

Candela



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

December 2020

ISSUE 102

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to this issue of Candela which we hope you will enjoy and also find useful for your spiritual focus and practice. Being December, it's also got a Christmas feel.

It should be our fervent wish that people find wonderful ways this Christmas of redressing the balance of this year's separation, isolation, depression and lockdown. In the right way, let's party and push everything the other way than it's generally been.

Swedenborg enjoyed a good social life. As a bachelor, he wasn't tied down to family responsibilities but could act more freelance, and I get the feeling that he was sought after as a dinner invitee, being a friendly person, well worth listening to, and also with some interesting, even strange, ideas and experiences to share. It was at a social event in Gothenburg that he pushed his chair back in agitation to announce that a fire had broken out close to his Stockholm house and, sometime later, calmed down again because he'd been told that the fire – The Great Stockholm Fire of 1759 – had been stopped from reaching his house. And so it was reported to be.

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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 2021

Our next issue will be in March, so if you would like to write something please get it to me by, **15th February 2021**

Email to ruth@duckworth.me or post to the registered office.

Ruth



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* * continued from page 1 * *

A nice story, but also a true one. Imagine being one of the two dozen guests and witnessing this pleasant gentleman suddenly becoming alarmed at something no one would normally be able to know. Imagine the thoughts or quiet asides... "Is he in his right mind?" "I've never heard such nonsense!" "Oh yes, he's ... unusual." But this and other situations are fairly sensational examples of how Swedenborg was in full touch with the spiritual world, became aware of his dialogue with angels and spirits in his own mind, listening and accepting what came into his thinking, and trusting it all to be orderly and in line with Divine revelation.



So, did Swedenborg celebrate Christmas? Well, probably, but we've no accounts. Being a Nordic snowy country, Christmas or 'Jul' was big in Sweden. One tradition was the Julbock or Christmas goat which brought presents and people also dressed up as one to deliver gifts.

But while I see Swedenborg smiling on all this pleasant activity, he was not a folk-custom person, and might well have seen them as going back to pagan times. He was increasingly aware of the actual historical coming on earth of God, to bring human beings a closer clearer truth of God in a human form, the Word made flesh, taking on and overcoming the power of hell and darkness to keep us in spiritual freedom.

And with the cosmic power of this coming, Swedenborg may well have gently chided people not only to celebrate it with merry festivity but to understand its truth and purpose for us all. And increasingly, Swedenborg aimed to bring the 'Christmas' coming of God towards the ways in which God comes into us individually and personally, with truth, change, service and gratitude to God for restoring and re-making us.

I would go so far as to say that everything Swedenborg wrote in all his many spiritual writings is to do with our reception of God in our lives, in our hearts and minds. Then it really is Christmas!

So, in 2020, doing Christmas well because of this year's severity is good for everybody, but it's to bring us back and into how we are each meant to be in life, purposeful and sharing, no longer in some bleak place inside us wondering what on earth it's all about.

*Have a real and really good
Christmas.*

Julian

Welcome to our new members

We hope that our new members enjoy being a part of our association. There are now a lot of activities that you can join in with on-line.

Welcome to these new members this year:

Mishka Jambor NSW

David Millar SA

Christina Mimmocchi NSW

Patrick Morahan VIC



A FINE ART?

By Joe Vandermeer

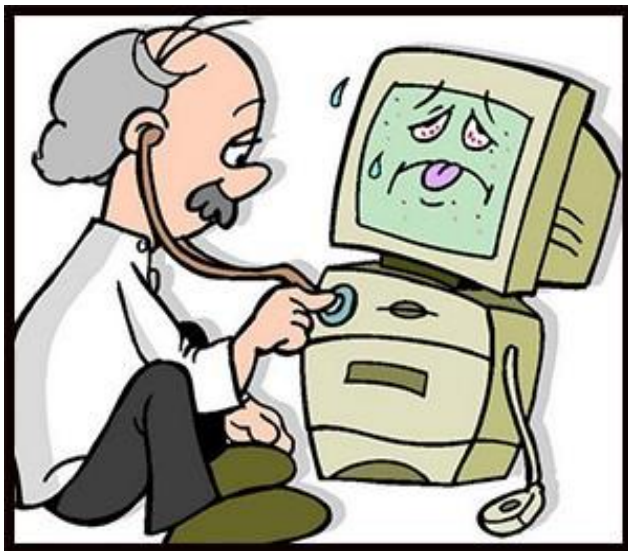
In the beginning God created heaven and earth and made us in His image, and then spent the rest of His days troubleshooting and maintaining the lot.

Computing professionals do it. Doctors do it. Engineers and mechanics do it. And physicists and mathematicians do it too.

I'm not talking about eating, sleeping and dreaming, but about the fine art of troubleshooting.

Troubleshooting: "to analyse and solve serious problems for a company or other organization, to trace and correct faults in a mechanical or electronic system."

Doctors prefer to call it diagnoses: "identify the nature of (an illness or other problem) by examination of the symptoms."



When things don't go as expected, how are they fixed?

I spent a lengthy career developing and road-testing computer software. My experience tells me that troubleshooting is a backward art.

Let me put you in the picture.

First there are the specifications which tell us how something is supposed to work. What useful task or result it is designed to deliver, what kind of function it provides. The design and specifications have the end in mind. Swedenborg pointed out that all things involve three aspects or 'levels', a celestial, a spiritual, and a natural part. The aim in mind is the celestial level of the product: its end, goal, purpose, which is the highest part because it governs all else that happens after that.

Then comes the puzzle of how to build it. What materials are needed? How do we put the materials together? Breaking it into steps, in what order can and will we connect the parts, and using which materials? Superglue, elastic bands, nuts and bolts, nails? Perhaps the whole has smaller components which can be built and tested as separate pieces to see if each performs according to the specifications? This breaking down the making of something into a sequence order of steps is the spiritual part of its development. It provides the means to get to the goal. But so far, all work has been conceptual, a thought experiment in our head or on paper. The thing itself hasn't yet materialised.

Finally comes the manufacture, the doing part. Actually following the recipe to make the cake is the natural part of its realisation. This too, has to honour the celestial purpose in every detail. We are seeking to follow the plan, in which we put our trust, as a way to get as close as possible to what was hoped and wished for at the outset, fulfilling the aim.

But once we have the outcome delivered comes another phase: it's maintenance.

First, we must be watchful and monitor that all is going to plan, that the wheel is greased, the mouths are fed, the computer



program is behaving as expected (as designed).

So, when there is a sign that something is not behaving as it was intended (we call that sign a symptom), something is wrong.

Much troubleshooting is the art of tracing a symptom back to the originating cause. Hence it is the art of working backwards.

We follow the thread from symptom to origins. Experienced mechanics who are familiar trouble-shooters may jump to conclusions which are valid, most often correct (due to their expertise) and saves much time. But a novice trouble-shooter may spend much time in a complicated design as he or she tries out various assumptions, techniques, guesses, gradually discovering the maze and its dead ends (parts unconnected with the problem).

We try to create conditions which reproduce, worsen or ease the symptoms. If we tug on this rope, what happens? If I eat that pill, does it stop the symptoms?

A big clue is the last thing that happened to the system. What was the last thing he ate? Was it that upgrade I did last night? Was it the soup we ate yesterday afternoon? Did she pick it up from the childcare centre? Did I leave it on the last bus I caught?

Maybe it's possible to reverse the last step or change (that's why good computer engineers back things up).

One thing I have observed over the years is that sometimes a computer trouble-shooter gets too hung up on a particular explanation, convincing themselves that this is the only possibility that can explain the symptoms, then wasting much time

pursuing that approach. This becomes a form of bias (confirmation bias: the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories). The key is to remain flexible

in our conclusions while remaining focused on finding more detailed clues of what the malfunctioning system is telling or showing us. To remain focused on perceiving the truth of the situation rather than celebrating that we have it already. It has been shown that the effect of Confirmation Bias is fuelled and amplified by a sense of certainty, the

more certain we feel the greater the crisis if we are wrong (and the more likely we are to miss subtle clues that we do not entirely have the right assumption).

Swedenborg says that spiritual angels are excited by discussing what is true, while celestial angels have a more immediate perception of what is true. I liken the difference to an amateur first learning to troubleshoot a complex problem versus a skilled and experienced engineer, mechanic, doctor or nurse who is able to almost immediately perceive with very few clues what the nub of the problem is.

Confirmation bias suffers from the fact that reasoning alone is not always sufficient to get to the truth. In Swedenborg's words: "there is an endless supply of arguments undercutting goodness and truth." (AC1820)

Swedenborg was shown extreme examples of people who put all their faith in their reasoning, and they were "unable to see whether a truth is true or not, yet they can take anything they want and make it appear to be true." (TCR334)





Reasoning is not the same as perceiving, in fact reasoning may lead down a false road which does not lead to the destination. Swedenborg again says: "being able to provide arguments to support whatever you want is not intelligence; intelligence is being able to see that what is true is true and what is false is false and to provide arguments to support that." (TCR334) It might seem like a case of placing the cart before the horse, but actually it's not, because if all truth comes from the Lord, perception is the state of listening to the Lord over and above our voice of reason. It is not saying that our voice ought to be ignored, but rather that we should keep an open mind about whether the convincing argument of 'our inner voice' is the influence of such hellish "providers of arguments" or whether it is the angelic communities or the Lord directly wanting to assist us. Doubt (arising from the challenge or reconciling yes and no) will always be with us to some degree because it is the by-product of the freedom to assess and decide things as if it's entirely done of ourselves. Swedenborg: "It is in accordance with the laws of order that no one should become convinced of the truth instantaneously, that is, should instantaneously be made so sure of the truth that he is left in no doubt at all about it. The reason for this is that when truth is impressed on a person in that kind of way, he becomes so fully convinced of it that it cannot be broadened in any way or qualified in any way. Truth like this is represented in the next life as that which is hard, not allowing good into itself to make it pliable. This goes to explain why in the next life as soon as some truth is presented through plain experience to good spirits, some opposing idea giving rise to doubt is presented. In this way they are led to think and ponder over

whether it is indeed a truth, gather reasons in support of it, and so introduce that truth into their minds by the use of reason. This enables their spiritual vision in respect of that truth to be broadened, seeing even into the ideas that are opposed to it. They therefore see and perceive with their understanding every characteristic of the truth, and from this are able to let in the influences coming from heaven as the situation demands; for truths take varying forms as dictated by circumstances." (AC7298)



So, how do I become better at the fine art of troubleshooting? Keeping my mind focused on the idea that "the truth is out there." I can closely monitor my sense of certainty, because as soon as I affirm that I have an absolute, infallible and accurate picture of reality, I decide to stop looking for clues of the truth, and instead start looking for confirmation that I am right (evidence to support my view I can always find, even when I'm wrong). I'll try honing my listening skills and taking a greater interest in learning more than in basking in my past achievements. There is always more to discover about anything. If I can get more joy out of learning than I get from promoting myself to others as a very clever fellow (which I'm sure is a feeling that the "providers of arguments" are happy to pass on to me), then perhaps that's a step in the right direction. There are infinite aspects of perfection to the manifestation of things around us that are both good and true that we'll never be disappointed if we take joy in learning about that perfection.



Sharing ideas on a Swedenborg passage: Heaven and Hell 401

By Julian Duckworth

One of the great things about Swedenborg passages is how much they lend themselves to good discussion, personal application, impact on us, as well as all the spiritual information they provide. Each passage offers us a principle (or two) but not dogma, and this principle is always relevant to our personal lives. It's rather like a well which never runs dry.

So, we are going to explore one such passage and see where it opens itself up to us. Of course, in writing this, I won't be able to access your discoveries, only my own, but with spiritual things, it's very true that links and connections are generally common to us all.

Here's the passage, on the right, so just



have an initial read through it...

So, let's start out with a few overall things to help us get the essence of this passage:-

1. It's about how we experience things now and how we will experience things after we die.
2. At some point after we die there is a major change for those who love God and other people and there is an intensifying for those who are driven purely by self-love.
3. All these are outcomes and consequences, not rewards and punishments from God.
4. The main point seem to be that in this world, spiritual sensations are often faint

because we live in a physical body and world. In the spiritual world, they come right out, openly.

Heaven and Hell 401:

So long as people who are caught up in loving themselves and the world are still living in the body, they feel the pleasure that comes from these loves and the gratifications that result from them. On the other hand, so long as people who are focused on love for God and love for their neighbour are still living in the body, they have no obvious sense of the pleasure that comes from these loves and from the good affections that arise from them. All they feel is a sense of well-being that is hardly perceptible because it is hidden away in their deeper natures, veiled by the outer sensations of their bodies and dulled by the cares of this world.

Our state changes completely after death, however. Then, the pleasures of loving ourselves and the world turn into painful and fearful sensations because within them is what we call hellfire, and also into the foul and unclean things that answer to their filthy gratifications, all of which, amazingly, at that point, seem delightful to them.

By contrast, the faint sense of pleasure, the almost imperceptible sense of well-being that was found in people who were focused on love for God and love for their neighbour in the world, turns into the pleasure of heaven, perceptible and palpable in countless ways.

This is because that sense of well-being which had been lying hidden in their deeper natures while they lived in the world is now unveiled and released into open sensation, because now they are in spirit, and all this was the very delight of their spirit.



What I'm going to do is give a commentary on this passage, but I will keep it very much to do with our own current personal experience. I'd imagine that while you read through the passage, you pretty much understood what Swedenborg was talking about. The reason you could understand it is because you have had similar experiences such as those he was describing, even those that he says are what happens in the spiritual world after we leave this world.

Let's start with what Swedenborg calls that "sense of well-being which is hardly perceptible" which people have who love God and love other people. He goes on to say that these two loves are buried away deep down in us and veiled over by all those bodily needs and ailments and dulled by all the cares of living in the kind of world we do, with things like time and space and ageing and pains, not to mention things like information overload and social media pressures.



Lots of people have a very strong love of God and feel that this is the whole foundation of their lives. Many people would say exactly the same about their humanitarian feelings towards other people and how we are all here to help each other. So why is Swedenborg saying that such loves and the sense of well-being they bring are hardly perceptible? You would think that these loves would be right at the front of our minds!

But apparently not. For one thing, our love of God and of our love for other people are not on display like a flashy

sports car everyone turns to look at. They are very personal and while we know they mean everything to us, we might not be capable of talking about them to other people. How can you begin to describe such deep loves?

Another thing is that these two loves are invisible. Of course, we might see the results of them in someone who is very religious and someone who works to help sad and troubled people, but we don't see their loves but the fruits of them.

Then there is literally the time we spend doing everything that life practically demands of us. If you don't love God or like other people, life is full enough; if you do have these loves, you sense them through the filter of what I've got to get through today. So, while they are definitely there, they're intruded on and move towards the quieter sidelines.

But then Swedenborg goes on to say that in the spiritual world where time and space are not fixed and where love determines everything that goes on, we will come into a full and open sense of this well-being which stems from loving God and loving other people. And wonderfully, this is because these were the delights of our spirit and we're now fully in our spirit-life.

I think one thing to take away from all this is for us not to be over-concerned at how little we think about God or feel we don't do enough for other people. Maybe, instead of feeling bad about ourselves or feeling we don't have a real faith in God, maybe we should set them again stark reality but guard them well deep down, because their time will certainly come. Meanwhile we do well to do what we can do.

Now, in this same passage, Swedenborg describes the situation as it is with those who are driven by a love for themselves and for the things of the world. And, in comparing this with the previous



situation of loving God and people, Swedenborg brings out a fascinating contrast. Life in the world offers narcissists and materialists everything they could ever want, and their gratification knows no bounds. So much scope for indulgence, so much opportunity to seize power and rule, crushing any opposition.



But wait a minute, did this world get designed by God with a design fault which will ensnare us? No, no way. For one thing, most of the world's 'things' have been brought about by human endeavours and it is arguable if we should or should not have all the amenities we do so that instead of chores we have more time to contemplate the meaning of life. Really?

But less cynically, God's creation of a created world in which we find ourselves brings us the essential choice. Is this all there is, or is this the gift of a loving wise Creator who wants us to work out and through how we will see it and use it.

In our passage – Heaven and Hell 401 – the outcomes of these choices are spelled out very powerfully. We've already looked at the situation with people who hold a heavenly approach to life deep within their heart, and find that this erupts into fullness in spirit-living. Now we need to look at Swedenborg's description of what might await a person who is completely wrapped up in themselves and who sees everything else as serving that need.

Before we can comfortably go along with Swedenborg's view of these people in the spiritual world, we need to put it in context. Unhappiness is not one of God's purposes and we are all born predestined for heaven. There would be very many

people whose upbringing and also their heredity have loaded them towards a disorderly and false idea of what life is for.

We are basically human beings with a God-given sense of freedom or being free to make our choices in our lives and with a capacity to think and understand why we make the choice we do. This brings responsibility on us, but it also brings capability. God never punishes but he does permit things which go against his purposes. No one can be in hell unless they have seen and felt what heaven can be and then turned their back on it to follow what they have chosen to love. All this is the background to Swedenborg's striking language he uses in this passage.

Imagine an existence where there are no things to accumulate because they somehow keep melting away. An existence where your absolute power and majesty lasts no more than a minute. And an existence where the only thing that pulls you is determined by what you most love. It's an insanity where nothing will ever satisfy you but you won't leave it because round the next corner is what you most desire and titillations of pleasures-to-come drive you on and on. And, as Swedenborg says about this tragic desperate loss known as hell, it amazingly keeps up its allure because fantasies reign and momentary scope exists for foul reprieves. And enough said on what those could be....



"The Last Judgement" a 13th century Byzantine ceiling mosaic at the Florence Baptistry.



The most important and vital thing to keep in mind whenever you read about the desolation in hell is that it is no punishment, that it is a divine mercy – God would not impose some version of heaven on spirits who just wouldn't want a bar of it – so God allows people's loves to eventually create the environment they live, tragic though this may be. God also governs those in hell (for do understand, God governs everything) with the aim of making the lives of those there as untortured as possible.

This is such an important passage for us. I remember coming across it and making a careful note of its number. It said so much to me. And I have looked at it on quite a number of occasions since I found

it and realised how much it describes not just the eternal consequences of things but also the nature of those various states that come upon us.

Elsewhere, Swedenborg says that human life is midway between heaven and hell and thereby open to be influenced by them both (and creating our spiritual freedom in the process). In a real way, as well as picturing heaven and hell, it portrays how we can be fully in grateful praise to God at some point, and at some other time consumed by self-interest and wilful passion. These changing states are universal to us all. Heaven and Hell 401 brings out quite forcefully our need to see our states, understand their sources, and view the outcomes, potentially eternal outcomes, that they bring us.

Portals to Parallel Worlds

The whole of religion can really be seen as the acknowledgement of a parallel world within our own familiar physical world. The invisible within the visible. Our world is the most concrete level of reality, and everything else inflows into it from the Divine, causing it to exist and being there within it. Swedenborg fully supports this, saying that the spiritual world is immediately close to us, simply another dimension we can't yet see.

As well as contemporary science exploring the possibility of parallel worlds and multiverses, writers of fiction have tried to make use of this idea, not only with time travel but with entry into radically different dimensions. As long ago as 1666, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, wrote *The Blazing World*, in which the heroine enters a portal near the North Pole to a land where stars are different and animals talk.



purpose determining this. Time in Narnia is completely at odds with this world.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, the 'wood between the worlds' demonstrates a kind of multiverse.

Michael Ende's novel *The Never-Ending Story* presents a portal to a parallel world, Fantastica, which is closely connected to humans on Earth. We read the story of this world in a book until we

understand that we may take part in what goes on and save both it, and eventually the imagination of Earth.

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series (1995–2000) deals with two children who wander through multiple worlds, opening and closing

windows between them. The final book elaborates the same idea as C.S. Lewis, that all the worlds share a common heaven, and in this case, an underworld.

There are very many fiction accounts of portals into parallel worlds, and many imaginative ways of using time, space, personal states, connections, and the unexpected, to describe our inner space and quest for discovering. One interesting thing is that over time to now the number of fictional portal stories increases exponentially in a steep upward curve.



One well-known portal is the wardrobe in C S Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, part of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The portal exists when it exists, but it may not, implying a higher



Christmas for Kids these Days

By Carole Lacy

"Tuesday will be the start of Advent," said our daughter to Sam, aged four, as we were enjoying a leisurely brunch the other day. "You can start opening your Advent Calendar."

There were gasps of excitement from Sam and Harry his younger brother.

"What is Advent?" I asked Sam.

"It means it's only so many days until Father Christmas comes" he replied without a moment's hesitation. There was a bit of an embarrassed shuffling from the adults.

"Yes" I said "but Christmas is also about the birth of baby Jesus. Have you been hearing about that at school?" Sam goes to a Church of England school but, in spite of preparing a Nativity play for parents next week, it seems the Christmas story has yet to be told there.



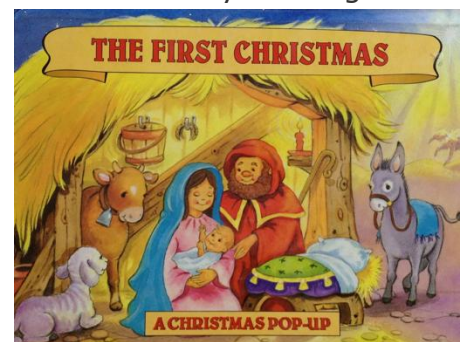
We live in a Western secular society where, unless we believe and share absolutes of faith that defines the Creative in a specific and concrete way, such as Christ as God, as part of a Trinity, as the one God in Allah or Jehovah for example, we are grasping at clouds in our attempts to explain to children where we are coming from. A belief in a Universal Creator that encompasses all these faiths and yet none of them, that dwells in the heart of each of us and is there for the asking through all our joys, trials and tribulations, doesn't sit comfortably in any religious book.

Yet children need the absolute. They drink up the colourful stories and myths whether they are Bible stories, fairy tales or stories of Batman and Robin.

The story of Christmas is a beautiful one. Who cannot be moved by the arrival of a new baby, let alone one whose birth is accompanied by a brilliant guiding star, surrounded by ox and ass, lying on a bed of sweet smelling straw and who is brought presents of fluffy lambs by local shepherds and gifts of treasure by kings on camels – to say nothing of the chorus of angels?

I, for one, will be searching today for a colourful pop-up book of the Christmas story for our grandchildren. We, as much as they, need to know there is still magic in the world.

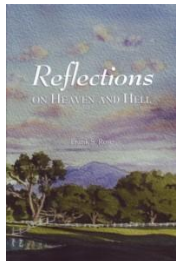
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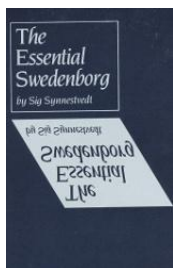
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Reflections on Heaven and Hell by **Frank Rose**

204 pages, paperback, now only **\$15** (includes postage)

Frank Rose offers his own reflections on Swedenborg's remarkable book, *Heaven and Hell*. Using everyday examples and conversational language, Rose takes the main topics from the sixty-three chapters of *Heaven and Hell* and demonstrates how these concepts relate to our lives right now.



The Essential Swedenborg by **Sig Synnestvedt**

202 pages, paperback, now only **\$8** (includes postage)

Within the confines of a brief compendium, this book presents the basic elements of Swedenborg's thought. It will be valuable for those who have had little or no previous contact with Swedenborg and will serve as a useful over-view for others.



Temptations, by **Basil Lazer** (illustrations and typesetting: **Donna Heldon**)

154 pages, paperback, now only **\$5** (includes postage)

This is one of the best collations of Swedenborg quotes, arranged by topic into twelve chapters, which cover his primary practical material relating to spiritual growth. It gets to the heart of why we need temptation for a certain time if we are to reach a certain stage of spiritual growth. Explores the cause, meaning and purpose of temptations. Lazer has a keen eye for that which is useful.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

If you are not yet a member of the Swedenborg Association of Australia you might like to consider it. Feel free to contact the Centre for further **info on how you can become an SAA member** as a way to support this valuable work. Check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au (click "Contact" in the top menu) which contains more details on benefits, and a membership application form which contains the current membership rates. Details of **group events** which are either held online or physically at various locations around Australia are advertised on the website at www.swedenborg.com.au home page, plus on the events page which also lists location and contact info of your nearest group convenor.

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

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*** Christmas and New Year closure of the Swedenborg Centre ***

The Centre will be closed commencing **Saturday, 19th of December, 2020** and will reopen for business and events starting **Monday, 11th January, 2021**.

We thank you for your very kind, generous and extensive support of all activities this year. It has been a real pleasure to expand the activities which the Centre and SAA have offered despite the difficulties which faced us all during this bushfire and Covid year. Here are some snapshots of recent Swedenborg Centre discussion events:

Small Talk Vortex



Yes, we sometimes even discuss spiritual politics. We look forward to having you all back onboard next year for more activities.

On behalf of Liz Kemmis and myself, we would like to wish you and your family all the very best for a meaningful Christmas period and a happy start to the New Year.

Joe Vandermeer

