

Candela



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

December 2022

ISSUE 110

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to this Summer and Christmas issue of our magazine, "Candela". Have a great Christmas, with all its vast range of activities and associations, including the coming of God in the birth of Jesus.

Every religion has its own contribution to make to the whole scheme of things. Buddhism brings us the Path; Islam holds to devotion and even surrender to God. Hinduism embraces the many aspects of the Divine and our eventual release from endless cycles; Judaism points to our ethical life as the expression of our faithfulness to God. Christianity would draw from all these, but its unique contribution is the actual presence of God in this world, in Jesus.

Next Issue –March 2023

Our next issue will be in March, please send any articles to me by February 16th.

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

Ruth



'Adoration of the Shepherds' by Matthias Stomer 1632

This amazing idea can also be seen spiritually as the presence of God **in my world**, which then includes the bits of me which follow God, the bits of me which oppose this presence, the bits of me which are blind, deaf, lame, paralysed, even dead, and the bits of me which are puzzled and haven't a clue what's going on. We are the Gospel background.

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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.



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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.

For details on how to join, call (02) 9416 2812 or browse <https://swedenborg.com.au/contact/>

* * *continued from page 1* * *

All this is in the phrase 'God with us' or as it gets biblically put, "His name shall be Immanuel, which translates as 'God with us'." A close cousin of this idea is 'the Word made flesh' and in this one it's very helpful to see that it's the **Word** which becomes flesh and dwells among us.

Okay, you get the idea; in some way or ways, God is present, with us, back then but also right now. It doesn't take much more thinking for us to realise that God must be present with us, always so, because he is keeping us in existence. A bit like electricity keeps the light on, the casserole simmering. Swedenborg makes a big deal of this, often saying that our life is continuously and endlessly maintained by divine influx every moment and every fraction of every moment. If that were to stop, then John would be gone and no longer be.

And yet, we don't feel a thing of all this but live and are meant to live with the sensation that our life is our very own. That

sounds to me like the best deal ever. No pressure! I'm with you but it's all yours!



Hang on though. If God is with me like that, is that all he does, just keeping me going? A wall socket? Well, no, God is very involved with us, fully, actively, but (as far as I can tell) never demonstrably so. Me feeling free to be me is the priceless treasure, but God is opening things and closing others, re-diverting, bending us (a really good Swedenborg word for what God does) and trying always to bend us to what is good. "Bend it like Beckham God".

God can and will bend us better if we do things our end, like some self-examining, repenting, shunning some evil as a sin against God. When we do that, we are basically aligning ourselves more with the divine and God's access to us increases as a result. When someone doesn't give a toss about anything else but indulging their own cravings, does God have any access? Well, they are certainly being kept alive, but it's not going to be much else. All I can think of is a kind of 'seed-bank' storage for some time to come, however long that will be.

A fascinating area of this 'God with us' activity is to contemplate that God really does know everything about us, past, present, future, every thought and whim, every private rage and heartfelt hope, every contingency which could follow some deep change we make or choose. We perhaps only know 0.02% about ourselves (like those alcohol-free drinks!) but that's enough, that is good, we've got some self-knowledge to chew away at.



There must be so many other ways of seeing how God is present with us. Have a think. Is that sudden insight part of it, or that twinge of conscience, or maybe that feeling that you will never go back on your need and wish for divine guidance? If you ever hear a voice saying, "Yes, that's Me!" don't take it on unless it adds "but I'm not going to show you."

Enjoy Christmas, ponder it, and keep enjoying what God keeps bringing your way.

Julian



S.A.A. A.G.M

On the 27th September we held our AGM. The new committee is listed in the box on the opposite page.

Ruth has stood down this year as the SAA has a policy that nobody can serve for more than six consecutive years without taking a break. But she is still the editor of the Candela so do please keep writing articles for her.



We are very happy to welcome Caroline Neave back onto the committee. Here is what she says about herself.



Caroline Neave

I came to an appreciation of Swedenborg as a student of Dr. Groves in the 1990's.

We studied various disciplines and I believe this gave me a broad ranging view of paths to spirituality, and an interest in the works of Swedenborg specifically.

I am currently reading "The World of Spirit", an Introduction to Swedenborg's Metaphysics by John Howard Spalding. A fascinating guide for those of us who might enjoy an insight into Swedenborg, via a perhaps easier route than direct translations of his works. Of course, the intention is that we find the inspiration to research Swedenborg's own writings more fully.

I have been privileged to serve on the Committee previously, in 2009, and I hope to be of some use to the Swedenborg community by serving another term.



Investigating our Lives in the Light of the Swedenborg Teaching Part 1.

By Bede

My name is Bede and I have been studying the Swedenborgian teaching for the last six months.

This is by no means the first spiritual teaching I have participated in. It is, however different, in that the Swedenborg teaching has brought about a reconciliation between myself and Christianity. My religious background is Roman Catholic and as a young man, I spent time in a religious order studying for the RC priesthood.

Swedenborg's teaching has been a complete surprise to me, as it came completely left field. I have had formal training in various forms of Western Psychotherapy and some years ago spent 14 months in India, studying under a rather remarkable Hindu monk who exposed me in his own unique way, to Vedic psychology.

In discovering Swedenborg my main point of interest was his God-centred psychological teaching. Swedenborg has clarified issues that were not addressed in my studies in India. However, without the understanding I gained there, I would not have been able to approach Swedenborg or recognise his importance.

Because I am new to the Swedenborgian approach to spirituality and do not know what I do not know, I would ask to cut me some slack if you see any errors in my understanding of the teaching. I am a work in progress.

My special thanks to Reverends Julian Duckworth and Dan Goodenough for their weekly support in approaching this wonderful subject. Also, my many dialogues with Joe Vandermeer have been invaluable.

Starting Points

Let us start at the very beginning.

We are living in a material world and have been given material sense organs that tell us what is happening in this material world. So, we have a material way of seeing which is ordered towards material objects.

A primary thing to notice is that our material senses show us the material world we live in. They are highly useful, for without them, we would not see what is going on. It is useful to be able to see a big bus coming

towards us because then, we will get out of its way.

Our material senses or knowing powers can ONLY see empirical facts. So here we are living in a material world which is made up of sensory appearances.

From this fact, and it is a fact that we do live within a material world, we can come to the very convincing idea that we are also one of the material objects which exists in the world with other material objects. In other words, we are a "thing."

From a materialistic perspective, we are a complex of matter and energy, arranged into a particular form which exists IN space and persists THROUGH time, until it disappears into the nothingness from which we came. Practically this is what being a "thing" means. The other





thing that goes along with this view is that thinking and feelings is also a movement of matter and energy and is an outcome of PHYSICAL processes happening within the PHYSICAL organism.

One thing that stands out about empirical facts is the certainty we have concerning them. I can look at this cup which is sitting on the table beside my computer. I BELIEVE it is sitting there. In fact, if the whole world said that this fact was untrue and it is not a cup but a vase full of flowers, I would not BELIEVE them. This is because I have made a reality judgement: "This is a cup resting on the table." I, without effort, feel very sure about this.

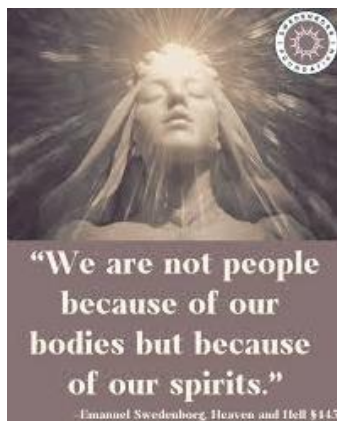
Of course, people can have the same degree of certainty about beliefs that they take to be empirical facts like "the world is flat." "All people of a certain colour or race are less than human." But this issue, which is very important, we will leave for another time.

What I want to emphasise now is the fact that material senses are only useful in seeing empirical facts which by the way, as I have said earlier, is a wonderful gift.

What this means is that if there is something that we can call a spiritual world, it cannot be revealed to us by our material senses. Swedenborg unfolded before us a vision of what the person IS, that stands in opposition to the view that the person is a thing among other things. In Swedenborg's view, the person not only HAS a physical body with physical senses but IS also a spiritual body with spiritual senses.

What this means is that we have

faculties that can become active in us which will enable us to "live in" and "see" a spiritual world whilst living in this one. He never denied that the body was a physical object in the world. Rather, he saw that the life and being which IS the person is distinct and from physical matter. However, we are not separate from physical matter while living in this life.



Wait a minute! How can Swedenborg prove that we are spiritual and that we live in a spiritual world? Well, getting back to what we have been discussing, it is not possible to use our empirical senses to SEE a non-empirical fact. This means that what Swedenborg says can't be verified by empirical means. Someone who tries to prove through empirical means what Swedenborg says about spiritual life is attempting the impossible. This does not mean that there is not another means of verification available to us but this form of verification has nothing to do with empirical proof. To seek or even hope for empirical proof about a non-empirical or non-material world or reality is a futile effort.

So how do we verify the existence of ourselves as a spiritual organism with spiritual faculties, the existence of a spiritual world or dimension; what Swedenborg called Heaven? Lastly but most importantly, how do we awaken to the presence of God as a fact to be appreciated?

Maybe an example might help us understand this idea of spiritual sensations as opposed to material sensations. We all have had the



experience of seeing a beautiful sight like a sunrise or sunset. Our physical senses are working, showing us colour and form ONLY, but simultaneously our spiritual senses are also working so that BEAUTY which is a spiritual reality can come into our lives as a fact to be appreciated. Beauty is not a material fact but a spiritual fact.



As we can see, Swedenborg does not restrict "knowing" to only empirical or material facts. This is important because the Swedenborg spirituality involves the awakening of our spiritual senses. Without this awakening we may THINK of ourselves as spiritual but we will not be appreciating ourselves as BEING spiritual.

BEING spiritual is not possible without SEEING spiritually.

Here is St Paul speaking to this most important issue from 1 Corinthians 2:14 -

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Staying real and not getting lost in abstractions

Before we go on, I just want to give a principle from the father of Existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard:

"Truth is not away from the situation of the knower"

I have no interest in studying the works of Emanuel Swedenborg as an object of study, away from my personal situation. Rather, I want to examine and study my life UNDER the light of his teaching. This study is a moment-by-moment exercise.

I have studied Philosophy, Psychology and Theology. Did these studies fill my heart with the Goodness which is God? Did they liberate me from falsities that dominated my understanding? Did they free me from my obsessive egocentricity? No, they didn't! On the contrary, they built up an enormous intellectual vanity that fortified me against seeing my selfishness and my destructive conduct.

It is my belief that Swedenborg's teaching needs to be taken Existentially. By that I mean that the starting point must be OUR **way of being in the world**. This as our starting point and as it turns out, from a Swedenborgian point of view, it is also our end point.

The transformation of ourselves, from a way of being in the world which arises from our self-love and our love of the world, to a way of being in the world that arises from our love of our neighbour and our love of God, is what Swedenborgian spirituality, or this spiritual path, is all about.

So, when I talk about an existential change, I am talking about a SHIFT in WHAT we are BEING. It is existential because it transforms our existence.

This existential change is not brought about by "knowing all about Swedenborg." Rather, it is brought about by the understanding of a truth that we can **look at our lives in the light of and living that truth AS a way of being in the world** that is useful and beneficial.

It is well to be remembered that, as stated in 2 Corinthians 3:6 - **"for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."**



The Swedenborg teaching unfolds spiritual meanings that exist in our lives that we can awaken to.

To summarize, it is much more fruitful in my opinion to study Swedenborg with the intent to discovering the existential significance, rather than studying his theology as an object away from our concrete daily lives.

Let us say we are angry about what a person said or did. My interpretation of this event is that someone has upset me.

They are the CAUSE and I am the victim of their upsetting conduct. However, from the Swedenborgian vision, which is a **spiritual way of seeing**, I am enclosed in falsity. The real meaning of my suffering is that I am obsessively involved with myself and craving a certain worldly experience; for example, I crave the experience of people saying and doing what I like.



If right here right now, this Swedenborgian vision comes alive in me AS MY VISION then I will be free of blame. I will be brought back to my inward state and I will be SEEING my suffering as MY involvement with hell. This freedom from blame was not due to anything external but rather it came from seeing my present situation in the light of the spiritual understanding. This spiritual understanding has come alive in me as a result of my mind being exposed to the teaching.

In this study we do not seek a material or empirical verification as to its truth. Rather, it is the existential verification that produces its own certainty. When we see that our way of being has undergone a transformation that transformation is its own proof.

Many of us have experienced being in a painful emotional state. When we turn to God and remain trustingly in his presence exactly AS WE ARE, we find ourselves lifted out of that painful way of being. This is because we are drawn into a peaceful way of being in which struggle and conflict are left behind. In this way, God's saving activity in our lives then becomes a spiritual fact to be appreciated.

I can't help but **BE the way I SEE**. This is a primary existential fact.

If I am seeing someone as the CAUSE of my suffering, all my attention will be on trying to change them so that I can feel better IN myself. I will not see the falsity of my way of seeing, because I am convinced my problem is external to me, which is false. But on the other hand, if I clearly see that the CAUSE of my suffering is that I am being caught up once again in my love of self and love of the world, all blame will drop away. I may be still upset but **I have arrived at the place in myself where the transformation can begin**. My ideas about Swedenborg can bring about no transformation in my life as they are not the same as **living the vision** unfolded by the teaching.

This might help understand the term 'existential' a little clearer.

If I was to say that it is an existential problem, I am no longer thinking in terms of things like resentment, anxiety, sadness or anger as 'things' away from me as a person that I have to struggle with. Rather, I will be seeing all these as WAYS OF BEING or ways of existing. Not seeing them as things that I am suffering from but as states of being which involve EVERY aspect of myself, helps me clearly see my situation at any one moment. For example, when we are angry, every aspect of us is



involved in this existential condition: our tone of voice, our posture and gesture, our physiological reactions like breathing and muscle tensions and our facial expressions. What we will most importantly see is that our conduct has a strong tendency to conform to this way of being. For example, if angry we will feel compelled to engage in attacking behaviour and attacking verbal expressions.

At any one moment, we are in a way of being and out of this way of being comes our way of experiencing our world.

The importance of the Swedenborgian teaching on self-reformation and regeneration is that it produces right here, right now, an existential shift or a shift in our way of being – from a way of being in which we are enclosed and which arises out of our egocentricity and cravings for worldly experiences, to a way of being which arises from our love of our neighbour and our love of God.

So, our use of the term 'existential' is not a word to impress others at a party as to our intellectual acumen. Rather, it is for me the best word to give an emphasis to our concrete and particular situation that we find ourselves in. This is extremely important because as stated above, the action of truth in our lives is not away from the situation of the knower.

The inspiring thing for me is that Swedenborg provides a vision of God which when understood rightly, has a direct bearing on my existential situation.

The truths he unfolds are not away from my way of being right here, right now. When these truths are understood existentially, it results in being lifted out of being enclosed in the various forms of suffering (ways of being) that we human beings tend to be involved in.

The value of the Swedenborgian spirituality is that it saves us from **OUR** involvement with Hell by raising us up into Heaven.

Conclusion

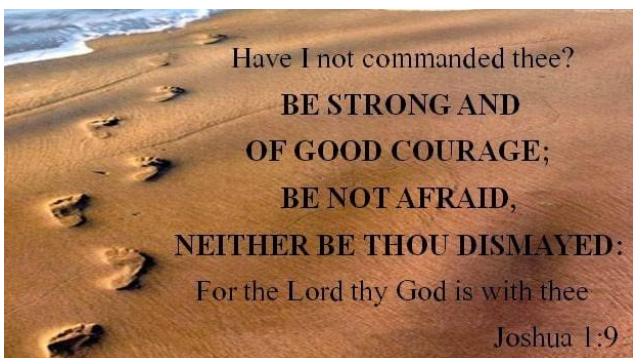
My way of living in the world (how I see things and what I do), is a lot of the time **MOVED** by love of myself and love of the world. Unless there is a shift in what **MOVES** me, unless there is a shift in my heart, I will remain as I have always been. However, if I am moved by love of neighbour and love of God through the birth of a new will in me, a real change in my way of being in the world becomes possible. As stated in Proverbs 23:7 -

As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.

The last concluding point I wish to make is this:

I am WHAT my heart IS at any one moment.

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The important point here is that we need an existential understanding of God if it is to make a real difference in our lives.

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night" ([Luke 2:8](#)). A key phrase here is "keeping watch."



This corresponds to the operation of the intellect, the part of our mind that understands, reasons, analyses, and "watches." In this case, watching over the



surprise that he was unfamiliar with someone who clearly deserved fame, but it was more likely that it was because he found no information there other than the tributes and the name of the people making them. There was no information on Swedenborg or his effect on the world. But also there was no information at all about the origin of the leaflet - no name, no contact details.

You will probably be wondering about that last part. No contact details? How, you'll ask, will people find out more about Swedenborg if there are no contact details? I was thinking that if they really wanted to find out more about him then they would find a way. And should, by their own efforts, they manage to find something of worth for themselves, they would then feel that thing to be special. People definitely like the experience of discovering for themselves things of worth and value. There is always a sense of pride associated with it.

Another advantage to this approach I believe, is that the curiosity allowed to build up in the seeker helps carry him or her through a difficult initial time with Swedenborg. It is normally not until considerable information is processed before a person can see a big picture emerging in Swedenborg's system of thought. Until then, the information can seem decidedly underwhelming; Swedenborg's explanations strongly relate to things that are not normally associated with spirituality. Instead of the Western tradition of glorious and pure heavenly visions and rewards, he talks about down-to-earth endeavours and the importance of working spiritually at the ordinary level of life; instead of things elevated, pure and special in nature he centres his focus on the struggles of impure earthly life. In contrast to the traditional sense, Swedenborg's pragmatic approach can seem unimpressive, uninspiring and unappealing. This may be reduced if the seeker has developed an interest in Swedenborg and his writings that has been fostered by a lively curiosity.



By letting people search for information on Swedenborg themselves we can make their experience more positive and rewarding. But I also think that when we serve them the information immediately up front, as happens in conventional advertising, we can actually make it a negative experience. For the moment I might leave that as the subject for another article, but in the meantime, I would like to suggest that we seriously start to consider advertising Swedenborg using this type of strategy. If Swedenborg is correct in stating his writings represent the ultimate divine revelation of truth to humanity, then surely we could expect divine providence to play its part in directing people to his writings if we should happen to leave our contact details off advertising material.

The day I handed out those leaflets was actually so long ago that the internet was not yet widely used and smart phones were still in the future. But now when people are so used to instantly looking up online everything and anything they happened to be interested in, it looks like Providence might have arranged the world beautifully for curiosity in Swedenborg to skyrocket. May we take advantage of this wonderful situation.

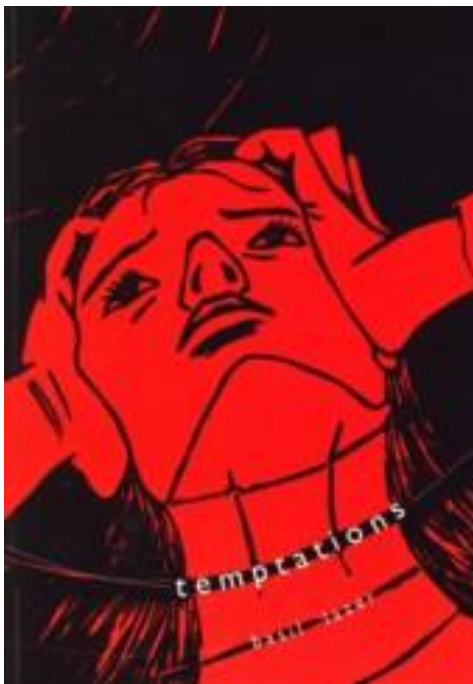




Book Offer for This Quarter

Below is this quarter's book offer. **Candela** readers who order the following titles during the next quarter will receive the discount below, **while stocks last**. Complete the Order Form below and send to the Swedenborg Centre or phone on 02 9416 2812 and mention this page.

Temptations, by **Basil Lazer** (illustrations and typesetting: **Donna Heldon**)
154 pages, paperback, now only **\$5** (includes postage).



We have offered this insightful book before, but that is because it is one of the best available collations of Swedenborg quotes on the subject of spiritual growth, with a focus on the necessity of temptation. The quotes are arranged by topic into twelve chapters which get to the heart of why we need temptation for a period of time in order to be spiritually transformed. Explores the cause, meaning and purpose of temptations. Basil Lazer has a keen eye for material that is useful.

If you have not yet got a copy, as a Candela reader you can now obtain one for only **AUD \$5 (while stocks last, price includes postage within Australia)**. To purchase, phone +61 2 9416 2812 and mention this ad, or send your name, address and phone number with a cheque, or money order, or credit card details (card number, expiry date, card-holder name) using the form below.

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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.

[Luke 2:7](#): "And she brought forth her first born son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for Him in the inn."

Jesus could have been born anywhere on earth - in the most splendid palace, heir to worldly power and might. He chose a humble stable. Partly this was because He didn't come to be an earthly power. As He said, "Who is greater? He who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves." ([Luke 22:27](#)).

But the reasons were greater than that. Even in Bethlehem He could not be born in the inn. The inn represents a place of instruction, a place where people gather and exchange thoughts. But the inn was full, even as in our own minds, we often think we know it all.

So, He was born in a stable, where the horses feed. A horse, which carries us where we want to go, represents an understanding of specific truths which show us the way in life. It represents an understanding of spiritual truth. And He was wrapped in swaddling cloths, which represent simple, innocent truths, and laid in the place where horses come to eat. Innocent truths are the ones we are tempted to scoff at - simple ideas like "It's good to be good," or "It's wrong to hurt others," or "I can use my abilities to bring happiness to those I love." These are

among the most fundamental teachings to be found in all of Scripture.

In other words, the Lord, when He descends into our minds and hearts, finds that in many parts of our lives our spiritual "inns" are full. We think we know very well how to make our way in life. So He chooses instead to move us with His love in a special part of our mind - where we seek spiritual truths, and we do so from innocence.



We all have a spiritual manger in our minds. Every person has an innocent spot, where she or he wants to learn, and where she feels humble in learning ideas which will make life so very much better than it is now.

Our Saviour wants to come to all of us. He created us for heaven, and in order that we may know the joy of heaven He teaches us His laws. When we respond, then His love is born in our hearts.