But the simplest way of expressing the reconciliation is with the principle I cited at the outset - "A moral life is the necessary foundation of a spiritual life." It is necessary, but not as an end in itself.

If a spiritual life is built on the foundation of a moral life, this means that there is growth in love and wisdom, and therefore in happiness. This kind of moral person is gentle and understanding, affectionate and cheerful, - a far cry from the moral people who "bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."

The life of a spiritual-moral person itself invites others to share it. It testifies to the fact that a moral life is a free, relaxed and happy life. It brings people closer together, deepening their mutual affection and understanding.

The key to this is found in the way we face our moral combats. Blind obedience, or obedience from fear of hell, is inadequate. We need to search out the reasons for our immoral urges, to find out, quite literally, what is wrong.

For the Lord's laws are not arbitrary. Nothing is evil that actually gives us freedom or happiness. Evil is evil because it enslaves us, cuts us off from each other, sets us against each other.

There is even a limited sense in which we rarely do anything evil. Swedenborg's teachings tell us that "what we love, we call good". No matter what we are doing, by doing it, we are calling it good, feeling that it is good. So it is not much help to have someone else tell us that it is bad - we need help rather to see this for ourselves. And it does indeed help to see profoundly moral people who are affectionate and understanding.



This, then is the reconciliation between majority moralism and permissivism - the growth of a moral minority determined to demonstrate the beauty and the wisdom and the happiness of a moral life lived for spiritual ends, conveying that message not by means of constant disapproval of others, but by loving, understanding and helping them.

A point of view by Dr. George F. Dole reprinted from *LOGOS*, a newsletter published by the Swedenborg Foundation Inc.

Quotation to Contemplate

BIRDS of the air

The idea that birds fall into two classes - the clean and the unclean, the heavenly and the demonic, is found in several mythological connections. Certain of the Egyptian gods were depicted in the form of birds - the falcon and the ibis. The dove is widely recognised as a symbol of peace. The robin in the U.K. and the stork in Sweden are associated with Christian tradition and the crucifixion of Jesus. The owl, no doubt on account of its nocturnal habits, sometimes has more sinister connotations.



"In mythology birds, with their powers of flight, universally represent the spirit, the soul, ascent to the heavens and communication between god and men. In many traditions the soul takes flight in the form of a bird when it leaves the body. In myth and fable the hero is often accompanied and guided by a bird, and he understands the language of birds." (Brewer's Myth and Legend)

"In general 'birds' mean thoughts - intellectual or rational concepts. They are called 'birds of the air', 'flying things', 'winged things', or simply plain 'birds' according to whether it means intellectual ideas, rational ideas, sensory ideas, or thoughts in general. Indeed there are many kinds of birds, clean and unclean. Clean ones are thoughts about truth, the unclean are about falsity."

"When angels are chewing over ideas and matters of thought, birds automatically appear in the world of spirits in one form or another according to the subject under discussion. I once saw some birds - an ugly dark brute, and a couple of elegant ones. At the same time two spirits suddenly fell upon me leaving me somewhat shaken. It wasn't the first time this sort of thing had happened and I assumed I was being attacked by spiritual thugs - but I was mistaken. They said they had just fallen from heaven because there was a discussion going on there about thought processes, and they had stupidly ventured the opinion that thoughts originated in sensory impressions. This view was evidently false so they had simply tumbled down of their own accord. Hence the different kinds of birds; and I was left in no doubt that, whatever it might seem, ideas always come from within."

Arcana Caelestia 745/3219
(very loosely interpreted)

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Dr Philip Groves, a founding member of the Swedenborg Association, died on Friday 26th March. Dr. Groves had been a guest lecturer at SAA meetings on a number of occasions and touched many people's lives. Our love and sympathy are extended to his wife and family. A memorial tribute follows this report.

Dates for 1999 Board meetings:

Tuesdays 20th April, 20th July, 19th October.

Members are welcome to attend these meetings at The Swedenborg Centre starting at 7.30pm.

Group News:

The theme for the Celebration of Spring this year is 'The Waters of Life'. For those who would like to receive the entry form for the Art Competition associated with this Celebration, please contact the Swedenborg Centre.

At the Swedenborg Centre in North Ryde over 40 people attended Julian Duckworth's talk titled 'Diary of a Mystic' in January. It looked at Swedenborg's own account of some of his experiences. One example is from section 604 of the Spiritual Diary 'Moreover, while I was in bed, before I fell asleep, I heard a general singing of Heaven around me, which was that of many angels in the inmost heaven.'

About 18 people attended John Carr's talk 'A Transpersonal psychology of Spirit' in February. John gave an excellent lecture on the different stages one passes through in spiritual development. The talk was recorded and is available from the Swedenborg Centre.

In March, about 25 people attended Dr Rosemarie Lorenz's presentation on the mystic Hildegard von Bingen. It was a very special evening with Rosemarie providing a biographical outline of Hildegard's life before showing paintings of her visions and describing some of the meaning behind them. She also touched on other important aspects such as the music and hymns Hildegard composed for worship and her healing ministry.

Julian's and Rosemarie's talks were videoed and can be borrowed from the Swedenborg Centre. Details of forthcoming activities/meetings are listed on the back page.

The Melbourne Group also continues to meet monthly (usually every fourth Friday) to hear and discuss a talk from a guest speaker or their Convenor, Chris Skinner.

Email addresses:

We would like to keep our membership database up-to-date with email addresses. If you have an email address please send Michael (mchester@accsoft.com.au) a greeting so that your email address can be recorded. Thanks!

Concluding quotation from the Secretary:

"In the Word, to be 'watchful' conveys the spiritual idea that a man needs to be in the truth but also in a life that is in agreement with it. He who learns truths and lives by them is like one who is woken from sleep and becomes watchful. He who does not live by what is true but is only in worship, is like one who sleeps and dreams. Natural life in itself is nothing but sleep; but natural life in which there is what is spiritual, is watchfulness."

Apocalypse Revealed 158

Michael Chester
Secretary

"Love desires to communicate what is its own to another, and to give of its own as much as it can."



*Some recollections
and impressions of
Dr Philip Groves*

The news of Dr Philip Groves leaving this world has preoccupied my thoughts the last few weeks. There are many things I fondly remember about him, not least his witty humour and engaging smile. I will resist the temptation to sum up a decade of acquaintance, but just visit a few snapshot impressions of mine.

His own reality is not for me to describe. Like many great teachers I found him an enigmatic person. Whenever I or anyone else tried to categorise him over the years as this or that sort of person, he would overthrow such impressions by behaviour which defied any labels. Like the campaigner for health who loves to smoke the pipe, or the upholder of the highest moral standards who also laughs heartily at some rude joke (he was frequently amused at his own jokes, and I couldn't help smiling at the mere sight of his pleasure).

Dr Groves lived the law of "otherwise". There seemed for him no conflict of interest in expressing and exploring opposite viewpoints. He even seemed to relish looking at things in non-conventional ways. Especially where it seemed useful in widening his understanding, illustrating a point - or shaking a student out of his conventional perceptions - or if it enabled him to extend his compassion toward someone in his midst. He knew how to catch his students' expectations by surprise (again, often to his amusement - and to make a subtle point), e.g. by playing an excerpt of rock music when something conventional was anticipated, reviewing the latest *Star Trek* plot, quoting Clive Robertson, or simply talking football or golf instead of physics or metaphysics. Nothing appeared to be done or said without some conscious intent.

I began to appreciate that he was not living a life of happenstance but of conscious action. He was the piano-player and not the pianola. He knew how to **Do**. He taught as he learnt. What helped me to learn was his infectious passion for almost every subject one could think of. He conveyed not just facts, methods and observations, but communicated hope and a joyful delight for everything.

He was an astute observer, and nothing seemed too trivial to pass his sight. He taught me to notice and investigate. I recall him pouring me a glass of Coke, then with the excitement of a young child he explained to me the chemical reactions taking place in the glass... He taught love because he himself loved deeply. Everyone felt they mattered to him. On a botanical field-trip with students, he casually

chatted and laughed with the local children playing by the creek. When inspired, he was equally inspiring. His enthusiasm led me to appreciate Swedenborg, Gurdjieff, Sufism, quantum physics, Egypt, astronomy, dreams, and many more fields. But above all he revealed how to learn by sharing his own learning activities. It is this which moved me from armchair spectatorship to more active involvement in practical pursuits.

As a teacher, I found Dr Groves most excellent. The Sufi, Idries Shah, once remarked that a lack of familiarity with real teachers caused people to bestow the title on those who are not. I feel fortunate to have known a genuine teacher. What he taught was essentially a three-way study: that of oneself by active reflection, that of the world and its scientifics, and that of the Divine Laws and the Divine Being (a study in which Swedenborg proves immensely helpful). His presentations were always entertaining, as well as being highly informative and personally applicable. So much the latter, that during the early talks I wondered how he came to know so much about me!

My present impression of the first talk by Dr Groves I ever attended differs vastly from my initial impression at the time. I now appreciate a depth in it that I was incapable of seeing at that time - I was initially more in awe of the depth and breadth of his knowledge than of the lecture content. But the reason I came back was that something in me felt like it had come home after a long journey. Here was someone who knew from his own experience what I was previously merely grasping at and struggling to define.

Although I miss his jovial physical presence, I am very pleased Dr Groves' physical suffering has ended, and that he can now enjoy the blessed spiritual realm he longed to understand, experience, and convey for so long. I am thankful for his tireless and prodigious efforts, and for his struggle to produce something beautiful and immensely useful in his life despite the difficulties and hazards which naturally oppose such an aim. The only way I feel that I can do his teaching efforts justice is to echo in my own life some of his tireless effort, his deep love, and his commitment to be of useful service.

Joe Vandermeer

Questions and Answers

"Questions & Answers", a regular *Candela* column, is an open forum in which readers can participate by contributing questions, comments and answers. Questions may cover any philosophical or theological topic. Anyone wishing to make a response in writing is invited to do so and depending on space constraints these will also be printed in "Questions & Answers".

Contributions (which may or may not relate to Swedenborg or his ideas) can be sent to "Questions & Answers" C/- Wayne Kasmar, 61 Surfers Parade, Harbord, NSW 2096.

Again continuing to look at the series of questions posed by Waldis Jirgens and printed in Issue 15 of *Candela*.

Waldis' fourth question reads:

"In our jails we have programs to rehabilitate offenders, we even try to reform hardened criminals. If God governs the Hells (Heaven & Hell 536) is it right to assume that in the Hells such programs don't exist?"

In the last "Questions and Answers" column we looked at God's ruling love and saw that its existence ensures human free will. God's whole life comes down to one thing and that thing is love of others. If God were to interfere with the free will of human beings, those human beings would seem to him no longer to be separate beings from himself. Rather they, to him, would seem to be like his little finger. But his whole life is centred on others, not himself or parts thereof. So the last thing he would ever do is reduce us to mere automatons by depriving us of our free will.

But I think there is another, more internal reason for God not being inclined towards interfering with human free will. This reason centres on his humility. In the person of Jesus Christ, he talked of himself as being humble, "... for I am gentle and humble of heart ..." (Matthew 11:29) and "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." (Mark 10:43).

The question of God's humility is an interesting one. Swedenborg has the habit of overturning traditional ideas of God that we've had and he has conditioned us to see him in completely new ways. One such way is seeing God to be completely humble. That is to say, God is humbler than anyone else. In effect this would mean that he sees himself to be the most unimportant being of all. In his eyes absolutely no one is beneath him. He is the lowest of the low. Not even the worst spirits in the deepest hells are seen, by Him, to have less consequence than himself.

On first thinking of God in this way it tends to be a bit of a shock for us. We're so used to the idea of God as utterly imposing and descriptions of him in the Old Testament as an angry and jealous God have left generation after generation of Bible readers in no doubt that here was a deity who had a large measure of pride as a big part of his personal makeup.

It wasn't until relatively recently, until Swedenborg's contribution in fact, that we came to understand this was only an appearance, and in reality God has no pride in himself at all. Swedenborg explains that over the ages Man had undergone a development that is mirrored in that of an individual human being. As a child growing to adulthood increases in intellectual capacity, Man has gone through the same basic stages of development in regards to his ability to understand spiritual realities. And just as it is in its best interests for a child to obey the dictates of a seemingly angry and potentially harsh parent, humans in past times were best served by a fearful respect of God in order that they may keep to living a spiritually ordered life and so avoid the spiritual death that inevitably follows disregarding God's commandments.

The peoples who lived on earth in past times were not capable of understanding that God was not at all a harsh or punishing deity, without being in grave danger of disregarding his advice entirely. Nowadays humanity can both understand it and still keep to the Commandments, just as a person who, coming into adulthood will, without being

induced by fear, be able to take the sound advice of a wise parent.

So we now understand that God was never a proud God, ever ready to take retribution on any who defied him. He allowed himself to appear in such a light for the benefit of humanity. In reality he was always infinitely humble, as he still is.

This humility means that he will never tell others what they must do. His great desire is that everyone experiences the kind of joy and happiness in life that he experiences. He made us and he knows exactly what we need to do in order to have this happiness. But being as humble as he is, he doesn't force it upon us. He doesn't feel he has the right. Whilst he will never stop urging us to live the life that leads to true happiness, he will always allow us to make up our own minds as to whether or not we do it. He will never force happiness upon us.

This contrasts sharply with the way we treat criminals. As Waldis points out, we try to reform them. The threat of prison is designed to compel people to live ordered lives. We have a sense of moral superiority over criminals and its in this spirit that we design rehabilitation programs for them in order that we may put them right.

Providing we act out of a concern for their well being there is nothing wrong with doing this. But there is no parallel here with the relationship between God and the spirits in hell. God is not judgemental. His sense of lowliness won't allow it.

And neither is hell a jail. All who go there are there through their own free choice. Swedenborg explains that all who end up in hell do not die before they have completely confirmed themselves in the life of evil and falsity. They have had every opportunity to pull away from living a life of unhappiness but they have made the decided choice not to do so. And when they go to hell they find that they want to be nowhere else. They have no real inclination to "jailbreak" out of the place at all. To them it feels like home. It is where they feel they belong.

Waldis draws our attention to a passage in *Heaven and Hell* that concerns God's governance over the Hells. The control that he exercises is purely from his great mercy. It is to prevent the evil spirits destroying themselves and one another. In no way does it come from some sense of superiority that we imagine he feels he has over these spirits.

Everything that we've been considering here has been in connection with the lack of willingness on God's part to force the spirits in hell to change their ways. We've not tackled at all whether any such change is in fact possible, even should God be so inclined, which, of course, I've argued is not the case. In his writings Swedenborg seems quite emphatic that no such change is possible. This disturbs many people as it seems to rule out the possibility of spirits ever leaving hell. Although a difficult area, it is a very interesting and productive one to ponder, and if we have the chance in the next edition I would like to do this. Anyone who is interested in contributing some questions or thoughts on the subject is encouraged to send them to us. They will be very welcome.

Wayne Kasmar

One Personal Journey

The following was recently provided by a newer "devotee" to Swedenborg living in country NSW as part of the questionnaire sent by The Swedenborg Lending Library and Enquiry Centre to those who receive its series of 24 Introductory Talks:-

My beliefs, I feel, have become full of light as a result of meditation/contemplation which is "Life Itself" for me!

I have privately studied philosophy, theology, psychology, sociology for most of my life. I was an entrenched atheist for a large slice of my early life, but in the early 50s "relevatory experience" caused me to search out "comparative religions" including Christianity. I found it very difficult to relate to denominational Christianity with its "blinkers on": fundamentalism. Moreover, it tended to conflict with my own "inner experience" of spiritual issues, which I equated as allegories, symbols, parables etc.

However, I must confess Paul's Epistles were "full of light" in terms of morals, ethics, "faith", the deathly nature of evil, the "powers and principalities" we as humans face daily as we press on toward our goals.

However, in this period I found myself alienated from mainstream belief - sort of in limbo. Then came Swedenborg! At last, I sighed, belief is now credible. That which was nonsensical was now beginning to make sense. The transition to real acceptance was slow nevertheless. It took much research to overcome my scepticism about Swedenborg. My own lifetime experiences point to the fact that this kind of "journey of transformation" is very individualistic, indeed a largely lonely journey, but nevertheless, a very rewarding one. I have no doubt whatsoever that my being 'coincidentally' introduced to Swedenborg is nothing less than the Lord's providential care in my life - rescuing me from myself.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

For Group activities, contact your nearest Group Convenor

- Sydney region (Michael Chester on 9498 9703);

- Melbourne (Chris Skinner on 9435 8599);

- Perth - new Convenor is required for this Group.

It would be good to see additional viable Groups established in new areas. If you can help contact Michael Chester.

FORTHCOMING SAA PUBLIC MEETINGS

NORTH RYDE GROUP:

23rd April	Personal benefits gained from Swedenborg's Life and Writings		
28th May	99 Names of God and Calligraphy		
25th June	Readings from Dr. Groves' <i>Swedenborg's Mighty Contribution</i>		
23rd July	Stories Relating to the Psyche		
14th August	Annual General Meeting (no charge))	both
4th September	Celebration of Spring - " <i>The Waters of Life</i> ")	Saturdays

Panel of speakers
Aurora Scarlett
Lynne Heir and
Michael Chester
David Russell

MELBOURNE GROUP:

23rd April	Conscience	
28th May	Topic to be announced	

Chris Skinner
John Teed

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- Promoting Emanuel Swedenborg as a scientist, philosopher and religious visionary, by means of his inspired writings, through meetings, lectures, and other functions
- Making available information on topical subjects drawing on Swedenborg's own contribution to stimulate interest and discussion
- Establishing, operating and supporting branches around Australia
- Providing material for the purpose of maintaining local libraries

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- + Joining together as a group with other members living in close proximity.
- + A Swedenborgian based book, tape or video is sent to each financial member each year.

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