

Between April 1745, when his open experiences of the spiritual world started, and December 1748, when he started writing *Secrets of Heaven*, Swedenborg wrote some 5,000 folio pages of material that he never published. He started by drafting a presentation of deeper meaning in Genesis and Exodus, turned then to Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings, then went back and went through Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and then did Isaiah and made a beginning on Jeremiah. All this has been published posthumously, both in Latin, as *Adversaria*¹ or *Notes*, and in English as *The Word Explained*.² Later, he started systematically recording brief accounts of his experiences as they happened, his “*Spiritual Diary*.” The earliest entries are dated in August 1747, and the latest in my Latin edition is from September of 1749. This material too has been published both in Latin and in English.

He also wrote what have been referred to as biblical indexes, but that title is misleading. One, which seems to go from Deuteronomy through Second Kings, is more like a concordance, since it offers brief summaries of the biblical text at each entry. This, incidentally, is obviously a fair copy—very neatly written. In another manuscript, we find the beginnings of an “index” of Genesis, which has been carried only a little way into chapter thirteen. At that point, it was discontinued, and the same folio volume was used for an “index” of Isaiah (at least as far as chapter 54 [out of 66]). Now, though, in Swedenborg’s treatment of both Genesis and Isaiah, we find not just an index or a concordance but outright exegesis, with comments on the deeper meaning of each term in each of its listed occurrences. These

[†] The following article, presented at the Fryeburg New Church in 2011, is most definitely not intended as the last word on the subject. It is offered as a first look at a subject that merits far more attention than it has thus far received, in the hope and expectation of a great deal more to come. (G.F.D.)

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¹ J. F. I. Tafel, ed. *Eman. Swedenborgii Adversaria in Libros Veteris Testamentis* (Tübingen 1842–1854).

² Alfred Acton, tr. *The Word of the Old Testament Explained* [Eight volumes plus Introduction and Index] (Bryn Athyn, PA: 1927–1951).

“indices” (my dictionary would allow and probably prefer “indexes”) are available only in phototype volumes of the manuscripts themselves, and are clearly in first draft format.

Of all this material, only the *Diary*³ has been given much attention, and that attention has been slight. Benz’s⁴ treatment of *The Word Explained* dwells almost entirely on Swedenborg’s comments on his spiritual experiences, which are scattered quite sparsely through that extensive work. Sigstedt⁵ merely notes briefly that “Some of the expressions—and to some extent even the ideas—of his previous works were taken from orthodox theology and embody the dogmas of the Lutheran church in which he had been raised” (p. 217). That is in fact an understatement. Even so, it surely should have opened the door to further inquiry, but it seems instead to have closed it. There is a story waiting to be told, and while some years of work are needed to tell it well, the rough outline seems fairly clear. It is, I have come to believe, a vital part of the story that Swedenborg summed up late in *True Christianity*⁶ (§ 779), as follows: “. . . from the first day of that call I have not received anything whatever pertaining to the doctrines of that church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while I was reading the Word.” Now we can watch this happen.

To start with Sigstedt’s understatement, we may look at a few samples of what she is talking about. “In the beginning,” that is, in commenting on the creation story, Swedenborg wrote, “The creation was done and accomplished by means of speech, or of the Word. The creation itself is credited to God the Parent, but the speech or the Word to the second Person of Divinity, his only-begotten Son, . . . while the efficient cause is the Holy Spirit” (§ 4). Commenting on Genesis 29:21, he notes that “God could have saved the world by an infinite number of means, but this was the only one:

³J. F. I. Tafel, ed, *Eman. Swedenborgii Diarii Spiritualis*. [Successive parts published between 1843 and 1847 in London: Wm. Newbury, Tübingen: Verlagsexpedition and Henricum Lappium, and Stuttgart: Ebner et Seubert]. See also J. D. Odhner, *Spirituales Experientiae* (Bryn Athyn: Academy of the New Church, 1983–1997).

⁴Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*, Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, Tr. (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002).

⁵Cyriel Odhner Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic: The Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952).

⁶Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, Jonathan S. Rose, tr. (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2011).

that the Messiah himself should take upon himself all forms of guilt and become the righteousness that is imputed by him to believers" (§ 585). As the story progresses, we find that the devil is a fallen angel (Volume II, § 136, at Genesis 37), that the time will come for "a gathering of all in heaven and on earth, when God Messiah will come to judge the whole world" (Volume II, § 503 at Genesis 40:19), and that "by faith alone we fix our minds on God Messiah, and at the same time on what God Messiah suffered. This insight is what makes it possible for us to reach him and acknowledge him, and so to reach Jehovah the Father through him . . . then God Messiah imputes his righteousness to [us]" (Volume II, § 527, at Genesis 40–41).

This is not just "some of the expressions—and to some extent, even the ideas" of orthodox Lutheranism. Page after page after page, it is the faith of Swedenborg's own childhood, a faith that is quite appropriate to states of childlike trust (see, for example, *Secrets of Heaven* 561).⁷ It can certainly be understood as an empirical instance of the doctrine of "remains." It is not hard at all to believe that the emotional impact of meeting with angels reawakened a quite lovely character of heart that had been lying dormant though years of striving for recognition and success, dealing with big business and big government. This was not a faith hammered out through theological debate but a faith that he loved; and this becomes more and more evident as the story proceeds.

There is a book to be written on his exegesis of the deeper meaning of Scripture in *The Word Explained*. His methodology is explicitly typological, seeing Old Testament events as foreshadowing future events, and naming them as "types" of things to come. Cain's murder of Abel is a "type" of the crucifixion, for example (*WE* 94).⁸ This is a mode with deep roots in Christian thought, clearly present in several of Paul's epistles and especially clear in Hebrews. At this point, Swedenborg sees the deeper senses

⁷ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Secrets of Heaven*, Volume 1, Lisa Hyatt Cooper, tr. (West Chester, PA: 2008).

⁸ The numbering of this material is confusing. Swedenborg himself started over at one point, and while Tafel's Latin edition faithfully notes Swedenborg's volume divisions, it has been variously bound. In his translation, Acton numbered the entire work consecutively, even going so far as to reduce the total number of sections by combining many of the shorter ones. The "one-liners" §§ 6305–6312 cited below, for example, are Acton's § 6656, with Swedenborg's § 6313 as § 6657.

of the Word simply as extensions of the literal story to increasingly inclusive categories of humanity. So what Jacob does in a given passage, for example, is on a deeper level typical of what his descendants will do, on a still deeper level what “people like Jacob” in the story will do, and on an even deeper level what “people like Jacob” throughout the world will do. At the deepest level, it is about “the Jacob side” of God Messiah and his kingdom, the true church.

What emerges is a history of the church, with God Messiah present from the beginning, but with humanity gradually turning away from him. The first sign of renewal was when Abram (who of course was a gentile) “trusted the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Abraham’s descendants ignored the inner law, though, so God Messiah, largely through the lavish use of miracles, kept them externally on track, primarily so that he could come into the world as a descendant of Abraham, the epitome of true faith. All this while, he was actually neglecting the gentiles who were the true church (WE 589)—a situation typologically foreshadowed by the seven years in which Leah, the external church, was fertile, and Rachel, the true bride, was barren (see especially WE 765) When God Messiah did come in the flesh, the faith of Abraham was revived (see Romans 4:3), and the Christian church became the church of the gentiles openly—the true church of God Messiah, the church in whose loving arms Swedenborg had been raised.

This theme seems to fade from view, though, as the commentary progresses, and more and more attention is given to the correspondential meaning of specific terms and relationships. At this point, the primary protagonists are God Messiah and his “choir of angels” on the one hand, and “the devil and his crew” on the other, with humanity in general vacillating between what God Messiah is giving from within and what self and the world are offering from without. There is motion toward the view of the inner meanings as we find them in *Secrets of Heaven*, but this is still little more than theological reflection of a relatively simplistic, childlike kind.

When and how, then, did the light *really* dawn? He had to let go of the old before he could take in the new. This took quite a while; and it seems to have happened in stages, with three critical turning points. The first

occurred while Swedenborg was working on Genesis 47. This is where the seven years of famine in Egypt begin, and where in order to buy grain from Joseph, the Egyptians give him first all their money, then all their livestock, and then their land and themselves, becoming slaves. “All the silver,” Swedenborg writes, “in the case of the individual, means all insights into earthly matters (among the Babylonians, all the things with which they buy spiritual credits [we’ll come back to those “Babylonians”]) and likewise all the skills that follow from those insights” (II, § 1061). The livestock mean “all our more inward abilities” (§ 1062). Then it gets intense.

The actual insights are meant by the silver, and they are of no use apart from their application to spiritual matters. These are taken away first, as serving no useful purpose, which at this point has been done, for they lack relevance to heavenly matters (if I am deprived of these, as now seems to be the case, the insights thus far granted me by the divine mercy of God Jesus Christ are of no use, so my labor thus far has been in vain; as follows) (§ 1063).⁹

Think for a moment of all he had achieved as an engineer and scientific researcher. Add the hundreds of pages of biblical study and exegesis, and picture this fifty-six-year-old man overwhelmed by a sense of total failure. Everything he has done is “of no use.” When he came to publish his volumes on the deeper meaning of Scripture, he would present that meaning as applying to humanity in general. He experienced it as aimed directly at himself. He continues:

The livestock and such, along with the horses, are likewise deeper insights—the horses, for instance, pleasures and desires of the world (these too have been taken from me, so that I dare nothing, I know nothing, where I am headed) (§ 1064).

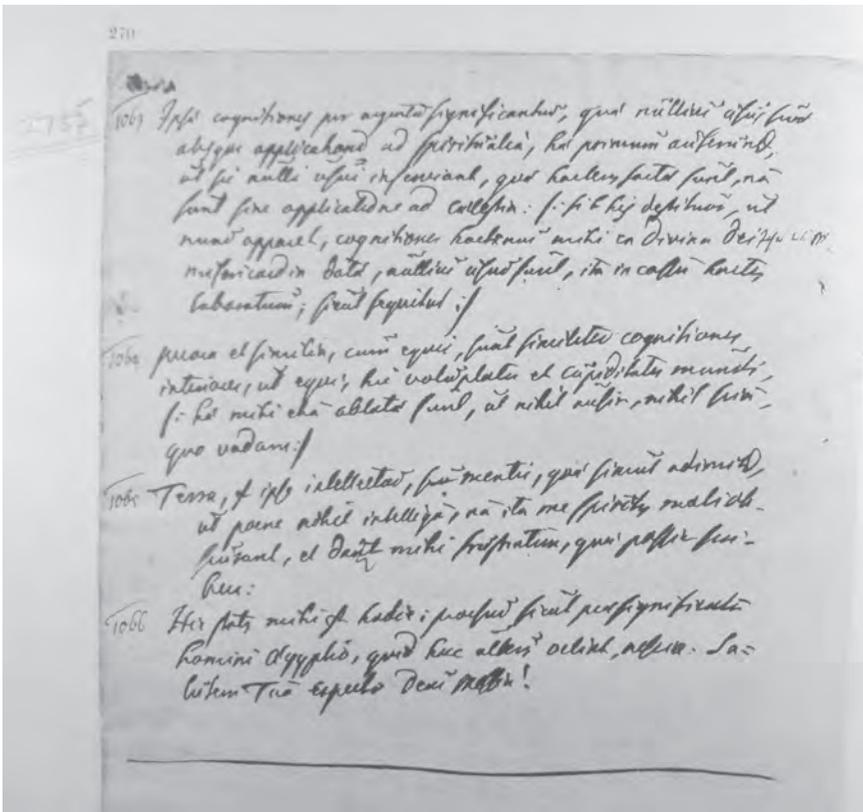
⁹ §§ 1063–1066 from Photolithograph Vol. VIII (*Adversaria* II) p. 270.

Then,

The earth is the understanding itself, of the mind, which is taken away at the same time, so that I understand almost nothing, for evil spirits are so beclouding me, and what I am able to write is given me in bits and pieces: (§ 1065).

And finally,

That is my state today, exactly as foretold for the Egyptian person. What else these things may intend, I do not know. I await your salvation, God Messiah! (§ 1066).



Swedenborg, in other words, identifies completely with the Egyptians who have step by step given up their wealth, their livestock, and their land, and finally themselves.

This is followed by a bold line drawn across the page, and the rest of that page is blank. It is almost as though his own slate has been erased. The word “vastation” comes to mind.

Some years later, he would write that “It is common knowledge that there are many people in the church who are influenced by the Lord’s Word and devote a great deal of labor to reading it. There are few, though, who do so with a view to being taught about the truth. Most of them actually stay within their dogma and just work to confirm it from the Word” (*Secrets of Heaven* § 4368:2).¹⁰ Swedenborg had certainly been influenced by the Lord’s Word. He had certainly been devoting a great deal of labor to reading it. He had been finding confirmation of the faith that he loved. He had, though, been doing all this with a view to being taught about the truth, and now he found himself at the parting of the ways. It was telling him things he did not want to hear, and he was listening.

Much to his credit, he then picked up his quill again and got back to work, and while a cursory scan of his treatment of the Bible shows interesting changes in approach (in Judges, for example, he pays very little attention to the narrative but dwells at some length on the Song of Deborah in chapter 5), there seems to be no crisis of similar importance until he gets to what we can identify as the second turning point. This came as he was working on the laws for the year of jubilee in Leviticus. Leviticus 25:24 reads, “Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.”

This prompted the following series of cryptic “one-liners” (from Tafel’s *Adversaria* Part 2):

6305. So the land must be redeemed, that is, what is meant by the land, namely the slaves (see verse 55).

6306. Because we are wanderers, that is, cast out of the kingdom, so we need to be redeemed.

6307. If we were native inhabitants of heaven and had not been cast out, we would not need to be redeemed.

¹⁰ *Arcana Coelestia*, Standard Edition.

6308. The “possession” is heaven, but it is not a possession of anyone as personal property. That is why it says, the land is God Messiah’s, and we are wanderers and aliens, and need to be adopted.

6309. It is only the fruit, because it is not personal property.

6310. It follows most clearly from this that no mortal can sell heaven, for it does not belong to anyone but God Messiah.

No problem so far—this is perfectly good Lutheran doctrine.

6311. The produce or the fruit, though, is what comes from heaven—that is, from the possession, and therefore from the Possessor, God Messiah.

6312. [The fruits] are then faith, charity, and the works of charity.

6313. Anyone can sell this as produce, for we do seem to be able to distribute this, that is, to teach it.

Now we’re on dangerous ground. This seems to be saying that our works *are* in some way our own.

6314. “The poor” are said to be those who either sell these things or go into slavery; so the possession too, or the land, which is the same as the person, can go into slavery. Slavery is working and meriting a salary under the banner of God Messiah.

But even what we do “under the banner of God Messiah” is slavery if we think we merit a salary for doing it.

6315. Redemption has to do with the produce, not the possession.

6315. The produce is charity and the works of charity: we are redeemed and saved depending on these.

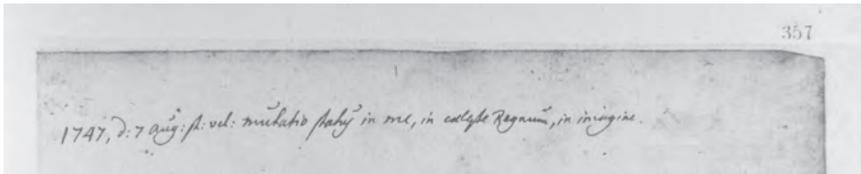
So his childhood faith was dead wrong and dead right at the same time. Our salvation depends on our works, but our works do not earn us heaven.

6316. These matters are most obscure to me so far, and there is no way I can understand them. So I lay them aside, for I have never been so distressed, so perplexedly distressed.

The fact that this was a landmark event is underscored by the fact that it is one of the very few that is dated. It happened on July 22, 1746.

We should not take this lightly. The depth of his perplexity and distress is due to the fact that this seems to run counter to his beloved childhood faith, the beauty of simple trust in God Messiah. It teeters on the edge of the “Babylonian” or Roman Catholic emphasis on works, the way they use them to “buy spiritual credits,” the whole scorecard system of sins and penances. This feels like nothing less than the death of innocence itself.

Again, he kept at it. It seems that the third turning point, the resolution, came over a year later; and as we might expect, it came in the course of his further study of the Bible. At some point after this, he started the new index of Genesis mentioned at the beginning of this article. While there is no direct indication of why he discontinued it, at the top of the first page of that index there is a most intriguing sentence: “A change of state in me, into the celestial kingdom, in an image.”¹¹ It may well be that what prompted the change of course was this change of state. It is dated August 7, 1747.

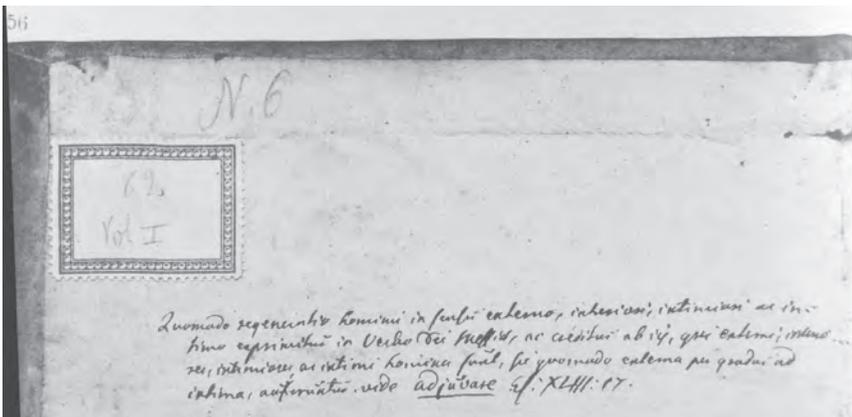


¹¹ See image from Photolithograph Vol. IV (*Index Biblicus I*) p. 357.

It may not be coincidence that he abandoned his Genesis index shortly after finishing Genesis 12, in which Abram is commanded, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:10). What would that have said to him about his loyalty to his father’s faith? What expectations might it raise concerning the land that the Lord was promising to show him?

This introduces the conclusion of “the missing chapter,” which is signaled right next door to the statement about his change of state. At the top of the basically blank page facing that first page of the index is another sentence:

How our regeneration is expressed in the outer, inner, still more inward, and inmost sense of the Word of God Messiah, and how it is believed by people who are outer, inner, still more inward, and inmost, so how outer things are lifted up step by step to the inmost. See *adjuvare* Isaiah 43:17¹² (44:2 in modern Bibles¹³).



This certainly does not sound like typology. It sounds very much like the enlightenment that comes when the inner is opened so that we see “from within” (*Secrets of Heaven* 10551:2).¹⁴ The verse in question reads as follows: “Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you.”

¹² See image from Photolithograph Vol. IV (*Index Biblicus* I) p. 356.

¹³ Swedenborg was at this point using the Latin translation of Immanuel Tremellius, whose chapter divisions differed at some points from the usual.

¹⁴ *Arcana Coelestia*, Standard Edition.

This of course sends us to the entry for *adjuvare* in the index that immediately follows, and since it begins with the letter “a,” there are not too many pages to turn. Bear in mind, though, that the index was not written in alphabetical order. He would have started with chapter 1, verse 1, and proceeded verse by verse, and it would have taken quite a while to get to chapter 43.

We can take the shortcut, though, and when we do, this is what we find. *Adjuvare* [“to help”], for providing assistance so that we may be reformed.” In its outer sense, it is for people to whom it seems that their own efforts contribute to their reformation; in the inner sense, for people who demand something of themselves for their regeneration; in the still more inward sense, for people who know in theory that they are capable of nothing but still think they are somehow involved, and in the inmost sense for people who claim no credit whatever for themselves.”

We could not ask for a more beautiful resolution of Swedenborg’s perplexity. His childhood faith is completely intact, but is now the seed of a goal to be reached, the seed that must fall into the ground and die. It is the innocence of infancy that foreshadows the innocence of wisdom, and step one is leading a moral life that is the necessary foundation of a spiritual life. It is the gradual opening of deeper levels of the mind. It is hard to imagine how Swedenborg must have felt when he realized that this whole transformative process was vividly imaged in the first chapter of Genesis. Incredibly, all that intense meaning will get compressed into three little Latin words, one of the most frequent phrases in the theological works, one that occurs over one hundred and fifty times—*sicut a se*, “as if of oneself.”

To summarize, Genesis 47, with the Egyptians selling themselves into slavery, was the brick wall. Leviticus 24:25, the redemption of the land, pinpointed the problem. Isaiah 43:17, with its contrast between God’s power and our powerlessness, marked the dawn of a new day; and with *adjuvare*, the clouds finally parted.

The unwritten chapter of Swedenborg’s life seems to be saying that *sicut a se* is not just a clever solution to a theological problem, something given to us through Swedenborg’s extraordinary mind. It comes to us also and perhaps even primarily through his heart. It is one of the loveliest phrases in the doctrines. □