

# **SPIRITUAL VISION AND REVELATION<sup>†</sup>**

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **F.C. Oetinger and Emanuel Swedenborg: An Encounter and a Disagreement**

**T**he connection between spiritual vision and revelation is not readily seen by the present-day audience or readership, as the conception of spiritual vision does not appear in the dictionary of modern theology. This is the result of the dogmatic disparagement of all mystical experiences—which are no longer regarded as genuine encounters with the transcendent but as purely psychic phenomena. Spiritual visions are explained as at best hallucinations or pseudo-hallucinations, that is, as psychopathological phenomena, which are a matter for the psychiatrist. As Kant claimed to be forced to believe in the case of Swedenborg, the appropriate abode for the visionary is thought to be the lunatic asylum.

As has frequently happened, in this case also a modern rationalistic ideology, which has even penetrated theology, has completely misinterpreted the real significance of the phenomena.

An examination of the Old and New Testaments and of ecclesiastical history actually shows that spiritual vision is a form of religious experience which has played and is playing a decisive creative role in the history of the Jewish and Christian religions and in ecclesiastical history, and constitutes an element of direct guidance of the Christian church from its very beginnings. It is understood as a charisma, a gift of the Holy Spirit, which played a decisive part in the assessment of whether particular documents were, or were not, part of Divine revelation, i.e. in laying down the canon of the Old and New Testaments. Even those with only a superficial knowledge of the Old Testament will remember that the prophets were in the majority of cases visionaries, and that their activities as proph-

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ets were generally legitimized either by a particularly shattering vision on being called to that office, or a series of such visions, this fact constituting the prior condition for the acceptance of their prophecies within the canon. When it is stated in the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy (3:16) that “all scripture is inspired by God” (literally “breathed into” by God) it is clear that the participation in such visions of this Divine inspiration, this gift of God, into which the Holy Spirit breathes, is very considerable.

The same applies to the New Testament. The distinguishing of the Apostles by visionary experiences of the most varied character also constitutes an important element in the determination of the canon of the New Testament. These visions include not only instructions regarding the missionary work of the church, but also glimpses into the other world, a foresight of the vision of the coming of the kingdom of God. Paul, whose entire activity as the Apostle of the gentiles is accompanied and guided by visions, speaks cryptically of such visionary spectacles, which he finds so overpowering that in describing them he speaks of himself only in the third person:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the Third Heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, but God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (2 Cor., 12:24)

Paul speaks in this connection of “an abundance of revelations” and there can be no doubt that these revelations were of a visionary character, for if he knows that he is in the third heaven and in paradise, he can do so only if these ecstasies were linked with optical, visionary spectacles.

The connection between spiritual vision and revelation in the New Testament—if we consider this alone—is so obvious as to be undeniable. The life of the church, as it is described in the Acts of the Apostles, including both the original church community at Jerusalem and the gentile Christian congregations of Asia Minor and Greece, is characterized as a visionary environment. The author of the Acts of the Apostles, the apostle Luke, recognizes in these very visions the most important means

for the heavenly guidance of the entire history of the Christian church. Behind the visions is a plan of control in accordance with which, with the aid of repeated direct action from above, the expansion of the Christian church, its instruction in doctrine and its equipment with the necessary spiritual forces, were conducted. With a surprising degree of internal logic the Acts of the Apostles shows how all important turning-points in the history of the church were brought about by visions. Not only the apostle Paul, but all the other Apostles, operated in this visionary environment, and were led by visions to views and actions which were of decisive importance for the global development of the church. At the beginning, the missionary activity of the apostle Peter was guided by visions. First of all his change over from a mission to the Jews to a mission to the gentiles, as described in detail in Acts 10:9, was guided by a whole series of synchronized visions shown not only to Peter but also to the centurion Cornelius. In the same way in the case of the apostle Philip the decisive change-over from his mission to the gentiles to one to the Jews took place under the direct guidance of a vision. But above all it is the apostle Paul who appears as the archetypal Christian visionary. His visions took place at the decisive turning-points of his life and his missionary activity, providing evidence of Divine guidance. The entire activity of Paul as an Apostle is accompanied by continuous guidance by means of visions. Paul's blinding vision of the Lord at his call on the Damascus road was also, characteristically, one of a series of synchronized visions, being followed by a second vision to Ananias in which the Lord told the latter of Paul's call, commissioning him to visit Paul, restore his sight and tell him to wash away his sins by baptism, and to bear witness of the Lord to all men.

The Acts of the Apostles also contains numerous reports of other visions of the Lord by Paul, taking place at decisive points in his life-history: his commissioning by the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem as a missionary to the gentiles, a third vision of the Lord in the synagogue at Corinth, and a fourth after the arrest of the Apostle in Jerusalem, when he was told to go to Rome; in addition there was the vision at night of the Macedonian at Troas, which led to his call from Asia Minor to Macedonia. Besides these visions there was the ecstatic opening to him of the celestial world, his being caught up to the third heaven and paradise, which must

also have involved visionary experiences, as otherwise he would not of course have known that he was in the third heaven and paradise. The last book of the New Testament, the Revelation to John, is expressly described as a record of visionary experiences, of the underworld, the heavenly and earthly worlds, the struggle between Christ and anti-Christ and the descent of the Holy City. The connection between the content of the visions and the writing of them is strongly emphasized, and in some cases characterized as dictation by a voice from heaven. The book ends with the warning:

I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this book.

The contents of the vision are therefore literally revelation dictated by, and protected by sanctions from, God Himself.

It could be assumed, by the very nature of this revelation, that it would continue so long as the charismata of prophecy, spiritual vision and the ability to discriminate between good and evil spirits remained alive in the church. Actually, however, this development was soon stopped and suppressed by those who had acquired leading positions in the organization. This was linked with the establishment of the priestly profession, in particular the episcopal office, which resisted the free play of charisma within the congregation. One of the most decisive developments in the early church was the elimination of the prophets and of free prophecy and the setting up of a canon of Holy Writ, a rule regarding faith and an official creed in accordance with the views of the Apostles.

The most obvious evidence of this process is the fact that the visionary message of Hermas, a prophet who was active in the Roman congregation at the turn of the first and second centuries, was refused canonical recognition by the church. The process of formation of the canon was not, as is often thought, simply the collection of the existing scripts, gospels, histories and epistles of the Apostles, and apocalyptic writings which could be traced back to the authorship of the Apostles, but a selection from a very

much more extensive collection of documents available among the various church groups. This selection was made by the bishops on the basis of the principle of "apostolicity" laid down by the bishops, not in the light of such criteria as historical criticism, but by the "common sense" of the bishops and the congregations. That was apostolic which seemed to the bishops of the various churches to be such, and was recognized as such by the bishops.

The practical result of this was that it bolted the door against any further prophecies and any continuation of Divine revelation. From then on there was no prophecy except in the form of the interpretation of the scriptures which were already comprised in the canon of Holy Scripture sanctioned by the church. "God has spoken only once" (Ps. 62:11). This was in fact equivalent to putting a gag on the Holy Spirit: it lies within the power of the official expositors in the church to ascertain what He may have said, and how His utterances are to be understood. The formation of the canon lasted several centuries and it was a very long time before it became uniform throughout the whole church. The Eastern Church was sceptical about the inclusion of John's Apocalypse in the canon and sometimes omitted it; the Western Church on the other hand not only included the Apocalypse, but also *The Shepherd* by Hermas and the first and second epistles of Clement as canonical books. The New Testament canon first appeared in its present form in the 39th Festive Address of Augustie, Bishop of Hippo in the province of Africa; the conclusion of the process of fixing the canon took place at the Second Trullanic Synod of 692, the so called *Quinisextum*, though the Apocalypse was not included on that occasion.

There have in fact continued to be inspired writings in the church, which have claimed for themselves the character of direct revelation. Prophecy continued, but found it increasingly difficult to maintain itself within the scheme of regulations enforced by Ecclesiastical Canon Law. The prophetic movement of Montanism, which appeared in the third century, had already been declared heretical by the church. Later there repeatedly arose in the church great prophets, and more especially prophetesses, such as St. Hildegard of Bingen and St. Birgitta of Sweden, whose writings claimed to be visionary inspirations from the Holy Spirit or direct Divine instructions to contemporary popes, church leaders, and theolo-

gians; but all later prophets found it hard to escape suspicion of heresy and persecution under ecclesiastical law by the supporters of religious orthodoxy. I cannot go into detail regarding this story of suffering endured by the prophets and visionaries in the history of the church in the Middle Ages and the Reformation period, but wish to mention merely the fact itself, to make it understandable why Swedenborg also, after publication of his visionary writings, immediately became the object of accusations of heresy from the church, and why Oetinger, although a prelate of the established Evangelical Church of Württemberg, was immediately attacked for heterodoxy, and why his writings regarding Swedenborg largely took the form of a defense and self-justification against the accusation of heresy.

The encounter between Oetinger and Swedenborg represents a unique climax of the theological and religious debate of the 18th century, the far-reaching importance of which to ecclesiastical history has hardly been appreciated even yet. This period was characterized spiritually by the appearance on the scene of the "Enlightenment," the philosophy of rationalism, which in the field of Christianity was expressed as the victory of rationalistic theology with all such symptoms as Bible criticism and the critical dissolution of the traditional authority of the Sacred Scriptures and apostolic dogma.

Friedrich Christoph Oetinger lived from 1702 to 1782, when he died as a prelate at Murrhardt. He was the founder and head of the theosophical and naturo-mystical movement in Swabian Pietism. He was a genius with a range of knowledge and ability almost inconceivable today, which can only be compared with that of the universal genius Leibniz. He was, however, not only a scholar, but also a man with a unique charismatic gift, as well as a sense of the visionary and prophetic side of Christian life and of the other world. At the same time he had a unique knowledge of the various theological movements of the day in the sphere of doctrine, biblical exegesis and church history. Above all, he was familiar with the esoteric tradition of Christianity, as revealed in the personalities of "prophets" of the recent past such as Jakob Boehme and contemporary ones such as Emanuel Swedenborg. An inner kinship of being drew him towards the important charismatic personalities of the church of the past and of his own times. Oetinger's autobiography describes in detail where and how

he made the acquaintance of the mystic fathers of the early church, such as Makarios the Egyptian, the writings of Jakob Boehme, the Jewish and Christian Cabals<sup>1</sup> and the visionary Swedenborg. He got to know this mystic tradition of natural philosophy, not merely by reading, but had a personal relationship with its living representatives. For instance, he reports on his getting to know a number of persons who themselves, like Boehme, experienced the “Central Revelation,” mystics to whom the “vision of the essence of all Being” was opened, in which vision and insight into the secrets of nature was combined with a revelation of the secrets of the Gospel.

Often the bearers of this tradition were simple laymen. For example Oetinger was introduced to Jakob Boehme by the owner of the powder-mill at Tübingen, who invited him into his living room, showed him Boehme’s “Aurora” and said: “That is the true theology” (Schaible, p. 32). He got to know the Christian Cabal (*The Cabal Revealed*) by Ritter Knorr von Rosenroth in Frankfurt at the home of Councillor Fende, and was introduced to the Jewish Cabal by the Jewish cabalist from Frankfurt, Coppel Hecht, at the home of Cabinet Minister Johann Jakob Schütz. He also familiarized himself with the art of the alchemists. In theology he primarily carried on the exegetical tradition of his teacher Johann Albrecht Bengel, whose historico-typologica<sup>2</sup> interpretation of John’s Apocalypse he adopted whole and made the basis of his early expectation of the “last days” (the End of the Age, i.e. for him, of the world). He came to grips also with all other tendencies in the theology of his time, which he studied with indefatigable attention, especially the newly developing rationalistic theology of Semler and the Berlin theology of Teller. He also kept under close observation the happenings in the field of philosophy. He was as familiar with the ideas of Leibniz as with those of Maupertuis. He knew the French materialists such as Lammetrie as well as the English empiricists. He was one of the first Protestant theologians to criticize Kant’s writings. Even

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<sup>1</sup> Although the word “Cabal”—derived originally from the Hebrew “Qabbalah”—is used nowadays for a conspiring and intriguing faction of persons, it is used here for two different secret traditional methods of interpreting the scriptures to elicit teaching on metaphysics, physics and pneumatology. Tr.

<sup>2</sup> Typology is a doctrine according to which events etc. recorded in the New Testament are prefigured in the Old. Tr.

more astonishing was his keen critical observation of the developments in the field of the natural sciences, both physics and chemistry, as well as astronomy and medicine. His interest in Newton's scientific theories was particularly intensive.

Oetinger's contact with the visionary writings of Swedenborg occurred at a very critical period of his life, the external circumstances of which favored the deep impression which Swedenborg's revelations about the spiritual and celestial worlds made upon him. In 1762 Oetinger was taken ill with pleurisy, which rapidly degenerated into consumption, and caused fears of his early death. During this period he devoted himself especially to questions of the condition after death and designed his theosophical system, which was based on the idea of the corporeality of the spiritual. In the light of the visions of Ezekiel and John's Revelation he elucidated the corporeal character of the celestial existence, and searched in all the works of the scientists and metaphysicists of his time for arguments which would reveal to him the internal link between earthly and heavenly "physics," between the vital arrangements of the earthly and spirituo-corporeal existences. To this period belong not only his account of the *Cabalistic Instructional Diagram of Princess Antonia*, but also, and most importantly, his book *Swedenborg's Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy*, 1765.

In Swedenborg, Oetinger made the acquaintance of a seer with a most unusual—in fact, unique—type of visionary experience. Swedenborg, son of a bishop of the established Swedish Lutheran Church, after departing somewhat from the orthodox piety of the family home, turned to the natural sciences, and after studying in England with the most important astronomers, physicists, geologists, and technicians of the period, returned to Sweden with numerous sensational inventions, and there received from the King, Charles XII, who quickly discovered his talent for science and technology, an appointment as Assessor to the Board of Mines.

He became a member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, and was in close touch with the most prominent scientists of the Paris and London academies, and often visited them in the course of his numerous study trips to Germany and Holland, as well as to France and especially England. He had his scientific works (written in Latin) published in Sweden, Germany, Holland, and England.

The gift of spiritual vision was given to him comparatively late, i.e., at the age of fifty-seven (in 1745) after a shattering year-long crisis in his scientific work, when he realized the impossibility of his ever achieving by the familiar methods of analysis and experimental science the long-sought-after breakthrough to a general understanding of the universe. In the course of a vision of Christ at the termination of this period, he was instructed to undertake a complete and most thorough study of the Bible in its original languages as a means of receiving, with the Lord's help, its internal senses, and conveying them by printed books. It was to help him in this task that the eyes of his spirit were opened to see into the spiritual and celestial worlds. The characteristic feature of the books which he wrote in a kind of inspired condition after the opening of his inner sight—ready for printing, and without any need for fundamental revision of his manuscripts—is that they are not pure reports of visions, such as are found in the Scivias of Hildegard of Bingen, for example, but commentaries on the interpretation of the Scriptures, in particular Genesis and Exodus, and also the Apocalypse, appearing as commentaries after the interpretations, and giving information gained by the author from his Divinely guided studies and from the spiritual and celestial worlds of angels. He also sees there representations, signs, correspondences and images or illustrations of the Lord's kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

Swedenborg formulated his claim to be a visionary in a letter to Oetinger dated 23rd September 1756 accompanying a copy of his work *Apocalypse Revealed*, in the following terms:

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<sup>3</sup> The first-fruits of his call are contained in ns. 14 and 15 of *Arcana Coelestia*, which read as follows:

14. In all that follows the name THE LORD is used exclusively to mean the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, and He is called "the Lord" without the addition of the rest of His names. Throughout heaven He is acknowledged and worshipped as Lord, since He has all power in heaven and on earth. This He also commanded when He said, "You call Me Lord, and you are right, for so I am" (John 13:13). Furthermore, after the resurrection the disciples called Him "Lord."

15. Throughout heaven they do not know any other Father than the Lord, for they are one, as He Himself has said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. Philip said, Show us the Father. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know Me, Philip. He who has seen Me has seen the Father. So why do you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? Believe Me, that I am in the Father and the Father in Me." John 14:6, 8–11. Tr.

It can be clearly seen from this book that I converse with angels, as without revelation not even a single verse from the Apocalypse can be understood. I solemnly affirm that the Lord Himself appeared to me, and that He sent me to do what I am doing, and that to that end He opened the internal of my spirit, that is, my spiritual man, so that I may see things which are in the spiritual world and hear its inhabitants, both of which I have been doing now for twenty two-years already.

In the same letter he explained to Oetinger the character of his revelations. Oetinger, in his letter to Swedenborg, had referred to the latter's visions as "prophecies." Swedenborg now explains to him that his book about the New Jerusalem does not contain "prophecies" in the usual meaning of that word, but "revelations." Whereas by "prophecy" he understands a soothsaying which in the form of dark, enigmatic, metaphorical, oracular, symbolic or allegorical utterances conveys information about future events or hidden truths, his "revelations" are for him not soothsayings, prophecies or predictions of future occurrences, but disclosures, revelations, the unveiling of the soothsayings recorded in the Holy Scriptures, but hitherto kept concealed, the discovery of which God has delayed until the present time, but now allowed to take place through the instrumentality of him, Swedenborg. Actually, Swedenborg did not always respect this distinction, but published various revelations which were prophecies of future events, e.g. the coming of the New Church, and the Second Coming of Christ in the form of the publication of his book, *The True Christian Religion*. However, Swedenborg does not claim to be considered a prophet announcing new dark sayings and signs, but a messenger bringing bright, clear, unveiled truths, recognizable to an enlightened understanding.

Oetinger's reaction to his encounter with the visionary writings of Swedenborg is expressed most clearly in the work which he published at the climax of his illness (1765) when he was facing what seemed to him to be his almost certain early death: *Swedenborg's Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy*.

The special feature of this book was the fact that Oetinger was already a thorough connoisseur of Swedenborg's numerous scientific works written before the sudden burgeoning of his visionary powers in 1745. The

encounter now in 1765 with the visionary writings of Swedenborg, which had hitherto been unknown to him, led him to initiate a lively correspondence with Swedenborg, which induced him to go to the defense of the Nordic Seer—who was being strongly attacked by the Lutheran established Church of Sweden—in several defensive pleas. The content of the first part (vol. I) of this work is therefore a comparison of the earlier familiar scientific works and the newly discovered visionary writings of Swedenborg. It was inevitable that in the figure of Swedenborg, who from a learned scientist had become a seer, he should be particularly fascinated by the problem which most interested him, viz., the connection or relationship between scientific and religious knowledge. Hence this first volume comprises two parts: *A. Swedenborg's Earthly Philosophical System; a Comparison of this Philosophy with that of Jakob Boehme. B. The Heavenly Philosophy of Swedenborg. Natural Historic News from the Spiritual World and from Heaven, Extracts from Swedenborg's Documents.* The second volume contains the criticism of Swedenborg himself, who is here set in a critical comparison with the great scientists and philosophers of his period, a comparison which is based on Ezekiel's vision of God (Ez. 1: 495) which for Oetinger constituted a revelation of God by Himself, comprising both the secrets of nature and the plan of salvation. The title of this second part therefore significantly reads as follows: *The Second Part of the Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy, in which the Earthly Philosophy of the following are compared with the Heavenly Philosophy of Ezekiel: 1. Swedenborg, 2. Malebranche, 3. Newton, 4. Cluver, 5. Wolf, 6. Ploucquet, 7. Bagliv, 8. Fricker.* Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1765.

The ideas here expressed in a rather disordered, intuitive style and raised by the author's illness to an almost feverish sensitivity, next return in a third work, which was also written during Oetinger's illness and shows his deep inner concern with the questions of the nature of heavenly existence and the condition after death. This was his *Theologia ex idea vitae deducta* (Theology deduced from the idea of life), which was also published in 1765, but now attempts to bring his natural theology and his teaching about the spiritual world into a systematic relationship.

The fourth work of this tetralogy of his theological and scientific beliefs is entitled the *Symbolic Dictionary of the Bible*, published in the same year, 1765. This work is so specially significant, because it brings forward

the naturo-mystic ideas of Oetinger as explanations of the biblical conceptions which seemed to him to be particularly important, arranged in alphabetical order. In this work, which has been phototype-copied in the *Emblematic Cabinet* published in 1969 by Prof. Tschizewski and me, he had already incorporated his exposition of the visions and scriptural interpretations of Swedenborg in the appropriate articles.

In the preface to the first volume Oetinger presents the visionary Swedenborg to the world of German theologians and other scholars as a man whose appearance in the Divine Plan of Salvation was foreseen for that particular epoch. "I hereby present to the reader something really rare, for him to verify what God has made known for the present time." Oetinger sees in Swedenborg's teachings a revelation which is adapted in a special degree to the contemporary "enlightened" form of unbelief, based on the modern sciences. "The unbelief of the world has decided God to make a famous philosopher into a herald of heavenly teachings." Unbelief founded on philosophy and mathematics is to be overthrown by a seer who himself has mastered the sciences. Oetinger expressly confirmed the genuineness and charismatic nature of Swedenborg's revelations. They are, he assures us on the basis of his critical examination, "not imaginings, but derived from influences from Heavenly intelligences at the Lord's command."

The making of new revelations causes Oetinger in his very first comment on Swedenborg to lay down a few aspects of a pertinent critical theology of revelation, and to demand the establishment of a set of principles for "a prophetic theology." He presents to those who radically reject all new revelations, as is the practice of contemporary orthodoxy, on the basis of its dogma of the definitive completion of the canon of Holy Writ, and its "sufficiency" for the salvation of mankind, a demand that before they reject a priori all extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, which express themselves in new revelations, they must first draw up the right criteria for the objective assessment of any such new prophecy. His fundamental point of view was that Swedenborg's writings were actually genuine revelations. The assumption that the information given regarding the supernatural world had been "entirely invented by him" would require him to have been gifted with a faculty of imagination which itself must be regarded as a miracle, and would transcend by its "miraculous character"

all philosophic conceptions hitherto of the nature of the soul and the operation of the powers of the imagination.

1. The first of the main ideas of his "prophetic theology" is that in the history of the Christian church there are in addition to the "ordinary revelations" at all times "extraordinary" ones. The Divine revelation provided in the Old and New Testaments has not come to an end. It is a revelation as part of the Plan of Salvation, which interprets itself in the progressive flow of history. History interprets itself as the history of salvation by revealing the situation of the particular epoch of the history of salvation by extraordinary revelations. "It is demonstrable from them by the Father that there have been in century after century extraordinary revelations alongside the ordinary ones" (*Swedenborg in Deutschland*, p. 93).
2. Swedenborg's position as the herald of new extraordinary revelations is in Oetinger's opinion by no means limited to him. Such heralds of extraordinary revelations appear at all times. Oetinger therefore, as one familiar with ecclesiastical history, endeavors to provide evidence of the existence of extraordinary revelators from earlier times. So he names as such, for example, Ruisbrock and Tauter, but also St. Therese, and the English Philadelphians with their visionaries such as Pordage, Bromley, Leade. In any case he sees the appearance of such extraordinary revelations in his own times increasing. For him it was Jakob Boehme and Albrecht Bengel who were of decisive importance in the period before Swedenborg. He saw both of them as standing in a direct relationship to Swedenborg.
3. To illustrate how widespread is the phenomenon of extraordinary revelation he considered it important, even in his work on *Swedenborg's Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy*, to consider, besides Swedenborg, two minor contemporary visionaries, viz. Hans Engelbrecht, originally a sheetmaker from Brunswick, whose reports of his visions appeared in 1783 under the title *The German Swedenborg*, and Lorentz Pscherer, "a schoolmaster in the hamlet of Altstadt," both of whom have published revelations about the spiritual world. He also mentioned, apart from Swedenborg, "the Convulsives from France": the inspirational group

from the Cevennes, who through their spiritual gifts—of healing, speaking with tongues and prophecies—had such an influence on German Pietism.

4. Nevertheless Oetinger does not risk accepting the extraordinary revelations in accordance with their own authoritarian claims. Two kinds of judgement are possible: one is to reject them in principle and to ignore them altogether even to reject them as insinuations from evil spirits or devils. This is wrong. It is just as wrong to take the opposite attitude, and to understand them in accordance with their own claims in the same way as the Holy Scriptures, as an expansion of the biblical revelation. The only correct attitude is that recommended by the apostle Paul himself: “Test [or check] everything; hold fast what is good!” (I Thess. 5:21).
5. A test is in Oetinger’s opinion necessary above all because where revelations and visions are concerned errors and misunderstandings can easily creep in. It is part of the essence of such revelations since the period of the oldest Christian prophecy that error is mixed with the truth, because these revelations are made through the medium of men who speak in the language of their time and in conformity with their own endowments and receptivity. “I find no-one who has been directly illuminated who does not carry with him much that is merely human, much error and many wrong conclusions.” The grain of Divine revelation grows on the stem of human thought, as Paul himself confirmed. “Even in his time direct prophecies in some cases earned contempt because of this admixture, but Paul did not wish on that account that they should all be rejected. In such cases the cleverness of the just and the willfulness of a few saints express themselves” (*Swedenborg in Deutschland*, p. 172). The human spirit is too limited in scope to contain all the fullness of the Divine Spirit. The limited (human) spirit grasps only a part of this, and understands it in human words when talking about it. “For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect” (I Cor., 13:9). In the same connection Oetinger repeatedly appeals to the fact that even during the period of the Apostles, prophecy fell into contempt owing to human weaknesses: “Do not despise prophesying” (I Thess. 5:20).

6. Oetinger justified the existence of extraordinary gifts of the spirit, visions, and revelations, by his Theology of the Holy Spirit. He understands these extraordinary gifts as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. He sees them as standing in a special relationship to the passage regarding the seven spirits before the throne of the Lord (Rev. 1:4).

Prophetic influences derived from God all come from the seven spirits, which greet us all in Holy Revelation. They greet us, but some people say: we do not wish to know anything about such things. Now these influences cannot be received unless the spirit who receives them has some similarity, kinship or relationship to them. The influences flowing out from God are like a sea. Every influence flowing from the manifold radiations of the Glory of God has a different nature and condition, and is as abundant as a sea. The limited (human) spirit grasps only a part of it, not all, and understands it in human words when talking about it.

That is the limitation which results from the finite nature of the human spirit itself, which can receive the influx of the Divine Spirit only in conformity with the peculiar features and finite limitations of the spirit in question.

It remains undisputed that the extraordinary revelations are understood as signs of the new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last times (Whitsun sermon, in "Oetinger's Holiday Sermons" [1759, in the Appendix to the 2nd part of the so-called "Weinsberg Gospel Sermons"] reprinted 1974, Metzingen). "As we are getting close to this time (the 'last time'), it is no wonder that the forces of the gift of prophecy are appearing here and there. Follow the strait path! He who loves Jesus, keeps His Word, and if Jesus reveals Himself to you, remember that He has secretly revealed Himself to thousands of others since His Ascension. Ruysbrock, Tauter and Jakob Boehme are living witnesses. But test everything! They are not purified to the seventh degree; do not despise prophecy, however, but wait in love to the Lord to see how, in accordance with your endowments, Jesus will reveal Himself to you! So many visions, so many different kinds of revelation, in wisdom, in knowledge, in the faith and in skills."

7. The other explanation offered by Oetinger is linked to his teaching regarding man's sensory faculties. Originally man had direct access to the Heavenly World. In the period before Enoch,

the sensory faculties for the invisible world had normally been very open. After the flood their power had waned, or had at least not been very normal. In this primeval condition of the world, when the love of many had gone cold, spiritual communication with the other world from the revelation of the Holy Spirit remained merely among few as something extraordinary, whereas it had previously been quite ordinary, not to say common.

It should be borne in mind that "the ordinary and the extraordinary must always run in double harness with each other. These current phenomena are in the present climate of opinion considered fanatical, and the perverse fear of fanaticism is doing a great deal of damage to the whole Church." In this light the great significance for the Plan of Salvation which Oetinger ascribes to Swedenborg is perfectly understandable. He describes Swedenborg's development, which led him through all the sciences of his time, as a preparation for the restoration, in accordance with his expectations, of man's original spiritual sensory faculties.

All these preparations were intended to ensure that he could, with his pure and unspotted soul, bring the communion with the invisible world, through great and important events, into effect again. The very first promise which Jesus made to His disciples was: "You shall see Heaven opened." In these last times, therefore, something of the same kind must appear, not to fit in with the creeds, but so that it should be added, without being noticed, to the blessings of the Early Church.

The call of Swedenborg in these latter days therefore signifies the restoration of man's original sensory faculties for the spiritual world, access to which he had closed through his rejection of God.

8. Being equipped with extraordinary spiritual faculties may in itself constitute a temptation to abuse them, as it kindles and promotes the

egotism of the person endowed with such "extraordinary" gifts. Here speaks the man who knows from experience:

Along the extraordinary path a man rejoices that the spirits are subject to him, that he is entrusted with special skills or revelations. Simply as a result of this there easily arises a willful, self-centered, self-orientated pleasure which afterwards is the greatest obstacle to God's revelation in the soul. It was this which happened to the disciples, who, after the acknowledgement: "Thou art the Christ!" from great conceit committed their most flagrant acts of presumption. That is how things still are. The most upright have the greatest zeal, but at the same time the greatest lack of judgement. They want quickly to come to terms with themselves in their preconceived, devout manner, unacceptable to God though it is. They imagine they have made enough progress, judge everything by their own standards, despise the ordinary kind of revelation made to other people, and exalt their own enforced extraordinary achievements, if perchance God grants them dreams or other unusual insights in prayer or gives them the polish to develop pleasant relationships. Therefore God must humble them deeply and long, until they cast out their offences, which hurt only themselves . . . and when such souls as these put in order these things which have grown under the influence of spiritual pride . . . they provide the devil with many new ways of access to themselves

9. In spite of the dangers from human inadequacy, the progressiveness of revelation through extraordinary witnesses has a positive purpose, an important significance for the Plan of Salvation. It is here that the eschatological attitude of Oetinger's theology finds its most characteristic expression. Divine Revelation is effected in stages, it does not fall from Heaven in its finished form, but runs in double-harness with world history, which embraces the whole period from the Creation to the Last Judgement. It is this which endows history with its character of the history of salvation, by proclaiming its hidden sense, the Self-Revelation and Self-Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. As in God nothing is stationary, but everything eternally in flux, the search for

wisdom is constantly proceeding. “For wisdom is more moving than any motion; she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness” (*Wisdom of Solomon, Apocrypha, 7:24*—King James version<sup>4</sup>) So there is a progressiveness in revelation, which is constantly being further interpreted in the course of history, revealing its essential character as a history of Salvation, and the path to its goal, and proclaiming its position in relation to that goal, the kingdom of God, the “Golden Age”—with ever greater clarity.

“The prophecy of Joel was not concluded with the history of the Apostles . . . It must remain for ever true that the effects of Faith in past ages, as described in Hebrews, 11, will continue to give rise to both extraordinary and ordinary deeds.” The knowledge of salvation grows with the progress of the history of salvation. “The least in the New Testament is greater than John the Baptist,” but nevertheless John for his part was “greater and lived in a happier time than Abraham, Moses and David . . . But how hard it is for us to believe this!” This progress applies also to our own time. We are told that we have more than the Apostles had. The revelations made known in recent times by St. Thérèse, Mme. Guyon, Mme. Bourignon, and by Engelbrecht, Boehme and Swedenborg, provide a greater development of the knowledge of salvation, beyond the level provided by the Apostles. But

we do not believe this, we are not humble enough to acknowledge our weakness. On the contrary, we are conceited when we can find faults in Jakob Boehme, Thérèse, Guyon, Bourignon, Engelbrecht and Swedenborg. We reject them as “dreamers”; we almost go so far as to libel the works of the Holy Spirit by saying that in these days God cannot perform them any longer, as He did in the past. (*Swedenborg in Deutschland*, p. 192)

Oetinger reproaches his theologian contemporaries with “suffering from torpor or sluggishness, closing their minds to the living utterance of the spirit.” Everyone looks

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<sup>4</sup> A more modern version (N.E.B.) reads: “For wisdom moves more easily than motion itself, she pervades and permeates all things because she is so pure.” Tr.

towards the small corner of the world where he was brought up. At the time of the Apostles it was not so. Jesus Christ brought us the Heavenly teachings in their true proportions, but we are no longer in the right relationship to the whole. We have more than the Apostles had, but not in true perspective—that is where we are lacking.

10. When Oetinger emphasizes “We have many blessings which they [the Apostles] did not have” (Vol. 6, 2nd part, p. 334) what is he referring to? The blessings he refers to consist in the progress of our insight into the secrets of “the last things.” The disciples were convinced of the immediate coming of the kingdom of God, the start of the “Golden Age,” but Jesus was unwilling to tell them the time and the hour of these events.

The disciples believed that Jesus would convert them during their lives, and ascend with them in the clouds (I Cor. 15:51, 52). This belief was good for the time when they were living, but for our times, 1770 years later, something else was kept in reserve, the understanding of the long periods involved. This was made known to us by God through His own instruments, and He is still sending His instruments who develop one passage after another more deeply and in greater detail.

So Jesus at first kept a great deal hidden, He Himself “spoke least about these things (*Herrenberg Gospel Sermons*, p. 581) therefore He shows (*ibid.*, p. 560) that His revelation would always be moderated by a seemly concealment due to its stage-by-stage nature.” The reason for the continuation of revelation in the church is therefore the delaying of the Second Coming.

The great significance which Oetinger attaches to the subject of spiritual vision and revelation is clear from the fact that he opens his great work *A Discussion of the High-Priesthood of Christ* with a full consideration of this subject. The starting point for this is the distinction he makes between ordinary and extraordinary revelation. For this purpose he regards ordinary revelation as limited, in accordance with the orthodox

theology of the Schools, to the books recognized by the church as included in the canon of the Old and New Testaments, whereas extraordinary revelation extends through all the centuries of ecclesiastical history. His ideas are partly derived from a discussion on this subject in the year 1740 with Prof. Hottinger of Heidelberg during his stay in Bad Liebenzell (near Hirsau).

Oetinger depicts very graphically the different views held, p. 152:

Among the orthodox the question arises, whether there may still be fresh revelations in the New Testament when the guidelines governing the Holy Scriptures have been closed by the Apocalypse. It is obvious that promises are made in the Apocalypse of certain new revelations at appropriate times. The strictest of the orthodox assert that there are no new revelations. They quote the text: "They have Moses and the Prophets" (Luke 16:29). Those with more experience do not deny that God could establish fresh instruments of revelation; but assert that He will not do so. The most experienced, however, say with Moses (when his followers asked him to rebuke some among them who were prophesying): "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets!" (Num. II: 29). Only let unbelief prevent all the miraculous powers from being poured out, and may He in the meantime continue to provide in secret a portion of the extraordinary to accompany the ordinary.

His definition of revelation shows that Oetinger is accustomed to respect the variety of charismatic experience.

By revelation (p. 151 f.) is to be understood

Any and every thing which is revealed to a soul in an extraordinary way, whether by voice or vision, in sleep or awake, directly or indirectly by angels, about secrets, future events, the arousing of the neighbor from his delusion of safety in sin, with a presentation of the terrible judgements to come unless he repents, to save him from worry and dangers . . .

Revelations take many forms (Heb. 1:1; Num. 12:6, 8; 1 Sam. 28:6). It is wrong to assume that only one or another method is Divine; for in each successive generation God reserves to Himself the use of a method which He has not used before: the eagle or the angel, seen and heard by John flying through the midst of Heaven and crying "Woe, woe, woe," had

quite a different kind of revelation from that of the angel with the eternal gospel, Rev. 8:13. And similarly the two witnesses had quite a different kind of revelation from the two others before them. Different revelations again were provided by Mörlin, Engelbrecht and Boehme, and quite different ones yet again by Swedenborg. Their revelations are all mixed with the human leaven of clumsy language. From this I conclude that the characteristics of true revelation must be drawn, not from the method, but from the degree of agreement of the main features of the spiritual vision with the principal aspects of Holy Writ.

Revelation cannot be classified by its subject matter either. Secrets, visions, doctrines, duties and prophetic symbols are individually distinct. What was previously revealed “through a glass darkly” is later made known openly. What had been kept secret from eternity was clearly revealed by the Apostles, so that it was no secret any more. But even the most certain revelations are covered over now and then with a certain amount of camouflage, like the tabernacle with badger skins. That is why there has been so much dispute about Bengel’s declaration of revelation, as well as the revelations of Jakob Boehme and Swedenborg. God does this in order to enhance the light with shade, and to try, test and preserve our obedience, faith and hope by patience and the consolation of His Word.

Oetinger now expressly puts himself on the side of the supporters of extraordinary revelations—he even assumes the task of illuminating throughout the church’s history the continuity of extraordinary spiritual gifts. In doing so he is conscious of carrying out a task that had been overlooked by previous ecclesiastical historians.

From church history witnesses will now be adduced to show that the extraordinary has remained in progress alongside the ordinary. It should be noticed that when a person, after much prayer, control and modification of his manner of thinking, achieves a certain degree of spiritual judgement, he selects both the extraordinary and ordinary forms with understanding and the Fear of God. Therefore everyone can assess for himself how such men as Semler, H. v. Holberg, Mosheim, Bengel and Hahn judge the history of the church.

Oetinger then himself gives a short history of the visionaries and charismatics who during the centuries of the Early Church became themselves the bearers of extraordinary revelations, concluding it with the words:

I have now adduced witnesses enough, from which it can be clearly seen that the Early Fathers received from time to time from God, besides the ordinary, also extraordinary, Divine assistance to enable them to bring their hearers to an effective belief in the Word. But to what end do I do this? Is not my main theme the High Priesthood of Christ? I answer that the High Priesthood of Christ cannot be acknowledged to its full extent unless God Himself, the King of all the Ages, provides extraordinary assistance, in addition to the ordinary. The present is a proper time, among other proper times. (Cf. I Tim., 6:15, for 'at proper times')

As a matter of fact there is a qualitative distinction, so far as Oetinger is concerned, between ordinary and extraordinary revelation:

It is necessary to conceive the inspiration of revelation quite differently from the way in which it is normally thought of. In Holy Writ the words themselves are arranged by God in a particular order, they are not conveyed by a spokesman. The most important matters are conveyed directly, but the words by arrangement in order, which is more determinant than the inspiration of all the words. Moreover, the scholars do not take into consideration that there has never been a major instrument of revelation without Divine inspiration, but there have always been contradictions at work, and that was why in the Apostolic Church two or three prophesied direct through the Spirit, and the others had to judge by the Spirit. It is therefore certain that the spirits of the prophets must be subject to the prophets, and that the extraordinary revelation must be checked against the Ordinary Canon, and if found to be in error, duly corrected.

Besides these points, with such extraordinary persons the position is similar to that in Nature itself: the subtle oil of the plants is carried by the coarse and unhealthy, bitter or sulphurous oil, and if this carrier were not available, the plant would not yield the subtle oil of the controlling essence. Let us take an example. If Luther had not been so stubborn, he

would not have brought off the Reformation; if Swedenborg had not had the secondary ideas, he would not have produced the principal ones; this is in accord with the above rules of order.

The acknowledgement of Swedenborg's account of the spiritual and celestial world by Oetinger as a genuine revelation was not without reservations at first; it was hindered by Oetinger's criticism of the form of the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures on which Swedenborg based his Writings. The peculiar feature of Swedenborg's writings is of course the fact that they do not consist, like the Apocalypse of John or other visionary writings of the early period of the Church, of independent reports of visions, but contain accounts of things heard and seen which act as illustrations of and commentaries on teachings about the spiritual and heavenly world which were communicated to him by angels and spirits during his visits to the spiritual world, when the spiritual content of these teachings was made known to him by means of so-called correspondences. The vision is therefore not isolated, and takes place as a self-contained pictorial experience, but always relates to an individual word of scripture, being always a commentary on a passage of scripture, or a doctrine. Thus the visions mostly consist of descriptions of participation in conversations in heavenly schools, discussions and teaching assemblies, in which the heavenly participants dispute regarding a specific doctrine, and in doing so themselves represent the content of this doctrine by the manner of their attendance, their clothing, the place of assembly, by means of correspondences. This transforms the method of his interpretation of scripture into an approximation to the classical form of interpretation by allegory.

To his growing alarm Oetinger felt compelled to conclude that Swedenborg understood the words of the Sacred Scriptures not in their proper, literal sense, but in a figurative sense, which treats the actual statements of the Bible merely as keys to a concealed spiritual sense, which must be revealed by higher inspiration, namely by the voices of the spirits and angels,<sup>5</sup> in such a way that the historical or material or personal corporeal realities of the scripture are interpreted as keys to other corre-

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<sup>5</sup>In rare instances this is true, but Swedenborg asserts that the source of his inspiration was the Lord alone, "while he was reading the Word." Cf. *True Christian Religion* ns. 779 and 780. Tr.

sponding spiritual or abstract conceptions and ideas. Thus Swedenborg compiled a complete lexicon of correspondences, giving the spiritual meanings of the concrete statements of the Holy Scriptures. The actual result of this “hieroglyphic [correspondential] interpretation” was therefore the heralding of a new science, consisting in the unveiling and discovery of the internal spiritual sense of the literal statements of the Holy Scriptures. It is only fair to add that Swedenborg in the majority of cases readily accorded the literal sense, as well as the spiritual sense, its full significance. Only here he believed he was dealing with language of “prophetic style”; as for instance in the Revelation of John, he regarded the literal sense merely as a vessel to contain the deeper, spiritual meaning. But it was just this elimination of the literal meaning of the Apocalypse that Oetinger, trained in the purely literal interpretation methods of Bengel, could not accept.

Oetinger’s dispute with Swedenborg reveals (both in his personal correspondence and in his numerous critical arguments with him which can be seen in his various theological works, in his book in vindication of Swedenborg, and in his other apologetic and critical writings) a peculiar dualistic character—on the one hand he shows the highest appreciation of Swedenborg’s revelations, his statements regarding the last times, the condition after death and the spiritual and heavenly world, and accords him the highest assessment as an instrument of “extraordinary revelation” in the Plan of Salvation; on the other he becomes more and more critical of his interpretation of Scripture. This criticism of his expositions in some cases assumed quite unusual forms; for instance he repeatedly appealed in his works and in his personal letters to the Spirit-Seer Swedenborg asking him to obtain from heaven a decision regarding the truth or otherwise of the interpretations of Scripture on which he had thrown doubt. As Oetinger for his part still adhered to the realistic literal interpretations of his teacher Johann Albrecht Bengel, he repeatedly asked Swedenborg to take advantage of his visits to the spiritual world to question Bengel as to how he understood his plain and literal interpretation of the heavenly Jerusalem and other factual statements of John’s Revelation about the heavenly city, the New Heaven and the New Earth, and what were his views on Swedenborg’s figurative interpretation.

After Oetinger had for many years hoped and endeavored to convince Swedenborg of the incorrectness of his allegorical, figurative interpretation of the Scriptures, a decisive parting of the ways took place on the publication of Swedenborg's final masterly theological work *The True Christian Religion* in 1771. Swedenborg had foretold the publication of this work several years earlier in a mysterious message. As early as 1768 at the end of his publication *Conjugal Love* he printed a list of the religious books he had so far published. This concluded with the mysterious announcement: "In two years men will see the Teaching of the New Church, foretold by the Lord in Revelation, Chapters 21 and 22, in its fullness."

This announcement, which was repeated in the *Theosophic Lucubration* by Hartley in 1770, aroused Oetinger's particular attention. He understood it as a promise by Swedenborg that the prophecies of the descent of the New Jerusalem and its teaching would be fulfilled within two years. He therefore decided to regard this "deadline," fixed by Swedenborg himself, as operative for the truth or untruth of his scriptural interpretations. On the 24th March 1771 he wrote to the Landgrave of Hesse: "Your Lordship will have seen at the end of the book *Conjugal Love* the words 'within two years will be seen in fullness the doctrine of the New Church foretold by the Lord in chapters 21 and 22 of the Apocalypse.' The two years have passed and it has not happened." He therefore asked the Landgrave, who was in personal correspondence (initiated by him) with Swedenborg, would he kindly ask the latter what was the position in relation to the two-year deadline, "which had expired without effect." In his book *Assessments of the Teaching regarding the Condition after Death* also, Oetinger reverts to Swedenborg's announcement. He states therein that Swedenborg's error consisted in his opinion that God had called him to establish a New Church, and explain the Scriptures "hieroglyphically."<sup>6</sup> "That was his folly, his fatuity, and it will be difficult to get him to abandon it, that is, unless by it he meant merely the publication of the teaching, which seems a strange construction to put upon the words."

As a matter of fact Swedenborg had intended his announcement as a reference to the appearance of a new book, as the announcement of his

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<sup>6</sup> I.e. Correspondentially. Tr. [p. 79 original]

next publication, which was to contain the complete teachings of the New Church. The book appeared. Its contents confirmed the worst suspicions of Oetinger. It bore as its blazons or emblems the words of the prophet Daniel regarding the coming of the Son of Man, 7: 13f., and those of John's Revelation, 21: 2-10, regarding the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven. This emblazonment indicates the purpose of the work: Swedenborg regards this his book on the true Christian religion as the fulfillment of the Old and New Testament prophecies of the descent of the Son of Man, and he regards himself as the figure through whom the fulfillment of this biblical prophecy would take place and in fact, had taken place.

This exalted Messianic assessment of his personality and his mission had already been foreshadowed in his book *Apocalypse Revealed*, published in Amsterdam in 1766, in which he assures the reader that the "hieroglyphic" (correspondential) interpretation of John's Apocalypse presented by him is the true, definitive, spiritual opening (revelation) of the internal sense of this book, by means of which he is introducing the descent of the New Jerusalem and the New Church.

Anyone may see that the Apocalypse could not possibly be explained but by the Lord alone, since every word of it contains mysteries, which never could be known without some special enlightenment and consequent revelation; wherefore it has pleased the Lord to open the sight of my spirit and to teach me. Think not, therefore, that anything there given is from myself, or from any angel,<sup>7</sup> but from the Lord alone. (Preface)

Similarly, Swedenborg then taught elsewhere that the Second Coming of the Lord would not take place in person, but in the Word. During the years following the publication of the *Apocalypse Revealed* in 1766 his religious self-confidence increased; now he draws the final conclusion from his religious exaltation: it was through him, Swedenborg, that the Second Coming of Christ, prophesied in the Revelation, was to take place. In No. 776 of the *True Christian Religion*, after many preparatory passages, he declares quite openly:

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<sup>7</sup> Benz seems himself to find this difficult to believe. Tr.

The Lord's Second Coming is not in person, but in the Word, which is from Him and which He is . . . We read in many passages that the Lord will come in [the clouds of heaven, but no one up to the present has known what] "the clouds of heaven" means; they have thought that He would appear to them in person. It has so far been unknown that the clouds of heaven mean the Word in its literal sense, and that the glory and power, with which He is to come at that time, mean the spiritual sense of the Word . . . Since the Lord has now revealed to me the spiritual sense of the Word, and has allowed me to associate with angels and spirits in their world, as if I were one of them, it has been disclosed to me that the cloud of heaven means the Word in its natural sense, and glory the Word in its spiritual sense . . . It is clear from this that the Lord will appear in the Word now.

The next paragraph of the work is preceded by the following theorem in bold type: "This, the Lord's Second Coming, is taking place by means of a man, to whom He has shown Himself in person, and whom He has filled with His spirit, so that he may teach the doctrines of the New Church which come from the Lord through the Word."

Swedenborg expressly repeated this Messianic claim for himself to the Landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt (when sending him a copy of the *True Christian Religion*) in the following letter dated 18th July 1771:

The Lord our Savior predicted that He would come into the world again and establish a new church, and because He cannot now come into the world [in His Glorified Humanity. Tr.] it became necessary that this should take place by means of a man who could not only grasp the teachings of this Church with his understanding, but also make them known by the press. And because the Lord had prepared *me* for this from my childhood onwards, He revealed Himself to *me*, His servant, in person, and appointed me to this task. This occurred in the year 1743, and thereafter He opened my spiritual sight, and also introduced *me* into the spiritual world . . . That this happened to me was simply and solely for the sake of the New Church just mentioned. (Italics by Benz)

This new interpretation of the goal of all man's expectations from the Plan of Salvation, the Second Coming of Christ, and the descent of the

New Jerusalem, in which Swedenborg was to play such a central role, absolutely shattered Oetinger. He saw the central feature of his glowing faith—the expectation of the physical fulfillment of the eschatological prophecies—overthrown in the most offensive manner: the place of the living reality of the returning Son of God and the descending City of God with its walls and gates of precious stones, with the stream of living waters, is taken by a book by a Swedish Assessor of Mines printed in Amsterdam, full of all the human defects and secondary qualities which habitually form part of a book written by a human being!

As a result, under the direct influence of reading this book Oetinger's hitherto-so-approving judgements of Swedenborg change immediately into the language of absolute rejection. On the 17th August 1771 he writes to his friend Hartmann, who had stood by him through all the vicissitudes of his relations with Swedenborg: "Swedenborg has sent me his new book: his tricks are all revealed in it. The future of Christ must not be understood literally. He (Swedenborg) is the future! My views regarding the Swedenborg problem are still too mild!" And in another letter to Hartmann dated 10th September 1771 he writes: "What presumption, to weaken the sense in such a manner. Perhaps I shall become his severest opponent, for he is blowing the same trumpet as Semler, though in a different sense; he is weakening and disembodimenting the entire sense of the Sacred Scriptures."

Oetinger goes into greatest detail with his criticism in a letter dated 15th October 1771 to a former apologist of Swedenborg in Germany and a pupil of Albrecht Bengel, Headmaster Hasencamp of Duisburg:

But now I am very worried about him in the light of his most recent book. I am sending you the book, from which you will see how much he is opposed to us. May I ask you, for the defense of the literal sense (of the Holy Scriptures) to publish a book expressing therein not only your own but also my opposition to him because he denies leading teachings of the Scriptures. He denies the White Horse (mentioned here also in the first place), the two witnesses, the three angels, and the High Priesthood of Christ . . . and accordingly agrees entirely with Semler, against whom I have published the book on the literal interpretation of the Scriptures . . . He actually says Christ will not come again in person, but only in the

Word, to establish the New Heaven and the New Earth, whilst the (personal) future of Christ will be represented by Swedenborg's person. All this is in direct contradiction to our doctrines.

Oetinger also expressed his severe criticism direct to Swedenborg himself, in a letter which the latter never received. "I do not know what he will see now." Oetinger therefore seemed to expect a rupture of relations, but this did not come to pass. Oetinger did not cease to stress the positive features of Swedenborg's revelations, and even undertook to excuse the latter's "hieroglyphic" (correspondential) interpretation of the Apocalypse, pointing out the fact that even the Apostles had made erroneous statements regarding the return of the Lord in the clouds of heaven. "We should consider how the Apostles, not without the guidance of the Eternal Spirit, situated close to their own times what was still 1770 years away. We must have patience in the great cycle of world events until everything comes to fruition." Why, there even seemed to be prospects of a personal meeting between Swedenborg and Oetinger. In spite of his 83 years Swedenborg made plans to visit Landgrave Ludwig IX of Hesse-Darmstadt and Lavater of Zürich, who was in correspondence with him regarding the death of his friend Felix Hess, with whom on the latter's death bed he had arranged for the latter to contact him after his death. On the way to Zürich he intended also to visit Oetinger at Murrhardt. From a letter from Swedenborg to Oetinger which did not reach him until December 1771, the latter learned to his great surprise that Swedenborg had in the meantime complied with his urgent request and spoken with Bengel and Fricker regarding their interpretation of John's Apocalypse, and reported "Both are making good progress with it. Fricker must himself have suggested the idea to him." In Duisburg among the friends of Hasencamp as well as in Murrhardt eager preparations were made for the meeting with Swedenborg. Oetinger began to modify his harsh judgement in anticipation of the visitor, who had already arrived in Amsterdam. "If God imparts extraordinary influences in quantity, errors must occur. Boehme contains mistakes, like Swedenborg, as does also Burignon. We must accept what is useful." But Swedenborg's visit, the promise of which had caused so much excitement, never occurred. So the actual discussion of the passage on the White Horse did not take place.

The dispute regarding the understanding of the Sacred Scriptures developed among the Pietists in Swabia round a quite peculiar point, namely, the white horse on which Christ was riding on his return after the victorious establishment of the kingdom of God. Rev. 19: 11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.”<sup>8</sup>

The rider on the white horse is followed by the armies of the saints: v. 14: “And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses,” the army which, led by the Lord of all Lords, conquers “the beast and the Kings of the earth and their armies.” For Bengel in the first place, then for Oetinger, but also for Johann Ludwig Fricker, Philipp Matthäus Hahn and Michael Halls, the white horse on which the King of all Kings sits, and the white horses of the combatants in the last battle, play a special role. The complete biblical literalism of these theologians is made clear by the emphasis given to the belief that Christ really is sitting on the white horse when he wins his last victory. In Oetinger’s symbolic dictionary of the Bible at the section about the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, pages 516 ff., an extra section regarding the rider on the white horse is inserted:

As Jesus earlier had ridden meekly in the guise of a servant into Jerusalem on the foal of an ass, so He will come again in the last times unexpectedly as a man of war mounted on a white horse. His eyes are like a flame of fire . . . and the name by which He is called is the Word of God, the power of which will be felt by His enemies. And the armies which are in Heaven, as mentioned in ch. 17; 14, followed him on white horses, to fight along with him at Armageddon, to capture the beast and the false prophet and throw them alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, and to kill the rest with the sword of battle, and to defeat the nations.

In the dispute about the reality of this apocalyptic scene the opposition of the Pietists to the figurative, symbolic or allegorical interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures was turned against both Semler and the Berlin

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<sup>8</sup> See below ch. 7 for Swedenborg’s teaching on this subject in *Arcana Coelestia* 2760–63.

rationalists such as Teller. The reason for the peculiar concentration of biblical literalism on the white horse lies in a very strange fact: there were many copies in Pietist homes of a copper engraving by Steinmetz of Nuremberg depicting very picturesquely the descent of Jesus to judge the Antichrist as described in the 19th chapter of Revelation. Oetinger had written a commentary on this engraving in pamphlet form, which is mentioned in his symbolical dictionary of the Bible mentioned above: "Read my booklet 'Descent of Christ on white horses' in the light of the engraving in question." The engraving showed the climax of the struggle at the end of the age and the Second Coming of the Lord; the optical center of the scene shows Christ on the white horse, followed by his supporters on their white horses. The booklet in question, five and a half pages long, published in 1769 under a pseudonym, was entitled: "Abridged basic teaching of the Württemberg Prelate Bengel regarding the setting for the descent of Jesus in judgement of the Antichrist before the last day, together with the associated 'last things,' in proof from Halatophilus, Irenæus etc. that the Sacred Scriptures are to be understood in their actual, non-figurative meaning" (reproduced in the edition of Oetinger's complete works published by Karl Chr. Eberh. Ehmman, 2nd part, vol. 6, "Papers of the Second Coming"). In this paper the problem of the interpretation of the Scriptures "in their actual, non-figurative meaning" is in fact discussed with reference to Jesus' white horse and His white horsemen. Those who deny the non-figurative meaning are threatened in advance in the symbolic dictionary of the Bible with the Divine punishment: "He who mocks at these things, and considers it unseemly for God and Jesus to show Himself so physically to His enemies should see to it that he does not fall among the enemies from whose blood Jesus to His eternal honor wears a blood bespattered robe." Even the sprinklings of blood on the white robe are genuine. While Swedenborg was not under discussion in this connection, in the booklet itself there is an express reference to him: "Swedenborg brings new doubts, so that we shall learn how to test prophecies; this teaches us to respect John's Holy Revelation literally" (Vol. 6, p. 474).

If we enquire regarding the deeper reason for this peculiar discussion about the genuineness of the white horse, we come across one of the most difficult problems of theology, which hardly any theologian dares to discuss, namely, the distortion of the words of Scripture by theological

interpretation. In theology lurks a danger which threatens its credibility. In the course of time the theologians, by using various methods derived from constantly varying philosophical trends, have quibbled so much about the letter of the Sacred Scriptures that the subjects of their quibbles have become tattered and torn, and lost their credibility. From Platonism to Rationalism, and today from Marxism to Pseudo-Marxism, there is no philosophy which has not led to the development of new methods of interpretation, new kinds of hermeneutics, which help the Bible along the path towards contemporary conformity. Particularly striking was the development of a modernistic exegesis during the period of the Enlightenment in which the rationalistic meaning of the Scriptures, even in the modern form of the dictionaries for the use of the clergy, could be detected in the daily life of the church congregations, and finally resulted in a demythologization of their sense content. Against this tendency the Pietists put forward their biblical realism, not merely in the form of a new Fundamentalism, but in the case of Oetinger on the basis of a completely new theology of corporeality, based on the recognition of the facts of the natural sciences and medicine, which for its part came to the conclusion which the devout Pietists wanted: a white horse is a white horse, and we shall not let ourselves be robbed of this fact by any figurative explanation of the theologians, however clever it may be, which destroys the actual sense of the words.

### **The Fundamental Problem of Continuing Revelation**

If we confront the problem of continuing revelation in its fundamentals, we find that it is not an internal theological, not even an internal Christian, but a global problem of religious history. This is still perhaps too little recognized in Germany; our theology is still concerned with venerable old problems, even where it claims to be radical. During my work as guest-professor in North and South America I took a special interest in the so-called New Religions, which are appearing everywhere with an unexpected vitality and missionary power: everywhere the basis of these new religions is their appeal to a new revelation. To mention just two examples from among the numerous new religions of Japan: Tenri-Kyó, the Church of the Teaching of Heaven, appeals to the revelations of

the Parental God, which were communicated to the poor carpenter's wife Miki Nakayama, partly in the form of easily understood and easy-to-sing songs; Omoto-Kyó appeals to the revelations of the God of the highest heaven received by a poor office-cleaner Naó Deguchi, who though illiterate picked up a brush and wrote with it didactic poems containing the new revelation. Both churches have many millions of adherents, with great organizing power and have established new towns and settlements. The cofounder of Omoto is Nisaburo Deguchi, a visionary, whose extensive reports of his visions of the spiritual and heavenly worlds immediately remind one of Swedenborg. Both religions conduct worldwide missions, Tenri even in Africa.

But even religions which have arisen within the ambit of other classical religions appeal to a new revelation. The Baha'i religion, which has developed from the Shiite (Muslim) religion of Iran, and has since spread to all the continents as a world religion, is based on the revelation of its founder Bab, as he is known in Baha'i circles. Bab, whose name means "the door" or "the gate," was joined by a young merchant from Schiras, Mirza Ali Muhammed. The teaching of Bab belongs to the Sub (mystical) sect of Islam. Bab regarded himself as the gate through which the will of the "hidden" Imam (Muslim religious leader), the messianic teacher of the "last days," reveals himself to the world. In a later development his messianic self-consciousness brought him to the conviction that he himself was an independent revelator; he described himself as the "mirror of the breath of God" and claimed for his written message from Him in the book Bayan (Declaration) recognition as a Divine Revelation. This claim in particular gave rise to the severest persecution by the Iranian Shiites, as it spread the idea of a new revelation going beyond the Islamic teaching of the Quran as the final, definitively valid, document of revelation.

Within Christianity also the idea of the continuance of revelation is constantly cropping up. It is characteristic of a whole series of newly founded churches, which are described as "sects" for the very reason that they are based on special revelation. That is for example the case with "Christian Science" whose founder, Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, makes the claim for her work *Science and Health, with the Key to the Scriptures*, that it reveals the true essence of the Christian revelation and contains the key to the actual spiritual understanding of the Sacred Scriptures. This claim is

expressed in the services of Christian Science by the practice of reading the Scriptures only and always in conjunction with corresponding passages from *Science and Health*, without any sermon in exegesis of the Divine Word, but only parallel readings as described. For the “New Church” of the Swedenborgians the writings of Swedenborg, and for the followers of Jakob Lorber, his writings, have the significance of a new revelation. Although in these cases the writings of the founder of the sect, according to their own claims, do not represent a new revelation in the same sense as the Bible itself, but the inspired definitively valid interpretation of the true sense of the biblical revelation. The claim of a new revelation is made without restriction by the Mormons, who see in the *Book of Mormon*, which was opened in a miraculous manner to their prophet Joseph Smith, the document of a new revelation. According to the convinced views of the Mormons, a genuine book in an archaic script on golden plates was made available to Smith by an angel Moroni on Mount Cormorah. He was enabled to decipher it with the help of a reading appliance supplied with the book, Urim and Thummin,<sup>9</sup> and to publish it in English. This book contains an expansion of the New Testament by revelations about the prehistory of the American peoples and the revelation of Jesus taking place on the American continent parallel to the Gospel story; the book is understood to be the Everlasting Gospel of the last times, the coming of which is prophesied in the Apocalypse, on which prophecies the “Church of the Latter-day Saints” is based. Since America is not mentioned either in the Old or the New Testament, the need for an expansion of the revelation can readily be seen.

Probably the clearest expression of the idea of a continuance of revelation is that of Spiritism. This world movement, which spread following its derivation from Mesmerism in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century in a powerful wave over North America, South America, and also the Asiatic countries, frequently took the organizational form of Christian Free Churches and lodges, which continue to recognize the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Scriptures as revelatory documents, but see in the connection with the spiritual world the possibility of a continuous expansion of the biblical revelation through information regarding the

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<sup>9</sup> These were in fact the names of interpretation plates used by the high priests of the children of Israel. Tr.

world to come, and believe in the link with that world through mediums as a permanent source of a "third Revelation." The idea of being able in this way to learn more regarding the world to come, and if possible to make contact with the dead, is one of the main causes of the fast growth of Spiritism during recent years. Here also the motive of the continuance of revelation is the main impulse behind the movement.

### **The Question of the Continuance of Revelation**

The question of the continuance of revelation beyond the Canon of the Sacred Scriptures can these days no longer be rejected. The history of the establishment of the Canon seems by now to have been satisfactorily settled. It goes back to the bishops of the early church, who laid down by a selection process which among the numerous writings extant among the congregations were to be considered Apostolic, and which not, and then declared the Apostolic revelation to be concluded. Basically all the Protestants who accept the orthodox teaching of the sufficiency of the Sacred Scriptures are Episcopalians (no matter in how Protestant a manner they behave in relation to other points of church doctrine and the Church Constitution) and it is the Pentecostalists (who are convinced that prophecy and the other gifts of the spirit still continue) who have remained, or returned, nearer to the heart of the matter.

Against this it has to be pointed out that the New Testament itself refers to the fact that progress in revelation is to be expected, namely, in connection with the factor of the activity of the Holy Spirit. To start with, Jesus says at John 15: 26 in his parting speech: "But when the Comforter comes whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I said unto you." Obviously the "teaching of everything" covers something new and additional to the reminding of all that Jesus had said to the disciples. In the same parting speech, ch. 16: 13, Jesus also said: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth." That means then that the revelation previously made to the disciples was not complete, i.e. in view of the limited power of comprehension of the disciples in comparison with the present time, but that in future the Spirit of

Truth would guide the disciples into all truth, into the full recognition of the truth. It is to the eager anticipation of the “not yet,” of the coming fulfillment, the continuation and future increase of the gifts of the Spirit that the higher understanding, the deeper insight and the greater outpouring of power from the Holy Spirit in all the charismatic spheres belongs. This therefore demands a fundamental adjustment to the continuance of revelation.

### **The Absence of Biblical Answers to Pressing Questions**

It is clearly a fact that extensive biblical areas of doubtful meaning are hardly touched upon, or deliberately put into the background, areas where the absence of answers was found in later times more and more troublesome, such as the question as to the course and end of the history of salvation, the question as to the fulfillment of the Gospel promises by the second coming of Christ, the date of the Last Judgement, the descent of the New Jerusalem, the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth. What a paradox: the earliest congregations used to pray when taking the eucharist: “May Thy Kingdom come, may this world pass away, Maranatha!” They were so expectant of the immediate coming of the kingdom of heaven, that they prayed for this world to pass away, to expedite the coming of the kingdom of heaven, but of what the kingdom of heaven is, no details are given, except perhaps the negative statement that there will be no marrying or giving in marriage there. That is exactly the point at which Oetinger, after the lapse of 1700 years, considers clarification by means of an extraordinary continuance revelation necessary—an answer to all the questions which were becoming ever more pressing as a result of the delay in the second coming, the question of the fulfillment of the Gospel prophecies, of what life will be like in the new age, in the hereafter, to which the entire hope, expectation and longing of the Christian is directed.

The absence of answers to these questions in the New Testament was at all times in church history the repeated occasion for bold hopes and miscalculations, but also a pretext for transforming the eschatological expectations into ecclesiastical or political revolution. The “biastai” (Matt. 11: 12) are the “men of violence,” who in the course of history become more and more violent, as is shown by the example of Thomas Müntzer,

not to mention more modern examples. They are the people who do not wish to go on waiting, but are unwilling to be silenced by the delaying evasion: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only," and instead of continuing to wait, take up revolutionary weapons, to get rid in the first place of those whom they consider the enemies of God, and thus to "force God's hand."

### **"Ordinary" and "Extraordinary" Revelation**

To cope with this attitude a theology of revelation is necessary which leads beyond a purely formal understanding of the Sacred Scriptures as the definitive, sufficient and finally concluded revelation document, and acknowledges and respects the continuance of the "extraordinary revelation," alongside the "ordinary revelation," which are the concern of both the visionary and the theologian.

After all, we have behind this acknowledgement the basic thought of Oetinger's experience and vision of God: God is the *ens manifestativum sui*, the Being Who reveals Himself, Whose fullness wells up from the depths, from the abyss of His self-concealment to self-revelation, which leads beyond the creation of the world to the creation of man in His image and likeness and to His incarnation in Jesus Christ. That is the actual content of Oetinger's theology, which is derived from the idea of life: all life flows from the depths of God to self-realization, and this self-realization is aimed at displaying Himself in corporeal fashion, for corporeality belongs to the completeness of God. Finally, here also the contrast with Swedenborg is overcome, for what Swedenborg is aiming at with his doctrine of correspondences is not the proclamation of a realm of abstract ideas, but a kingdom of a spirituo-corporeal universe, in which the forms of earthly corporeality rise into a realm of spirituo-corporeal fulfillment of their being, and are there united into the kingdom of God. Swedenborg's correspondences are not abstractions, not immaterial ideas, as they seem to be in the case of rationalists such as Teller and Semler, not monads as conceived by Leibniz, but the complete spirituo-corporeal realizations of God's will to self-revelation in His full kingdom. "It is God's good pleasure to make Himself incarnate and visible on His throne."



## CHAPTER IV

**“Emanuel Swedenborg” (from “The Truth of the Heretics”)**

Emanuel Swedenborg was pronounced a heretic, not by the verdict of the inquisition court of any Church, but by a no less severe and no less effective judgement, pronounced from the Chair of Philosophy of Immanuel Kant—Immanuel versus Emanuel. The name of Swedenborg is still linked with the criticism which Kant published against Swedenborg in his book *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*. This publication labeled Swedenborg with the title of “Spirit-Seer,” and thus exposed him to a completely one-sided assessment. Judging by Kant’s criticism, it appears as if Swedenborg’s heresy was that of spiritism, and therefore he has been associated with all the innumerable forms in which modern spiritism expresses itself in the religious and pseudo-religious consciousness of our epoch. Actually, however, if one takes this polemic of Kant against Swedenborg as one’s starting point, one cuts oneself off from the way to a true understanding of his life and teaching; firstly, because this procedure seeks to limit the significance of Swedenborg to his activities as a spirit-seer, which is not in accordance with the facts; secondly, because it ignores the fact that this so-called spirit-seer was a scholar of the rank of a Leibniz, who, with a range of knowledge in all fields of philosophy, natural science, and engineering of the period which would today be inconceivable, had come into prominence with new knowledge and inventions which were acknowledged, accepted and used throughout the whole European learned world; and thirdly, above all, because in this way the positive contribution of Swedenborg to a new understanding of the Christian revelation is completely ignored.

Kant’s criticism ignores Swedenborg the scholar and pays attention exclusively to the visionary experiences which were met with by the fifty-six-year-old scholar in a later period of his development, viz., in the year 1745. Kant uses Swedenborg as a typical example of a man who believes himself able to break through the frontiers of reason which prevent us from seeing into the transcendent world, and, by means of visionary glimpses into it, to provide us with direct knowledge of its structure. Kant himself disposed of Swedenborg as an “Arch-Phantast” (fantasy-monger) and described his revelations of the spiritual world as “moon-calves.” But

he would have been equally justified in taking the author of the Revelation of St. John or the Apostle Paul as the starting point of similar criticism, as they also claimed to have seen visions and apparitions. In view of this it would be difficult to uphold the reproach of heresy against Swedenborg unless all those persons in the history of the Christian church who had similar visionary experiences were also declared heretics on this ground.

In order to declare Emanuel Swedenborg a heretic, therefore, it is not possible to base this accusation on the fact that he had visions, for he shared this unusual feature with hundreds of Christian visionaries who have received the approval of the church, but such an accusation must be based on the Christian revelation which was given to him in his visions. This new understanding of the Christian doctrine can however only be understood if the internal connection between his scientific and religious development is borne in mind.

### **Swedenborg's Development from Natural Philosopher to Seer**

Swedenborg was born of an old-established Swedish family concerned with mining and the church. His father was a famous bishop of the Swedish Lutheran established church, whose piety was completely dominated by a belief in the reality of the spiritual world in the form of angels and devils. Swedenborg grew up in this pious atmosphere. Deeply convinced of the existence of the spiritual world of angels and devils, his inner personal life was based on godliness and prayerfulness. He came into contact with the world of modern science only as a student at the University of Upsala and during his subsequent student years in England, and these experiences seemed to lead him completely away from his childish faith. In London he made the personal acquaintance of the leaders of modern science such as Newton, Halley and Flamsteed, and the other great ones of the Royal Society, and also during his subsequent educational stay in France got to know the mathematicians, geometers, and physicists of the Paris Academy. He gave himself up with such devotion to the ideal of discovering by the scientific method the secrets of our universe that this led to a deep estrangement with his father. But his feeling for religion could not be forgotten. Even his scientific endeavors were dominated by the attempt to penetrate to that original perception of Adam, the

spiritual intelligence, which Adam enjoyed before his rebellion against God. Swedenborg's scientific endeavors never led him to stray from the truth of the Divine Word, but even in the period of his youthful development, in which he abstained from Divine service and from taking the sacraments, he was always convinced that there was an internal conjunction between the revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures and His revelation in the Book of Nature. He hoped and expected that his scientific efforts would open to him that universal spiritual intelligence which is contained in the internal, hidden sense of the Holy Word.

His biographical development followed a course quite unique in the history of the Christian religion. The scholar who was tirelessly endeavoring, in the important fields of natural science of the period, physics, geology, and engineering, to advance towards a comprehensive scientific view of the Universe, experienced one disappointment after another in the course of his efforts to combine the knowledge acquired in the various fields of research which he was studying into the so ardently-longed-for universal plan. And each time he lost contact with the ideal of a comprehensive scientific view, the old religious idea of spiritual intelligence emerged more forcibly. The more the analytic method used in his scientific research work in the various fields led him away from a general solution, and the more he took the measure of the social phenomenal world of academic activities in the universities and academies of that period, the more he was fascinated by the thought that the true knowledge which simultaneously contains both the secrets of eternal salvation and those of the natural world could only be understood as a result of divinely inspired intuition.

### **Vision of a Divine Call and Consciousness of a Prophetic Mission**

It was typical that during this period of his scientific crisis he should be subjected to numerous visionary experiences, which were not caused for instance by doubt as to the correctness of his scientific theories in individual fields—which one after another were acknowledged by the European learned world—but by his doubt as to the possibility of finding a way forward by the method of analytical research to universal knowledge. This whole crisis also involved a moral aspect, in which he aban-

doned his previous habits, his interest in the fair sex and enjoyment of good food. The climax of the crisis, which was accompanied by a series of soul-shattering experiences and by constant dreams and other visionary experiences, was a vision in which he saw Christ face to face. The conclusion of this development was a vision of a Divine call in April 1745 in London, when he was told that his eyes would be opened to enable him to see into the world of spirits, including heaven and hell. This vision of a Divine call also signaled a fundamental change in his external life: he gave up his profession as Assessor in the Swedish mining industry and from then on lived only for the sake of his visionary experiences: "Daily thereafter the Lord opened to me the eyes of my spirit so that I was in a position, in a fully waking state, to see what was going on in the other world and while quite awake to speak with angels and spirits."

His call by the Lord was the occasion of the unfolding of a consciousness of his prophetic mission. In the light of his call he saw his whole life as being under the control and guidance of the Savior and Redeemer, while he soon became aware of the providential connection between his studies in natural science and the eventual opening of his sight into the spiritual world. He answered the question, why he as a philosopher was chosen to be allowed to see the secrets of Heaven, by a reference to the relation of "correspondence," which exists between the natural and spiritual worlds: "This happened so that the spiritual things which are today being revealed should be taught in a natural and reasonable way. For the spiritual truths stand in correspondence to the natural truths, and reach their conclusion in the latter and rest upon them. For this reason I was first introduced into the natural sciences from 1710 to 1744, after which heaven was opened to me."

But this vision of his call formed for him the unshakable foundation of the conviction that the spiritual knowledge given to him from now onwards by the Lord had the character of genuine revelation. This is the basis of his claim to a unique revelatory mission, which in his opinion meant that he was entrusted with a quite specific role in the history of the church. This high consciousness of mission increased in his case to the thought that through the visionary opening granted to him of the spiritual sense of the Holy Bible the eschatological event described in the writings of the New Testament as the second coming of Christ was to be completed. This

second coming was to take place through a man whose spiritual sight is opened and who should reveal the hitherto hidden secrets of the Divine Word: "That the Lord revealed himself to me in person and sent me on this mission, I testify in truth."

### **Biblical Interpretation and Dogmatic Criticism**

It now becomes clear that his mission was not one of expanding Holy Writ by additional inspired writings, but rather a work of exposition: it consisted in unlocking the hitherto hidden spiritual sense of the Divine Word! The special feature of his exposition consists in the fact that this process takes place on the basis of visionary experiences in which the inhabitants of the spiritual and heavenly world—and sometimes the Lord Himself<sup>1</sup>—opened the spiritual sense of the Divine Word to him. This is the novel feature of his visionary experience and also the characteristic principle of his method of interpretation, which is based on his unique teaching of the "science of correspondences."

By means of the spiritual interpretation of the text of the Bible, a series of fresh ideas, which actually constitute an amplification of the traditional teaching of the Church, appear on the scene. This is the point at which some critics of Swedenborg—principally several theologians of the established church in Sweden—felt obliged to accuse him of heresy.

The deviation from the dogmatic views of the church of the period was twofold: firstly there was in Swedenborg's writing a penetrating criticism of certain dogmatic teachings. First of all was his criticism of the old doctrines of the Trinity and of Christology. According to his opinion the errors arose in the very earliest period of the church which led to the teaching of the triple personality of God and that of two natures in Christ. When faith had been separated from charity, in the sense of active love of the neighbor, the doctrine of faith became an arena for extensive disputation, the result of which was to lead men further and further away from the truth. Probably his most striking criticism was that of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of justification, which was directed by him against its originator, the apostle Paul himself. His main reproach against Paul,

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<sup>1</sup> But see first page of ch. 8—Tr.

which constantly reappears in his criticism of the contemporary theology of justification is this: Paul, by his teaching of the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, had separated faith from charity, and had thus given charity a back seat in the virtues of Christian piety (“whereas charity is everything”) and had in this way contributed to a loveless theological formalism in the church.

Moreover, his criticism of the then accepted dogmas was not presented in the form of abstract teachings, but by the reporting of visionary encounters with the originators of the dogmas themselves. In this way his dogmatic criticism has a very modern sound, for instance when he spoke of his frequent meetings with Martin Luther, who continued to preach his doctrine of justification in the world of spirits, but there under the influence of the heavenly truths underwent a change of opinion [accompanied no doubt by a change of heart—Tr.] and addressed the following speech to the angry Lutherans, who could not understand the recent change in the views of their reformer:

Do not wonder that I seized upon faith alone as justifying, depriving charity of its spiritual essence, and took away from men all free will in spiritual things, besides teaching so many other dogmas which depend like links in a chain upon faith alone when once it is received. For my object was to break away from the Roman Catholics, and this end I could not otherwise pursue and attain. I do not wonder then that I erred; but I do wonder that the folly of one man should make so many others foolish . . .

### **The Recasting of Christian Teaching**

It would however be wrong to see the main feature of Swedenborg’s teaching in this criticism of the traditional dogmas. What was actually new in his teaching was that he tried to give mankind of his period a Christian understanding of reality in those fields in which the traditional church teachings were in duty bound to offer the world new teaching as a result of a deep-seated change in general sentiments and attitudes in that period: he did this by means of his teaching of the form of the spiritual and celestial world, by his theology of sexuality and by his new understanding of the

position of mankind in the universe. Swedenborg's teaching about the structure of the spiritual and celestial world was an effort to take over the faded doctrines of the after-life and the last judgement from the religious orthodoxy of his time and to fill them with a new, living religious attitude as real stages in the spiritual development of the individual man. The eschatology of the New Testament was everywhere based on the expectation that the risen Christ would shortly return in the clouds of heaven, collect his disciples round him and rule with their help. The proximity of the events of the "last days," with all the great events connected therewith, the general resurrection, the judgement, the creation of a new heaven and a new earth were bound to overshadow—owing to their urgency—everything on earth which had previously been considered important. Earthly life appeared now as only a temporary preparation for the rapidly approaching fulfillment of the prophecy of the second coming and the entry of Christ into the holy realm of the kingdom of God which was to make all things new.

However, this materialistic expectation of what would happen at the End of the Age was robbed of its power of conviction by the lapse of time. The later generations of Christians got out of the habit of expecting that the world would soon come to an end. As part of this development the original conception of the events of the last judgement became more and more questionable. Even the expectation of such a judgement, which seemed to be postponed to an indeterminate but remote future, faded away and lost its interest for religious and moral sentiments.

Swedenborg has now filled the traditional conceptions of the afterlife with a new religious content, by understanding them not as historical events, but as stages in the spiritual development of men. The starting point of the new conception is his image of men. The old orthodoxy knew two kinds of spiritual creatures: angels and men. The angels were the first spiritual beings whom God created in his image. A few of these, with Lucifer, the leading angel of light, at their head, misused their freedom to rebel against God Himself and were banished from heaven; (demons or devils are fallen angels, which existed as special spiritual beings before men and alongside them). Man is the second creature who was created in the image of God; the numbers of the fallen angels were to be made up from the ranks of men and Adam was to be raised to the throne of the

fallen Lucifer. But the fallen angels endeavored to involve this new creature also in the rebellion which they were plotting against God. Thus, against the background of world history, the struggle between God and Satan, the angels and the devils, for the soul of mankind is played out.

Swedenborg however knows—and this is the most important message, which he received in his intercourse with the inhabitants of the celestial and spiritual world—no basic difference between different kinds of spiritual beings. There is only one spiritual creature and that is man. Angels and devils are not specially created creatures in addition to mankind, they also are men at a different stage of their development in their spiritual bodies. Heaven, earth and hell are places for the realization, elevation, or rejection of man; they provide for the unfolding of mankind in all its heights and depths, its possibilities and peculiarities, individually and communally. Men and angels are not two different kinds of genera in creation, like the mouse and the eagle, but are two different stages of development of the same genus of men, like the caterpillar and the butterfly.

In Swedenborg this thought is linked with the further recognition that the development of mankind is not closed at the conclusion of his earthly life but continues in the afterlife, which starts immediately after his bodily death. No waiting period of indeterminate duration intervenes after death between the life here and the life to come. Dying is immediately followed by resurrection. At death the internal man is freed and can develop, unhindered by the restraints of the physical body, in the form of the spiritual body, and can also become what he actually is, that is in accordance with the inmost drive of his love. Not only the idea of resurrection but also the idea of the judgement receives a spiritualized interpretation. According to Swedenborg the judgement is not a single unique Divine judgement on all those who have died, after having been reawakened for this purpose, but it takes place immediately after the death of each individual man. It does not however consist in the judgement of the deceased by a heavenly judge but by the life of the man himself; the realization and the demonstration of his striving in this world is his judgement already. Death results in the uncovering of the form, which the internal man has received during his life. In man there is an “internal memory” active, which records everything and from which the complete, true image of the

man, undisguised by the mask of flesh, is assembled. This internal memory is the inward model of the man himself in the uniquely individual form with which it has been stamped during his life. After death this internal man begins to reveal itself without concealment, as it is shown by his internal memory. This internal memory is the book of life. It is not an external judge, which judges man, but an internal one, which the man himself carries with him in his own internal being.

The development of man—and as elsewhere this includes woman—is not concluded with this earthly life, but continues in the afterlife, and does so immediately after the death of the body. Life here and above forms a single connected chain of development and progressive education of the man. There is no intervening night of death of unlimited duration. The man changes from life here with the whole of his personal being into the condition of the spiritual body, which is adapted to the life of the spiritual world. Death draws the physical curtain and opens to the eyes of the inhabitants of the spiritual and celestial worlds the true form of the man, which only now begins to develop to its actual being. The description of the changeover of human personality after death involves a characteristically revolutionary reinterpretation of the Church's teachings of "last things" (eschatology) undertaken by Swedenborg. The world to come does not appear as a world in which man is eternally rewarded for temporal good deeds, or punished for temporal sins, but as a place for the further development of man, the further unfolding of his personality. It is not a place of faceless, bodiless, sexless non-personal beings, without any past history, but the site of an ever increasing development of active spiritual personalities, the site of further individualization of personal life and the formation of higher forms of community.

This further development takes place according to the rule that after death a man becomes what he loves. He develops in the basic direction which his internal man has chosen and embarked upon during this life. His interior form now comes to the fore without concealment. After death man is at first still in possession of his external consciousness, and does not yet understand the fundamental change which has taken place in his essential being. Soon however he is transformed into the condition of his internal; the agreement between the true internal and the external, which during the period of his earthly existence had been lost, is restored, and his

inner man completely determines also the external form of his appearance in the spiritual body in the spiritual world. The internal model of his personality is rejected undisguised in his face, when the earthly mask has fallen away. When once transformed into the condition in which the internal essence of the man has become free, everyone turns to the company of those of his own kind, his true “kindred spirits”: Everyone is attracted by the special love which forms the basic urge of his being to those who are animated by the same kind of love.

It is at this stage that the great separation of the spirits takes place. As long as they are in their externals, the good and the evil live together just as in this world. As soon as they are transformed to their internal essence, and the ruling basic love of their being reveals itself in the very facial expression of their spiritual bodies, the good separate themselves from the evil and each one hastens to his own society, in which the attraction of the heart which guided him on earth is completed. Heaven and hell are not realms which existed before mankind and to which each soul is allocated only after a Divine judgement, the so-called “Last Judgement.” Hell consists of societies of men whose basic drive is self love, who rebelled here on earth against God and His Word and maltreated the neighbor here on earth in order to increase their own power and selfish pleasure, and in the world to come punish themselves because they must by an inner compulsion exercise their perverted basic drive against each other. The wicked man is the devil for the other wicked man, and their hell consists in the fact that they are under an internal compulsion to do evil to each other. In just the same way the good man is the angel of another good man and the realization of love of God in love of the neighbor provides the life of heaven for both him and his neighbor. There are no angels or devils other than men.

It is therefore a continuous internal link which joins the different worlds together. In this world the internal form of the spiritual man is developed, in accordance with the basic inclination of his ruling love. In the spiritual world this internal form is visibly revealed and impels him to associate with those of his own kind, his spiritual kindred spirits. It is from the world of spirits that both heaven and hell draw their recruits.

### Incorporation of Human Sexuality into the Scheme

Swedenborg used this idea for the formulation of a new theology of the sexes. This theology of the sexes, as developed in his work *Conjugal Love* (1768), is of the greatest importance to Swedenborg's visionary theology. Swedenborg was far in advance of his times when he based his theological teachings regarding marriage on a new theology of the sexes. True marriage is the form of the union of husband and wife, in which they achieve not only an external conjunction in full and true love, but also a personal union of souls embracing all stages of personal life. Swedenborg expounded this idea in his interpretation of the story of creation, which he understands as teaching in the literal sense that Adam and Eve together originally formed one human being. Marriage in the complete sense exists where husband and wife in complete love achieve complete personal union. This drive towards union plays a very important role even in marriage love on earth, as it is rooted in the very being of husband and wife. It is true that this complete union is only seldom achieved in the sphere of earthly marriage love; it is only possible in its complete form in heaven. An essential condition for this is of course—and this is the boldest conclusion to be drawn from Swedenborg's metaphysics of love—that the sexual physical differences in man and woman continue to exist after death in the spiritual world.

The differentiation and reunification of the sexes into a personal union reflects a fundamental law for the realization of Divine love through mankind. It was just at this point that Swedenborg came into conflict with the traditional conception of the future life. Ever since the times of Saint Augustine the teaching regarding angels had been affected by an attitude of prudishness elevated into the field of metaphysics. In the church's expectations of the afterlife, as first formulated by Augustine, two of his basic religious attitudes came inevitably into conflict: on the one hand he believed in a bodily resurrection, on the other for him the sexual impulses belonged undeniably to the sphere of sin. He overcame this conflict by the strangest speculations, which are found in his work entitled *The City of God*. On their being taken up into heaven the bodies of resurrected men and women were transformed into a sexless condition, although the sec-

ondary sexual features remained unchanged. It was not until the publication of Swedenborg's works that this opinion was challenged. As, according to his view, it was obvious that the sexual differentiation in the human race was due to an inclination which is part of the inner constitution of mankind, and as men and women have at the core of their being, in accordance with the inmost essence of their true love, a propensity towards such union, it is obvious that there must be marriages in heaven also, since the true marriages made in this world will only be able to achieve realization in a pure, fulfilled form in the spiritual body form of existence characteristic of heaven.

### Hymn of Praise to Conjugal<sup>2</sup> Love

This idealistic conception, which is based on the principle that true marriages are made in Heaven, did not prevent Swedenborg from regarding earthly marriage relationships quite realistically. He knows that sexual love is infected with selfishness and that it is infected with an insatiable lust for pursuit of variety. He also knows that true marriage love is a gift of God and that the union of each truly loving couple into one true married pair can only take place in God. He also knows that the sexual elements in both men and women must first be purified in marriage in order to be cleansed from their roving and selfish character. Finally, he also knows that very few marriages are concluded on the basis of such an internal love, and that most are affected by considerations of social status, social habits and calculations of all sorts of possible financial and business advantages. For just this reason Swedenborg lays even greater emphasis on the fact that in the spiritual world those who belong together come together, even if they did not manage to do this on earth. Non-genuine marriages do not last in heaven. The last judgement which takes place after death for every human being by the revelation of his true and essential character and his genuine love, also sits in judgement on the marriages. Those couples remain together who belong together, and con-

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<sup>2</sup> Swedenborg did not use the word "conjugal," but the word "conjugal" to refer to true marriage love, in which the parties find their happiness in bringing about the happiness of each other.—Tr.

stitute a single human being, the others go their separate ways. In heaven, chaos in marriage, like all other forms of earthly chaos, is brought into order; in heaven those who do not belong together are not forced to live together.

So this visionary theology of marriage reaches its consummation in a hymn of praise to conjugal love and to true marriage—in the middle of a period of incipient breakdown of marriage in court, noble and bourgeois sections of society. If it were possible, Swedenborg believes, to raise true marriage to become the general form of earthly marriage, the kingdom of God on earth would be realized, and human society would be in true correspondence with that in heaven.

The opposite of conjugal love is harlotry. It is love perverted by human selfishness. In sexual indulgence of this kind the “partner” is not the object of love, but an object for selfish enjoyment—merely a means of increasing one’s own selfish pleasure. In this kind of “love” the image of God in the neighbor is completely despised and dishonored; it therefore degenerates in the person who yields to this kind of love. It therefore leads to all who are addicted to this selfish love pairing off together and using each other for their selfish purposes and falling further and further into their wickedness. The reports of Swedenborg’s visions of adulterers and fornicators are comparable in poetic force with Dante’s vision of hell.

This sexual theology represents a considerable amplification of Reformation theology. The Reformation certainly brought a new theology and new teachings for life in this world, but no new views of the world to come. The views of the world to come were carried along with the theology of the Reformation as a kind of appendage from the pre-Reformation church; the traditional conceptions of the Catholic Middle Ages, in which heaven appeared as a kind of large monastery, with hosts of sexless angelic beings praising the Lord in eternal choirs, had been retained. Swedenborg’s teaching overthrew these remains of the monastic attitude of piety of the Middle Ages: heaven also is the kingdom of an endless further development of mankind, including all man’s personal inclinations and powers, both of love and of knowledge.

In the same way as all other forms of love reach their fulfillment there, so does conjugal love, particularly as this conjunction of man and woman into a single spiritual person is a fundamental drive of human nature, and

both sexes bear within themselves this desire for personal integrity and unity, by virtue of creation itself. This teaching strongly influenced the ideas and conceptions of the Romantic poets and the philosophers of German idealism. Whilst the theologians of the church of today, in their desperate efforts to find a new attitude to the phenomenon of sex, mainly restrict themselves to the discussion of the permissibility or impermissibility of the pill, the “heretic” Swedenborg could teach our generation, quite independently of the contents of his individual conceptions, at least this, that it is more important for the church, with the aid of a new theology of sex, that is to say, a new theology of marriage, to take up a position of leadership in respect of the spiritual and moral developments of the race, and give an authoritative theological answer for the overcoming of the problems with which our generation is faced, and thus smooth the way for a corresponding way of life, than to trail with flowing surplices, behind the latest developments of pharmacological or other technical inventions.

### **Inhabitants of the Planets**

The last distinctive feature of the teachings of Swedenborg about the spiritual world deserves special attention, particularly at the present time: the fact is that Swedenborg based his ideas of the structure of the spiritual body organization of the next world and the connection between the earthly and spiritual worlds, on modern cosmological conceptions, and developed therefrom a very detailed teaching regarding the inhabitants of the starry heavens. This teaching is very strongly influenced by his familiarity with the cosmogony of modern, post-Copernican astronomy, but in his case is derived, according to his own statement, from visionary meetings with inhabitants of the planets of our and other solar systems. His work *The Earths in Our Solar System and Other Earths in the Starry Heavens, Their Inhabitants, and the Spirits and Angels There, from Things Heard and Seen*, London 1758, is of particular interest in the present decade, in which ufo-ology<sup>3</sup> is beginning to develop into a religion, all the more so as the translator of the oldest exposition of ufo-ology was no other than Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, the founder of Swabian Theosophy.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Science Of Unidentified flying Objects”—Tr.

Here Swedenborg's visionary gift seems to follow a path into the sphere of pure fantasy, even the wildest fantasy. Nevertheless this connection of his teaching of the spiritual world with his cosmological conceptions is not so extraordinary as it may perhaps seem at first sight. It includes Swedenborg in the illustrious society of several leading astronomers who were the founders of the modern scientific cosmogony such as for example Kepler, Huygens, Fontenelle, and above all Kant.

It is hardly possible for us any longer to form a conception of the profundity of the change in man's view of himself resulting from the change in the cosmogony introduced by Copernicus, Galilei and Kepler. According to the old Ptolemaic cosmology the earth was the center of the universe, mankind was the highest creature on this earth, and his redemption was the central event in heaven and on earth. The discovery that the earth is only one planet alongside a number of others circling round the sun, and that the sun itself fits into the innumerable solar systems in the starry heaven as just one speck of dust, also shattered the old conception of the central position of mankind in the universe. When the earth itself descended to the status of a speck of dust in the structure of the macrocosm, was it still possible for man, dust of the dust, still to claim the holy privilege that he and his actions and history were the only object of Divine action? Was it not an inevitable consequence of the radical devaluation of the earth that mankind itself should be even more radically devalued, and would this not lead to the result that the traditional conception of the Gospel itself should be similarly devalued? What megalomania on the part of the inhabitants of this insignificant grain of dust to expect that God should have descended on this pitiful spot for the salvation of its inhabitants!

Astronomers such as Newton and Huygens had already attempted as believing Christians to bring their view of the Divine control of the human race into harmony with the new aspect of the universe. For this purpose the thought came ready to hand that the existence of beings gifted with intelligence and reason was not limited to our planet, but extended to the other planets, and even to other solar systems in the starry heavens. This hypothesis made it possible to maintain the universality of Divine salvation and to include the stars in the Divine scheme of redemption and salvation, pointing to them as dwellings of those who had already died,

who there experienced their further development and impatiently awaited the great day of the Lord. Kant himself had already expressed this thought regarding the planets as the location of enlightened spirits in the third book of his *Natural History of the Heavens*, dated 1755. But it is thanks to Swedenborg and his visionary meetings with the spirits of the inhabitants of the planets of our and other solar systems that this view was filled out with concrete images. However adventurous his reports regarding the inhabitants of the planets individually may be, the fact remains that the fundamental thought on which his new cosmic theology is based is sound. All the spiritual beings in the starry heavens—both near and far—have not only the human form, but form together the “Maximus Homo,” the macrocosmic Universal Human. Each individual society of spirits, associated with its own particular planet, constitutes a specific organ in this universal body. The macrocosmic organism itself is thought of as a body, and thus the description of these planetary communities is transformed into a kind of anatomical atlas of the cosmic Grand Man as the universal form of the Universal Heaven. Thus the main concern of Swedenborg is expressed in these conceptions regarding the inhabitants of the planets and their religion: God is omnipresent, present everywhere throughout the heavens: His work of salvation and redemption is not restricted to our tiny planet Earth. He is the one Lord, Who presents Himself in various forms to the spiritual beings in and from all the planets as the Redeemer. Absolutely everywhere throughout the whole universe—both here and hereafter—the Lord’s work of transforming His creatures into higher spiritual beings is proceeding, so that they shall assemble to form the body of the Grand Man, that is, the church of the redeemed, the Bride of the Lord. The Christian idea of redemption has thus become a universal, cosmic principle, promoting the development and perfecting of everything living into a finite version of the Divine Humanity.

### **Reconciliation of the Philosophies of Science and Religion**

Modern theology has hardly troubled to free its fundamental theological ideas from the traditional fetters of the mythological doctrines derived from the literal sense of the Old Testament and to bring them into harmony with the modern post-Copernican image of the universe. On the

contrary, it seems for its part to attach special importance to adopting the no-less-than-schizophrenic attitude of trying to maintain the religious and scientific world-views alongside each other in different compartments of the mind, though they have nothing in common with each other—and this in a period when knowledge of modern cosmology, thanks to the achievements of the Space Age, has ceased to be the privilege of a small circle of specialists in astronomy, and become a part of the general knowledge of whole populations. In the light of this fact we must ascribe to the “heretic” Swedenborg a really pioneering significance, since with the benefit of his scientific knowledge on the one hand and his visionary experiences on the other he laid the foundations of a new cosmic Christology, a new cosmic conception of the Gospel and revived expectations of the afterlife, extended on a cosmic scale, which could be a positive or critical blueprint for endeavors which Christianity cannot permanently avoid.



CHAPTER V

**Swedenborg as the Spiritual Pioneer of German Idealism  
and Romanticism**

The reception of Emanuel Swedenborg's teachings in Germany and the fate of these teachings in the German intellectual life of the 18th and 19th centuries are so remarkable and full of conflict that it is not inappropriate to cloak it in a short fable. This fable would read roughly as follows.

A great intellectual from the north, to whom much knowledge of both heaven and earth had been revealed, went into a more southerly country, and began to preach there. Eventually there gathered around him the Quietists, the genuine Pietists,<sup>1</sup> the poets and visionaries. And one of them said: "This man tells of things which are heaven-stirring and earth-shattering. Whether he is one of the old prophets, we know not, but that he speaks from God we do know." But the scribes and pharisees, the professors of higher education, came along and grumbled against him and shook their heads. But one of them said: "Surely, the world has never seen a bigger fool than this man." And they all agreed that he was a fool and that they would not even mention his name. The Quietists, the genuine Pietists, the poets and visionaries, however, continued to believe in him and he kindled in their souls and minds a great power of perception and creativity, which brought forth fruit a thousandfold in the form of works of art and of the intellect, so, that from the seed sown by the "fool" there was a wonderful blossoming in that country.

This is the current interpretation of the fable: The dissemination of Swedenborg's teachings in Germany took place in the seventies of the eighteenth century, a period when the new rationalistic and mechanistic philosophy from England and France seemed to have won final victory.

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<sup>1</sup>The Pietists originated as a German religious group active early in the 17th century, and eventually led by P.J. Spener, whose aim was to encourage those of simple faith wishing to emphasize a Christianity of love and charity, in opposition to the rigid dogmatism of Lutheran Protestantism.

The Quietists were inspired by the *Guida Spirituale*, by Molinos, a Spanish priest, and were active a little later in the 17th century in both Germany and France. They pursued as their ideal form of religious observance silent, mystical communion with God, in contrast to the noisy, repetitious and mechanical services of the Catholics. (Tr.)

As, however, Swedenborg had, through his scientific studies and also his religious experiences, passed through the stage of rationalism as part of his youthful development, his influence did not take effect among the professional philosophers and scholars of rationalistic mould at the German academies and universities, but he was instead first discovered by those circles who were themselves assuming the task of overcoming rationalism: the leaders of the new Pietism, the disciples of the new Theosophy movement and the leaders of Revivalism. The first from these groups to acquire a full and sympathetic understanding of Swedenborg's teachings was Friedrich Christian Oetinger, the founder of Swabian Theosophy, who went so far, in his acknowledgment and veneration of Swedenborg, as to accept and proclaim him as an important link in the chain of development of Divine revelation and the Christian Gospel.

The first public recognition brought on to the scene the German scholastic philosophers, who saw their entire rationalistic philosophy, which they had had to struggle so hard to acquire, thereby threatened. Their spokesman was the young Kant who attacked Swedenborg in a bold literary coup de main, making him a figure of fun, and actually succeeded in making it impossible for a long period for contemporary leaders in scientific and philosophical circles to treat his work seriously. The death sentence pronounced by Kant on Swedenborg, however, applied only to the forum of German universities, academies, and high schools. Those minds which were striving to overcome Western rationalism turned increasingly to the Nordic Seer despite this public excommunication. Via Oetinger the stream of Swedenborgian ideas flowed to Oetinger's great spiritual heirs, Schelling and Hegel. Even Goethe did not close his mind to the powerful visions of the philosopher from Stockholm, but drew inspiration from him for his Faust. Lavater translated his vision of heaven into the language of the Revivalist Movement in his work *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (Prospects for Eternity), and in his ideas regarding physiognomy was most strongly influenced by Swedenborg's perception of the relationship between the spiritual and the corporeal. But the noblest form of expression of Swedenborg's spiritual heritage in German Romanticism is perhaps the *Geistliche Lieder* (Spiritual Songs) of Novalis. The cult of friendship in Romanticism and the Romantic attitudes to love and marriage remind us strongly of Swedenborg's ideas. Franz von Baader's philosophy of reli-

gion is characterized by an internal appropriation of Swedenborg's views, and in the field of Protestantism it is Jung-Stilling who develops the Swedenborgian heritage, in his *Szenen aus dem Geisterreich* (Scenes from the Spiritual World).

It is of course true that the condemnation of Swedenborg by the academic world nevertheless had such a strong influence that Swedenborg's name was seldom mentioned even by his secret disciples in Germany. It is just this fact of the hidden nature of his influence which makes the investigation of its effects on the history of German thought so attractive, and gives such research the character of a kind of "rescue operation," as Lessing once described his literary reports on writers in the past who had been treated badly or unjustly.

Well, what was the course of the three stages in question of the influence of Swedenborg on the history of German thought?

## I

The most concrete example of an initial unprejudiced reception of Swedenborg in Germany is the work of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger bearing the title (in English translation) "Swedenborg's earthly and heavenly philosophy, and those of other authors, exposed to the light of truth, in order to find the best," Frankfurt-Leipzig, 1765. Two questions must be raised here. In what light is Swedenborg presented to his German contemporaries, and what aspect is stressed as the most important and decisive feature of his personality and teaching?

The first question can only be answered if it is made clear what is the general view of Christian history on the basis of which Oetinger forms his judgements of the individual historical figures. Oetinger's view of history is in the tradition of the Swabian apocalypticist Bengel. According to this view, world history is in its essence the history of Divine redemption and salvation. It is determined by a definite plan, which has been in existence and action ever since the Creation, and has been leading the world to its goal, the kingdom of God, all that time, during which the latter has been involved in constantly renewed struggles with the activities of the opposing satanic forces. The internal development of world history is effected by the opening up in ever new stages of the Divine Self-Revelation. This Self-

Revelation of God in history is put into action by the Holy Spirit, which is thus the real initiator of world history.

The view of the Holy Spirit as the ever present and ever-active principle in history now leads Oetinger to a consequence which was considered new and revolutionary compared with the orthodox Christian view of the Holy Spirit and revelation. According to the orthodox view the direct revelation of God in history was terminated with the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in the person of Jesus Christ as described in the Gospels, and the “giving of the Spirit” as described in the Acts of the Apostles. Direct revelation is complete in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Oetinger, however, is driven to a different conclusion; Revelation is not a unique “once-for-all” event; it is not something which is finally concluded, but still continues, and accompanies the whole development of history to its goal and termination. Each epoch in history has special new forms of revelation appropriate to its categories of thought, its experience of the transcendent and its scientific knowledge.

In the light of this viewpoint, so far as Oetinger is concerned, the figure and teaching of Swedenborg have a special significance. For him Swedenborg is the prophet of his time, in and through whom the Holy Spirit manifests Itself in its contemporary form, expanding and further interpreting the Divine revelation. That is the decisive feature of Oetinger’s conception of Swedenborg’s work. Swedenborg is not just any old philosopher or seer, but is a member of that group of great expanders and propagators of the Divine revelation whom the Holy Spirit is constantly raising up from time to time to promote and stimulate the descent of the kingdom of God. Thus Oetinger includes the Nordic seer in the long line of those instruments of God’s Self-Revelation, which ranges from the Old Testament prophets via the early Christian church to Luther, and from him via Jakob Boehme to the great mystics of the 17th century. Every epoch, Oetinger believes, has its special form of revelation. He considered his own period to be that of incipient unbelief, the Age of Self-Confident Reason, which believes only what it thinks it can prove.

For this very reason God chose for this period a man of learning, a philosopher and mathematician, in order to enlighten the unbelieving learned world by means of a contemporary scholar. Hence Oetinger wrote in his Preface to the work already mentioned:

I now present to the reader something strange for the verification of what God has made known for the present time. The unbelief of the world has moved God to appoint a famous philosopher as a herald of heavenly communications. This philosopher has put a rein on his imagination through the study of mathematics. Let no one therefore say that his statements are mere fictions of that faculty. These experiences are derived from an influx from heavenly intelligence, by order of the Lord. It is true that we have Moses and the Prophets, and are therefore free to choose not to read these revelations.

In his later writings Oetinger then tried to describe more closely Swedenborg's special task of bringing salvation to his contemporaries. The epoch of rationalistic philosophy denies the existence of a spiritual world and that there is life after death; it seeks to understand the spiritual and inner life of man on the basis of mechanics and physics. It is just the former essentials of the Christian message, passed over by contemporary philosophy with scholarly superiority or disdainful contempt, that are emphasized in Swedenborg, despite the resistance of the general climate of contemporary opinion, illuminated and clarified by an actual scholar in possession of the best scientific knowledge of his time.

Since these are unstable times, when men have abandoned these beliefs due to their intellectual self conceit, God has sent Swedenborg to help us regarding the most important points of the constitution of man's internal nature and his state after death. He had of course been long preceded by Jakob Boehme, who, however, had not studied optics, mechanics, architectonics or geometry. (He himself stated that if he had understood these he would have been equal to a learned professor instead of a mere layman.) Therefore God had found Swedenborg, who was in a high degree master of these subjects, had been well brought up and continued to live a pure life, without attaching undue importance to honors, rank or wealth. God prepared him for the task, and then found him, like David, to bring an extraordinary new light to the sceptical, doubt plagued earth. It is certain that Jakob Boehme's revelation was incomparably more profound than Swedenborg's but he was unable to express himself scientifically, as was necessary in writing for students. Therefore God brought Swedenborg on the scene.

As is the case with all God's revelations that they do not occur outside the laws of order (God adheres strictly to this rule) it was necessary also in the case of Swedenborg that his revelation should take place in accordance with a certain order, or the general laws and rules of the invisible world. As when heavy rain falls, it revives whatever is thirsty, and ready to receive the rain, so because Swedenborg was very experienced in cosmological science, even rivaling Leibniz, the revelation fell on him, after his preparation from his youth onwards. But he in fact learned his science in the modern manner, by reasoning, with mechanical aids, as well as from diagrams and models in motion, and he retained his attachment to these methods; with these models to guide him he readily grasped God's revelation. Jakob Boehme saw into the inmost of Being, which follows from the first source of the seven spirits, and is an explanation of Ezekiel, Chapters 1 and 10. But Swedenborg's concern was not with Necessity and Being, but with that which God arbitrarily provides, alongside what is Necessary, in the invisible world. Thus there must be a great difference between the revelations of these two men.

Swedenborg is therefore not just anybody, but he is here crowned with the glow of a splendid aureole: he appears as the contemporary instrument of the development of Divine revelation, as an angel with a new Gospel, which opens up, deepens and clarifies the old gospels. Thus a quite unique authority is ascribed to his writings, which puts his teaching almost on a level with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures themselves.

We are now in a position to answer the second question: what seemed to Oetinger particularly important and authoritative about Swedenborg's personality and teaching? Here we find a striking difference compared with later views of the personality and teaching of Swedenborg: from 1766, the year of publication of Kant's attack on Swedenborg, onwards, the Swedish philosopher receives consideration merely from the limited and one-sided point of view of the "Spirit Seer," who enjoys intercourse with departed spirits in the spiritual world. Oetinger, however, did not allow himself to be distracted from Swedenborg's teaching by these more sensational and prominent phenomena, but directed his gaze in the first place to the unity of Swedenborg's teachings regarding nature and the other world, the unity of his cosmology and theology and the unity of his view of the

material and spiritual universe, or, as Oetinger himself describes it, the unity of his "earthly and heavenly philosophy." It is just this, which for him constitutes the religious significance of Swedenborg: for contemporary natural science the unity of the universe is shattered. Natural science turns against the faith and loses its way in a demonic self-conceit in relation to Divine revelation. In Swedenborg, however, there is a genuine Christian universalism, in which the methods and teachings derived from modern scientific thinking are developed into a deeper opening up of the Christian revelation and the truths of the Christian Gospel. In him the study of nature and the study of the secrets of heaven are combined; he sees in the processes of nature the hidden workings of the laws and operations of the spirit, and it is for him the same study which enables him to recognize the laws of the heavenly world, and their analogy in the movements of the elements and in the natural forces of the earth.

So Oetinger tried to appreciate both aspects of Swedenborg and his teaching, the student of nature and the seer, and he includes him among the great universal geniuses in German history, with those who by studying the secrets of being, learned the laws both of the world below and the world above: with Jakob Boehme and Leibniz. Oetinger's book on Swedenborg's earthly and heavenly philosophy therefore consists of two parts. In the first part he gives a short but splendid description of the internal unity of Swedenborg's scientific and visionary perceptions:

Swedenborg's system of earthly philosophy (pp. 1–14) together with a comparison of this philosophy with that of Jakob Boehme (pp. 14–25), followed by the heavenly philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg (pp. 26 ff.) with a detailed treatment of individual teachings, e.g. the Holy Scriptures or the Word, how it opens up the Divine sense, which is accessible to good spirits and angels; the speech of spirits and angels; the light in which the angels live; tie paradisaical gardens and dwellings of the angels; the spheres of activity of the spirits; the spaces and localities of the spirits; heaven and heavenly happiness; the societies of which heaven is composed.

The second part contains a scientific comparison of Swedenborg's scientific and theological views with the systems of other leading scientists

of the period. It bears the title “The second part of the Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy, in which the Earthly Philosophies of Swedenborg, Malebranche, Newton, Cluver, Wolf, Plouquet, Bagliv and Fricker are compared with the Heavenly Philosophy of Ezekiel,” Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1765. In this second part the agreement of Swedenborg’s view of this world and the world above with the discoveries of earlier and contemporary investigators is proved, and the bringing up to date and development of the old biblical universally accepted truths is explained in detail. Again it is primarily Jakob Boehme with whom Swedenborg is linked.

So that philosophy shall not be regarded merely as an idol to Dan and Bethel in one single form, I have considered it useful to give a brief account of the philosophies of a few recent scholars, and to compare them with the philosophy of the Holy Scriptures, particularly that of Ezekiel, and then to show in addition what God has revealed to a layman, Jakob Boehme, by means of a sense organ adapted to the invisible world, as demanded by the “great philosopher of Sans Souci” [Frederick the Great of Prussia.—Tr.] but not recognized by him, but which nevertheless proved to be accessible to the old philosopher Swedenborg.

Thus Swedenborg appears here as the heaven-sent developer of that true Christian universalism maintained by German thinkers up to and including Leibniz, and finally displayed (following the trail laid by Boehme, Leibniz and Swedenborg) in the metaphysics, natural science and religion of German Idealism.

## II

One year later, viz. in 1766, there came a reaction against this high appraisal of Swedenborg’s revelations. The young Kant published a book bearing the title *Träume eines Geistersehers* (Dreams of a Spirit Seer). This book contained an attack on Swedenborg, the fierceness and petulance of which would have been inconceivable from the older Kant. This is not the place in which to discuss the significance of this book for Kant’s own spiritual development. In contrast to the unusually high appreciation which Oetinger extended to the Nordic seer, it is instructive to assemble

just a few examples of the fierce invective which Kant flung at Swedenborg. Kant reported that he had obtained a copy of his *Arcana Caelestia* and in fact “unfortunately” paid good money for it, in the hope of finding something useful in it, but he stated himself “he found (as is usual, where it is not our business to look) he found . . . nothing.” He did not at any price wish to exchange the visionary experiences reported by Swedenborg for the discoveries of his own reason.

If we balance against each other the advantages and disadvantages which might accrue to those persons provided with organs not only for the visible world, but also to a certain degree for the invisible one (assuming such a person has ever existed) such a gift would appear to be of similar value to that with which Juno honored Teresias, in making him blind beforehand, so that she could endow him with the gift of prophecy. For to judge by the above passages, the visual knowledge of the other world can be achieved here only by forfeiting some part of that understanding which one needs for use in this one.

Kant even declares quite frankly that he himself is inclined to regard visions of spirits and the reception of “supernatural” divinations as fundamentally a pathological phenomenon, which is the concern not of the philosopher but of the physician. “Therefore, I do not at all blame the reader, if, instead of regarding the spirit seers as partial inhabitants of another world, he consigns them without further ceremony as patients for the hospital, and thereby spares himself any further investigation.” And Kant even descends to borrowing from *Gargantua* (Rabelais) in order to hold Swedenborg up to ridicule: “The perspicuous Hudibras might himself have succeeded in finding us a solution to the problem, for in his opinion if ‘wind’ develops in the stomach it all depends which direction it takes if it goes downwards it becomes a f . . . , but if it goes upwards, it is an apparition or a holy inspiration.”

The second part of Kant’s book gives a more accurate account of individual teachings of Swedenborg whom he everywhere calls “Schwedenberg.” In this part he is described as “The Arch phantast of all Phantasts,” and is the subject of the following comment: “His bottle in the lunar world is quite full, and is inferior to none among all those which

Ariosto has seen there, filled with the reason which was lost here, and which the owners will one day have to seek again; so utterly empty of the last drop of reason is his big work." The big work itself "contains eight quarto volumes full of nonsense, which he presents to the world as a new revelation under the title *Arcana Caelestia*." After a description of some of these revelations Kant goes on: "I am tired of copying out the wild chimeras of this worst of all dreamers, and forbear continuing them with his descriptions of the state after death . . . I have mostly avoided quoting the visions themselves, as such wild chimeras would only disturb the sleep of the reader."

These vehement insults make one thing clear: this book is no cool scientific appraisal, but a passionately antipathetic outburst by Kant with the object of ridding himself of the impression made upon him by Swedenborg's work. But what was the cause of this passionate outburst and what are its consequences in relation to the general public assessment of Swedenborg in the German learned world?

The first question is not easy to answer. There are perhaps two answers. First, the reason for Kant's vehement rejection of Swedenborg is biographical or psychological. It was the young Kant who in this early work attacked the Nordic seer. Kant had only recently broken away from the bigoted supernatural teaching of his early education, abandoning the old metaphysics and the old "heaven," and shedding the old skin of Scholastic supernaturalism. He was enjoying a honeymoon with a very earthly and practical reason, and was proud of his new bride. Then someone crosses him, and has the impudence to build up a new supernatural system with a thousand heavens and a thousand hells and a thousand ways of purifying the mind in a higher after life, on the basis of fresh visions in the form of reports from heaven. In the proud consciousness of having worked out for himself a modest, but orderly, epistemological system, and in a surge of boorish youthful self confidence in the reliability and trustworthiness of his new bride of "common sense," he bowls over this frightful supernatural apparition, this ghost from the supposedly conquered Middle Ages, only to secretly reassemble later on his own altar the pieces of the icon he had so wantonly destroyed.

From the point of view of the history of philosophy the rejection of Swedenborg by the young Kant expresses the general mood and attitude

of the rationalist generation of German philosophers, who were influenced by the scientific discoveries in France and England, and passed through the school of Christian Wolf. They were tired of supernatural systems and even of heavenly inspirations and revelations. Instead of having a vague idea in outline of the entire scheme of things, they preferred to know less, but that with certainty. Nothing is more revealing about this attitude than these concluding paragraphs of Kant's philippic against Swedenborg, in which the outlines of the subsequent Kantian critical philosophy can be discerned:

Metaphysics is the science of the boundaries of human reason . . . I have deceived the reader so that I might be of use to him, and although I have offered him no new insight, I have nevertheless destroyed that vain belief and empty knowledge which inflates reason, and, in its narrow space, takes the place which might be occupied by the teachings of wisdom and of useful instruction . . . Before, we walked, like Democritus, in empty space, whither we had flown on the butterfly wings of metaphysics, and there we conversed with spiritual beings. Now, since the sobering power of self knowledge has caused the silken wings to be folded, we find ourselves with our feet firmly on the ground of experience and common sense. Happy, if we can look on it as our proper home, which we can never leave with impunity, and which contains everything to satisfy us so long as we hold fast to what is useful . . . Let us therefore leave to speculation and the care of idle men all the noisy systems of doctrine concerning such remote subjects. They are really immaterial to us . . . Human reason was not given strong enough wings to part clouds so high above us, those clouds which withhold from our vision the secrets of the other world. The curious who enquire about it so earnestly may receive the very natural reply, that it would be best for them please to have patience until they get there. But as our fate in the other world probably depends very much on the manner in which we have performed our duties in the present world, I conclude with the words with which Voltaire, after so many sophistries, lets his honest *Candide* conclude: "*Let us look after our happiness; go into the garden and work.*"

That is not only Kant's mood and attitude, but those of an entire generation and epoch, which, tired of all supernatural speculations, reacts

with an outburst of anger against the most noble visions, and opposes new supernatural systems, not with cool scientific refutation, but with an explosion of passion.

And now, what consequences did Kant's harsh rejection of Swedenborg have for the assessment of the Nordic seer in Germany? In that century nothing was so destructive of reputations as the curse of ridicule. Kant had pronounced this curse on Swedenborg, and it had worked. In the eyes of the German universities and academies, as well as German school philosophy, Swedenborg remained what Kant had made him out to be: an arch fanatic and a fool, who could not be taken seriously without exposing oneself to the curse of ridicule. This was the immediate experience of that courageous pioneer, the champion of Swedenborg in Germany, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, who after the publication of Kant's book was the victim of numerous attacks and spiteful acts on the part of academic philosophers, natural scientists and theologians. Oetinger did not fail to inform Swedenborg, in a very instructive letter, of his position, referring to himself in relation to the persecution he was suffering as a "witness to the truth."

A second consequence of Kant's judgement on Swedenborg was equally ominous: From now on Swedenborg was regarded, if he was even mentioned at all, in the form of the caricature in which he had been depicted by Kant. In fact the caricature had almost completely ousted the true historical figure. The Swedenborg myth in Germany was created not by Swedenborg's friend Oetinger, but by his enemy Kant. Thus only the distorted image was retained—that of the curious "Spirit Seer," who was introduced by Kant as "a certain Mr. Schwedenberg, without any office or position." Thus in the German consciousness of history the figure of the universal researcher, philosopher and visionary is transformed into that of an eccentric spiritist. Forgotten is Swedenborg the great student of nature who fathomed the secrets of electricity and published a pioneering work on magnetism as a result of numerous new experiments; forgotten Swedenborg the student of medicine and psychology, who pondered on the problems of the hidden connection between mind, soul and body; forgotten Swedenborg the mathematician, who undertook important astronomical and geographical calculations; forgotten is Swedenborg the geologist, who threw light on the formation of rocks and metals, who

explored subterranean water courses and worked out a scientific method of research regarding the use of fossils in elucidating the process of rock formation; forgotten is Swedenborg the practical man, engineer and inventor, who as Assessor of Mines followed up all major and minor suggestions of a technical nature and was the author of countless inventions in the mining industry, achieving an extraordinary increase in the yield of the Swedish mines, and earning a great deal of money for his King; who designed a submarine "capable of doing a great deal of damage to an enemy fleet"; the author of the first sketch of a steam engine, a plan for a compressed-air-operated machine gun, the model for an aeroplane, an adding machine and a mercury pump; who discovered a new method of calculating geographical longitude, and from whom many other technical achievements have been derived, such as the project for a long canal between Gothenburg and the Baltic Sea.

### III

But this condemnation of Swedenborg's teaching by Kant was also followed in its turn in Germany by the natural and (in a certain sense) general human reaction, prompted by the thought that a man who is painted so black must have some good in him. So Kant's harsh judgement contrary to his own wish contributed to the result that Swedenborg was eagerly read, though in secret. People did not write about him. He was not quoted by name in books. But they read him, and could not read him enough. In silent opposition to the official slaughter of Swedenborg, a secret Swedenborg movement began, to which the bold spirits, the outsiders, the enthusiasts and radicals belonged. In this way Swedenborg did not furnish direct inspiration to German Scholastic philosophy—or at least only did so negatively as a result of its self limitation in opposition to his "fanaticism"—but was the unknown inspirer of the future vanquishers of this Scholastic philosophy: in the philosophical field itself the inspirer of German Idealism in Hegel and Schelling, who continued the traditions of Oetinger and, simultaneously with the rediscovery of German mysticism and of Jakob Boehme, took up again the ideas of Swedenborg; in the sphere of Catholicism the inspirer of the theosophy and mysticism of Franz von Baader, and in that of Protestantism the inspirer of the Revival-

ist Movement, especially in the case of Jung-Stilling and Lavater—in short, the great reviver of all those spiritual forces which led to the victory of scientific, religious, theological, and artistic rationalism in Germany. Having been condemned by German Scholastic philosophy, Swedenborg became the teacher of the “Outsiders,” *who became the creators of the philosophy, poetry, and religion of the next one hundred years.*

We have not space here to do justice to the multiplicity of ideas and suggestions for which the leaders of German Idealism and German Romanticism were indebted to Swedenborg; moreover, research in this direction has not yet by a long way done even its simplest preliminary work—partly because Swedenborg’s name was not mentioned in most cases even by those authors whom he influenced most directly, and his influence can be traced only with the aid of the magic wand of diligent prior familiarization plus—an indispensable requirement—an accurate emotional penetration into his way of thinking. I have given an example of such an influence in my chapter on Swedenborg and Lavater.<sup>2</sup> I should like to set alongside this another instructive example, in which the most important elements of the influence of Swedenborgian thinking on German Romanticism and Idealism appear almost all together in a most charming and attractive literary form. This is a fragment of manuscript left to posterity by Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling which bears the title: *Clara, or the Connection of Nature with the Spiritual World, a Conversation.*<sup>3</sup>

The fragment is thoroughly impregnated with Swedenborg’s thought. The dialogue form is one which makes it possible to guide the thoughts of the reader in such a way that the most important ideas of Swedenborg, linked together in an attractive arrangement, are presented to the mind of the reader in the lighter, more pleasant vernacular into which the later generation has translated the somewhat austere language of Swedenborg’s writings. The main subject of the conversation is identical with the main subject of the scientific, philosophic and religious perception of Swedenborg: the connection has been disputed by mechanistic and materialistic science, and even where a belief in such a world was retained on traditional grounds, the spiritual world was felt and claimed to be opposed to nature.

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<sup>2</sup>See ch. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Schelling, *Collected Works*. Vol. 9 (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag, 1862), & reprints.

In the same way as Swedenborg had formerly protested against the tearing apart and splitting up of the unity of the universe, Schelling here sets himself the task, against the mood and teaching of the mechanistic and rationalistic philosophy of his time, of effecting the transition from the sphere of nature into that of the spiritual world, and even demonstrating the hidden mutual interpenetration of the natural and spiritual worlds, thus announcing the leading theme in the symphony of the Romantic philosophy of nature and religion.

Of the fragment only three conversations remain. The first is an autumn discussion on All Souls Day, the second a talk on Christmas Eve, the third a conversation during a walk. Schelling raises the subject in the light of the external circumstances, the mood of All Souls Day itself. Clara, his lady companion in all three dialogues, makes the following comment: "We ought to maintain all the holidays and customs *which remind us of a connection with the world beyond the grave*" (p. 10). The question which immediately arises from this remark, viz., how such a connection can take place, receives a reply which is entirely in accord with Swedenborg's teaching: the influx is downward, from the higher into the lower, from the spiritual world into the natural. "The lower," replied Clara, "can perhaps not exert an influence on the higher, but it is all the more certain that the higher can act on the lower, and thus the idea of such intercourse is not so absurd as it seems" (p. 11).

Also the answer to the question as to the nature of the bond which connects together nature and the spiritual world is entirely in line with Swedenborg's teaching: this bond, in its innermost being, is *love*. All other bonds will break, but love, the inmost spiritual and most personal bond between God and man and between man and man, never ceases.

"Do you not believe, then," said Clara, "that in friendship and love, by their very nature, there is something eternal, and that a bond which has been forged by God cannot be broken by death, or even by God Himself? Thousands of relationships may be broken in this life; perhaps they never touched our inner being otherwise than in a hostile or disturbing fashion, but *the bond of truly divine love is as indissoluble as the being in which it is established, as eternal as a pronouncement of God.*" (p. 15)

These words, which bear the hallmark of Swedenborg's teaching, clearly exemplify the principal motives of the Romantic conception of friendship, love, and marriage. They also reflect in mood and emotion the Romantic cult of love and friendship which found its lofty expression in the poems of Novalis and other Romantics.<sup>4</sup>

The question as to the bond between nature and the spiritual world, and the reference to the eternal binding force of love leads us to a third idea, which is also put forward entirely under the influence of Swedenborg's teaching: the intercourse between nature and the spiritual world takes effect only through mankind. Man is the creature through whom the raising and transformation of nature into the spiritual world is achieved, and the lower creature elevated, by education, into the higher. But what is here stated regarding man was valid, as Schelling emphasizes, for his original destiny as the archetypal man Adam, in his ideal completeness in the image of God, whose destiny as the intermediary between the natural and spiritual worlds Swedenborg describes so often and in such detail. "Should we not be able to assume," continues Schelling,

that there was a Divine plan *that nature should arise to become man*, in order to find in him the point of union of both worlds, so that afterwards through man there should be a direct transition from each world into the other, and the products of growth in the outer world *should continue without interruption to grow in the inner or spiritual world?*

In this way "the whole of nature would have been able to rise in and with him to heaven or to everlasting life" (pp. 37 ff.).

Man, however, did not fulfil his original destiny. The myth of the Fall receives here in Schelling, as inspired by Swedenborg, a new interpretation. The destiny of man was decided by the use he made of his freedom, the original gift of personality. "God did not want a 'dead' or compulsive bond between the two worlds (the internal and external) but a free and living bond, and man had the word of this connection in his heart and on his lips" (also pp. 37 ff.). God did not want prayers and worship from slaves who served Him under compulsion, but the unforced love of those

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<sup>4</sup>The direct literary influence of Swedenborg on Novalis has not yet been proved.

who approached Him voluntarily. But it was just this freedom, the highest mark of God's image in man, which led man to his Fall. He wanted himself, not God. He wanted to be master over his own external world, and abandoned his original destiny of raising the lower world to the higher one.

The forces which had arisen within him in all their power, ready to raise him into another world, *and to reach the point of transfiguration*, turned back to the present one, and thus stifled the inner life force, which still smoldered like a banked-up fire, but because such elevation was no longer possible, like a fire of pain and anguish, trying to find a way out on all sides. (p. 39)

In this way the original order of the world and the original path of ascent and transformation of the lower existence into the higher were overthrown. Man himself, failing to realize his higher talents and achieve his task, was put under a spell and bewitched. It was as a result of this "reaction" of the forces, which were no longer able to raise man into the higher world, that the world was bewitched and enthralled, and because of the sin against God of claiming self existence, could no longer serve its original destiny. And Schelling's picture of the bewitched world is as follows (p. 40.):

Oh, but it is not those ruins of ancient human splendor, for the sake of which the inquisitive visit the deserts of Persia and the wildernesses of India, which are the real ruins; the whole earth is one big ruin, in which dwell animals like ghosts, and men like spirits, and in which many hidden forces and treasures are held captive as if by invisible forces or by the spell of a wizard. And did we want to accuse these instead of thinking rather of liberating them in ourselves? It is true that man in his own way is no less bewitched and enthralled. Therefore from time to time Heaven sent higher beings, who by means of wonderful music and incantations were to break the spell inside him, and thus reopen to him the power of vision into the higher world. The majority however, were captivated by the outer scene, and thought that was where they would find what they sought. Like peasants prowling round an old ruin or an enchanted castle

with their magic wands in their hands, or shining their lanterns into its subterranean chambers, and using levers and crowbars in the hope of finding gold or other treasure: so man prowls round nature and peeps into some of her hidden chambers, calling this natural history research; but the treasures are not merely covered by rubble, they are locked up inside the ruins and stones themselves by a spell which only another more powerful incantation can break. (A marginal comment by Schelling: *Quite a different world buried inside from what we suspected. Odyssey of the spirit.*)

This idea of a world bewitched, which repeatedly crops up subsequently, with frequent modifications, in Romantic poetry, appears here as a brief synopsis of the numerous visions of Swedenborg, in which before the eyes of the seer the men of this world shed their external form and change to their real internal, appearing in the pure form of their innermost being, which is determined by their ruling love: enthralled by demons, with animal or devilish heads, or liberated by angels, with transfigured angelic faces.

The spiritual world therefore—and this is a fundamental teaching of Swedenborg—is not somewhere remote, beyond the grave, but is present in a concealed way in this visible world, though it does not achieve its free development here; the higher forces are in subjection to the lower, and must first be released from the latter's thrall, liberated and guided to their true destiny. This process of release from enchantment takes place in the believer by the operation of God, who in regeneration endows man with true heavenly freedom. This basic theme of Swedenborg's, which constantly recurs throughout his *Arcana Caelestia* and forms the conclusion to his *Heaven & Hell*, is the final subject discussed in the first of Schelling's conversations with "Clara." Regarding this freedom Swedenborg writes in his *True Christian Religion* (n. 498):

Whatever is in a higher degree is in a state of perfection above that which is in a lower degree. This freedom is the means by which, in which and with which, the Lord is present in man, unceasingly urgent to be received. Yet He never sets aside or takes away man's freedom; for . . . whatever in spiritual things is done by man otherwise than in the exercise

of freedom does not remain with him; so that it may be said that this freedom in man's soul is the abode of the Lord with him.

According to Schelling, however: "The majority of men shun freedom, in the same way as they shun magic or anything they do not understand—and particularly the spiritual world. *Freedom is really the true apparition*" (p. 51; emphasis added).

In the second conversation, as a result of its Christmas setting, the subject of the Christmas story (the Incarnation), a main problem was broached, leading again right into the center of Swedenborgian theology: the problem of body and mind. Even at the end of the first conversation Schelling protested against the foolish habit of tearing apart nature and supernature, body and mind, and, as in the case of Oetinger, this polemic against the splitting up of the spiritual and corporeal unity of the universe becomes also in the case of Schelling a polemic against pure Idealism, which Oetinger had already called "a fear of materialism like that of a shying horse." The pure Idealists, who dissolve all reality into abstractions, are the real destroyers of the world and the annihilators of the unity of life, for they break the secret chain which conjoins nature with supernature, the physical with the spiritual world. The Idealists

begin with the most general and the most spiritual, and can therefore never descend to the particular, and to reality. They are ashamed to begin with the earth and to climb via creation as by a ladder, and to derive their supernatural ideas in the first place from earth, fire, water and air. This has the result that they get nowhere, and their web of ideas consists of plants without roots; they hang suspended from nothing, like spiders' webs from bushes or walls, or float before us, like these same gossamer threads in the air or in the sky. And yet the purpose is to strengthen their fellow men—and even to help the whole contemporary generation, which is however actually suffering from the fact that while part of it has sunk into the mire, another part has climbed so high that it can no longer find any ground under its feet. *If in this world we want everything to be spiritual, what will remain for us in the next?*

And, drawing on Swedenborg's ideas regarding the higher knowledge of the Most Ancient Church, Schelling continues: "It seems to me that men of

an earlier age had quite different and more definite beliefs about that other life while they were still standing, with marrow in their bones, on this earth" (p. 49).

The root problem, which is now dealt with in the discussion on Christmas eve, is the relationship between mind and body. Probably there is no point in which the new thinking of Schelling is so clearly distinguished from the abstract conception of spirit of the Enlightenment as in the answer to this question, and probably at no point is the effect of Swedenborgian ideas as clear as it is here. The spiritual kingdom is by no means a sphere of pure abstractions. The spiritual does not exist for itself alone, with a disconnected life in a world of pure conceptions, but is only real and existent at all in its relationship to a specific bodily form, and on the basis of that form. The Word becomes flesh, and only becomes real and effective by doing so: that is the theme which develops during the Christmas eve conversation by the closest of links with the Christmas gospel. By the Incarnation of the Logos, by the Son becoming man, the original relationship between the spiritual world and the world below is restored. "Therefore the angels could not do otherwise than celebrate this birth (of the Son) and proclaim glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, since the higher had come down to the lower, *and the chain which had for so long been broken was now restored*" (p. 54).

"At times like this," continued Clara, "my conviction requires no reasons: I see everything as if it were immediately present before me; I feel as if I were already living in the midst of spirits, as if I were still moving around on the earth, but as a quite different being, carried about by a soft, yielding substance—without needs and without pain. Oh, why cannot we hold moments like this captive?" (p. 55)

Once again it is from the image of man that this new spiritual idea is developed. The old dualism of the Enlightenment, which seeks to understand human nature from the contrast between soul and body, is overcome by the idea of the unity of man, which is generated by the organic combination of mind (or spirit), soul and body. There is no abstract, spiritual or psychic existence, but there is the life of the personality, to which the spiritual existence belongs just as does the bodily existence, and

a man's bodily existence is just as much the expression and embodiment of his spiritual form as his psychic life. On the basis of this conception of the spirituo-corporeal unity of the human personality Schelling stoutly rejects the old dualistic teaching of the immortality of the soul. For Schelling—as for Swedenborg—death does not bring about a dissolution of the human personality into a decomposing corpse and the abstract phantom of an immortal soul. For him the answer to the question as to the purpose of death is not immortality, but resurrection. There is no spiritual existence without a bodily form. It is therefore an absurdity to dream of the continued existence of an abstract soul. Either *the whole man*—the entire spirituo-corporeal unity of his personality—survives death, or nothing does so. Either he is rescued from death complete, or not at all.

So it is here in answering the problem of death that the new unitary image of man is developed. Death appears in the conversation not as a division of man into separate components but as his elevation to a higher whole, as a “positive transition to a spiritual condition,” in which, however, man loses nothing, but the whole man is present, as “body, mind (or spirit) and soul” (p. 70). In death the great internal transformation—and, to a certain extent, a conversion—take place. As in the earthly existence the life of the whole man is determined by the earthly, material nature of his bodily form, so in the future existence the life of the whole, even as regards his corporeal aspect, will be determined by his spiritual nature. This future form or nature must and will also have a bodily character. The miracle that “in the spiritual condition the man remains a unit, as body, mind (or spirit) and soul, i.e. as the whole man” is no greater than the miracle which we see daily in this life, consisting in the fact that “man in the bodily condition is not merely a body, but also mind or spirit, and at the same time soul” (p. 70). We have only got used to this daily miracle of the unity of body, soul and mind (or spirit) because it is an inevitable precondition of our earthly existence. But the miracle of the joint presence of body, soul, and mind-spirit in earthly life is in itself no less than the miracle of the resurrection, in which our body, soul, and mind-spirit unit will again be realized in a neat bodily form.

Just as Swedenborg teaches that in each human being the inner man dwells as his mind-spirit and his internal, heavenly, angelic life form, so Schelling also explains the secret of the death and life of the human

personality, basing it on *the separation of an inner and an outer-life form*. Once more it is the idea of enchantment which he uses in this connection.

The naked external appearance of the whole is the consequence of deferred development, which is not able to destroy the inner form but which can convolute, restrict and subdue it, making it subject to the outer form. Is it not only natural that if one form of the body, in which the internal has been restricted by the external, collapses, then the other, in which the external is cast off and subdued by the internal, is liberated? (p. 76)

In life on earth the inner form is in bondage to the outer, material form and cannot achieve the freedom to form the spiritual body corresponding to it. Death, however, is transition to an existence in which the possibility of free development of the inner form is opened up, because the spell of the outer form is broken. This assumes as a matter of course that the inner form is there, present and active during this life.

*“So this spiritual form of the body must have been there and present in the merely external one already?”*

*“Of course,” I [Schelling] replied, “but only in embryo, trying to develop, but being held down by the strength of the external life, able to show its presence only partially and in special circumstances.” (p. 76)*

It is just this which is the justification of and necessity for death, which comes not as a destroyer, but as a liberator, and introduces the mind-spirit-soul-body unit of man to his final fulfillment and consummation.

*“Death is then the liberation of the inner life form from the outer, which keeps it suppressed?”*

*“Excellent,” said I.*

*“And death is necessary, because those two life-forms, since after the sinking of nature into the merely external they cannot exist together, must exist successively?”*

*“Quite right,” said I, “and you have expressed this splendidly.” (p. 79)*

A prior condition for the understanding of these ideas is that here by "body" it is not a material, substantial, physical body which is understood, but that "body" in itself has nothing to do with physical substance and material, but that corporeality relates to being and existence. There is a material corporeality or body, but there is also a spiritual corporeality or body, since even a spirit has its specific form, its individually impressed or stamped being and life. In the outer body an inner body, an inner essence of the body, is hidden, which is the seed and root of the future resurrection body, the seed corn of the heavenly transfigured corporeality, or spiritual body. Thus death is certainly a separation,

*"not from the inner essence of the body, but from the body in so far as it is an external feature and a part of merely external nature."*

"But during this life that spiritual essence of the body was already in existence inside the merely external?"

"At least as a seed or embryo," I replied. (p. 82)

Thus in death only the external form of corporeality disappears. But there remains *the entire human being*, not as an abstract phantom or specter, not as a "soul," but as a personality which has and keeps its body, to which necessarily belongs a real, individual, bodily being. This spiritual being of corporeality continues to exist *"as a silent bearer of the higher light, retaining the capacity for doing this only so that it shall have root and ground, but not for itself."* It can however never be eliminated, even in thought, *"as with it the personality would itself disappear"* (p. 101).

That Schelling is here following Swedenborg's train of thought is shown by the fact that he speaks of resurrection, but does not think of it in accordance with the teaching of the orthodoxy of the church as meaning being clothed with a new body on the day of resurrection and the Last Judgement, but as a kind of *development process* of a higher order, which *begins with death*, while within it the inner form becomes ever more pure and complete. Schelling here therefore takes up the Swedenborgian idea of the further development of man, which takes place in the spiritual world from the time of death onwards, through various stages and spheres, and paints the picture of a stage-by-stage spiritualization, with which

connoisseurs of Swedenborg are familiar from all his theological works. The step from this life into a purely spiritual existence is too sudden,

for from the present corporeal condition of a man to spirituality there may be so many intermediate stages that on dying he may be torn from this life and leave the external corporeal world entirely without making the transition to the spiritual world. Even the man in whom is the good seed of progress can still only be spiritualized in stages. (pp. 116ff)

As with Swedenborg, here also the will or love of man is recognized as the actual driving force towards the further development of his spiritual personality: each man and woman develops, and undergoes changes in accord with his inmost ruling love, in the direction to which his inner man is inclined: if he inclines towards God, then this plastic being of his inner life form conforms more and more to the image and likeness of God; if he inclines towards self love and evil, his original form deteriorates further and further into degeneracy.

Thus the conversation leads to the picture of the Swedenborgian heaven, which is not a kingdom of the blessed who are transferred thither at a certain moment in the history of the kingdom of God for all practical purposes as ready-made saints, but is seen to be a realm of manifold regions and stages, a universe of multifarious spiritual worlds, in which the spirits help each other to enhance and ennoble their true life forms, and in constantly changing communities undergoing modification and transfiguration to the last and highest forms of their personal beings. We should have

no hesitation in believing that in the invisible world which we shall enter after death there may be *many individual realms and quite multifarious worlds*, each of which may be the dwelling place of one or more races, and that many more such wonderful places are not beyond the borders of what is generally called the visible world, if it is moreover true, as has appeared so probable to us, that not every soul is absolutely released from this lower earth immediately after death, *but perhaps reaches the actual transcendental world only after a process of stage-by-stage spiritualisation.* (p. 128)

That is not the orthodox Church teaching regarding heaven and the state after death, but it is Swedenborg's teaching.

From this point onwards the subject of the conversation reverts to the main theme of Christmas eve: the birth of Christ is understood not as a merely historical event, but as a cosmic, universal act of God: the rift between nature and the spiritual world, between heaven and earth, has been healed by the Son of God becoming man, by the Word being made flesh. The chain is restored, the upward path to reformation has again been opened, and the harmony of the universe is reestablished.

Should we regard all that talk about the victory of Christ over the ancient Realm of Death, as merely empty, general figures of speech? Rather what I believe is this: Only when He, by Whom all things were made in the beginning, descended into sunken nature—now become mortal and perishable—to form there a bond between spiritual and natural life, could Heaven, the true spiritual world, again be opened to all, and the connection between earth and Heaven be established for a second time. (pp. 130ff)

The third conversation—during a walk—carries our thoughts along on the theme of the corporeality of the spiritual and the consummation of existence in a spirituo-corporeal, heavenly realm to a powerful finale. In this conversation, after the Christmas conversation had led to the demonstration of the existence of a multistage spiritual world, a general picture is painted of this heavenly kingdom, which reflects Swedenborg's description of heaven almost in the same way as does Lavater's *Prospects for Eternity*. Once more the new conversation is linked to the previous one by the idea of spirituo-corporeality, which is at first developed once more. The glimpse of the splendors of nature afforded to the strollers by their walk makes them appreciate how much of the spiritual is present and involved in nature. This marvel of the hidden involvement of the spiritual in external nature is no less miraculous than the miracle of the future existence, in which the corporeal will be involved in the spiritual nature.

"Of course it is usual for most people," said I, "to consider the spiritual as less real than the corporeal, and yet this organized and

subordinated nature, of which we are the witnesses and observers, evinces so much spirituality, which is in no degree less real and physical than what is generally regarded as such. And that is what we have been maintaining, that after death something physical follows the spiritual.”

“Of course,” said Clara.

“Must not then,” I continued, “that other or spiritual world be just as physical, in its own way, as this present physical world is also spiritual?” (p. 145).

So here the spiritual world rests in the external world, there the external in the internal. Both worlds, however, stand to each other—and here Swedenborg’s most important teaching breaks through—in a relationship of correspondence. The lower corresponds to the higher, everything on earth has its correspondence in the spiritual world, in everything earthly there inheres an analogy, a reference to its heavenly, spiritual world prototype, and wise is he whose gaze can penetrate to its essence, read this signature (to use Boehme’s term) of everything earthly and external, and decipher its spiritual form. From this Swedenborgian teaching of analogy the Romantic idea of *Nature as hieroglyphics* was developed. But the relationship of correspondence should not be thought of as external and abstract: the earthly form is not a simple epitome, shadow or analogy of the inner, heavenly form, but what is here external is there procreative, substantial, potent, archetypal, concentrated in a “most fine and delicate extract.”

The finest and most delicate part of anything is the Divine. If therefore the Divine and the spiritual are actually at home in that world, then something similar to that which touches us spiritually through the medium of the senses must be affected there also, namely, *the finest extract or essence, similar to a spice and its fragrance or exhalation*. For there we shall have to do with the essence of things, and not first have to separate the delicate from the coarse. There every taste must be a pleasant one, every sound euphony, speech itself music, and, in short, everything full of harmony, but in particular, that harmony exceeding all other which springs only from two hearts in tune with each other, enjoyed much more internally and purely. (pp. 150ff)

Then the conversation passes to a description of the heavenly kingdom, which is full of Swedenborgian assertions. This can be proved in detail from all the individual subjects, such as the pleasant taste of heavenly food and drink, heavenly euphony, and above all from the assertion of the musical language of heaven. What is much more decisive, however, is that Schelling here gives expression to a thought of Swedenborg's which in his case is the basis of all illustrations of the coordination and consociation of the spirits in the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is a harmony, of countless communities and societies. Allocation to and membership of, these groups takes place in accordance with the principle: *associate like with like*. Everyone joins that society, to which he is drawn by the ruling love of his being, the special nature of his love. Here is what Schelling writes:

For that also seemed to me quite incomprehensible, how people could ever have doubted that there like would be associated with like, that is, interiorly like, and every Divine and eternal love already existing here would find its beloved, not only from among persons already known, but also those unknown, for each of whom a soul-mate full of love is longing, seeking in vain for the heaven here which is waiting for him in her breast. For in this quite external world the law of the heart has no power. Kindred souls are separated here by centuries, by long distances or by the complexities of the world. The most worthy is set in an unworthy environment, like gold with base copper or lead in a vein of ore. A heart full of nobility and loftiness often finds a neglected wilderness world around it, which pulls down heavenly purity and beauty to ugliness and vulgarity. There, however, where the external is fully subordinated to the internal, as here the internal is to the external, *there everything must attract its kin according to its internal value and content* and remain, not in destructible or temporary, but in eternal and indissoluble harmony. And the sympathy which is already here a heavenly phenomenon, though weak and in many cases dull in its expression, must there achieve a quite different degree of intimacy, as we notice here already when bodies are transposed into a more spiritual condition, and they feel their relationship more intimately. (p. 157f)

So a man becomes after death what he inmostly is, his inner form develops more fully and accurately, and his inner being moulds his spiritual body in this new form of existence ever more completely, so that the external and internal are in perfect correspondence. Moreover, the man enters the community which earthly existence did not allow him to reach, but which he will join after a fulfilling and beatifying process of reformation. No material external hindrance now prevents him from contacting them and uniting with them in a community of indissoluble love. In this way there are formed in the kingdom of heaven a host of individual communities which join together in that great community of love, which itself is in the human form, into the "Grand Man" (or Universal Human) which is heaven itself.

The transformation of existence, in which we are followed, not by the material-corporeal, but only "*the fully unbound and free corporeal,*" i.e., a spiritual body which is the essence and being of the bodily form, now brings about a transformation of all the functions in the life of human existence. Once more it is Swedenborg's intuitions which guide Schelling in the description of this unbound existence. This becomes particularly clear from the description of the *language of heaven*, which has had great influence on the Romantic ideas of the "original language." Earthly language is a language of conceptions, with which each people designates things in its own way. In the language of heaven, the "original language," the "true general language," conception and essence coincide. There only those words can be heard which correspond "with the essential qualities or nature of the things to which they apply."

As in the spiritual world the external is entirely subordinated to the internal, and the spiritual form moulds the bodily form so perfectly that the external is a comprehensive representation of the internal, everything is its own interpreter, or, as Schelling writes: "*Everything bears within itself a living word as a combination of the vowels and consonants which constitute its core and inmost.*" Everyone represents himself, announces himself and explains himself. The inner word is completely and perfectly pronounced in the external spiritual body form. The external is the best interpreter of the internal—indeed, the person is also identical with the word, and communicates and imparts himself (his essence) *ipse facto* to others. Thus the language of heavenly spirits is not a means of communication by signs,

not an exchange of derivative conceptions which constitute an image, conventionally acceptable to both parties, of the thought itself, but *“the direct recognition of the conception of the original image of the person or thing in itself.”* Language does not therefore arise, as it does here, from the need to communicate to another person, but is a *“communication without signs,”* that is, everyone interprets himself, one person has an effect on another by means of himself *“through an invisible, but still, perhaps, physical influence,”* as a result of his inner word, which is a perfect expression of his essential nature and thought, inspiring the same inner word in the spirit and heart of his hearer, and thus the tone of the speaker strikes the same tone in the heart of his hearer, and unites them both in the unison of the heart, of cognisance and of the soul. (pp. 159ff).

However, the end of the conversation switches the reader’s attention back from the kingdom of heaven to earth. It would be wrong to allow our view of earthly reality to be clouded by the picture of future perfection and the spiritual world, for this earthly reality is of course provided for the very purpose of bringing that future perfection to birth, by means of the contrast and struggle, and leading the concealed internal form to its pure presentation. The earth is the battle ground on which the spiritual world, present here, though concealed and operating internally, struggles for its liberation and full self realization. The final goal, freedom, can only be achieved in the struggle for liberation. This freedom is granted to him who struggles to achieve it, not to the indolent.

*“It appears,”* said Clara, *“to be the same with man as with works of art. Sensitive tenderness and spirituality achieve here their highest value only in contact with a resisting, even barbaric, element, by nevertheless asserting their own nature against it. Where softness and gentleness overcome hardness and violence, that is where the greatest beauty is revealed.”* (p. 172)

So here again freedom appears as the most comprehensive idea for the development of existence.

Not until this point, the end of the fragment, does Schelling dare to mention the name of the source of his inspiration—Swedenborg. This he does in a retrospective *résumé* of the whole course of the argument, which returns to its central starting point, the descent of God to earth as man and

the Incarnation of the Logos. After all, Swedenborg developed all his ideas regarding the corporeality of the spiritual, the hidden presence of the spiritual world in its earthly body and the transformation of the earthly existence into the higher existence, from his view of the Lord and his interpretation of the Incarnation and the Glorification of the Lord. Schelling now does him the honor of mentioning him as his source, and claiming him for himself.

“I remember,” said I, “that earlier I heard the views of the Nordic Seer on this very matter, *and found his comments on this particular point most satisfying*. The point in question was, why it had pleased the Lord to be born on this earth, namely, for the sake of the Word, because only here was it materially possible for it to be propagated, written and meticulously cherished.” (p. 172)

It was therefore the Swedenborgian interpretation of the Incarnation and the Swedenborgian view of the Word which were the source of Schelling’s ideas regarding the connection between nature and the spiritual world, the hidden but effective presence of the transcendent in this world, the transforming power of spirit, as well as freedom in the sense of liberation of the spiritual world from its banishment from the external world and the liberation of sensitive tenderness from the grip of barbarism.

So a number of ideas can be found in Schelling which were formed as a result of Swedenborg’s teachings and intuitions, and in fact they are the great ideas on which Schelling was in the most intimate contact with the religious views and source of German Romanticism and on which he himself most authoritatively influenced it: the idea of the internal connection between nature and the spiritual world, the conception of man as at the center of creation, in whom the lower existence raises itself and transforms itself into the higher, the idea of the corporeality of the spiritual, the view of the infinite variety of the spiritual world, the idea of nature as hieroglyphics, and finally the profound plan of the secret of death and the secret of life, which lies behind all these other individual beliefs and is confirmed by the idea of the Incarnation of the Son of God, by the penetration of nature and history by the transcendent, by the hidden workings of the spirit in the outer world, by the liberation of the spiritual world

through its struggle with the outer world and by the freedom generated by the contrast.

The case of Schelling is only an example to draw attention to the influence of Swedenborg, but in its light it is surely not going too far to include Swedenborg among the great inspirers of German spiritual history. Researchers into spiritual and ecclesiastical history will do well to do justice to the real significance of the great Swede, in whom the tradition of the natural and religious philosophy of a Jakob Boehme, supported by a modern scientific conception, is developed for modern times, and to trace further his manifold influences, open and hidden, on the great German Idealistic and Romantic thinkers. Schelling's pupil Krause, one of the few who have tried to effect a scientific "rescue" of Swedenborg, was right when, in concluding his survey of Swedenborg's system, published in Munich as *The Spirit of the Teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg*, he wrote:

I find it striking that in all accounts of the history of philosophy, and also in all accounts known to me of the history of Christian doctrinal conceptions, Swedenborg's teachings, which are generally known merely by hearsay as a fantastic record of spirit seeing, are almost completely ignored or wrongly assessed—an injustice to a highly estimable and honorable man which ought to be remedied . . . From a purely scientific point of view, Swedenborg's system belongs to the spiritualistic and idealistic dogmatic systems, and deserves the same consideration as for example the work of Malebranche. If it is proposed to argue that he does not deserve to be considered a philosopher because he based his system on the religious documents of the Christian Church and on his alleged personal revelations, then all the profound thinkers of the Middle Ages, as well as all more recent philosophers who do the same, should similarly be ignored.

*(To be Continued)*

