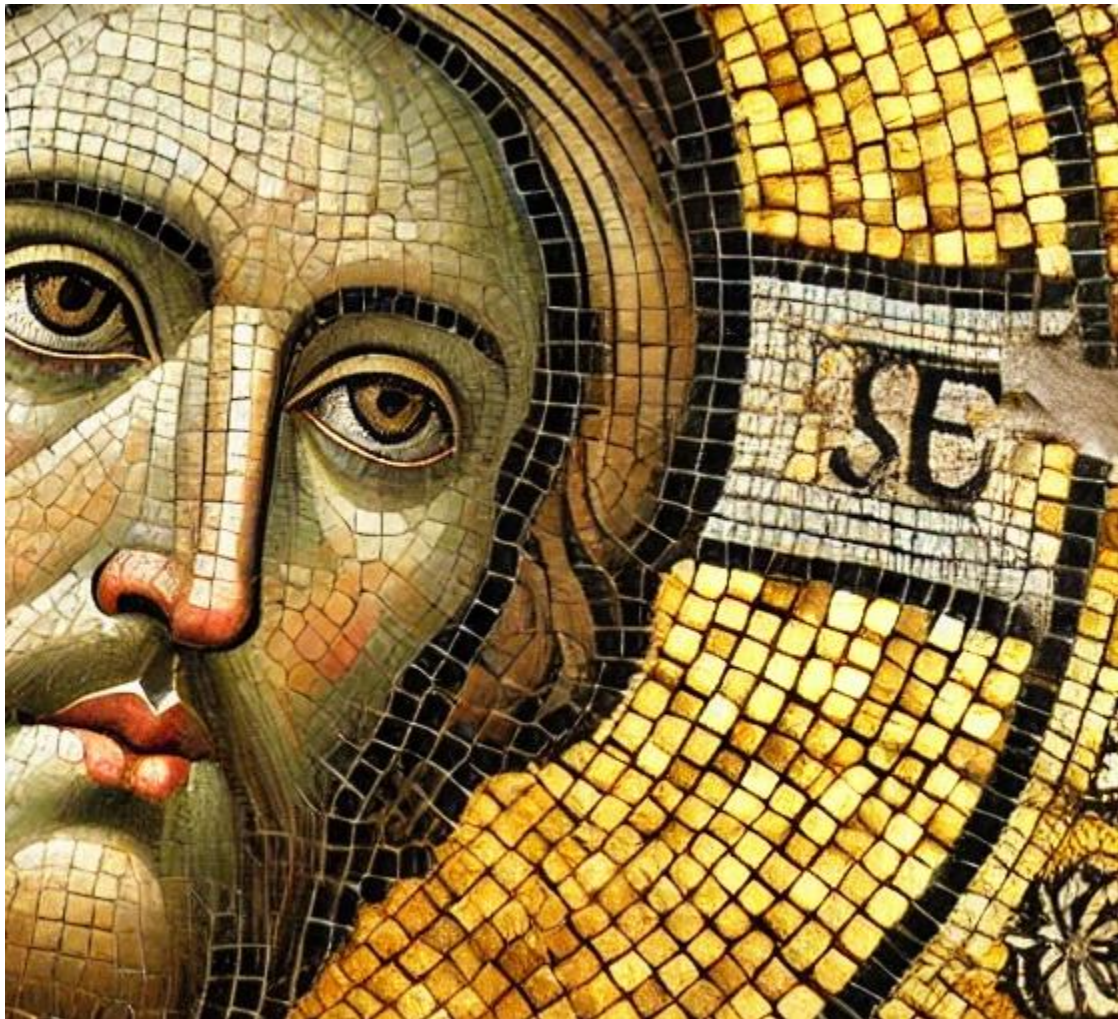


Spiritual Journey Series

PART 6 (of Six)



**Drawn from the spiritual writings of
Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772)**

Part 6 - Emanuel Swedenborg the Spiritual Explorer

Emanuel now enters the most remarkable period of his life - twenty seven years until death in London in 1772. He has received instructions from Jesus Christ to dedicate his life solely to the pursuit of spiritual matters. To this end he resigns from the Swedish Board of Mines and takes up a study of the Sacred Scriptures, brushing up his knowledge of Hebrew for the purpose.

His new spiritual quest meant factual, scientific observation within an unfamiliar domain - the visionary exploration of a world rarely glimpsed by a mortal. He used a form of meditative trance to enter the higher states of consciousness as he considered the Sacred Scriptures. Within a year he had begun the most meticulous and ambitious project of Bible Exegesis ever attempted by a single scholar. After ten years he had published Arcana Caelestia or Secrets of Heaven which comprises eight volumes in Latin and twelve volumes in English. He went on to pen more than another thirty titles which are all in print today. This series has introduced some of the teachings included in them and there is no space here to provide more details.

Swedenborg has rightly been described as the man who had to know. He came to perceive an interconnectedness between goals and motives, effects and causes, natural world and spiritual reality, that was profoundly purposeful. And science, his first love, was to become ever more spiritual for him as he increasingly intuited a unitive Presence behind the multiplicity of phenomena. But this was no simple intellectual exercise for Swedenborg; a truly in-depth analysis of his life clearly demonstrates that he came to live what he learned.

Perhaps the final question which needs addressing is why Swedenborg and his spiritual teachings remain relatively unknown. There are many reasons. What he offers contradicts much in mainstream Christian thought; the esoteric and self-responsibility aspects do not sit well there either. Salvation requires us to put in the hard work to transform our natures. No one else can do that for us, a message not too welcome by many.

Jesus Christ - An Enigma

In the previous session, it was outlined how, by understanding the relationship of natural phenomena and spiritual realities through the 'laws of correspondences', Swedenborg presents the Bible in a way entirely different from the traditional viewpoint. Instead, we can find a deeper, spiritual message related to the nature of God and our inner life. In the same way that Swedenborg presents the Bible to find a deeper meaning applicable to heavenly life, he focuses on Jesus Christ in terms of the spiritual role rather than on the historical aspect. There is little corroborating evidence that Christ actually existed although none can deny the influence and huge following over the past two millennia resulting from what is recorded in the Bible, albeit a verbal record for many years.

As discussed in the first session of this series, God is the infinite, the all pervading power and the sustaining source of everything in the created universe; God is unknowable by our finite minds. Yet, in seeing and appreciating the processes of nature and the relationships we have with others, we can develop an understanding and knowledge of the love and wisdom of God. The Bible presents us with several, apparently separate, identities of God - the One God of the Old Testament (Jehovah) becoming, according to orthodox Christian teachings, three Gods in the New Testament (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost). Theologians have 'argued' this dilemma for centuries without any real agreement. Today it is a little discussed subject so does it really matter? It does if Christianity is to provide a spiritual pathway leading to union with God simply because, according to Swedenborg, *the idea that we have of God pervades and formulates every other view we have - of the physical world, of relationships, of others.*

In focussing on Christ having a Divine status, does this not bring exclusivity to Swedenborg's teachings? Does it conclude Christianity to be the only pathway? Far from it. Seeing the possibilities of Divinity within the person of Christ can only but enhance the universality of spiritual laws to the human condition in all circumstances.

Can you relate to Swedenborg's point that the idea that we have of God pervades and formulates every other view we have? Would your thinking about others, and behaviour towards them, be different if you saw God as vengeful rather than only love?

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Jesus Christ - Who is He?

The Old Testament contains many clear statements that there is only One God. For example, "*There is no other God besides me, a just God and a Saviour, there is none beside me*" (the Jewish faith, of course, is monotheistic). It is the Christian who needs to ask:

- *who Jesus Christ actually is?;*
- *why he came into the world when he did?;*
- *what his relationship was with God the Creator?;*
- *what he achieved on earth?; and*
- *where is he now?*

Whole libraries of books have been written about the outer life of Jesus Christ in Palestine - his journeys, his teachings, his miracles, and finally his crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension. Yet, to understand his mission intelligently we must continue to utilise The Bible as a guidebook, looking below the surface to understand the spiritual role being played out through the life of Christ - to see what he was doing at an inner level. Most Christians today seem to leave aside this aspect because they do not understand it.

Swedenborg's presentation of Jesus Christ is radically different from traditional teaching, offering the idea that Jesus lived his life on two levels simultaneously. He was in the world, tramping the lanes of Galilee with his disciples; but at the same time he was consciously active on the spiritual plane. On earth, he taught and healed, and set an example of Christian living which led to the founding of the Christian Church. This life and work corresponds to incredibly important outcomes at the spiritual level.

According to Swedenborg Christ's purpose was twofold which we will look at in turn:

- to redeem mankind from the growing power of Hell;
- to glorify the human nature he derived from Mary of Nazareth;

Jesus Christ and Redemption

To redeem means to rescue someone from slavery or captivity. It can be done by payment of a large sum of money as a ransom, or it can be achieved by force. At the time we are considering, two thousand years ago, much of the human race - the so called "civilised world" - was enslaved by the hellish lusts of selfishness, self gratification and a decadence affecting all levels of society. This is well documented in historical records. A general redemption had become imperative, and Christians believe it was the specific task of Jesus to affect this.

The early church used to teach that Jesus did it by paying the ransom money of his own blood *to the devil*. Later, people said, "*No, no! Surely he did not pay the ransom to the devil! That would make the devil mightier than God!*" So the church changed things around, and said that Jesus paid the ransom to God-his-Father. The theory was developed late in the 11th century, somewhat like this:

God, the Father, had intended to destroy mankind as a punishment for sin. However, his son Jesus, who had always been with him in heaven, was persuaded to go down to earth to be punished on man's behalf ("How wonderfully kind of God-the-Father to send him" people used to say!). So Jesus came on earth, and lived a life of exemplary sinlessness, at the end of which he was unjustly tortured and nailed on the cross. This entirely

satisfied the "justice" of his Father, who then forgave the sins of the human race and human beings were saved! The only requirement needed for an individual to be brought into the redemptive scheme was a simple "belief" in such a process.

Such an explanation of the redemption (known as the vicarious atonement) makes little sense, especially in terms of a God of love requiring appeasement with an innocent 'victim', yet it continues to be espoused weekly by the majority of practising Christians. If we abandon it (and it is nowhere taught in the Gospels) do we have to drop all belief in the redemption? By no means.

Swedenborg's explanation is that Jesus did not redeem mankind by payment of a ransom but that he redeemed us by fighting single handed against hell, thus breaking the power of evil which was becoming too great for humankind to resist. Was Jesus the *"only begotten Son from Eternity"* sent into the world to do this redemptive work by his father, God?

A few Biblical quotes will help establish the scenario: *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord"* (Deuteronomy 6:4); *"Thus says the Lord your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel"* (Isaiah 43:14); *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people"* (Luke 1:68)

No mention of a second person! It is of interest that the Jews generally perceived Jesus to be claiming to be this one God, Jehovah, when as it is said they took up stones to stone him (John 8:59).

Swedenborg states that God, JEHOVAH, came into the world as the man Jesus in order that the human race could be rescued from the mess it was in. The evil spirits were acting on the human plane, in human heredity, so God assumed a human nature, complete with its evil heredity, and came to grips with them where they were operating. Jesus was God and man. He was God as to his inmost soul, and man as to his conscious thought, his physical desires and sensations, and of course, as to his physical body. Having a human dimension, he was tempted and attacked by evil spirits, like every other person at that time; but, being inwardly God, he had power to resist, which no other person could do - *"He trod the winepress alone."*

But what of Biblical references to the Son of God? By the 'Son of God' is meant the humanity which God took upon himself when he came into the world. Jesus 'came forth from God' rather as a son comes forth from his

father. There was no 'Son of God' before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The expression 'Son of God' does not appear anywhere in the Old Testament. The first time we read of the Son of God is when the angel Gabriel says to Mary: "*That holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.*" (Luke 1:35.) In other words, there was no Son of God up to that time, but there would be a Son of God when Jesus was born. A son must have a mother. The mother of Jesus was Mary, and God was his father; therefore Jesus was the son of Mary and the Son of God. The parts of his nature which he derived from Mary were finite, corruptible, and not divine; therefore, Mary was not the mother of God. God cannot have a mother!

Jesus was never separated from God in the way that the seed which produced us was separated from our father at conception. Always God was within Jesus as his SOUL, even while he was still a foetus in his mother's body, and all the time he was growing up in Nazareth - first as a child, and then a young man at the carpenter's bench. He spoke of God as his Father who was within him doing the works. "*He who has seen me*" he said, "*has seen the Father. I and the Father are one.*" (John 14:9 and 10:30).

Glorifying Christ's Human Nature

We all derive something from both our fathers and mothers. So with Jesus. What he derived from his Father (God) was *divine*. What he derived from his mother (Mary) was just the same as what other Jewish boys were inheriting from their mothers at that time, human thoughts and feelings corrupted with evil *tendencies* of every kind. Therefore, Jesus was "*tempted in all points as we are*" (Hebrews 4:15) and a thousand times worse than any of us are today.

He was prone to commit every kind of sin: to love himself and dominate others, to seize their possessions, to commit adultery, to bear false witness, to covet... and so on. But he never once yielded, fighting and overcoming with power drawn from within himself - the divine side of his nature. He said, "*Get you behind me, Satan!*" This was not easy for him; it was a perpetual struggle, with real pain and anguish.

While being tempted, he did not feel himself to be divine - far from it! On the contrary, he felt that God had deserted him. He had to pray constantly

to the Father within him for strength and courage. But each time, after the battle was over and another gang of evil spirits had been deprived of their power, he felt once again that he was the 'Son of God' - God in human form.

By conquering every worst evil desire and thought, Jesus actually restored the ability for everybody to *freely* make decisions about their spiritual approach to life. He did not bring an end to sinning and evil (there has been plenty of sin and evil in the world since the redemption!). Nor did he bring about the simple removal of sins on request or through allegiance to the Christian tradition.

Swedenborg's unique claim is that Jesus Christ ended mankind's slavery to evil if that is what is freely chosen. His whole life was directed to that cause. Suffering death on the cross, whilst the most grievous temptation involving outward physical suffering, was the final battle. He could have given in to the pressure and come down from the cross but instead said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

This unwavering love towards mankind broke the power of Hell to *totally* dominate the minds of men and women for all time (unless, of course, we invite them in from our own free choice). In the sepulchre after the crucifixion, his Divinity impregnated the very atoms of his physical body, absorbing them into itself, making his humanity divine - the *Divine Human*. Thus he was 'glorified' or made wholly divine.

'Son of God' is now a misleading term. After the ascension, Jesus became (as it were) the *body* of God. Jehovah is the *soul*, the newly formed Divine Human is the *body*. The continuing influence of the Divine directly into our lives is what is called the 'Holy Spirit' which means 'breath' or 'wind' and cannot be separately personalised. Here we have the three essentials of the Trinity which is God in one person. "*In Christ*", the Apostle Paul wrote, "*dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.*" (Colossians 2:9) which says it all.

As an individual, can you suggest how you might see yourself as a trinity of essential characteristics making a whole? Also, think about projects you undertake. Can you see another kind of trinity for successful achievement?

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The Prophecy for a Second Coming

What of that event for which virtually all Christians await as they have done for two millennia? - the second coming of Christ. The scriptures speak of this return as being "*on the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory*" (Matthew 24:30) following unprecedented disasters and upheavals. The sun and moon would be darkened, the stars would fall from Heaven; there would be a new Heaven and a new Earth. Angels would herald his coming with the blast of trumpets, and "*every eye should see him.*"

Prophecy cannot be properly understood until after it has been fulfilled otherwise it would interfere with our free will. Yet, what of the Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messiah's coming? Again, the same types of physical upheavals were predicted and there was a general expectation that the Messiah would raise an army in rebellion against the occupying forces in Israel and Judah, re-establishing Jewish sovereignty in their own land. The physical events did not happen and for most people, Jesus Christ turned out to be a great disappointment in teaching love, not war and retribution, telling the people to "*render to Caesar that which is Caesar's*", and going meekly to be crucified "*as a lamb to the slaughter*".

Like all Biblical texts which need to be understood symbolically or correspondentially to find the underlying spiritual realities, the language of

the 'second coming' prophecy is no different. The sun and the moon (a reflection of the sun's light) are symbols of love (heat) and faith, and darkness therefore means the loss of love and faith. Stars are symbols of the knowledges of truth which guide us in our darkness, and when it was said that they would withdraw their shining it meant a loss of those knowledges so that they were no longer seen, even taught (which was the case), or understood.

This was the situation within the Jewish Church when Jesus was born on earth. A state of spiritual darkness had descended, religion had become a sham, and observances had become meaningless rituals. Even the Commandments of God had been made of none effect through human traditions.

Reflecting on the history of the western world over the past two millennia as best you know it, can you think of a time when people have again been bereft of spiritual guidance? Can you relate it to a subsequent improvement in the human condition?

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Spiritual Light for a New Era

Has such a time occurred subsequently? One of the most challenging teachings which Swedenborg offers is in connection with the second coming: that these words refer in fact to the state of the Christian Church in the eighteenth century; a time when, as is widely recognised, it had reached its lowest ebb, doctrinally, and in every other way. Superstition had come to replace belief and conviction.

The religion of love to God and charity towards one's neighbour had been totally eclipsed and in place of it there was persecution and political manipulation. The teachings of the Church had become as unlike those which Jesus had taught as can possibly be imagined. Conditions were such that men and women were again unable to exercise the ability to choose in freedom their heavenly response to life. 'Upheavals' for a genuine spiritual life, along with an all-pervading darkness had come.

It was to be following upon such a situation that the second coming would take place. In the Christ's own words, "*they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*". Here again it is a matter for careful thought being given to what is meant. As mouthpieces of God and messengers of his truth, the Old Testament prophets were called 'son of man'. It is Christ as the embodiment of Divine Truth which is meant by the title 'Son of man'. The 'clouds of heaven' are the literal text of sacred Scriptures, which veil the brightness of the spiritual meaning within and behind. Think how fierce the physical sun is when there are no clouds.

The literal text, couched in worldly terms, tempers the power of the spiritual meaning and conveys the divine truth in a manner suited to our natural, worldly condition. But think of the other extreme when the clouds are so thick and dense that sunlight does not penetrate them and the world becomes dark and cold - when divine truth becomes lost, humankind is spiritually *under a cloud*.

Here is our clue to understanding the prophecy. Christ promised he would come again in a new disclosure of Divine Truth about himself, not in person but as a new revelation of truth. He had said on another occasion "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.*" (John 16: 12-13).

For a Revelation to be given it required a human instrument, and it is Emanuel Swedenborg's claim that he was that instrument:-

"The second coming of the Lord is not in person, but in the Word, which is from himself and is himself. It is taking place through the instrumentality of a man, to whom the Lord has manifested himself in person, and whom he has filled with his spirit, to teach the doctrines of the New Church, (the

words 'New Church' being used in the sense of a new spiritual era or age for humankind) by means of his Word. To the end that the Lord might be constantly present, he revealed to me the spiritual sense of his Word, in which sense divine truth is in its light; and in this light he is continually present, for his presence in the Word is only by means of the spiritual sense. I solemnly declare that the Lord has manifested himself to me, his servant, and has sent me on this duty (of having this new understanding of truth printed and published). He has opened the sight of my spirit, and thus introduced me into the spiritual world. He has permitted me to see the Heavens and the Hells, and to converse with angels and spirits, and this now continually for many years."

True Christian Religion 776,779,780

Quite a statement and inevitably startling to those who meet it for the first time! It is right that it should be weighed with scrupulous care but not rejected without examination because it does not agree with preconceptions, perhaps being vastly different from expectations (but again just reflect on how different from popular expectations the method of Christ's first coming was!).

We can easily see that any new revelation would certainly conflict with many ideas which people have held. To refuse to consider the new presentation on the assumption that there cannot be, and consequently never will be, any further revelation, is little different than to reject all revelation on the ground that there is no God from whom it could come.

Whilst Swedenborg claims that the second coming is now an historical fact (and the great advances in the western world over the past 200 years in terms of education, medical and scientific knowledge, technology, the striving for individual emancipation at all levels, and the more recent revival of interest in spiritual things, all point to a new liberation of thought), he also presents it as an ongoing process which can, and hopefully should, take place in everyone's life.

At a personal level we need to bring into our lives those simple basic truths, given by Jesus Christ in what he taught and through his example, which really appeal to our affections; we perceive they are good and right. Yet we also need a further spiritual awakening in our lives in order to

understand God through our intellect as well as our affections, and to give brightness and clarity to our sight of the Divine in revelation and nature.

There is no claim for exclusivity so far as Swedenborg is concerned. The revival of interest in spiritual things is a phenomenon occurring across all religions and spiritual movements - Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, etc. - indicating that 'the second coming' applies universally. Spiritual light is coming back into the world in many forms for those seeking it and Swedenborg's spiritual teachings can be seen as having played, and continuing to play, a very important role in the process.

Emanuel Swedenborg - a Prophet for Our times?

Many might question the validity for considering, at the beginning of the 21st century, teachings of a scientist/mystic born in 1688. It has not been the purpose of this series to try to persuade the acceptance of them as truth. They are simply offered in the same vein which Swedenborg wrote himself, suggesting 'Do not accept what I say just because I have written it. Test the veracity yourself'. As has been said repeatedly, Swedenborg was born and brought up a Christian and his opening up to mystical experiences is inevitably in that context. Yet in essence, it is universal with the underlying principles reaching across the barriers apparently separating faiths and spiritual movements.

Everybody's spiritual convictions are necessarily personal. They are the result of a wide induction from all facets of life which are open to our observation. In other words they are opinions, the truth of which we cannot demonstrate to anyone else. *But why should this disconcert or discourage us?* Indeed it should make us lenient in our judgement of others whose opinions may differ from our own and the processes of whose thought we are as unable to follow as they are to follow ours. It should make us modest in the estimate we may form of the completeness of the system of truth which has become established in our own minds, and hopeful that it may be amplified and perfected indefinitely.

But it ought not lead us to relinquish the quest of spiritual truth as useless, or to think that it does not matter what our opinions are. Of course we shall make mistakes in our search for truth, but the greatest mistake of all is to give up the search.

The search for spiritual truth, like the pursuit of scientific truth, consists largely in the correction of errors. If life were a sum in arithmetic, we need make no mistake, but then it would not be a human life at all. It is human because it takes account of values so inestimable that they can never be exhaustively conceived by any finite mind. Affirm then. Make sure that your affirmation is of the highest truth you can grasp and then affirm boldly, sure that whatever correction your thought may need will come from affirmation ratified by conduct.

We trust that what you have read and considered in this series will have been of some small help in your spiritual journey.

*"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added to you."*

**Tributes to
Emanuel Swedenborg**

Swedenborg That mountain peak of mentality was this great religious reformer.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

For you Westerners, it is Swedenborg who is your Buddha of the North.

DAISETSU TEITARO SUZUKI



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Dear Friend,

Spiritual Journey Series

You are receiving the final part (No. 6) in our series which was essentially aimed at introducing the spiritual teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772). Our hope is that you found this material helpful in stimulating your own thinking on spiritual matters. Please contact us if you wish to find out which books are available that relate to the subjects covered in each of these six booklets.

If you wish to maintain contact with the Centre there are a number of ways open to you. If you currently do not receive our monthly Enews which provides latest information about Swedenborgian matters you can stay informed by requesting the Enews. We also offer a continuing mailing service providing a quarterly Newsletter with life-related articles on a wide range of subjects incorporating something of the teaching which Swedenborg offers on the topic.

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We have been pleased to be of service to you and hope that we may continue to be so. If you are now pursuing different directions, we wish you well in your own journey.

With every good wish,

Joe Vandermeer

Director, Swedenborg Centre

To: Swedenborg Centre, 4 Shirley Road, ROSEVILLE, NSW, 2069

Or email the details to: info@swedenborg.com.au

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