



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Ltd. A.C.N. 056 529 769
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We are privileged in our Association to be independent of outside influences to the extent we can have such diverse topics as Carl Jung and Gurdjieff presented at our monthly meetings. The underlying contribution of people such as Jung and Gurdjieff and others like them is that they are primarily highly spiritual beings and we can learn a great deal by being in their presence. We do know that Carl Jung knew about Swedenborg through his own studies and through his close friend and colleague Dr Maurice Nicoll. We also know Nicoll spent time at Gurdjieff's esoteric school in France; the remainder of his life was in England teaching Gurdjieff's principles of self development and writing about the correspondences of Swedenborg contained in the New Testament.

There are many who have had their spiritual development influenced by Swedenborg and others; it doesn't matter from where it comes. The important thing for those who seek is to seek far and wide with a conscious effort to find one's truth.

Many religions and "isms" taken in an external way become dogma and can lead to fundamentalism. We are witnessing such dogmatism in world events today. I believe if different religions are understood and absorbed in an inward way, an esoteric way, rather than an exoteric way, one would find the same fundamental feature of creation, usually a creator, life, death and life after life. Religions bind a community in the same way that a language establishes a common core of communication between individual human beings. A large part of our intolerance to other religions is that we start from the outside, exoterically.

How does one start from the inside?

Firstly, I believe there is spiritual knowledge and understanding which should be read, learnt and taken in as correspondences rather than as literal knowledge. Literal knowledge has no place in the "Kingdom of Heaven" i.e. in our higher mind.

Secondly, the impetus to spend time in spiritual development needs to be fed so the Work can go on. The impetus is an affection for the Work which is putting these things into practice and in time our affection turns to love. At the core of all major religions is the feeling of the oneness of all people. We are all neighbours in the big scheme of things and we would each like to be treated equally - not just taking but also giving.

As Christmas approaches we will experience a lighter mood between 'neighbours', like a weight is lifted from our shoulders during the festive season. For a brief time we are not in competition with our "neighbour" but in a more accepting, even loving, relationship.

I wish you all, on behalf of the Board, a very happy and holy Christmas and good will to all people.

Agape,

John Brogan

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Living for the Sake of Others

A synopsis of a Talk given by Ruth Duckworth to the Swedenborg Association of Australia Ltd North Ryde Group meeting on 26th July 2002

Swedenborg's short work *Charity* was published in 1839, after Swedenborg's death, and was based on two incomplete manuscripts. It is a very practical handbook on how to develop charity

The first step in charity is to look to the Lord and to avoid evils for the reason that they are sins, which is done by repentance.

in our life. There are just two steps involved. However, we certainly can't achieve the two steps in a day, nor can we do it from the comfort of our own armchair.

This may sound like traditional Christian doctrine but I found this whole chapter very interesting, when I compared it with traditional and New Age ideas. The first sentence, 'We are born into evils of every kind', seems at first to confirm the old idea of original sin; that we are born totally evil and can only be saved by the Lord. Swedenborg is not talking about actual evil, the 'devil' in us, but a **tendency** towards evil. We inherit the **desire** to do evil. We could say Swedenborg is letting us off, but no.

This whole first part of the book is very strongly worded: he is trying to shock us into repentance by warning how insidious evil is. 'All evils are born pleasurable, for we are born into self love, and this love makes pleasurable all our own, all that we ourselves will and think'. Doing what comes naturally is not the way to get to heaven.

Evangelical doctrine says that we have only to believe in Jesus and we will be saved. Swedenborg gives us this same first step, **TURN TO THE LORD**, but goes on to say what this involves ~ repentance and avoiding sins, because they are sins. On the other hand some New Age thinking drifts in the other direction. We are all beloved children, we have to just let life flow into us, create good health and abundance and all will be well. The universe will provide and protect us. We are basically good.

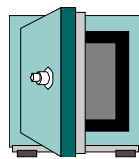
We need to find a balance between these ideas and I think that is what Swedenborg does. But we have also hit on here the whole reason why Swedenborg's spiritual teachings do not seem to have the appeal of the evangelical churches or the New Age movement. He actually gives us some work to do. It is no good to just repent and confess that we are totally evil and need the Lord to save us.

Self-examination is the key to getting it right. We have to actually look at our life. We **can** start on the level of what evil thing we have done. If we only look at our actions we may not find many evils.

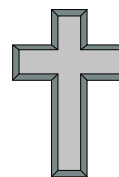
There are a lot of outside influences stopping us doing obvious evil acts ~ the laws and punishments of our country may deter us or just the risk of being thought badly of by others. We seem to be free of sins if we confess on this superficial level. I'm afraid that we need to go deeper. If we examine our thoughts and intentions we can find more. We might hate someone and wish them ill, though never actually do them harm. We should do both, look at our actions and intentions.

But Swedenborg gives us an even better way to root out those evils and that is to look at what we really consider **is** a sin. If someone has hurt us, do we feel justified in hating them? Is it alright to look down on someone as stupid so long as we don't tell them? If we make it allowable in our head, then believe me when we die we will make it happen, because then all the barriers we have between our inner thoughts and what we actually do are gradually lifted. If we mock in our head here, we will do it out loud there.

Much of today's life is openly showing evil, it is coming out in the open. Think of the



child abuse scandals in the Catholic church, the corporate financial scandals in America. If you compare today with



Victorian times, society is becoming more like the spiritual world. Things are less hidden and evil is more obvious. I also think it is becoming easier to admit that we are selfish and have vices and not try to cover them up. It has its good and bad sides but if we are living more open lives and evil is not so hidden we should be able to notice it in ourselves more and start to do something about it sooner.

Now let's look at **'good'**. All the good that goes on in the world is from the Lord. Most good is done through people; the Lord uses us as helpers to carry out his wishes. If we want to do good because it **is** good, because we believe in God and His Word, then the good that we do is called **charity**. But a lot of good is done in the world that is not charity. God also uses selfish and greedy people to do good to others. People are often willing to do good to help others if they will get something out of it. But they are not rewarded by the Lord. If we have charity we do receive a reward; it's called **heavenly pleasure** and it goes on for **EVER**.

This is the first step, like a 'John the Baptist' stage. John baptised people if they admitted they had sinned. We need to repent, feel remorse, be sorry. If we only avoid doing evil but don't repent we are actually increasing our evils by driving them underground. We need to turn to the Lord for help. We certainly can't do it on our own.

The second step in charity is to do good things for the reason that they are useful

Charity moves us to will to do good to the neighbour. But then Swedenborg gives a warning. Lots of people feel that doing good cancels out evil. We feel that we can become clean by adding up good deeds. This is not true! If you are doing good for the wrong motive and not avoiding evils then you do not have true charity. It's all to do with keeping our inner and outer lives in harmony. We have good in us opened up on three levels. The first or lowest level is **civil** good. This is opened up as children learn right and wrong, the ten commandments and the laws of the country. Then **moral** good develops; this is higher and lifts a person above the world, but still below heaven. This level is the reasoned-through good that we use to live in society and in relationships with each other. Moral good flows into civil good, but above both of these is **spiritual** good. Spiritual good is charity. It is doing good for the sake of the neighbour, for the sake of good itself and above all doing it for God. Having spiritual good lifts us not only above the world but into heaven. It is what makes us angels and we can be angels here on earth. It is charity that is the glue that holds heaven together. So achieving these three levels of good in our life is how we can develop charity. There is one little technique in getting it right.

To remember this: *Any good I do is the Lord working through me, it is not me at all.* This will help you not to pat yourself on the back and get self-righteous as you start to develop charity.

But the book does not finish here. There are 10 more chapters which are very practical, full of tips and hints. The third chapter is called **The Neighbour to be loved**. This reminded me at once of the parable of the Good Samaritan and the question asked of Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" Swedenborg explains this in this chapter and starts by discussing what makes us human. What do you think? We can watch the television and see many beautiful and fit bodies, perfect human bodies. But **that** is not the human side of us, it's just the parcel. We could say that it is our rational thinking part that makes us human. This is partly true, that gives us human qualities, but we are **more** human if we are spiritual too. It's not our body or mind but the will to do good and the understanding of truth that we have that makes us really human.

Of course our neighbours are other humans, but it's the human part of them we have to be a neighbour to ~ the good and truth in them, not their bad or weak side. In trying to help we have to make some judgments about who our neighbour is. We do have to make judgments about the people we want to help or we could be taken for a ride and even do more harm than good by our actions.

So we **have** to use our heads - rationality and discernment - but Jesus also warns us in Matthew. "Judge not, that you be not judged." This may seem contradictory to the idea we have been looking at, but if we condemn people for something they have done wrong then we are judging them wrongly. We can make a judgement without a condemnation.

The passage following this quote is the piece about finding a speck in our brother's eye and not noticing the plank in our own eye. We have to first remove the plank in our own eye: back to our first topic of **self-examination and repentance**. If we do that we will be less judgmental or condemning of others.

So if you see someone that needs help, you need to discern the best way to help them. An unemployed family may need money; a practising gambler certainly does not. He needs support and re-education. But our attitude to anyone that is doing wrong, or is just in need of help should not be condemnation. If we listen to the talk going on in our head 'They are stupid, she is evil, or he is a total loser' it will give us a clue as to where we are coming from. What we **should** do is to search in them for what good and truth there is; find what part of them we can be a neighbour to. Every evil that we may see in others is there in potential in us, and it is only with God's constant care that we can be prevented from heading down the same path.

We are neighbours to individual people, some more than others. It is not the close proximity of one person or another that makes them more of a neighbour, but how much good and truth that they have.

Around the individual is the community that we live in. Greater than that is our country and above that is the whole of the human race. Your neighbour can be as much someone in Nigeria as someone in your own family. Our spiritual neighbours are those that we are close to in common truths. When we die we live in a community with like-minded neighbours. When we find our community in heaven we know that is where we live: we have already built a house there by our life in this world. We meet the other angels and know that they are our spiritual brothers and sisters.

I found the next chapter very beautiful. It is telling us that we have to become a living form of charity. We start to do this here but once we are in the spiritual dimension it is total. Angels in the second heaven look like beautiful forms of charity. An angel is nothing else but an embodiment of the good that he or she does. The more love and wisdom we open up, the more beautiful will be our spiritual body. While we live in the world, our love for the neighbour cannot be easily seen in our body but it can be seen in our mind. We can talk to others and realize that they are full of love or charity. It is this mind that is given a matching body after death. And if we don't develop charity while we live here we will have a body that is grotesque and ugly, an embodiment of hatred and falsity.

Chapter 6 is about the fact that the reason for our whole existence is so that we can become a form of charity. I found this very helpful. As long as we are loving others and trying to help them, it does not matter what job title we hold. What is lasting is the love that we are developing in ourselves.

Then follow the very practical chapters of the book. If we do the work of our employment sincerely, justly, and faithfully, we develop charity. Swedenborg describes charity in various occupations of his own time and how each of these can become charity. He covers priests, leaders, judges, down to soldiers, sailors and servants. Chapter 10 tells us that we have legal obligations of charity such as paying taxes, so we can't get away with that either!

Chapter 11 is a great little chapter on how important it is to take time off, time out from our work to restore our mind and body. Swedenborg says that when our minds are overactive we need to go into the physical level of life and enjoy all our senses which give us pleasure so that our mind will relax. He describes how the internals of charity, or lack of it, dictate the kind of pleasures we enjoy. Even recreation can be heavenly or hellish.

What I found was that the more I re-read this book the more I saw in it. I know this is true of all spiritual ideas, but even such a short book as this kept me occupied for weeks. Everything spiritual is related, and this book is certainly related to life and living: I have been able to connect so much to it. It is really so central to how we live our life.

Ruth Duckworth has a long association with the spiritual teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg with her parents involved in the Swedenborg movement in UK. Ruth trained as a physiotherapist and has worked with children specializing in cerebral palsy, spina bifida and cystic fibrosis. It was in her work with children dying from this debilitating disease that her faith in the afterlife strengthened. Homoeopathy, spiritual healing and how the spiritual world affects us all the time are particular current interests.



Charity:

The Practice of Neighborliness

By Emanuel Swedenborg

76 Pages Paperback **\$16.00**

Member's Price (after 20% discount) **\$12.80**
(plus postage)

We hope that the above talk, based on this work of Swedenborg's, will whet your appetite to read the text itself. Ring The Swedenborg Centre on 02 9888 1066 to obtain your copy.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

New Members

We are very pleased to have Anne Stephen (NSW) again as a member after a period "off the list".

Swedenborg Quotation from the Secretary

"When the physical body ceases to function in the natural world...the person is said to die. This is when the lungs stop breathing and the heart stops beating. But the man is not dead, he is simply separated from the bodily part that served him in the world. The real man lives on. We say, 'the real man' - for it is not his body that makes him a man, but his spirit. It is plain then, that 'dying' is simply passing from one world to another.

Welcome to our final edition of *Candela* for the current year. Since our last (September 2002) issue of *Candela*, the Association has been busily engaged in its usual administrative functions and scheduled activities. The past few months has evidenced the SAA's regular quarterly Board Meeting (conducted 22nd October), as well as the regular monthly meetings conducted in Melbourne and Sydney as reported elsewhere.

The Board Meeting brought with it a number of matters for consideration including Membership/Renewals, Group News, both local and interstate and the 10th Anniversary Appeal. This Appeal has drawn a wonderful response and on behalf of the Board, I would like to warmly thank all those members who have donated so generously to it.

We reported in our September issue that there were two positions as Directors to the Board which were unfilled. To date these positions remain unfilled and I invite members to consider their possible appointment to the role. If you are interested in joining the Board, please call me on 02 9888 1066.

Our next Board Meeting is scheduled for January 21st 2003. Board meetings are open to all members and should you wish to attend please contact me to confirm details and to receive an Agenda.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to personally wish all our members and friends a blessed, and reflective Christmas.

Michele Knight

Candela

10th Anniversary Commemorative Issue

Regrettably due to several unforeseen circumstances, we have not yet been able to go to press with this project. Members would have been expecting this to arrive in the post - hopefully looking forward to receiving it. Apologies are offered for this delay. We expect it to be ready for distribution in early

Febr 03.

A Member's Journey

I have a life-long interest in the spiritual and religious sides of life. My first contact with Swedenborg's work was through my interest and research into the Christian mystics. Apart from the obvious genius of the man himself, I found that his writings reflect so much of my own beliefs and philosophy, only more eloquently expressed of course. I was particularly drawn to what I feel is an uncommon gentleness and kindness that pervades even the translated versions of his work.

My own background would read like 'War and Peace' and probably fail to hold most people's interest for too long anyway. Very simply and briefly put, prior to 1994, my working life was predominately in the military and police force. I was brought up Catholic, but my calling led me to originally do my Discipleship Studies and be ordained as a minister in the Evangelical Church. Since then I have moved on, becoming ordained as a Deacon with the Independent Catholic Union (Roman Rite), as well as a Brother in the Order of Servants of Christ, an ecumenical Benedictine religious Order. I have been awarded a Doctor of Divinity and am currently pursuing further Biblical Studies through St. Luke's. In addition to studying, I presently have a non-denominational Christian ministry, providing counselling and community chaplaincy services by referral or via the internet. All of this, plus family, keeps me too busy to get into much mischief at the moment.

I only use the titles and trappings to show up-front that I am God's servant and to make it easier to get a 'foot-in-the-door' when I'm going about His work. Otherwise I'm just an ordinary bloke, so I much prefer either to be called just by my Christian name or the honoured Australian title of 'mate'. Strong relationships are built upon mutual affection and service to the Lord, and also others, which to me is really one and the same. I think the very purpose of our existence is to come into communion with God ~ perceptions of just what that is can and do differ between individuals. The philosophy of my Order (and me personally) is that we best serve Christ through service to others, and this is best done with a tolerance and genuine compassion for people.

A Queensland Member

GROUP'S NEWS North Ryde, Sydney:

On September 27th Clare Dunne presented to around 40 people a very informative talk titled **Wounded Healer of the Soul. Introducing the life and work of Carl Jung**. It was based on her latest book which looks at the life of Carl Jung. At 84, Jung wrote *The journey from cloud cuckoo land to reality lasted a long time. In my case Pilgrim's Progress consisted in my having to climb down a thousand ladders until I could reach out my hand to the little clod of earth that I am*. During the evening she covered that journey, with a special focus on his latter years, and showed how some of his central messages have relevance to us today. The talk was illustrated with many wonderful images.

On October 25th, 3 members of the Sydney Gurdjieff Society presented the talk **Gurdjieff, Nicoll and 'The Work'**. Joseph Azize provided a brief overview on the man and a practice to develop greater compassion for others. Michael Griffith played on a piano keyboard some wonderful sacred music composed by Gurdjieff with the assistance of Thomas De Hartmann. He also provided an introduction to the practice of Self-Remembering. Rose Griffith talked about the special dances/movements that Gurdjieff taught his students with some examples shown from the film **Meetings with Remarkable Men**. It was well received by the people attending, with lots of questions.

John Brogan gave a talk on Friday 22nd November titled **Ancient Wisdom, Ancient Church**. Eleven people attended this interesting talk, principally on the design of the Temple of Luxor. Utilizing the work of Schwaller de Lubcz it was shown that the Temple was designed using the proportions of man and the extensions of the Temple emphasising the principal stages of human growth. In this way the Temple was dedicated to the spiritual development of the human being. Many interesting aspects of ancient Egyptian life, including the annual Festival of Opet held at the Temple, were presented. A striking similarity with the design of Notre Dame de Paris was also illustrated.

All three evenings were videoed and can be borrowed by calling the Swedenborg Centre.

Michael Chester



Melbourne:

In September (27th) **James Edgar** spoke to an audience of 24 on **Man, Myth & Mystery - Unlocking the Ancient Wisdom of the Ages**. He related his interest in sacred architecture, astrology and other similar disciplines to demonstrate a thread of wisdom shining through cultures over the centuries.

A good sequel to this theme followed in October when our speaker was **John Brogan**. He spoke to 14 people on the topic of **Ancient Wisdom, Egyptian Culture and Swedenborg**. This very well researched talk was illustrated with transparencies and other material. Opportunities were available for questions as the informative and detailed talk progressed.

Chris Skinner

Directors Profiles

Brief autobiographical sketches for two more of our Directors follow to give members some idea of the "faces" behind these names. Thanks to Kirk and Chris. It concludes this series, at least until we have new Directors appointed.

Kirk Holst

The love of nature, adventure and spontaneity have been the drivers in my life. Exploring the bush and foreshores of Port Hacking was the joy and fun of my childhood in the fifties. Life hasn't changed much at present - it is camping, bushwalking, cycling, surfing, sailing and paddling. Love of the outdoors is still in my veins. As a family, most of our holidays were spent camping up and down the east coast from Cairns to Tasmania.

Although I spent 7 years at Qantas where I was trained as a gas turbine engineer, I found working inside a factory unsatisfactory. I then moved to the forest industry as a timber merchant and - as you would guess the reason - to be outside.

My spiritual life and belief in God was initiated and instilled at our local Methodist Church where I attended Sunday school for 10 years. I now thank those teachers for the time and effort they freely gave to us. I owe them much.

In 1984 after our third child was born, I began a quest to find the "Laws of Life" as I ascertained this would be the greatest gift I could give my children. Maybe I was like a blind man trying to climb Mount Everest, but to me, it has been the greatest adventure of my life. There has been a cost to pay, many lessons to learn and tests that have been challenging. However, I now accept that experience as the school of life in which we are all living.

Discovering the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (or should I say being introduced to them by Divine Providence) has most definitely been the highlight of my quest for truth. I now look upon those books of writing as a wine connoisseur would look upon a cellar full of the world's finest and rarest wines.

For the future, I look forward to working with and supporting the very dedicated and genuinely interested team of SAA board members in promoting and sharing Emanuel Swedenborg with all persons that show an interest in his work.

(n.b. Kirk is the current Hon. Treasurer of the SAA)

The reason Jehovah God came down into the world as the Divine Truth was so that He could effect redemption. Redemption was the conquest of the hells, the ordering of the heavens, and afterwards the establishment of a new dispensation in which men and women could again live in love to the Lord in accordance with truth from the Word.

Swedenborg: True Christian Religion (86)

Chris Skinner

In the last 'Candela' Neville Jarvis spoke of his origins which are exactly the same as mine. We were brought up in a small town in Essex, England and therefore have known of Swedenborg from a very early age having been associated with a New Church (Swedenborgian) congregation. I am very thankful for the wonderful freedom experienced in growing up in a close knit community.

Whilst being quite happy to remain in England it was a young lady from Australia, who returned to her native England for a working holiday, who was instrumental in changing the plans and I came to Australia in 1970 at the age of 27 to get married. I too thought I would only stay for two years but the country appealed so much that I had no thoughts of returning.

My love of Swedenborg's teachings started in my middle teens when I read the book *Heaven & Hell* and it enabled me to see the Bible, theology and spirituality in a new light. I then owned these teachings for myself rather than inherit them from my family who had been associated with the New Church for generations.

For almost 30 years I was involved in the provision of finance for businesses. I am a qualified accountant and found that Swedenborg's approach provided me with the insights to put life and spiritual progress into perspective. My wife Margaret is a wonderful partner and help and I have two lovely daughters aged 27 and 24 years with the older one marrying in 2001. Both are very computer literate which is more than can be said for their father who is the source of constant frustration when help is needed.

I became a 'certified' Australian some years after leaving England and I am happy to be an 'Aussie' and a 'Pom' although more particularly Aussie when it comes to cricket given results recently. I enjoy watching sport and am an avid AFL convert - a Collingwood supporter (but please do not hold that against me!). I also enjoy stamp collecting as a pastime. I have always been involved in various aspects of the promotion of Swedenborg's teachings and was instrumental in forming the SAA group in Melbourne 10 years ago.

I took early retirement in 1998 and then answered a call to ministry which if I were honest was there for 35 years. I serve the Melbourne New Church but equally see my role as working as a facilitator for learning more about the spiritual teachings of Swedenborg in a less ecclesiastical forum. During my time in Australia I have held many positions in the church organisation and see the church organisation as one way of meeting spiritual needs.

I am proud to be a Director of the SAA as I see it as a wonderful way of increasing awareness of the 'Writings' and how they can be instrumental in making sense of life and nurturing a relationship with God.

I am sure that the Swedenborg Association can explore a number of ways to provide opportunities for people to add meaning to their life.

Christmas ~ A Time of Re-connecting

Early as it struck us as being, we received our first Christmas card in the second week of November. It reminded us of friends now living far away and from whom we were pleased to hear. It also reminded us of what *we* are yet to do in the coming weeks to get *our* cards away.

Most of us see in Christmas a time for re-connecting. It is often the only time of the year we make contact with a lot of people. We could let the links go but are reluctant to do so. All too easily the relationship would fade altogether.

For any relationship to survive and be meaningful it needs to be nurtured and, from time to time, re-negotiated. Other things crowd in; other interests take over; life takes us to other places and, if we are not mindful of it happening, what was once so important and central becomes meaningless and marginalised.

Just think for a moment of the ages and stages children go through, each stage requiring of their parents, as also of them, a re-negotiating of the relationship if it is to survive and continue in a valued way. Otherwise things once shared in common shrink to near nothing. There comes to be little rapport and little to talk about. To prevent drift, irreversibly, we need to find ways to come back into the relationship. We get into disconnectedness and need to re-connect.

This, in fact, is how it has been with the human race down through the ages with regard to God and spiritual things. We can see and read about it in the Word and it is much more fully opened up, explored, and commented on, in Swedenborg's spiritual writings. The very early Biblical stories are about connectedness with God and then follows disconnectedness. There is re-connectedness but then comes disconnectedness again. And so it goes on and on.

The relationship the Lord has with us is described in the Bible as a **covenant** - a word which brings out the responsibility both parties have to keep it alive. The Lord's covenant with the people of the first great spiritual era in mankind's history; with the people of the Most Ancient Church; was a strong and healthy one. That covenant is beautifully captured for us in the made-up stories of the Garden of Eden and of Adam and Eve. But in time people drifted away from it, forgot their obligations to it, causing it to become threadbare and ending in it being broken. So a new covenant was entered into. The relationship was renegotiated and things went well for a time. But then it too became neglected and the Lord had to re-negotiate yet another covenant; another way of keeping the all-important link between Himself and mankind alive.

As a race, and as individuals, we desperately need our link, or relationship, with God and with spiritual things. Were it to be choked off life here would be unliveable. We need to be in touch with good and holy influences. We need to feel the nudges and pangs of conscience. We need to have a sense of life being more than just some sort of pointless, vain, existence. We need to be moved, *and to be open to be moved*, by feelings of disinterested service to others and care for their welfare and happiness. Life without such things would be sterile beyond belief.

Yet this is a picture of what was emerging all these centuries ago leading up to the coming of the Lord into the world. The old covenant had broken down. It wasn't working any longer. People were more and more locked into natural, sense-based, self-focussed thinking and behaviour. As the prophets vividly bring home to us, God and spiritual things had become a laughable irrelevance.

It was to establish a new covenant that God Himself came into the world. He saw the relationship being broken and knew He needed to renegotiate it. It was His one, all-important, aim. Here was the human race into almost total disconnectedness, nearly irreversibly so. He came to revive that connection and re-position it on another basis.

How did He do it?

Disconnectedness, at all the different times it has happened in our history, has occurred when the Word, and the spiritual values it encapsulates, has been muddled and falsified. God came in the person of Jesus to re-establish the relevance and power of the Word. In His own life He lived the Word and renewed it. He wasn't thanked for it. Indeed He was scorned and rejected for doing so. Yet in the end He accomplished what He had come to do. He re-established the Word as the vital connecting link with us.

There is an amazingly informative section about this subject in the book *True Christian Religion*, penned by Swedenborg, around paragraph 85 in which it is said that "*the Lord came into the world to fulfil all things of the Word.*" This was the key. Without the Word we are lost. Without the Word there is disconnectedness. The Word is the link. When we are into the Word in a meaningful way we are into relationship with the Lord. Take the Word away and the relationship ceases to be. By reviving the power and relevance of the Word the Lord was - *and is* - able to re-connect with us by means of it.

There is much about Christmas that is commercialised and frivolous. It would be a pity, however, if Christmas cards were to also fall into that category and so be dispensed with. The sending of them, though, can be invested with new significance and meaning if, as we send them, we think of re-connecting and renewing of relationships and see in that a lovely reminder of what the Lord's Advent - though of course on a far different level and cosmic significance that it carried - was all about. He *could* have allowed His relationship with us to die. But that is to get into the realm of the unthinkable. In and of His infinite love He would have it otherwise. Thus He came and our opportunity to enter into covenant with Him was restored.

Ian Arnold, a member in Adelaide who is also Minister of The New Church (Swedenborgian) there.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

For Group activities, contact your nearest Group Convenor

- Gold Coast (Kevin Attwater on (07) 5545 2401 and Jack Benson on (07) 5545 4115)
- Melbourne (Chris Skinner on (03) 9435 8599);
- Sydney region (Michael Chester on (02) 9913 2421);

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

Melbourne: The New Church Hall, 426 High Street Road, Mount Waverley - 7th December commencing **2pm**
The Most Mystical Book of the Bible - The Book of Revelation. Dreams, Visions and Mystical Experiences, What are they saying to us. A series of three short presentations showing how God speaks in different ways to every age of humankind. The titles of the talks are as follows:-

- i *Spiritual World Experiences* (Ian Arnold)
- i *Place of Myth, Legend, Dreams and Visions in the revealing of Divine Wisdom* (Chris Skinner)
- i *Wisdom in the Book of Revelation in relation to ourselves* (Ian Arnold)

Sydney: The 2002 programme of meetings at North Ryde has been completed and the series for 2003 is being worked on. Details will be sent out in due course. Meetings are normally held on the 4th Friday evening of the month commencing at 7.45pm. Ring 9888 1066 should you wish more information.
31st January 2003 Swedenborg 315th Birthday Celebration (details to be confirmed)