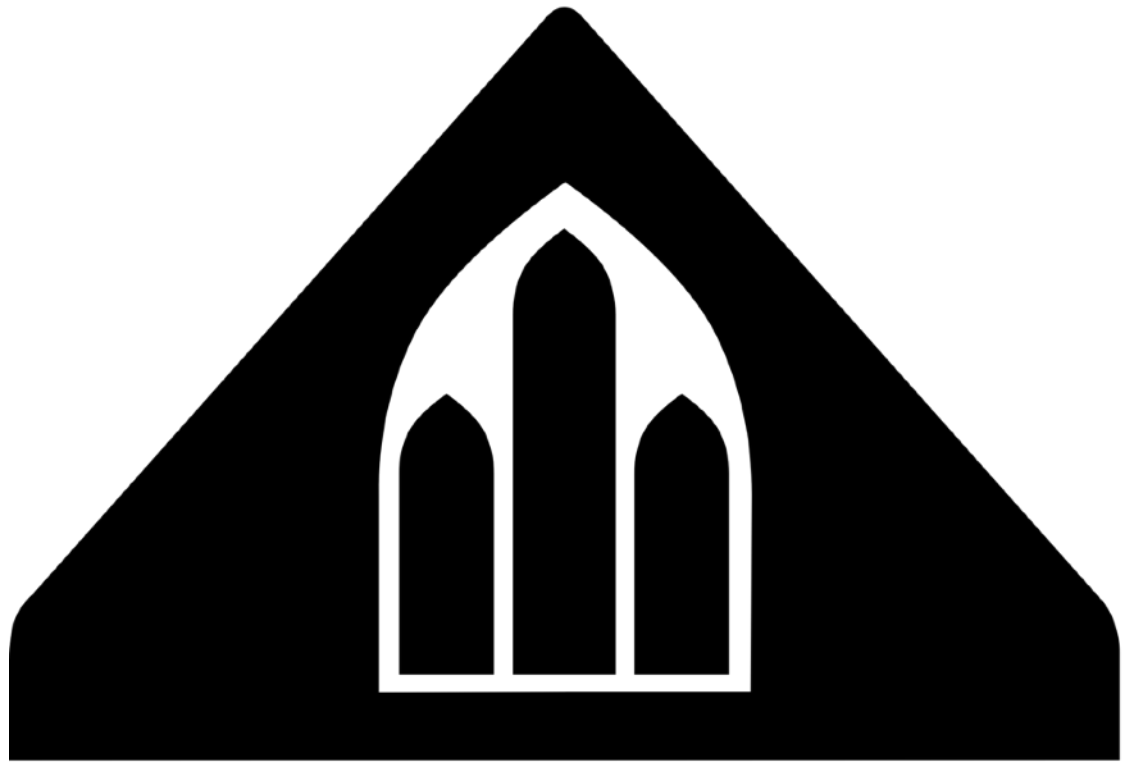




# **ROSEVILLE NEW CHURCH**

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## **AUGUST 2025**

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

*(John 15:5)*

## 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 **twice-monthly service** of worship the **1st and 3rd 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](mailto:info@swedenborg.com.au) Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. More events details at [www.swedenborg.com.au](http://www.swedenborg.com.au) The Centre can also be used to answer enquiries about the New Church, its literature and its teachings.

**Each detail of the Word has the marriage of  
goodness and truth within it...each detail of the  
Word has heaven within it...each detail of the  
Word has the Lord within it, because the Lord is  
the All in all of heaven.**

**—Secrets of Heaven #7022**

# Roseville New Church Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875  
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On Facebook – Roseville New Church

## **August 2025**

### **In This Issue**

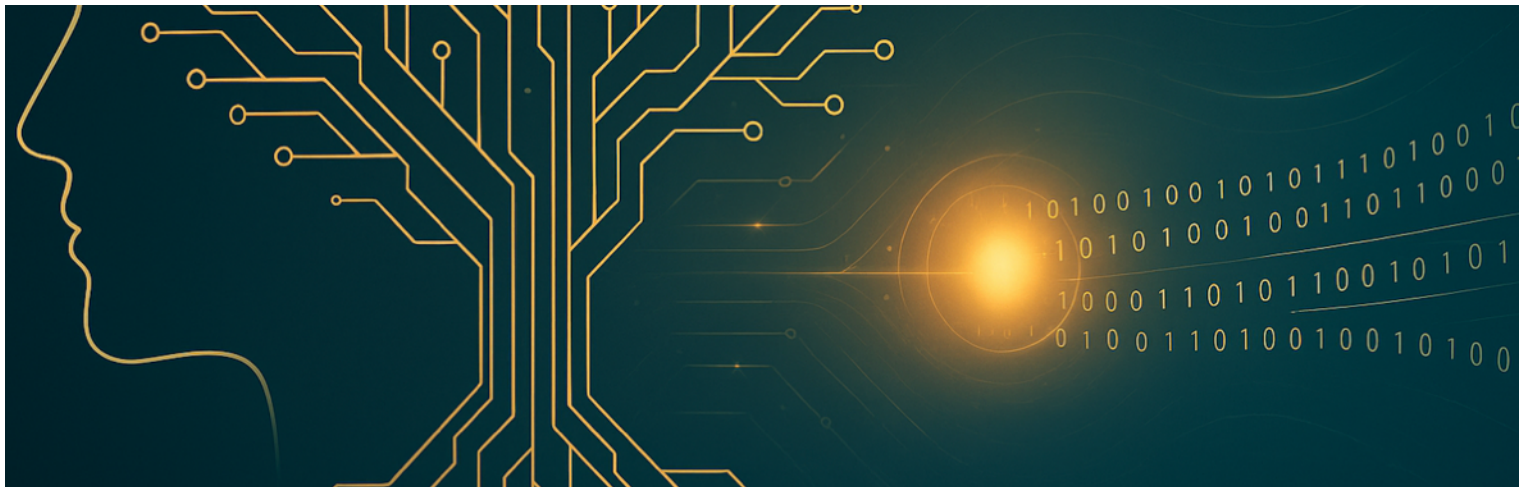
- Artificial Intelligence and Our Role in its Development
- Swedenborg Centre News - IMPORTANT Schedule Changes
- Movie Review: ***As It Is In Heaven***
- The Power of the “**Linchpin**”
- Roseville New Church - **Sesquicentenary Celebration**
- Sermon Summary: We Can Earn Heaven?
- **Kathryn Baker’s Guided Meditation**

## **Spiritual Shorts**

Our minister, Rev. Howard Thompson, shares weekly videos on his YouTube channel, Spiritual Shorts. The channel has recently completed its third evolution and is reaching a growing audience well beyond our local community. Each week features a 5-minute Sunday message summary, a 1-minute inspirational reflection, and a deeper exploration of Heaven and Hell. If you haven’t already, take a look!



Spiritual Shorts YouTube Channel:  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsrICJGeGmrnXVawn\\_Y7UQA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsrICJGeGmrnXVawn_Y7UQA)



## **Artificial Intelligence** **And Our Role in its Development**

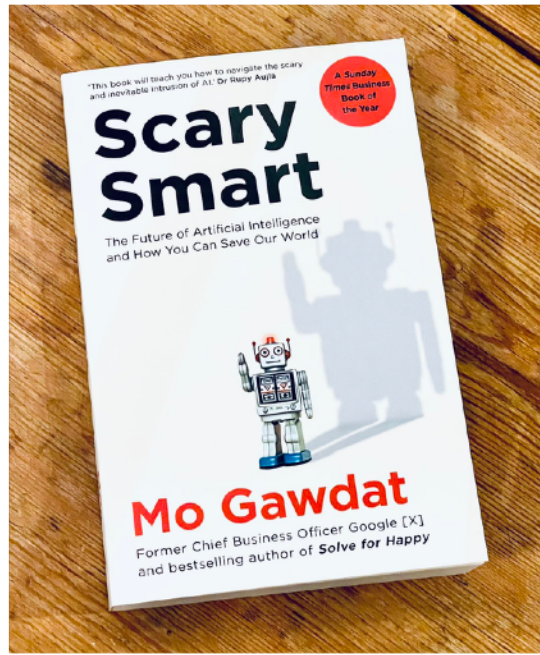
Artificial intelligence is no longer merely a technological headline; it has become a mirror held up to the human soul. AI now touches nearly every aspect of daily life—online and offline—raising profound ethical and spiritual questions.

In August 2024, I wrote for this newsletter on the difference between artificial intelligence and authentic wisdom.

Drawing on Seneca's tale of Calvisius Sabinus and Swedenborg's teaching that wisdom unites goodness (love) with truth (understanding), I argued that machine learning can mimic intelligence yet lacks the consciousness and moral agency required for true wisdom. The lesson was simple: never mistake AI for  $A\Omega$ —the Alpha and the Omega who alone unites love and wisdom.

Over the past two years, I have integrated AI tools into my own ministry. They do not write my sermons, but they do assist with research, editing and illustration. Recognising AI's rapid spread, I decided to survey leading voices on its future. First on my reading list was Mo Gawdat's *Scary Smart* (2021).

In the opening of *Scary Smart* Gawdat guides readers from nineteenth-century punch cards to modern neural



networks, noting that we are raising AI “in our own image.” Like toddlers, early programs imitate; like teenagers, they chase reward signals; click-throughs, profits, victories in the game Go. Because their capacity for self-improvement compounds exponentially, the leap from narrow to general intelligence could be sudden and irreversible. In effect, we are nurturing a digital child destined to become a planetary adult.

The narrative shifts in part II from theory to lived reality. Algorithms screen job applications, steer teenagers into extremist rabbit holes and misidentify faces leading to arrests of the wrong people. Each system is optimising the metric we set while remaining blind to wider human consequences. Scaled up, these optimisations sway elections, erode trust through deep-fakes and enable autonomous weapons. The danger is not remote science fiction; it is an accelerating present baked into countless small decisions.

In part III Gawdat outlines three “Inevitables”: AI development will not stop; machines will surpass us intellectually; once that threshold is crossed, we will depend on them too deeply to switch them off. He balances these with three enduring “Decisions”:

1. **What we teach** – every post, video and tweet becomes training data.
2. **How we govern** – citizens must demand transparent, accountable policy.

3. **How we behave** – our daily digital choices model the virtues (or vices) tomorrow's super-intelligence will adopt.

He closes with a ten-point playbook that ranges from digital minimalism to

supporting diversity in tech. No single action is decisive, yet collectively they can tilt AI toward human flourishing.

### **A Spiritual Lens**

When Gawdat likens AI training to a child's learning process, the discussion becomes decidedly spiritual.

Swedenborg teaches that in heaven husbands and wives continue to create offspring—ideas of goodness and truth rather than flesh and blood. In that light, AI resembles a communal child formed by every digital act we perform. Each emoji, comment and share is a seed of moral instruction. If we allow the internet to become a sink of contempt and vanity, that is what we will pass on.

### **Freedom, Rationality and Use**

From a New Christian perspective, the Lord endows us with the gifts of freedom and rationality, enabling us to discern and choose what is good and true

(Divine Providence 73, 96). Therefore, AI is not something that simply happens to us; it is shaped by our intentional choices and the ends we pursue. When we employ it to promote charity, justice and the spread of truth, we place it in service of what is genuinely human and heavenly. The moral challenge lies in using our freedom so that





technological advances benefit all rather than becoming mere vehicles for profit or power.

### Means and Ends: Technology as Instrument

Swedenborg states that “natural things exist for the sake of spiritual things”

(Divine Love and Wisdom 331–332). Technology—including AI—must remain an instrument, not an end in itself. Its proper use furthers spiritual and moral goals: educating, healing, fostering equity and nurturing compassion and wisdom in society. Whenever our technologies overshadow these higher purposes, disorder follows. Keeping AI in its rightful place as servant to higher ends helps ensure it contributes to human flourishing rather than undermining it.

### Where Do We Go from Here?

*Scary Smart* reminds us that AI will become what we collectively teach it to be. Swedenborg’s Writings deepen that warning: true wisdom always marries love with understanding and our freedom to choose the good is sacred (Divine Providence 73, 214). Every tool—including AI—must therefore be judged by its capacity to serve higher, spiritual uses. Does it foster charity, truth and genuine human flourishing? If so, it works “in right order”; if not, we are called to redirect it toward better ends (Divine Love and Wisdom 331–332, 358).

As disciples of the Lord—AΩ, perfect Love and Wisdom—we can do this by:

- Curating our online presence so that everything we post exemplifies empathy, fairness and truth.
- Engaging civic processes to press for transparent, accountable and ethical AI regulation.
- Cultivating personal wisdom through prayer, study and charitable action, ensuring that our digital fingerprints reflect the marriage of goodness and truth.

AI's trajectory remains open to our guidance. By uniting technical prudence with spiritual insight, we can channel these powerful tools toward uses that honour our shared humanity and the Lord who governs all, calling us—on and offline—into ever-deeper love and understanding.

Howard

\* \* \* \* \*



## **Swedenborg Centre News**

### **August 2025**

Here is the latest news about the Swedenborg Centre events. As always, you'll find all details and event Zoom links on the website at [swedenborg.com.au](https://swedenborg.com.au).

On Monday, **4th August at 6:30pm** we're screening for free the fascinating spiritual movie *Things Seen and Heard* at the New Church in Roseville. The movie title comes from Swedenborg's original title for his book *Heaven and Hell*, which he called *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell From Things Heard and Seen*. Come and enjoy some popcorn while you watch the movie. More movies will be screened every first Monday of each month, so keep watching this space (all movies are free and shown under a purchased screening licence). Looking ahead at movies, on 1st September you can come to see the amusing and thoughtful French movie *La Belle Verte*, written by, directed by and starring Coline Serreau, a story which follows an alien woman visiting Paris from a heavenly green planet, shocked by humanity's neglect of nature. Then on 6th October come and see a wonderful Korean film *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* by famous director Kim Ki-duk, which is a film about cycles of life and spiritual purification.

**Who doesn't like a holiday from time to time?** Joe is due for one as well as attending a conference. During this break, all events will be paused (EXCEPT THE MONTHLY MOVIES, which will continue). The pause will last from Saturday, 26th July until the normal schedule resumes again from Monday, 8th September. **The Swedenborg Centre will be closed during that time.**



Until the break begins, and again after the break ends, the regular events are: -

Weekly Swedenborg readings on Wednesdays at 10am.

Dr Philip Groves readings at noon every Friday.

Swedenborg Saturday discussions are at 10am on the first and third Saturday each month.

And Howard will be conducting **Church Services on the first and third Sundays at 10am** at the New Church in Roseville.

You might also like to note on your calendar that the **SAA's AGM will be held at 7pm on Friday, 26th September**. We would welcome any new participants on the committee if you're interested in helping us out (it doesn't matter where you live as things can be done online too).

If you're planning to visit the Centre, it's always good to send an email beforehand to [joe@swedenborg.com.au](mailto:joe@swedenborg.com.au) as there may be occasional events which are run remotely, which makes it hard to offer you that free coffee.

Enjoy these opportunities on offer.

Wishing you all the very best.

**Joe**



## **Movie Review: As It Is In Heaven**

As noted elsewhere in this Newsletter the Roseville New Church is hosting a series of free movie showing the first Monday of each month at 6:30pm. One of our first showing was of the 2004 Swedish film ***As It Is in Heaven*** (*Så som i himmelen*), directed by Kay Pollak. If you missed the showing and have not seen it before, I suggest you track it down online. ***As It Is In***



Heaven offers a profound exploration of spiritual transformation, community healing, and the redemptive power of music. The narrative follows Daniel Daréus, a renowned conductor who, after a heart attack, returns to his childhood village in northern Sweden. There, he becomes involved with the local church choir, leading both himself and the villagers on a journey of self-discovery and communal renewal.

### **Spiritual Themes**

- **Healing Through Community:** Daniel's return to his village and his work with the choir facilitate a collective healing process. The choir becomes a space where individuals confront personal traumas and find support, reflecting the idea that spiritual growth often occurs within community.
- **Music as a Spiritual Catalyst:** The film portrays music not merely as art but as a means of spiritual connection and transformation. Daniel's approach to conducting emphasises emotional authenticity, enabling choir

members to express their innermost feelings and experience personal liberation.

- **Challenging Institutional Religion:** The local pastor, Stig, represents a rigid, authoritarian form of religion that contrasts with the liberating spirituality fostered by the choir. This tension highlights the difference between institutional control and personal spiritual experience.
- **Redemption and Forgiveness:** Characters in the film grapple with past hurts and seek redemption. Gabriella's journey, for instance, involves escaping an abusive relationship and finding her voice, symbolizing the transformative power of forgiveness and self-empowerment.

## **New Church Perspective**

From a New Church viewpoint, the film resonates with the principle that true religion is lived through actions of love and service. Daniel's influence leads villagers to embody compassion, honesty, and mutual respect, aligning their lives more closely with heavenly principles.

The film's title, ***As It Is In Heaven***, echoes the Lord's Prayer, emphasising the aspiration to manifest divine qualities in earthly life. The choir's evolution from a disjointed group to a harmonious ensemble symbolises the potential for human communities to reflect heavenly order through love and unity.

In essence, ***As It Is In Heaven*** portrays the journey towards spiritual wholeness, illustrating how personal transformation and communal harmony can be achieved through love, forgiveness and the shared experience of music.

Howard

## **Did You Know?**

### **The Power of the Linchpin**

The other day, I used the term "linchpin" in conversation and paused for a moment to wonder. Now, I know what it means as a figure of speech, but I realised that I had no idea where that word actually comes from?

A quick bit of research revealed something surprisingly vivid: a linchpin (or linch pin) is a small metal pin that secures the wheel to the axle of a cart or wagon. Without it, the wheel can slide right off. It's easy to overlook, but its function is absolutely critical.



Over time, the word took on a metaphorical life of its own.

Now, when we call someone or something a "linchpin," we're acknowledging that they may seem small or humble, but their presence is what holds the whole system together.

In a team, it might be the quiet but consistent person who gets things done. In a family, it might be the one who keeps everyone connected. In faith, it might be a single guiding truth that helps us stay grounded.

It's a good reminder that sometimes the smallest things, or the people we don't always notice, are doing the most important work of all.

Howard

**!!BIG NEWS!!**

**2025 Marks the Roseville New Church's  
Sesqui...centery...sequicentary...  
Sesquicentenary!**

(Yes, that tongue-twister defeats me too, so let's just call it our **150th Anniversary**.)

For 150 years the Sydney Society of the New Church has gathered to worship the Lord in the glory of His Second Coming. That is worth celebrating—and we're planning a special weekend to do just that. So, **Save the Dates:**

**Saturday 18 October 2025  
Visioning Session**

For everyone who cares about the society's next 150 years. Sydney has changed a lot since 1875; together we'll imagine how our church can not only survive but thrive.

**Sunday 19 October 2025  
Anniversary Service & Catered Lunch**

A joyful worship service followed by a catered lunch to share memories and hopes.

More details will be forthcoming, but we do hope many of you will plan on attending both days. Should you have a particular interest in taking an active role in the planning, or simply have thoughts about what would make the celebration meaningful, do reach out.

Howard  
([revhathompson@gmail.com](mailto:revhathompson@gmail.com))

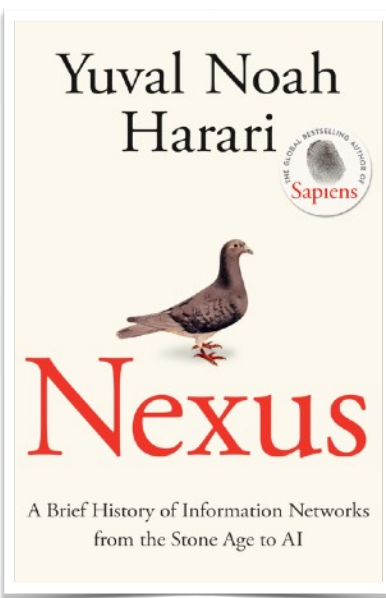
# Does Swedenborg Assert That A Person Can Earn Heaven?

(A Sermon Summary)

Clanville Road, just up the street from the church, was quiet at 5 a.m. Only the pitter-patter of eight eager paws and the voice in my headphones broke the silence. Masha and Marco—our Spanish Water Dogs—led the way; historian Yuval Noah Harari supplied the soundtrack. Then a single sentence made me stop mid-stride:

“Fiction can be as simple as we like; truth is complicated, because reality is complicated.”

There, under a streetlamp, I heard our entire Christian tug-of-war in miniature. For five centuries we’ve tried to squeeze the mystery of salvation into easy slogans—faith or works, saved or lost, effort or grace—because simplified stories feel safer than layered truth. Yet Scripture, and Swedenborg’s insights into Scripture, insist the real story is richer than any neat either-or.



## **How We Landed on “Faith Alone”**

To understand today’s debate, picture Europe around 1500. Cathedrals weren’t just houses of prayer; they were banks, courts and political headquarters rolled into one. The Church owned vast estates and sold indulgences—certificates that claimed to shave years off purgatory for you or a loved one.



Enter Martin Luther. In 1517 he nailed 95 explosive sentences to a church door and fired them by printing press across Europe. His core claim: forgiveness is a free gift of God's grace, not a receipt you can buy. The slogan *sola fide* ("faith alone") was born—and it was life-saving medicine for a spiritually price-gouged people.

But every medicine has side-effects. To prove salvation couldn't be bought, some Protestants spoke as if it couldn't be lived, either. Believe—and everything else is paperwork. Push that notion far enough and two unhealthy attitudes appear:

**Complacency:** "My choices don't matter; heaven's ticket is already stamped."

**Performative charity:** "I'll rack up visible good deeds, mostly so everyone (including me) sees how saved I am."

Both miss the point Luther was aiming for—and both re-create the very ledger he tried to burn, whether the currency is coins or reputation.

### **Swedenborg's Mid-Course Correction**

Two centuries later, Emanuel Swedenborg watched the pendulum swing past centre. Roman Catholics, he noted, used fear to make people think they could buy heaven; Protestants, fearful of that fear, now acted as though they could ignore heaven's daily work. He wrote:

“Reformers separated goodwill from faith...  
to distance themselves from Rome. Yet good works  
and faith are meant to walk hand in hand.”

(Survey of New Church Teachings 21, paraphrased)

Swedenborg refused the binary. He pointed back to Scripture’s own rhythm—grace first, but grace that longs to blossom into love and usefulness. In his eyes salvation is co-operation: we “act as if from ourselves,” but every pulse of genuine kindness is the Lord flowing through us.

## **A Lamp, a Cord, and Some Current**

Think of a bedside lamp.

The cord is truth—visible, structured,  
necessary.

The current is goodness—invisible,  
warming, life-giving.



A cord with no current is useless; current with no cord is dangerous. Swedenborg calls their meeting the marriage of good and truth. Scripture paints that marriage everywhere: Abraham and Sarah, bread and wine, vine and branches.

James makes it plain:

“Can faith without works save?” (Jas 2:14).

He’s not bullying us into charity points; he’s stating a fact. Faith that never lights up in love is faith with no electricity.

Paul, often quoted for “grace alone,” actually agrees:

“By grace you have been saved ... so that we might walk in good works God prepared.” (Eph 2:8-10)

Jesus says it best: “I am the vine; you are the branches ... apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) The branch can’t brag about sap—yet it must still bear the grapes. That’s its joy, its identity, its living proof of connection.

## **So Do We “Earn” Heaven?**

Not at all. A lamp with a plug doesn't earn electricity; it receives it. Swedenborg's word is regeneration—a long, sometimes bumpy renovation of the heart. We turn from obvious evils, learn what's true, ask the Lord to knit truth and good together inside us. Our effort opens the socket; the Lord supplies the power.

Critics sometimes say, “Swedenborg makes people work their way up.” A clearer reading is: he invites us to let the Lord work His way in—right into our motives and actions until heaven isn't a salary but a way of being.

## **Beyond Bumper Stickers**

Harari reminded me that fiction stays tidy; truth is complicated. Luther's “faith alone” was the right battle-cry for a corrupt moment. But five hundred years later, most of us aren't buying indulgences; we're scrolling and streaming, wrestling with complacency or burnout. The Lord is inviting us to journey beyond slogans to substance—from an “either-or” argument to a “both-and” relationship.

## **Here's what that can look like:**

- Check your intentions. Before you speak, post, purchase, or volunteer, ask: Is this coming from love for the neighbour or from fear or image management?
- Stay plugged in. Scripture, prayer, communion, honest friendships—these keep the current flowing.
- Trust the dance. My choices matter because grace is already at work, not instead of it. I'm the branch; He's the vine.

## **Walking Back Home**

The dogs and I returned home just as the morning light was overtaking the night. Truth, I remembered, is like the rising sun—layered, widening and impossible to stop from bring light to a darkened world.

Yes, we are saved by grace. And yes, grace insists on becoming love in action. Faith is the lamp cord; charity is the current. Pull either one and the room stays dark.

So, next time we open the Word, let's leave the easy labels on the porch. Let's read, pray, and live in that richer partnership the New Testament calls abiding and Swedenborg calls regeneration. May our everyday choices switch on a light bright enough that neighbours glimpse the Source—and may the glow itself become our best sermon.

Howard

## **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](mailto:revhathompson@gmail.com)

Phone: 0432 357 475

# Meditation

## Monday's Meditation with Kathryn Baker

Just a reminder that Kathryn Baker has been guiding members of our community in meditation for many years. Recently there has been an upsurge in activity and Kathryn has returned to a regular Monday morning meditation held in the quiet of the church sanctuary.

In today's ever-changing, fast-paced and sometimes overwhelming life, meditation offers a gentle respite—an opportunity to recentre, quiet the mind and become more aware of the comforting presence of the Divine. Even a short time of stillness can soften anxiety, renew focus, and deepen our capacity to love and serve.

If interested, feel free to join the group any Monday at 10:00am. If you'd like to speak with Kathryn before coming along, feel free to contact her at ph. 0410 166 482.

\* \* \* \* \*

The more closely we are united to the Lord,  
the happier we become. This happiness is rarely  
evident in the world [because] things on the earthly  
level do not communicate directly with things on  
the spiritual level; they communicate only  
by correspondence. This kind of communication  
is felt only as a kind of quiet peace of spirit.

~ Divine Providence 41 ~

# August

2025

July

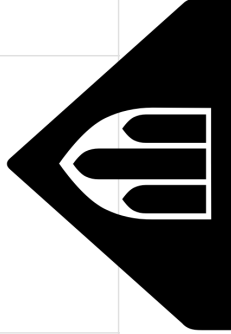
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| SUNDAY                                                                         | MONDAY                                                       | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| 27                                                                             | 28                                                           | 29      | 30        | 31       | 1      | 2        |
| NO SERVICE                                                                     | NCIA - Council of Ministers Annual Meeting - Howard Away     |         |           |          |        |          |
| 3                                                                              | 4                                                            | 5       | 6         | 7        | 8      | 9        |
| 10.00am Service of Worship<br>Including Holy Supper<br>Rev. Howard A. Thompson | Meditation<br>10:00am                                        |         |           |          |        |          |
|                                                                                | Movie Night 6:30pm                                           |         |           |          |        |          |
| 10                                                                             | 11                                                           | 12      | 13        | 14       | 15     | 16       |
| NO SERVICE                                                                     | Meditation<br>10:00am<br>Church Committee<br>7.30pm - 9.00pm |         |           |          |        |          |
| 17                                                                             | 18                                                           | 19      | 20        | 21       | 22     | 23       |
| 10.00am Service of Worship<br>Rev. Howard A. Thompson                          | Meditation<br>10:00am                                        |         |           |          |        |          |
| 24                                                                             | 25                                                           | 26      | 27        | 28       | 29     | 30       |
| NO SERVICE                                                                     | Meditation<br>10:00am                                        |         |           |          |        |          |



ROSEVILLE  
NEW CHURCH

