

**ROSEVILLE
NEW CHURCH**

**AUGUST
2024**

“Wherever the Lord is, heaven is there.”
(The Last Judgment 9)

Directory

Society Minister

Rev. Howard Thompson

Officers

Secretary

Graham Hall

Treasurer

Joel Duckworth

Church Officer

Debra Barratt Thompson

Sunday Service -

The Roseville New Church holds a regular service of worship each Sunday at 10:00am. The first Sunday of each month includes an opportunity to partake of the Holy Supper.

Sunday Social Hour -

After every service we have tea and coffee, an opportunity to meet socially, sometimes more formally.

Calendar - *Included*

The Swedenborg Centre -

The Centre is generously supported by the Sydney Society of the New Church and provides an independent and relaxing place to meet and discuss a personal approach to finding spiritual meaning. The Centre has a wide range of study materials, Swedenborg's works, and books by supporting authors. The Centre and its director Joe Vandermeer can be reached on phone (02) 9416 2812 or email info@swedenborg.com.au Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. More events details at www.swedenborg.com.au The Centre can also be used to answer enquiries about the New Church, its literature and its teachings.



“A person is a vessel for God, and a vessel for God is the image of God.”

(Love in Marriage 132)

Roseville New Church Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875
4 Shirley Road, Roseville, N.S.W. 2069
Church Office phone: (02) 9416 7026

Minister's e-mail : revhathompson@gmail.com

On Facebook – Roseville New Church

August 2024 **In This Issue**

- Reflections on Artificial Intelligence.
- Food Pantry Appeal.
- Report on General Church Meetings and Assembly.
- Stoicism Part III - Shared Practices for Spiritual Growth.
- Swedenborg Centre News.
- Spring Women's Weekend and Retreat 2025 News.
- NCIA Retreat 2025

Spiritual Shorts

Our minister, Rev. Howard Thompson, posts a weekly video on his YouTube channel, Spiritual Shorts. Begun during the pandemic to support home worship, these videos underwent a format change in 2023. This new format dispenses with the “ritual” elements used in the previous videos and results weekly episodes of around 5 minutes in length.



Spiritual Shorts YouTube Channel:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsrICJGeGmrnXVawn_Y7UQA



Reflections on Artificial Intelligence: **(Don't confuse the AI with AΩ)**

As some around me know, over the past year I have undertaken a study of the pre-Christian philosophy of Stoicism. I have marvelled at the wisdom of these philosophers like Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Seneca and Zeno of Citium, considered the founder of Stoicism. I have also found interesting the impact they had on several early Christian thinkers including Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.

Seemingly unrelated, doubtful given the influence of Divine Providence, this past year has also had me spending a good bit of time learning about and, yes, even using, Artificial Intelligence (AI). Several months go, while reading one of Seneca's letters to his student Lucilius, I came across a story Seneca shared that seemed to me to capture the limited value of AI. In a discourse on wisdom, Seneca wrote of Calvisius Sabinus, a wealthy but foolish man. Despite his riches, Sabinus possessed a poor memory and a shallow intellect. Desiring to appear smarter than he was, he spent a fortune buying slaves who had memorised works of famous poets like Homer and Hesiod. He kept these slaves at his side during dinners, using them to recite passages and impress his guests. Sabinus believed that owning these

knowledgeable slaves made him knowledgeable as well.

One evening Satellius Quadratus, known for exploiting and mocking wealthy fools, advised Sabinus to hire a team of



scholars to fill in the gaps when he faltered. He also sarcastically suggested that Sabinus, in poor health, should take up wrestling, pointing out the absurdity of thinking he could be strong through his fit slaves.

Seneca used this story to drive home the importance of true wisdom. Sabinus's belief that knowledge could be bought or borrowed is mocked. Wisdom and a sound mind cannot be purchased or delegated; they must be cultivated personally. The story underscores the futility of trying to acquire wisdom through superficial means and highlights the intrinsic value of genuine intellectual and moral development.

In his teachings for the New Church, Swedenborg also speaks of the importance of wisdom, both what it is and how it developed in a person. Swedenborg makes important distinctions that strike me as relevant to the current discourse. According to Swedenborg, knowledge, intelligence and wisdom are distinct yet interconnected. Wisdom is seen as a deeper, more profound understanding that comes from a love for what is good and true. It is rooted in spiritual principles and involves a higher level of insight and discernment. Wisdom is often associated with the ability to see the bigger picture, to understand the

underlying spiritual truths, and to apply them in a way that leads to genuine goodness and happiness.



Intelligence is considered to be more external and practical. It involves the ability to acquire knowledge, to reason, and to make sound judgments based on that knowledge. Intelligence is seen as a more cognitive

function that deals with understanding and processing information on a rational level. It is connected to education, learning, and the development of one's mental faculties.

Knowledge is merely the accumulation of information, facts, and data. It is the understanding of various concepts, theories, and ideas. In Swedenborg's writings, knowledge is seen as the foundation upon which intelligence and wisdom are built.

In essence, wisdom is viewed as a deeper spiritual insight that comes from a love for what is good and true, while intelligence is seen as a more practical and cognitive ability to acquire knowledge and make rational judgments.

Wisdom is rooted in the heart and soul, while intelligence and its foundation of knowledge are connected to the mind and intellect.

In short, knowledge and intelligence can come from a person's own efforts and experiences, while wisdom is granted by the Lord. The Writings teach that everyone is born with longings but acquires intelligence through education. However, true wisdom, which goes beyond mere intelligence, comes from the Lord. People are said to be kept in intelligence and wisdom in proportion to their connection

with the Lord. Without this spiritual connection, a person is described as being driven solely by their longings.

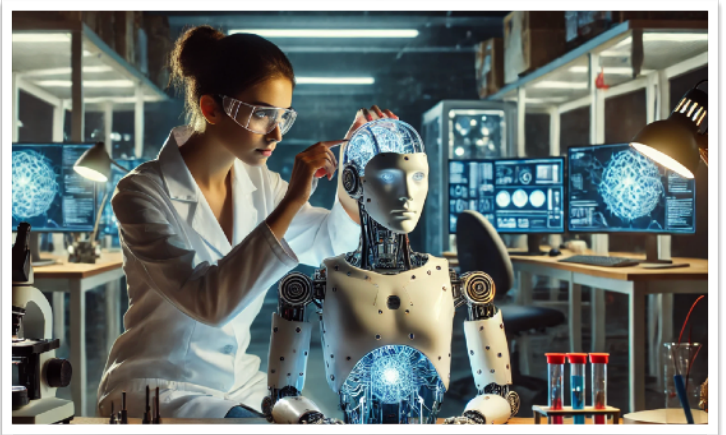
So, what have I learned from these parallel studies of and experience with the Stoics and AI in light of the Writings for the New Church? Simply put, don't confuse $\Lambda\Omega$ with AI.

In the Book of Revelation the Lord says "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." This passage symbolically represents the Lord as the God of heaven and earth, emphasising that He created



all things in heaven and on earth and governs them through His Divine providence. The reference to Alpha and Omega pertains to the Lord's Divine love, while Beginning and End relate to His Divine wisdom. In Swedenborg's explanation, every detail in the Word contains a marriage of love and wisdom or goodness and truth. This marriage of goodness and truth undergirds the structure of the universe, human life, and spiritual principles. Goodness is associated with love and the will, while truth is linked to wisdom and the intellect. The union of these two aspects is essential for the functioning of the human mind and the spiritual growth of individuals.

When considering Artificial Intelligence (AI), we must understand that AI operates based on algorithms, data, and programming created by humans. While AI can



process vast amounts of information and perform tasks efficiently, it lacks consciousness, emotions, and the ability to make moral judgments. In essence, AI does not possess a will or the capacity for genuine love or goodness.

The marriage of goodness and truth is possible only in conscious beings capable of spiritual growth and moral choices. Sure, AI can simulate certain aspects of human intelligence and behaviour, but it does not possess the inherent qualities necessary to engage in the marriage of goodness and truth. In other words (where AI is concerned) knowledge and intelligence are easy, wisdom is hard... wisdom is human.

As noted earlier, AΩ pertains to the Lord's Divine love. Maybe it is no accident that in AI there is no love. The ninth letter of the Greek alphabet is “ι” = iota, the smallest letter in the alphabet and one universally synonymous with things that are minuscule, tiny and insignificant.

There is no denying that Artificial Intelligence will impact our lives in unimaginable ways and probably already has, but let's never confuse AI with AΩ.

Howard

* * * * *

Food Pantry

(Reprinting this as there has been a terrific response to last month's appeal - Keep it Up.)

For many years we have been collecting, in bins just inside the foyer of the church, pantry items which we have formerly donated to the Exodus Foundation. Due to

difficulties around the logistics of regular collections, we have shifted our donations to the Salvation Army location in Chatswood. The Salvos already knew us, as we have been annually donating our fresh fruit and vegetable offerings from our Harvest service and annual Christmas toy drive.



I'm giving you this background because I would very much like to ask for your help. During my most recent delivery to the Salvos, I got to talking with one of the main volunteers. After expressing great appreciation for our small but regular donations she went on to say that the current economic conditions are creating more demand for their services and fewer donations. Between fewer volunteers, fewer donations coming in and greater demand, these organisations are struggling to meet the needs of our communities.

Please, if you can, collect any additional canned or dry goods in your weekly shop (even one or two items) and bring them to church, it would be most useful.

Howard

* * * * *



Report on the General Church **Week of Meetings**

As noted in the last issue of our Newsletter, Debra and I spent the last two weeks of June in the States. It was that rare year where the General Church of the New Jerusalem had organised both Clergy Meetings and an Assembly to be held consecutively over a one-week period. The Clergy Meetings were held over 3 days (25-27 June) and the Assembly over the following 3 days (28-30 June).

First let me share with you my impressions of the Assembly. Simply put — wonderful. The theme of Assembly 2024 was: “Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” The two Plenary sessions framed the theme well. Friday opened with Rev. Malcolm Smith taking us “Up The Mountain” and Saturday opened with Rt. Rev. Peter Buss bringing us “Down The Mountain” to serve others.

Nearly 1,000 people were in attendance from roughly 15 different countries. Over 50 presenters participated in nearly 50 presentations, large and small. From compassionate presentations on grief drawing smaller numbers to dynamic and engaging presentations on engagement in the digital age that drew hundreds. There were more sessions and topics than any individual could ever take in. Fortunately, an effort was made to record as many of the sessions as possible and those recordings are available at <https://gcassembly2024.org/> with more coming on as they are curated. I encourage you to take a look. The organisation alone was mind-boggling - 300 volunteers, 5,000 meals, lodging for 500+ attendees, childcare, shuttle services to cover the hundreds of acres that make up the Bryn Athyn community.

After so many years since our last Assembly, it was refreshing to be able to gather again with so many people; old friends, new friends and people we had not yet met. Debra's and my only regret was not having as much time as we would have liked to visit with more people.

Then I heard the voice of the
Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send? And who
will go for us?”
And I said,
“Here am I. Send me!”
(Isaiah 6:8)



The **Clergy Meetings** that preceded were equally refreshing. My colleague from Hurstville, Todd Beiswenger wrote that he attributes the positive vibe of the meetings to “the lack of controversy. Nobody was pushing an agenda this year; not the laity or the clergy.”

Like so many elements of modern life, meetings in recent years have been battlegrounds for the culture wars. Culture wars are wonderful stages on which to display the human ego, but terrible opportunities to let the Lord's light into our lives. For more on my thoughts around faith and the culture wars see my article “*Woke Like A Patriarch*” in the October 2023 Newsletter.

In many ways the landscape upon which our faith plays itself out is changing. The recent meetings, however, give me hope and remind me to “trust that [the Lord] governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good” (Arcana Coelestia 4855).

* * * * *

August 2024 Swedenborg Centre News

If you wish to glimpse a sample of what we might be exploring in the Friday Dr. Philip Groves reading sessions (noon and 7pm, every Friday), here is the opening idea of the book we currently intend to explore, “Spiritual Foundations”:

During our earthly life we are poised between two vast realms of spiritual existence, which simultaneously and continuously act and influence the totality of our speech, thought and behaviour.

Each person makes or breaks themselves spiritually according to whether they open themselves to an influx of forces, processes and falsities from hell or to an influx of forces, processes and truths from heaven.

Whether this fact be consciously recognised or not, the truth remains that every individual is what they are by virtue of the various forces and influences from these two realms which they admit into their own life by their own consent and confirmation.

Heaven and hell are not mere idle concepts or beliefs emerging from the mistiness of an irrational theology, but are actual realms connected with and yet extending infinitely beyond the boundaries of this earth.



Both heaven and hell comprise the spiritual world in which men and women inwardly move during the whole of their earth life and to which they automatically belong the instant that earth life terminates.

If that does not take your breath away, make your heart race, or bring a chill to your spine, then how deeply are we exploring our religious or spiritual life? Do we really believe the above statements to be true? Are we living what we believe? Do we understand reality clearly? What are we relying on to connect us with what the Writings promise us, a God-centred life? If we are indeed centred on the reality of God, then what kind of relationship do we have with Him - occasional, weekly, daily, hourly? Join us to explore such matters more deeply by visiting the Centre or joining in the Zoom sessions on Fridays, or even the twice-monthly discussions on Saturdays. For Zoom links, see the website at swedenborg.com.au in the right column containing the next three events and a “Join Zoom” button to make it easy for you to connect.

Our activities in the next month are as follows:

- Weekly ***Swedenborg Readings*** take place at 10am each Wednesday. The material on Regeneration is most illuminating. Join us if you can find the time.
- Fortnightly Tuesday ***Bible Studies*** with Howard Thompson are on at 11am, so that’s on August 6th and 20th.
- ***Dr Groves Readings*** will be at noon & 7pm EVERY Fridays.

- **Swedenborg Saturday** discussions are every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month, namely on August 3rd and 17th, always at 10am.

Have a pleasant yet contemplative month.

See you at the Centre or online.

Joe

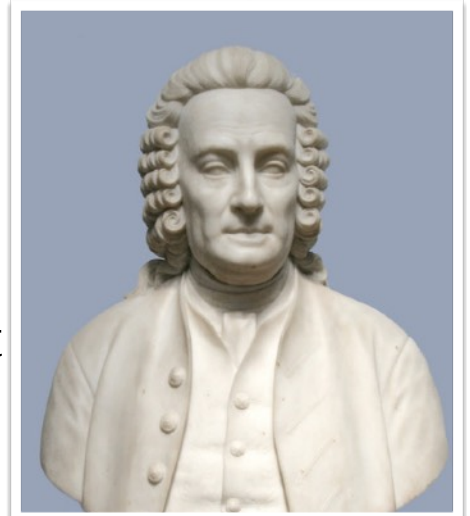
* * * * *

Stoicism Part IV: Freedom from Passions

In my continued series on Stoicism and its parallels with the New Church teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, we come to Part IV: Freedom from Passions.

One aspect of Swedenborg's writings that drew me to the New Church was his strong emphasis on rationality.

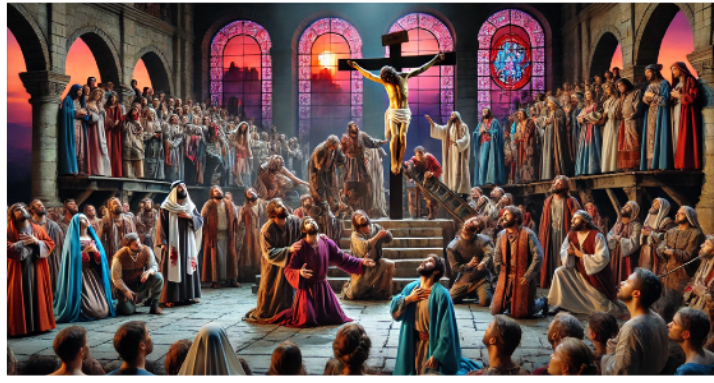
Swedenborg calls for us to use our ability to discern and think freely to align our intentions with what is good and true, ultimately leading to our spiritual growth and regeneration. It is, therefore, unsurprising that I was similarly drawn to Stoicism as I learned more about it.



Swedenborg

In our modern world, we like to think that we have ended slavery, and legally that would certainly be the case, but there are many forms of slavery beyond the historic example of one person owning another. Swedenborg would argue that many of us are enslaved by our passions, by the less-than-heavenly things that delight us. Anytime our will is not in alignment with the Lord's will, we are enslaved by hell

and the forces from hell, which like nothing more than to control and manipulate us through those delights by inflaming our passions.



Historically, detaching ourselves from our passions has not been an emphasis of traditional Christian churches. In fact, there are many examples from history, remnants of which we can still

see today, of churches manipulating their followers passions, delights and fears. From churches that preach the prosperity gospel to those that stoke the flames of anti-Semitism through Passion Plays; religions of all sorts have sought to control people with appeals to their base desires.

The New Church emphasises the importance of detaching ourselves from worldly desires as a means to elevate our spiritual state. Swedenborg explains that when individuals are engrossed in bodily and worldly interests, they are distanced from spiritual matters and the presence of heavenly influences. This separation occurs because the loves of worldly things obstruct the reception of what is celestial and spiritual. When our thoughts are immersed in worldly concerns such as possessions, riches, fears, and pleasures, we are pulled away from spiritual companionship with angels.

A life solely focused on worldly matters can hinder our spiritual growth and connection with the divine. When we



Marcus Aurelius

spend a lifetime deeply engrossed in worldly concerns, we will struggle to have genuine contact with heavenly beings in the afterlife. This detachment from worldly desires is essential for nurturing faith, charity, and goodwill towards others, which are fundamental aspects of spiritual life. By detaching ourselves from selfish and worldly desires, we create space for spiritual growth, love, and compassion.

The Stoic philosophers introduced the concept of *Apatheia*, a state of being free from destructive emotions and passions. In Stoic philosophy, passions are irrational and excessive impulses that disturb the mind and lead to suffering. *Apatheia*, therefore, is not about the absence of all emotions but rather the attainment of a balanced and



rational state where negative emotions do not dominate one's actions and decisions. This balanced and rational state comes from a life in alignment with the Logos, the rational principle with which

the Divine governs the universe. By understanding and accepting the natural order of things, a Stoic cultivates inner peace and resilience. This means recognising what is within our control and what is not, and focusing our efforts on maintaining virtue, wisdom, courage, and justice. Through this disciplined approach, one can experience tranquility and equanimity, even in the face of adversity.

Emphasising this freedom and how it appears in our daily lives, Seneca wrote, "No man is free who is not master of himself" (Letters to Lucilius 37.1). Further guidance on how to achieve this state in practice is given by Marcus Aurelius:

"If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment" (Meditations 8.47). I find this latter idea to be very useful in any negative interactions I may have with others. Recognising that if I am offended or "triggered" by something another has said or done, I am complicit in the offence is powerful. In other words, the other person did not offend me; I chose to be offended by what they said or did. That may take some time for readers of this piece to wrap their heads around.

Whether we are striving for *Apatheia* (freedom from passions) or the New Church notion of detachment from worldly desires, we are opening ourselves to influx from the Lord. When we do this, we are inviting the Lord to "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

Howard

* * * * *

Spring Women's Weekend **November 15-17, Hornsby**



We're doing it again! Ladies, mark your diaries: you're cordially invited to join other New Church-minded women across Australia and New Zealand for our

spring women's weekend. We'll be gathering **Nov 15-17** at an Airbnb in **Hornsby, NSW and via Zoom**. There will be a nice combination of fun and inspiring sessions on offer, including a guest speaker chiming in from the U.S. and once again assembling birth kits for disadvantaged women in developing countries – plus down-time to visit with our sisters and explore the area (and go for a dip in the on-site pool!?). If this interests you and you haven't already signed up, please let Jenn know (jenn@beiswenger.net). The deadline isn't until October, but the sooner we know who's coming, the sooner we can start planning our weekend -- and the sooner we can all get excited!

On the subject of assembling birth kits, we will need to raise \$1000 to pay for the supplies, as in previous years. Since we're planning this well in advance, there's no urgency yet; watch this space for further details! Thanks in advance for your consideration!

Jenn Beiswenger

* * * * *

2025 Retreat, Stanwell Tops
Thu 2nd - Mon 6th January

Retreat 2025 *Tuning Into Inner Life*

As well as living in our body and living in the world, we all live inwardly in our personal life. You inside you. You might call this our 'being'. It's this that is the whole focus of spiritual teaching and practice. It's this which is the gift of God to us and where God works with us to bring us to love heaven. It's the world of our loves, thoughts, intentions, freedom and choosing. It shapes our outward life, and it's the whole of our eternal life.

Swedenborg's teachings address this inner focus all the time, helping us to understand how it goes. Living in busy worldly lives can close us down from even noticing this inner life, let alone dealing with it. This means we can miss out on nurturing it. Why not come along to the Retreat where we are going to concentrate on bringing it to the surface and see if for what it is.

We are not going to have traditional talks, and just sit and listen but it will be all more personal and a sharing of our inner life. Some new ways of using the Writings will be presented that you may find helpful. As we become more aware of our inner life it brings the Word alive in us, opening up endless help from the Lord. This then helps us to deal with everyday life, with our feelings and how we cope with and help other people.

Do come and be a part of this new approach.

This retreat will be held at The Tops Conference centre at Stanwell Tops just south of Sydney. We have stayed there many times and have always had the highest care from the staff as well as comfortable facilities.

Arrival: Thursday, 2nd January 2025

Departure: Monday, 6th January 2025

Fully catered from Thursday dinner to Monday lunch

Ensuite twin rooms available.

For Booking Inquiries Contact:

nciaretreat@gmail.com

More information and details are available on our website: rosevillenewchurch.com.au



Minister's Contact Information and Office Hours

Rev. Howard A. Thompson

Office Hours: 11:00 am - 4.00 pm

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday

Email: revhathompson@gmail.com

Phone: 0432 357 475

August

2024

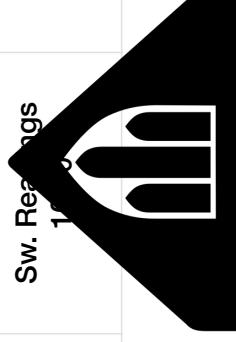
July

September

S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
28	29	30	31				29	30					

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
10.00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson						Insights from Dr. Groves Noon & 7pm	Swedenborg Saturday 10.00 - 12.00
4		5	6	7	8	9	10
NO SERVICE			Bible Study 11.00	Sw. Readings 10:00		Insights from Dr. Groves Noon & 7pm	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
10.00am Service of Worship Including Holy Supper Rev. Howard A. Thompson	Church Committee 7.30pm - 9.00pm		Sw. Readings 10:00		Insights from Dr. Groves Noon & 7pm	Swedenborg Saturday 10.00 - 12.00	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
10.00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson		Bible Study 11.00	Sw. Readings 10:00		Insights from Dr. Groves Noon & 7pm		
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
10.00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson			Sw. Readings 10:00				

Sw. Readings
10:00



ROSEVILLE NEW CHURCH

