

THE DOCTRINE OF CORRESPONDENCE: A REVIEW STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas regarding discrete levels of existence have been part of the history of ideas from very ancient times, embodied particularly in religious writings, in practices surrounding the dead, and in mystical and occult literature. Ideas concerning influences of realms beyond the material are also present in animism.

In Western thought, questions surrounding these different levels found early expression in works of Plato and Aristotle. In the course of time and principally through the agency of Thomas, the Aristotelian view of the world became the one accepted into the body of Christian thought. In this view, the world of nature has existence independent of man; it is an objective reality, susceptible of examination to discover the manner of its operations. Thus the church took on a stance which gave to the material realm a sure reality against the Platonic view in which the material plane was as nothing compared to the transcendental one from which it stemmed.

Having accepted Aristotelian astronomy, physics and chemistry, and biology, the church disallowed the possibility of serious consideration of other world views—it was acceptable to postulate them as mere working hypotheses, but they were not to be taken seriously, as part of one's belief system.¹ Thus the church fettered mankind's thought about itself and the world around it.

The story of the freeing of mankind from these chains has been told often enough. Suffice it here to say that through the writings of men like Boyle, Francis Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, and the firm establishing of the experimental method—institutionalized in the Royal Society—the old order was overthrown and the modern, mechanistic natural philosophy we now call science was established.

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¹ This is testified to in the preface to Copernicus' major work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium Libri IV* (1543) in which he revived the heliocentric concept of the solar system.

This triumph of mechanistic philosophy over the magical and organic traditions was not won overnight. It is documented in Kearney's *Science and Change: 1500 to 1700*. It may well be that the dominance of mechanistic philosophy is waning, possibly because of its strong association with a materialistic philosophy with which mankind—and I mean the common man as much as others—is becoming increasingly disenchanted. Materialism simply does not bring meaning and satisfaction to human life. But modern science also seems to be leaning in a direction which requires the operation of some metaphysical power not susceptible of discovery by experimentation, although necessitated by experimental evidence. David Foster's *The Philosophical Scientists* (1985) offers some interesting thoughts along these lines. And the new interest in Eastern philosophical approaches to mankind and nature perhaps also reflects disenchantment with the way things have gone.

Returning to our theme, the world of the Enlightenment that Swedenborg entered was one in transition; the way of experimental science was being pursued with increasing vigor, while the certainty of spiritual realities was being challenged. The scene was further complicated by the philosophical enquiries of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Hobbes; and men of faith like Descartes, while being instrumental in establishing a mechanistic philosophy of the world, still held to a belief in the spiritual plane of existence.

Descartes and other philosophers resolved the mind-body interaction problem in various ways, with pre-established harmony (Leibnitz), physical influx (Aristotle and the Schoolmen), and occasionalism (Descartes) being part of contemporary thought on the matter.

It should be emphasized that there *is* a real problem here. Even if you disallow the possibility of the existence of a spiritual world, the problem of the manner of the connection of the mental and bodily realms is still unresolved. For example, how, from having a sense impulse, do we gain sense perception? And how from this, do we engage in thought?²

For Swedenborg in the early 1730s this kind of question was uppermost in his mind: firstly, how could the Infinite connect to the finite in the

²For a commentary on this problem see Edward F. Allen, "Reflections on First and Last Things Said." *The New Philosophy* 93 (July-Sept. 1990), pp. 353-354.

process of creation? This for him was the fundamental cosmogonic question. Then, in a parallel, analogical, way, he asked how does the soul connect or interact with the physical body? It was in the quest for a solution to this question that Swedenborg developed the idea of correspondence on the basis of the contemporary theory.³

The story of this quest can be found in works he wrote from 1734 to 1745, the years of the publication of his *Principia* (Leipzig, 1734) and *De Cultu et Amore Dei* (London, 1745). The most detailed account of this in relation to the doctrine of correspondences is found in Inge Jonsson's *Swedenborgs Korrespondenslära* (Stockholm, 1969).⁴

The necessity Swedenborg recognized for a means for the causative spiritual plane to act on the material led to the quest spoken of above. Beyond this, he applied the doctrine of correspondences to the exposition of the internal meanings of some of the Bible. The search for inner meanings in the Scriptures has a long history which we cannot give here. Suffice it to say that, as with the soul-body problem and the problem of the mechanism of the interaction of the metaphysical and material worlds, Swedenborg was not alone in his desire to expose the inner meanings of Scripture. What did set him apart, however, was his application of the doctrine of correspondences to biblical exegesis, together with the declaration that he received his insights as revelation from the Lord alone as he read the Biblical texts.

As is well known, Swedenborg's writings included many volumes of exegesis—of Genesis and Exodus (*Arcana Coelestia*, 1749-56), and of the book of Revelation, (*Apocalypsis Revelata*, Amsterdam, 1766) as well as others. In these works, the internal sense is to the letter of Scripture as the soul is to the body. Seen in this way, there is a close parallel between Swedenborg's earlier philosophical endeavors and these later exegetical ones.

If there is one doctrine that qualifies all of Swedenborg's thought as expressed in his theological period, it is that of correspondences. Without it, the whole structure of Swedenborgian and New Church philosophy and theology collapses.

³See Inge Jonsson (1970).

⁴In this work Jonsson provides a summary of the whole text. This summary, translated by Norman Sjöman, was published in *The New Philosophy*, April 1970, pp. 299-327.

The need for it arises from his doctrine of causation which, put in simple terms, has “ends” residing in the Infinite Creator, “causes” emanating from the spiritual world, and “effects” appearing in the material plane of existence. These communicate “by correspondence,” the influence (communication) of a higher plane on a lower one being called “influx.” This connection is not only a necessary means of communication of higher with lower planes, but also a *dynamic* operation, without which all of creation would cease to exist. In this study, we want to go beyond thinking of it merely as an intellectual concept—take it or leave it—to see it as necessary for the existence and perpetuation of all creation, and as universally operating as, for example, gravity.

In working with this doctrine it is well to recognize that Swedenborg uses the term “correspondence” with a variety of meanings. Hugo Lj. Odhner published an article in *The New Philosophy* (April 1970, pp. 333-346) titled “Categories of Correspondence” in which he distinguished thirteen usages of the term. He emphasized that the only way to determine the usage is by consideration of the context. The fundamental idea is the one implied in the discussion above—the causal relationship idea. This Odhner describes as “primary correspondence,” and this is the most important one.⁵ We must also be aware of the ideas involved in the terms “representation” and “signification,” terms which are nonetheless tied to the basic idea of primary correspondence.⁶

The two main areas of application of the doctrine of correspondence are those of biblical exegesis where the effort is made to bring out the inner levels of meaning in the Scriptures, and the parallel effort to “think from correspondences” about the physical and biological worlds to see in them the working out of correspondential spiritual forces that have brought them into being. The classical work which treats of both these aspects of application is Madeley’s *The Science of Correspondence Elucidated* (1883).

Beyond this there is a considerable body of literature on each of these applications: for the first, and beyond what Swedenborg began, there are commentaries on books of the Bible by Clowes, Bruce, and Worcester—to

⁵The reader is referred to the article for further details.

⁶For a discussion of the distinction between these terms, see C. T. Odhner, “Correspondences, Representation, and Signification.” *New Church Life* 9 (April 1906): 239-245. See also below.

name a few authors, and beyond their works are innumerable expository sermons delivered over two centuries by New Church ministers. For the second, Worcester's *Physiological Correspondences* (1931), Berridge's *Physical Basis of Spiritual Reality*,⁷ and other shorter treatises bear testimony to application to the material world.

If discrete and continuous degrees, series of inter-related things, influx (or dynamic, causative influence), and correspondence play the overriding part the Writings say they do, then human enquiry into the natural and biological world, the processes of the human mind individually considered, and the collective activities of mankind, cannot truly be said to be understood without taking these things into account. If, therefore, thinking about nature and man (as represented by the various disciplines) does *not* take these things into account, then it remains in the realm of effects only, and can only bring what Swedenborg and his contemporaries called "secondary causes" to light. This may sound like a lot of pious verbiage; but if what the Writings have to say about people and nature is taken seriously, then what is said must, of necessity, be taken into account. Unless, therefore, the physical and biological sciences, the study of literature, psychology, history, sociology and economics are informed by what the Word has to say—especially in regard to these central doctrines—they cannot go beyond the realm of effects, and cannot penetrate to the causes of things. This does not say that the realm of effects is not worthy of enquiry within its own confines—such enquiry brings secondary causes to light, and knowledge of these is highly serviceable for life in this world. But surely we must also go beyond that alone.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Introduction

I undertook a review of the literature on correspondences for two reasons: (1) To clarify ideas about the doctrine of correspondences; and (2) to find out where we stand now. The accompanying bibliography is

⁷See references to published articles by Berridge under the title "Thinking from Correspondences," published in *The New Philosophy*. Also, Norman J. Berridge, *The Natural Basis of Spiritual Reality* (Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1992). 387pp.

incomplete, the search being made primarily in *New Church Life* and *The New Philosophy*.⁸ I presume that a survey based on these will give a valid view of the state of understanding of the theory in Swedenborgian circles, and of the extent and nature of its application.

It is not my intention here to comment on every article examined, but rather to present a view based on that examination. I arranged the references chronologically, then selected a number of papers for study and annotation.

Commentary

Madeley's definition embodies the essence of what is offered many times in subsequent articles, and so we quote it in full here.

...This term is derived from *con*, *re*, and *spondere*, meaning radically *to answer with, or to agree*, denoting, in the sense in which it is used in the New Church, the reciprocal relation of objects in higher and lower degrees,—a mutual union of the internal with the external,—the harmony of substance and form,—the concurrence of cause and effect...[I]t is a systematic, uniform, and certain rule of interpretation, founded upon the nature, qualities, and uses of all terrestrial objects, and all phenomena of life.²⁵ These have one and all the most exact correspondence with eternal realities and mental operations, for natural objects and natural truths are the mirrors in which spiritual subjects and infinite wisdom are reflected.²⁶
(p. 40)

The last idea is found in *Arcana Coelestia* 9300:3: "...and a man thinks rightly even about the things of faith and love, when he thinks of them from correspondences, for correspondences are natural truths, in which as in mirrors, spiritual truths are represented."

In the footnotes 25 and 26 in the above quotation, Madeley gives quotations from authors from antiquity to modern times, furnishing sub-

⁸No search was made in *New Church Magazine*, *The Intellectual Repository* and other journals that date back into the 19th century. Most of these do not have indexes, and searching requires consultation of every issue for its contents.

stantial evidence of the existence of the idea embodied in the word “correspondences” from ancient times. These are included with this text as an endnote for the interested reader. Their value lies in that they place Swedenborg’s theory in historical context.⁹

As the reader is no doubt aware, the subject of correspondences also involves the terms “representatives” and “significatives.” These have been the subject of exposition by several authors (see Elmo C. Acton 1931, R. H. Griffith 1955, Ormond Odhner 1966, and S. D. Cole 1977). On this topic Madeley gives a very succinct statement of the distinctions between these terms, as follows:

Correspondences are grounded in use, representatives in rituals of religion and human operations, and significatives in what is uttered or written; the whole, however, having the same ground of meaning, is included in the phrase we have often used—the science of correspondences. (p. 87)

Although this is given in the context of discussion of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, it does have general application in the exegesis of all the scriptural texts, and has application beyond these as will be shown later. We note here that when objects on a lower plane re-present their spiritual counterparts, the representative is a true correspondent.

By way of comparison, here follows Elmo C. Acton’s summary (1931, pp. 148-149):

The distinction between the three terms, “correspondences,” “representatives,” and “significatives” is frequently disregarded, and in many cases unknown. It is our purpose to set forth our understanding of these terms, as gathered from an examination of the passages in the Writings in which they occur. The conclusions at which we have arrived will first be given.

⁹Many of the quotations in Madeley’s footnotes are from ancient and Medieval sources. Some may, for all this author knows, post date Swedenborg and reflect influence from him. Checking of these sources awaits time to do it, the references themselves being incomplete, and the book has no bibliography. We note that on p. 47 of the text, Madeley quotes from Emerson’s *Essay on Nature* in which Swedenborg’s influence is known. He also quotes John Clowes, early (post-1773) expositor of the doctrines of the New Church, in the endnote given here.

CORRESPONDENCE refers to the relation of a cause on a higher plane to its resultant effect on the plane a discrete degree lower; to the relation of the effect to its cause, and to their mutual relationship.

REPRESENTATIVES refer to the appearance of the cause on the plane of the effect, the effect being the re-presenting of the cause in the lower plane, so that it may appear on that plane.

SIGNIFICATIVES refer to the spiritual thing that is to be understood by any individual word or series of words.

To give a general example: The whole of the letter of the Word has its cause in heaven, and therefore *corresponds* to the things of heaven; the lives of the characters of the Word *represent*, in the natural world; the things of heaven to which they correspond, and the words by means of which the representations are expressed, and also the natural objects used in the representative acts, *signify*, or are a sign of those spiritual things.

It is worth noting, too, that the use of these terms in the Writings is such as to defy, in Ormond Odhner's opinion, universal definition. He says:

The longer I study the Writings, the more I become convinced that it is frequently impossible to work out an exact definition of a word or phrase...in such a way that it will stand up in every usage of that word or phrase. (Odhner 1966, p. 551)

In 1970, perhaps in response to Ormond Odhner's remarks, Hugo Lj. Odhner published an analytic treatment of correspondences titled "Categories of Correspondences" (Odhner, 1970) mentioned above. In it we read:

A student of Swedenborg's Writings frequently meets up with statements about "correspondences" which seem to conflict with each other. This makes it difficult to find any universal definition of the term. But actually no definition has an exclusive application...[W]e have temporarily adopted a set of categories for descriptive purposes. (p. 333)

The set by title is as follows: primary; correspondence of identity; spiritual; elemental; organic and functional; formative; correspondence of spheres; microcosmic; homological; analytical; derivative; symbolic and verbal; and correspondence by opposition. Odhner emphasizes that the meaning of the term is to be gained by its examination in its context. Certainly, the cause and effect relationship of things separated by a discrete degree, described by “primary correspondence” is the fundamental idea associated with the term, and is the idea most widely understood by it. But Odhner’s analysis is a clear caution to readers, and his categories help us to be aware of ideas associated with the term.

Returning to the review, in a 1905 sermon titled “Perfection by Correspondences,” W. F. Pendleton (1905) described regeneration as the process whereby the internal and external man are brought into conjunction in a person. When this has been accomplished, the external part of a person is in correspondence with the internal part which is intrinsically good, being from the Lord and beyond the reach of perversion.

In an editorial titled “Correspondences, Representatives, and Significatives” (Odhner, C.T 1906), Odhner emphasizes that correspondence is the most universal of the three because “since both the representatives and the significatives are drawn *from*, and represent and signify *according to* their correspondences...” (p. 243). He also notes that correspondence in the supreme sense is a creative relationship.

Alfred Acton’s 1917 paper “Swedenborg’s Doctrine of Correspondences” gives a fascinating account of the development of the doctrine with Swedenborg. Early in the article he states: “Search the literature of Swedenborg’s day, and you will find no such doctrine” (p. 13). He qualifies this, noting that “It is involved in some of the writings of the early Greek philosophers; yet none but Swedenborg had seen it there” (p. 13). In the light of Madeley’s selected extracts from writers who pre-dated Swedenborg, this seems an exaggerated claim. Jonsson’s treatment of the subject also raises questions about Acton’s assessment. But there is certainly room for various justifiable positions in regard to this,¹⁰ and Acton

¹⁰ In the context of ideas found in the Writings regarding the origin of ideas, the question of establishing claims of originality of ideas takes on a quite different flavor. Swedenborg’s revelatory experiences, experiences “in” the spiritual world, enabled him to see that ideas are not original to people in the world (see Oyler 1927 in regard to this), but have their source in the spiritual world, from the creative force of loves that originate there too; and back of that,

touches base on many aspects of the question, giving an overall balanced view of it.

Acton notes that in Swedenborg's philosophical works the doctrine is the product of "human intuition enlightened by reason and guided by experience" (p. 20). It arose from Swedenborg's thought of creation from God, a process in which there had to be a stepping down from the Infinite. Hence arose the need for the doctrine of series and degrees, of order, and of correspondences and representations. In Codex 36 there is a little work titled *Correspondences* which seems to pick up where *The Hieroglyphic Key* left off. The former work includes passages on "harmonic," "parabolic or allegoric," "typical," "fabulous" correspondences and correspondence of dreams. The point of noting this is that Swedenborg himself recognized a variety of ideas associated with the primary one, just as others have recognized various meanings of the term in the Writings noted above.

Oyler (1930) saw the science of correspondences as a means to enable men to penetrate nature beyond the limitations of experimental science. He argues that science has "come of age" and that the senses have reached their limit. I have no doubt that were he to be aware of developments, say in medical technology and remote sensing, that man has witnessed since 1930, he would probably revoke what he said about the senses reaching their limit. An argument based on the doctrine of correspondence suggests that experimental evidence will always remain in the natural degree; experimental science cannot penetrate the barrier to the spiritual, causative realm. This Swedenborg himself made clear often enough.

But Oyler's point that the science of correspondences "will unlock the doors to those dark places which our senses cannot penetrate" (p. 210) is worth pursuing. Swedenborg declared that "nothing can look into itself," meaning that from within the natural plane itself it is impossible to penetrate to a higher degree. But he also makes clear that with the perspective gained from the Word, the mind can be elevated to think from spiritual

these in turn had their primary origin in God. That the idea of correspondences should have occurred to people throughout history is therefore not surprising. Certainly there must be a certain set of circumstances with a man for particular ideas to be made known to him. But people wrestling with the same problem or questions are likely to come up with similar ideas, because as to their minds, they would be in association with like spirits in the spiritual world. Seen in this way, disputes over claims of priority of ideas are rather pointless.

causes, and in so doing “unlock the doors to those dark places which our senses cannot penetrate.”

But Oyler’s remarks stimulated the following thoughts. If the essential idea in the doctrine of correspondences is that of the communication of end, cause and effect in the production of anything, then viewed in this context, the scientific study of nature follows this pattern. Natural phenomena are certainly the effects, be they falling objects, growing plants, or rocks. Scientific study of these effects brings causes to light, and reveals purposes in so doing. Human description of the cause in mental, abstract terms, represents the seeing of something spiritual because all thought is by its very nature spiritual by definition in the Writings. Also, the purpose or function revealed by the enquiry is also something that is above the degree of nature in which it is seen operating. The point I’m making is that scientific knowledge can be presented in an end, cause, and effect series, and is this not at the heart of correspondences? Does modern scientific enquiry therefore “unlock those dark places which our sense cannot penetrate”?

Berridge gives a wonderful illustration of this in describing muscular activity. In the case of, say, a handshake to express friendship, the end is the desire to express friendship; that spiritual end is by some mysterious way conveyed to brain cells and to connected nerve fibers, which in turn communicate the message (to contract or relax) to the muscle fibers by way of “end plates” that connect them. This combination of activities is clearly the cause of the effect, the motion of the hand in the handshake. This kind of illustration is given in the Writings themselves, in the interchapter material on Correspondences and Representations in *Arcana Coelestia* nos. 2987-3003, 3213-3227, 3376-3552, and 3472-3485, for example.

Continuing in this vein, Elmo C. Acton in the 1931 paper already referred to, quotes *Arcana Coelestia* 3484 as follows: “...Therefore, each created object has correspondence with the Divine according to the quality of the Divine that it shows forth;...” This gives no indication that the spiritual correspondence of any created thing is anything other than something that it “shows forth,” that is, something that is discernible to the senses.

As a chemistry teacher it is part of my role to develop in students the capacity to think about the world from a chemical perspective. This in-

cludes thinking about the physical and chemical properties of substances, the former being those properties they have in isolation, like density, and the latter, things that happen when a substance reacts with another one. Substances therefore “show forth” properties, which enable us to appreciate the quality and uses or purposes of them. Furthermore, chemical theory gives us rational explanation of why it is that substances have the properties they do, thus revealing the secondary causes. Is not, therefore, chemistry the science which enables us to see ends and causes represented in effects? And do not substances stand as ultimate representatives of human, and ultimately divine, qualities?

The laws of correspondence can be seen operating in other disciplines too. In mathematics and language we have end, cause, and effect relationships constantly operative. Mathematics and language being very much “mind stuff” are the means whereby thought is conveyed, and thought itself has its origin in affections. There is thus an end-cause-effect relationship here that is very close to the surface, as it were. The “inner meaning” of words and symbols is thought, and the “inner meaning” of thought is its emotional content, the affections which it embodies.

Likewise, in the fine arts, one is intimately confronted at every turn with the end-cause-effect relationship, for which reason no doubt, Aristotelian causal theory employs the image of the creation of a statue. So in the teaching of the fine arts, the student is confronted in a very intimate way with creation itself, because the same causal series involved in his art work images the same process that the Divine undertook in creating the universe and in sustaining it right now.

A statement in the Writings has a bearing on this. In the work *Charity* (n. 189) we read: “Then there are various musical harmonies and songs which affect the mind *by correspondence* with affections.” This is describing the process whereby we feel enjoyment (or displeasure) when listening to music. When the sound combinations enter the brain they trigger the influx of affections from the spiritual world, which, if in accord with our general affectional state, will give pleasure, and if contrary, displeasure. This all occurs because of the operation of the communicative law of correspondences. We don’t have to *know* about correspondences to enjoy music. Our appreciation of the affectional quality of the music is our

appreciation of the correspondents—the natural combination of sound, and the affections which answer to them “by correspondence.”

Acton (1935) made some remarks that are pertinent to this discussion. Firstly, he notes that “The doctrine of correspondences...is not a revival of the ancient doctrine. No progress can ever be made by mere revivals” (p. 250). This is relevant to the idea that the New Church should somehow get to know the ways of thought of men of the Ancient Church, then apply this in our modern setting. This idea, as Acton, says, has no validity. What kind of research or study is valid is that in which a new historical interpretation of the past is constructed within the framework of the history of the churches—this is no mere revival, but history at its best. Quoting from Acton again:

Our thought should be engaged and our minds occupied, not in the seeking of correspondences of objects, but in striving to see the actual laws that operate, whether in the field of anatomy, astronomy, economics, mathematics, or what not. Our genius is not the genius of the men of the Ancient Church... (p. 250)

And:

...and let me add that they [correspondences] can and will be rationally understood only so far as we progress in an understanding of the *laws of nature as the correspondential operation of spiritual causes*. (p. 253; emphasis added)

“The laws of nature as the correspondential causes”—what else need there be in New Church science education than to recognize that the laws elucidated are correspondential spiritual causes? Add to that the notion of purpose or use, and the great trilogy of end, cause, and effect is there displayed by the very works of God Himself.

In a District Assembly Address, W.D. Pendleton emphasized that correspondence is the “law by which all communication is effected” (1951, p. 538). That this is the case is clear from earlier considerations in this paper, that correspondence refers essentially to the end-cause-effect series,

and there simply must be communication between each level in this series if the effect is to embody the prior cause and end.

The processes involved in a meaningful conversation illustrates, indeed involves, this. The essence of what someone has to say is something affectional; this activates a lower plane and manifests itself there as thought; this in turn activates the bodily administering means of brain, nerve and muscle, resulting in speech. This effect, through sound, affects the ear of the hearer and associated nerves to register an impulse which the understanding and will together interpret as thought and meaning—nicely expressed when one says that “I see what you mean.” Thought has “meaning” if its generating affection is appreciated or felt.

The potential for application of this idea in any form of communication, and especially in education, needs no laboring. Suffice it to say that unless the teacher is sensitive to all the necessary correspondential communications that must occur, there will be a breakdown in communication. Educational theory developed on this could be very fruitful, and should be an important part of the theory of educational psychology.

Roy H. Griffith raises a question in a paper on correspondences (Griffith 1955). The question is evoked by a passage in *Arcana Coelestia* (n. 2994). Leading up to this, in n. 2993, we find a general statement of the theory as applied to natural things:

...the causes of all natural things are from spiritual things, and the beginning of these causes are from celestial things; or what is the same, all things in the natural world derive their cause from truth which is spiritual, and their beginnings from good which is celestial; and natural things proceed thence according to all the differences of truth and good in the Lord's kingdom; thus from the Lord Himself, from whom is all good and truth.

Then in n. 2994 we read:

So long as he lives in the body, man can feel and perceive but little of this; for the spiritual and celestial things with him fall into the natural things in his external man, and he there loses the sensation and perception of them. Moreover the representatives and corre-

spidences in his external man are such that they do not appear like the things in the internal man to which they correspond, and which they represent; therefore neither can they come to his knowledge until he has put off those external things. When this happens, blessed is the man who is in correspondence, that is, whose external man corresponds to his internal man.

Griffith does not pursue the implication of this; he merely notes that this passage seems to say that it is not until we have conscious life in the spiritual world that the correspondents of natural things can be seen. But perhaps this means we cannot see them while in the natural world in the way people in the spiritual world do—which is logical enough. But it may also mean that all men on earth can do is see the purpose or function of things in the way indicated above, and leave it that.

Arcana Coelestia n. 3226 lends support to this idea. The previous number (3225) gives a summary regarding correspondences: "...there is a correspondence between those things which are of the light of heaven and those which are of the light of the world, that is, between those things which are of the internal or spiritual man and those which are of the external or natural man." This idea then leads into n. 3226:

Among the eminent faculties that man possesses, although he is ignorant of it, and which he carries with him into the other life..., is that he perceives what is signified by the representatives which appear in the other life. He is also able by the sense of his mind to express fully in a moment of time what he could not express during hours in the body. The ability to do this is from ideas of those things which are of the light of heaven, assisted and given as it were wings by suitable appearances representative of the subject of the discourse, which are such as can't be described. Whereas man after death comes into these faculties, and in the other life has no need to be instructed respecting them, it is evident that he is in them (that is, that they are in him) during his life in the body, although he does not know it.

The reason for this is that there is a continual influx with man through heaven from the Lord. This is an influx of spiritual and celestial things, which fall into his natural things and are there presented representatively. In heaven among the angels nothing else is thought of than the celestial and spiritual things of the Lord's kingdom. But in the world, with man, scarcely anything else is thought of than the corporeal and natural things which belong to the kingdom in which he is, and to the necessities of life. And since the spiritual and celestial things of heaven which flow in are presented representatively with man in his natural things, they therefore remain implanted, and when a man puts off the body and leaves the world behind, he is in them.

I frankly don't know what to make of this. When considered in relation with the teachings about the elevation of the understanding into the light of heaven and also regarding the teaching that thought and affections *are* spiritual things, there is a seeming contradiction.

What is clear is that people while on earth have (1) thought patterns that are grounded in sense experience, and (2) are unable to experience the spontaneous generation of objects of sense that re-present thought and affection, as occurs with angels.

However, to the extent that people can consciously know the spiritual entities of thought and affection, it seems logical that these kinds of spiritual things should be able to be seen represented in natural phenomena as the Word says they are.

Perhaps the numbers quoted above are speaking about the *kind* of mental activity—that of angels—which people on earth cannot experience.

In speaking of correspondence in relation to creation, Pryke (1962) emphasized that correspondence is a relationship of *uses* rather than mere forms or shapes. He goes on: "Correspondence is the imprint of the Divine order on creation; it is the relationship existing between the parts which holds them together and unifies them" (p. 418).

After speaking of correspondences in Scriptural exegesis, Pryke eloquently speaks of its application beyond that realm.

However, the knowledge of the science of correspondences is not only to serve as a key to the Old and New Testaments...; it is also to serve as a key to the understanding of the natural world and all its marvels, every least one of which is the correspondential form of a spiritual cause. As New Churchmen progress in their knowledge of the heavenly doctrines, and as they see more clearly the true facts of nature, so will they, with the aid of the knowledge of correspondences, be able to relate these two, for genuine truth is never contradictory. From correspondences we shall be able to see increasingly, in the Word and in nature, illustrations of spiritual principles, and by these illustrations we shall see more clearly and more deeply all that is involved in those principles. We shall see confirmations of heavenly truths which will give us increasing delight as we recognize more and more clearly the absolute unity of the whole of God's creation.

...We are inclined to think of it [correspondences] only as the tongue of revelation, but that is just one area of its application. It is much more than that; it is an essential part of the order of creation. Indeed, in a sense it *is* the order of creation—the living pattern of the organism. We cannot avoid it, or ignore it, if we are to understand creation at all. (p. 428)

In responding to this presentation, Erik Sandstrom Sr. emphasized the use of the doctrine in education: "When we contemplate a subject like this we should ever have in mind that this is the key to New Church education..." (p. Pryke 1962, p. 429).

Sandstrom (1970) in a paper titled "Representatives, Significatives and Correspondences" spoke of correspondence as "living representation." (p. 382), and emphasized, as others had before him, that correspondence is with the use, not primarily with the form of a thing: "Correspondence with the form is secondary and derived, while correspondence with the use is primary and immediate" (p. 385). He also addressed the communication aspect of correspondence, noting that the "touch of the higher degree activates the lower degree" (p. 392), something to which I drew attention above.

In his paper titled "Correspondences in Education," Junge (1975) considers educational applications. "Obviously, this doctrine applies every day to our bringing the Lord's presence in the classroom, for 'correspondences are natural truths, in which as in mirrors, spiritual truths are represented' [AC 93001]. We need those mirrors in every aspect of New Church education, for 'as far as the ideas of thought concerning things spiritual are formed independently of correspondences, so far they are formed either from the fallacies of the senses, or from what is inconsistent with such things' [ibid.]" (p. 56). This idea is then given emphasis in *Arcana Coelestia* (n. 6652) quoted by Junge as follows:

Memory knowledges alienated from the internal are...opposed to the church; for the good and truth which make the church flow in through the internal; and if these are not received by the natural, the internal is closed, and so the man is alienated from good and truth and then no other memory knowledges which are in the natural are acknowledged as truths than those which are false. These are then multiplied, and the truths themselves are cast out of doors.

In this paper Junge draws attention to what is seen in "the light of the world" and "the light of heaven" often spoken of in the Writings (as in *Arcana Coelestia* 4223:2, for example), as well as "natural truths" and "spiritual truths." The distinction between these is often taken for granted. But this is not the place to give extended treatment of them now. Suffice it to say that this writer considers "the light of the world" to be whatever one concludes from experience in the world *apart from* thought explicitly drawn from the Word, whereas "the light of heaven" is enlightenment that comes from thinking from the Word. The endeavor to think from the Word opens the internal mind and allows the light of heaven to enter. It should nonetheless be recognized that the thought processes that yield "the light of the world" are *spiritual ones*, for all thought is spiritual in nature.

Also, the writer regards "natural truth" as what is contained in the letter of the Word, and "spiritual truth" as the appreciation of truth on a higher plane that is gained through reflection on the Word. Laws and the operations of nature as elucidated by people are natural "truths" only in

so far as they are viewed from the perspective of the Word. Otherwise, they are no more than knowledge gained from experience, useful for material and corporeal life, but incapable in themselves of elevating people's thinking to the appreciation of eternal truth and goodness.

We have previously argued that end-cause-effect relationships are seen in science, and that this constitutes illustration of correspondence. There is an apparent internal inconsistency here between this and the comments made above respecting natural and spiritual truth. I leave the matter unresolved for the time being.

Edward F. Allen's Philosophical Notes (nos. 326-331, 1976) published in this journal treat of Swedenborg's development of the doctrine of correspondence. He refers the reader to *Economy of the Animal Kingdom II* (p. 52), n. 648, wherein Swedenborg refers to rules which must be discovered to guide us "to discover what that is in a superior degree which corresponds to its inferior," and gives five circumstances as examples of conditions that require the use of the rules. This number is in Part I, Chapter VIII titled "An Introduction to Rational Psychology." Students interested in tracking down the development of Swedenborg's concept of correspondence would do well to consult both Professor Allen's Notes and this chapter VIII of Swedenborg's treatise.

Stephen D. Cole structured his "Correspondences, Significatives, and Representations" (dissertation, 1977) within the framework of the history of the churches, beginning with a discussion of the meaning of these terms. He agrees with Ormond Odhner's (1966) conclusion that a universal definition of these terms applicable consistently throughout the Theological Writings is unattainable, stating that this is so because "these terms represent infinite Divine truths" (Preface). This discussion of the subject gives a thorough account of it applied in the context of the spiritual history of humankind.

In a more recent treatment of correspondence theory (Bell 1991) applied to exegesis of the book of Ezekiel, Bell gives an account of the significance of correspondence in exegesis, in our own regeneration, and in understanding the natural world. He also speaks of the progenitors of the idea.

...the concept is not unique to Swedenborg. Once again we can find harmony with the Kabbalistic idea of emanations from the Divine into levels of creation, with all things within these levels eternally linked and interactive. The roots of this notion can also be found in Plato's philosophical marriage of spirit and reality. But despite evidence for a traditional thread of belief in a correspondential theology, it fell to Swedenborg to raise our level of understanding of this principle to a new and pragmatic level of sophistication. He gave us correspondence not just to ponder, but to use—a tool for our regeneration (p.11).

SOME PHILOSOPHIC PROBLEMS

Ontological problems

There are two basic philosophical questions involved with correspondence theory. The first, already spoken of, is the ontological one respecting levels of existence. Discussion of this is still very much part of modern philosophical discourse, with monism, dualism, and pluralism having their proponents.

In the context of Swedenborgian thought there is the need for the recognition of different sets in the consideration of discreteness—that necessary condition for correspondence to have meaning. The primary set is that between the Infinite and the finite; the secondary one is that between the two principle realms of the finite state—the spiritual and natural worlds. Then within these finite states there is the need for the recognition of other sets, defined on the basis of end, cause and effect relationships upon which correspondence is founded. So in the heavens there are the celestial, spiritual and natural states, and in the hells the opposites of these; in the human mind there are lower and higher interdependent interior states; in mind-body interaction there are processes that operate by means of correspondence; and in nature itself, there are end, cause, and effect interactions that involve correspondence too. A developing theory of correspondence requires a parallel theory of being at many levels.

Epistemological problems

If we speak in dualistic terms of spiritual and natural planes of being between which there are cause-effect relations, we need to be aware, at the very least, of the problems surrounding our “knowing” about these. For example, to what extent can it be said that we know this ultimate, material plane of being? This question has been addressed throughout the history of Western philosophy, and this is not the place to review responses to it.¹¹

But we *need* a ground of thought to begin from and I believe that God has provided us with a sensing mechanism that does not tell lies; that is, that our observation of, say, trees does provide us with an image of them which corresponds exactly with whatever they are that are called trees. As a mind-body dualist, I also believe that from birth a human being must *learn* to sense—an arcane and incredibly wonderful process exemplified by every child and described in Helen Keller’s well-known childhood story.

Taking this matter of knowing the world a step further, it is the province of the scientist to tell us about the material nature of the world and of the processes of its activity. But any scientific description of the world involves theoretical explanation, and hence all our “observations” that supposedly provide us with an objective reality are in fact “theory laden,” as the Goldsteins (1978, p. 17) have put it.

This has consequences for the application of the doctrine of correspondences. If it is accepted that there is a correspondence between the spiritual and natural worlds, and one wants to go beyond the mere acknowledgement of that, then the question must be asked: “Between what entity or process in the spiritual world, and what entity or process in the natural world is the co-response operating?” Are these corresponding things objective realities whose intrinsic nature we cannot know, or are we dealing with entities and processes as only *perceived* by angels and people on earth? The only way to avoid a hopeless skepticism here is to presume that the way of science does provide valid knowledge about

¹¹ The reader is referred to Part VI of my “New Church Epistemology” subtitled “Comparative Epistemology,” in *The New Philosophy* 91 (April-June 1988: 545-589 for some reflections on this history. This also includes a part on Swedenborg’s theory of knowledge as found in his pre-theological works.

the way the world works (about processes operating in it). In seeking to apply correspondence theory to the material world, the human mind is a good starting place—for it is a spiritual entity whose working we know something about, firstly from revelation and then from experience. This is based on the assumption derived from revelation that all processes in the natural world image processes in the human mind; and these latter owe their operation to the functional connections that the mind has with the affectional influences of the spiritual world.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Beyond the use of the doctrine in relation to the natural world there are other fields that deal more exclusively with the mind and human action. First and foremost is its application in biblical exegesis. While this is the province that a trained priesthood has developed and will extend, it is also open to all people interested in seeking guides to spiritual life. Beyond this there are many fields that focus on human beings *per se* such as education, psychology, medicine and sociology that could benefit, I believe, from the application of the doctrine. □

Endnote

Extract from Madeley (footnotes nos. 25 and 26)

The want of a strict rule of interpretation, for which the world was at that time so totally unprepared, is thus acknowledged by Augustine, “where he lays down the principle which guided him in the investigation of historical types.” [*Tract for the Times*, lxxxix., p. 38.] “These secrets of Divine Scripture we trace out as we may, one more or less aptly than another, but as becomes faithful men, holding thus much for certain; that not without some kind of foreshadowing of future events, were these things done and recorded [in the Word]; and that to Christ only, and his Church, the City of God, are they to be referred in every instance.”—*De Civ. Dei*, xvi. 2. By the Science of Correspondences, however, all distrust and uncertainty are removed.

“The severe schooles shall never laugh me out of the philosophy of Hermes, that this visible world is but a picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a pourtrait, things are not truly, but in equivocal shapes, and as they counterfeit some more real substance in that invisible Fabrick.”—SIR THOMAS BROWNE. Ob. A.D. 1682.

Milton says, “What if earth

Be but the shadow of heav’n; and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought.”

Paradise Lost, book v., lines 574-6.

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A similar idea is thus expressed by Barrow: "What we see in a *lower degree somewhere to exist, doth probably otherwise exist in a higher degree.*"-Works, vol. iv., p. 170.

"The Platonists," says Archbishop Leighton, "divide the world into two, the sensible and intellectual world, they imagine the one to be the type of the other, and that sensible and spiritual things are stamped, as it were, with the same stamp. These sentiments are not unlike the notions which the masters of the Cabalistical doctrine among the Jews held concerning God's SEPHIROTH and SEAL, wherewith, according to them, all the worlds, and everything in them, are stamped or sealed; and these are probably near akin to what Lord Bacon calls his '*parallela signicula;*' and *symbolizantes schematizmi*. According to this hypothesis, these parables, which are often taken from *natural things* to illustrate such as are *divine*, will not be *similitudes taken entirely at pleasure*, but are often in a great measure *founded in nature*, and the things themselves.-Leighton's Works, vol. iv., p. 156.

"Figures taken from natural things and actions are introduced into the Word of God to express divine things and actions, in such a manner, that, by looking upon one, we may, as it were in a picture, behold the other."-Honert's Institut. Theolog., etc., part 2.

"It is not a little remarkable that, according to Prescott, the Peruvian Mythology, before the conquest, was 'not unlike that of Hindostan.' 'They adopted also a notion,' says he, 'not unlike that professed by some of the schools of ancient philosophy, that everything on earth had its archetype or idea, *its mother*, as they emphatically styled it, which they held sacred, as in some sort its spiritual essence.'" -Conq. of Peru, vol. i., p. 37.

"Bacon hath wisely observed, that the works of God minister a singular help and preservative against unbelief and error: our Saviour, as he saith, having laid before us two books or volumes to study; first, the *Scriptures*, revealing the will of God, and then the *creatures*, expressing his power; whereof the *latter is a key unto the former.*"-Bacon's Adv. of Learning, b. 1. Such was the piety and penetration of this great man.

"For it will be found true, that the invisible things of God, that is, the things concerning his Being and his Power, and the economy of his spiritual kingdom, which are the objects of our faith, are *clearly seen from the creation of the world, and understood by the things that are made.*"-Jones's Sermon on the Nat. Evid. of Christianity, preached 1787.

"There was an opinion [I should rather call it a tradition] among some heathen philosophers that the world is a parable, the literal or bodily part of which is manifest to all men, while the inward meaning is hidden, as the soul in the body, the moral in the fable, or the interpretation in the parable." "We may call the world a fable, or parable; in which there is an outward appearance of visible things, with an inward sense, which is hidden as the soul under the body."-Sallust Peri Theown., cap. 3. -Jones's Lec. on the Fig. Lang. of Scrap., p. 70.

Philo says that "man is a little world, and that the world is one great man;" and Origen calls man "*Minorem Mundum*, a Microcosme."-H. More's Conj. Cab., Defence of, p. 205.

"Out of all beings known to us, *man* is the most elevated; as in his form, at the same time one and complex, he contains all inferior existences."-Abbe De Lamennais, *Equisse D'une Philosophie*, vol. i., p. 409. See Morell's Hist. of Mod. Philos., 2d ed., vol. ii, p. 297.

"Properly understood, earthly substances are the types, representatives, and shadows of heavenly things."-Dr. A. Clarke's Commentary, vol. v., p. 562.

"Davis, in his *History of the Chinese*, tells us that the Chinese physiologists expressly call man a *little universe*, or microcosm; to which they extend the dual principle, as originating the existence, as well as maintaining the order and harmony, of the natural universe."

"The universe is but a great mirror of the mind of man."-Gilfillan's Lit. Port., p. 8.

"Now this earthly world which we do see is an exact picture and pattern of the spiritual, heavenly world which we do not see. As Solomon says in the Proverbs, 'The things

which are seen are the doubles of the things which are not seen.”—*Kingsley’s Village Sermons*, p. 187.

“Things invisible to the carnal eye are clearly seen by the enlightened eye of the mind—being understood by the lively and sensible description of them in the things that are made. The material world and its objects are pictures of similitudes, in some view or other, of the actings of God in the spiritual world. Upon this plan the lively oracles of truth appear to have been written.”—*Serle’s Hor. Solit.*, p. 137.

“The whole of the visible creation is but the outside of a vast magnificent house or temple, whose inside is heaven, or the angelic kingdom; and this again is but the outside of a temple or house still more vast and magnificent, whose inside is Jesus Christ, the only living and eternal Lord our God.”—*Clowes’ Miscell. Thoughts*, p. 53.

“That the teaching of Nature is symbolical, none, we think, can deny.”—*Neale and Webb’s Introd. Ess. to Durandus on Symb.*, p. xlv.

“Philosophy, fable, poetry, and the most refined metaphysics, have not been able to form an idea of the universe which surrounds us, without at the same time imagining another universe of which this is the image.”—*Richter’s La Nouv. Jerus. on Correspon.*, vol. i., 2d part, p. 355.

“Between the work of creation and preservation on the one hand, and that of redemption [and the author might have added also, most truly, that of regeneration] on the other, there seems to be a great analogy; as the sacred writers frequently borrow images from one to explain the other. ‘The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen.’ Things visible do not only prove the *divine power* and *Godhead*,—the existence and glorious perfections of God,—but they also serve as a mirror to represent the invisible things of God. And between these two representatives there is such a correspondence, that an attentive view of things natural and temporal may help us to form better conceptions of things spiritual and eternal...Without this effect, philosophy is but a vain amusement. But when things visible correspond to what is revealed in the Scriptures concerning the invisible things of God, and these correspondences are traced under the guidance of the written Word, these two great books [creation and Revelation] help to explain each other.”—*Cosmology: Pub. at Bath*, 1791. tom. iv., p. 180.

“The world is certainly a great and stately volume of natural things, and may not improperly be styled the hieroglyphics of a better.”—*Fruits of Solitude*, p. 3.

“Nature is a book written on both sides, within and without, in which the finger of God is distinctly visible; a species of Holy Writ in a bodily form; a glorious panegyric on God’s omnipotence expressed in the most visible symbols.”—SCHLEGEL.

“In the book of Sohar, a similar sentence occurs: “*Quodcunque in terra est, id etiam in Caelo est, et nulla res tam exigua est in Mundo, quae non alii simili, quae in Caelo est, respondeat.*”

“All things in nature are prophetic outlines of divine operations, God not merely speaking parables, but *doing* them.”—TERTULLIAN: *De Resur.*, c. 12.

“Julian, in an oration, expresses himself thus: ‘Not view and contemplate the heaven and world with the same eyes that oxen and horses do, but so as from that which is visible to their outward senses, to discern and discover another invisible nature under it.’”—*Jul. Orat.*, iv., p. 148. Cited by *Cudworth, Intel. Syst.*, vol. ii., p. 260.

“Plato, in his *Timaeus*, calls the world ‘a made or created image of the eternal gods.’ By which eternal gods he there doubtless meant that ‘first,’ and ‘second,’ and ‘third,’ which, in his second epistle to Dionysius, he makes to be uncreated principles of all things; that is, his trinity, by whose concurrent efficiency and Providence, and according to whose image and likeness, the whole was made, as a grand chain of resulting effects.”—See *Cudworth’s Intel. Syst.*, vol. ii., p. 367.

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"The world may well be called an image; it depending upon that above [as an image in a glass], which is threefold."-Plotinus, cited by Cudworth, nol. ii., p. 315.

"Empedocles held, according to the Pythagorean doctrine, that there are two worlds, the one intellectual, the other sensible; the former being the *model* or archetype of the latter." [25 Exod., 40.]-See *Simplici in Physic. Arist., also Plut. de Placitis Phil.*, b.1, c.20.

"The symbolic language of the prophets is *almost* a science of itself. None can fully comprehend the depth, sublimity, and force of their writings who are not thoroughly acquainted with the peculiar and appropriate imagery they were accustomed to use."-BISHOP VAN MILDERT.

"The visible world throughout is a pattern of the invisible."-Jones's *Lect. of the Fig. Lang. of Scrip.*, p. 34.

"When the maker of the world becomes an Author, his word must be as perfect as his work.-"Jones's *Lectures on the Figurative Lang. of the Holy Scrip.*, p. 1.

"If God made this world the particular kind of world which he is found to have made it, in order that it might in due time preach to mankind about himself, and about his providence:—if He contrived beforehand the germination of seeds, the growth of plants, the analogies of animal life,—all, evidently, in order that they might furnish illustration of his teaching; and that so great Nature's self might prove one vast parable in his hand;—*why* may not the same God, by his Eternal Spirit, have so overruled the utterance of the human agents whom He employed to write the Bible, that their historical narratives, however little their authors meant or suspected it, should embody the outline of things heavenly; and while they convey a true picture of actual events, should *also*, after a most mysterious fashion, yield in the hands of his own informing Spirit, celestial doctrine also?" "Our purpose has only been to vindicate the profundity, or rather *the fulness* of Holy Writ, and to show that under the obvious and literal meaning of the words there lies concealed a more recondite and a profounder sense—call that sense mystical, or spiritual, or Christian, or what you will. Unerringly to elicit that hidden sense is the sublime privilege of inspired writers, and they do it by allusion, by quotation, by the importation of a short phrase, by the adoption of a single word,—to an extent which no one would suspect who had not carefully studied the subject."-Burgon's *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 168, 174.

"The philosophical ground on which they [the ancient nations] proceeded is this,- that *all matter or universal nature must of necessity be the form and visible idea of the essence or spirit within*. Each object in religion has thus its corresponding sign and character in one of nature; and those of nature in return are held in esteem and reverence from their consecration to the uses of religion. The extent, indeed, to which this system was carried in Egypt has at all times been proverbial. It formed the subject of expressed astonishment and secret admiration to the ancient historians of the world. The mythology of the West was, in fact, almost founded on [or rather identical with] Egyptian worship. We trace up to an Eastern origin the system of Pythagoras; the ethics of Aristotle; and even the philosophy of Plato, so far more spiritual and sublime than either; and have no question, from a comparatively abundant evidence, that the principles which appeared so great and glorious to the Greeks, existed on the Indus and the Nile ages before the first dawn of civilization in the West. The Jews, too, through every period of their varied history, were no less addicted to this fascinating study than the Eastern nations. The fact is of an extreme importance; since, in their possession of the Bible, we behold *the origin* of that philosophy which led them to the adoption of this system of correspondence."-Tucker's *Scrip. Stud., Inner Sense*, pp. 268, 269.

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