



SAA President's Report to the 2021 AGM

I would sum up the SAA activity during 2021 not as virtually nil but as virtually extensive, going far and wide. In this second viral year - and there are two meanings to 'viral' - a large percentage of Swedenborg-related activities has been online. Zoom gatherings, our Website, the various new and exciting items put up regularly on our Facebook page, our Youtube channel 'SwedenborgAustralia', a large number of emails, and no doubt some other electronic networkings and links, keeping us and the wider Swedenborg world closely connected. The SAA quarterly journal Candela is made available both online and in print form, and it is a major activity of our organisation.

I don't want to use the phrase 'the new normal' because it isn't that new, Swedenborg Radio Talks were going on in the 1980s 'putting the word out' (and these are all available on the SAA website to enjoy and gain from, thanks to Michael Chester and Liz Kemmis in recent years). And even more, I don't agree that it is normal. Online is good, helpful, modern, an alternative, possibly involving more people than physical gatherings, but I don't see it as normal. Normal would surely be a balance of both virtual (screen and seen) and physical (greet and hug!), adapting the amount of each accordingly as thought best.

People often say that online is "really like what goes on in the spiritual world". I get that, of course, but it leaves a lot out, like our sphere, affectionate closeness, and everything we sense and pick up and give out when we are right there with other people. Our screentime average hours over the last eighteen months must have exploded, partly because, for much of the time, there hasn't been anything else to do. But... 'normal'?

While the world has changed, the truths there in Swedenborg's writings haven't changed. They are eternal truths, true in every conceivable age or human situation. And because of that, it becomes vital that these get spread and posted big-time in a world where many people wonder if everything has collapsed and what is the point of believing anything? And I hasten to add that there are a great number of people around who do not believe that and who do uphold human values, help, optimism and kindness. It is true that in challenge our 'better angels' show themselves.

I've felt that during Covid and its restrictions and lockdowns, people are drawn towards more appreciation of everything which, when lives are easy and affluent, is less likely to be felt because we're too busy living it to the full. So that's a plus. I've also felt that in this same period, people have had the opportunity to go within themselves and explore what they discover - which is very close to the essence of spiritual practice - and that too is another plus. But none of us want what is going on now to be around a moment longer than it must be.

In this strange time for us, the Swedenborg Association of Australia has been active and promoting things, and on behalf of our members, I thank all those who are involved in this. There's been creativity, revision and also careful study and sharing. One thing that I want to highlight is that the Swedenborg Association is not exclusively Swedenborg but is open to several other parallel spiritual teachings and outlooks. That is actually very Swedenborgian! We are inclusive, not exclusive. So it is exciting to see groups sharing in other applied-Swedenborg material, and it is exciting to see excellent articles and presentations up on Facebook which offer things we can gain from even while they may not mention Swedenborg.

And some of us would really love to pat the people who are involved in all this on the back, and we look forward to the time when we shall.

Julian Duckworth