

## THE STOCKHOLM EXEGETIC AND PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY AND SPIRITISM\*

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On 19th June 1787 the “spiritist” faction in the Stockholm Exegetic and Philanthropic Society led by Baron Karl Göran Silfverhjelms, a nephew of the venerable Emanuel Swedenborg, sent a letter broadcast to universities, learned societies, mesmeric conclaves and Illuminist Freemasons throughout Europe.<sup>1</sup> The letter championed recent experiments conducted by the Society as providing ready confirmation of the Truths of Swedenborg’s teachings, in the “magnetic” means employed to contact higher “Guardian” entities who, they argued, were instrumental in the confrontation with, and the cure of, diseases.

With the support of leading Swedish aristocrats at Court, the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society was founded in 1786 by Carl Bernhard Wadström, better known for his antislavery efforts based on Swedenborg’s positive views of the African races, and the Finnish Mason Carl Frederick Nordenskjöld.<sup>2</sup> Organized for the redaction of Swedenborgian texts in Swedish, Latin, French and other languages and a new translation of the Bible, its brief existence of five years between 1786 and 1791 might have remained a footnote in New Church history but for the issues raised by its spiritist faction, who took control of the Society over the last three years of its tenure.<sup>3</sup> These issues would resurface within the New Church in varied

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\* A portion of this paper was read before the Swedenborg Scientific Association Annual General Meeting on 29 April, 2006 at Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

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<sup>1</sup> This letter is included in George Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg; or The Relation of the Developments of Mesmerism to the Doctrines and disclosures of Swedenborg* (New York, 1847): 261-69.

<sup>2</sup> E. Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion* (2 vols) (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1980, vol. 2): §§ 835–840; see R. W. Rix, ‘C. B. Wadström’, *Main British Abolitionists* (online); and Charles Arthur Hawley, “Swedenborgianism and the Frontier,” *Church History* 6: 3 (Sept., 1937): 209; Marguerite Beck Block, *The New Church in the New World* (New York: Swedenborg Publishing Association, 1984): 55.

<sup>3</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 52.

forms throughout the following century, in brief and minor schisms like Rev. Samuel Worcester's "New Era" movement, and deeply influence revisionist ministers such as the Rev. Henry Weller and the Rev. T. L. Harris, who would claim the mantle of supplementary Revelator, including spirit intercourse, ostensibly to reinforce Swedenborg's message of regeneration.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of this trend within the small but culturally permeative New Church is best understood as part of a larger trend in European intellectual culture. At various junctures since the 1770s, when the Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer had introduced "Animal Magnetism" as a therapeutic practice, the new "science" had first achieved notoriety within fringe movements then moved to the carnival circuit, only to gain a more salubrious place in medical circles in the latter nineteenth century as Hypnotism, when it had a profound influence on psychotherapy and early psychoanalysis through eminent practitioners like Charcot, Janet, Breuer and Freud.<sup>5</sup> The contribution of the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society and similar assemblies to this broader trend during the High Enlightenment was in the promotion of an alleged connection between "Magnetism" as a therapy, and the life of religion and morals.

In the late 1780s, only a decade after Mesmer had proclaimed his discovery, the Stockholm spiritists believed that through mesmeric means, they had arrived at an effective method of healing diseases that was also in accord with Swedenborg's teachings, in particular what in the *Arcana Coelestia* he had called a "speaking illustration."<sup>6</sup> The crux of their argu-

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel H. Worcester (Jr.), "A Letter to the Receivers of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem," (Boston: Otis Clapp, 1845); Edward Brotherton, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg and the New Church* (London: William White, 1860); "Letter from Rev. H Weller," *The New Church Repository and Monthly Review*, G. Bush (Ed.) 5: 12 (Dec. 1852); see "Nottingham and the Rev T. L. Harris," pp. 296–7; "The Swedenborgians and the Rev. Thomas L. Harris," pp. 501–2, and "Mr Harris's Mistakes," pp. 503–4.

<sup>5</sup> George E. Gifford (Ed.), *Psychoanalysis, Psychotherapy, and the New England Medical Scene 1894–1944* (New York: Science History Publications, 1978); see also A.R.G. Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis & Healing, The Work of J.-M. Charcot* (New York, Garrett Publications, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Swedenborg speaks of two kinds of vision which he had been permitted to experience. The first he calls "being withdrawn from the body," and the other "being carried away by the spirit into another place." E. Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, [1749] (London: Swedenborg Society, 1995): §§1883–1885.

ment is that Magnetism and Somnambulism (a deeper state of entrancement), if rightly understood and applied, were intimately connected with the advancement of Divine Truth. When this energy is directed “not to the natural and physical alone, but especially to the spiritual good of the soul” of the patient, and if the magnetizer is convinced that all diseases are the results of moral evil, the direct influence of the hell spheres, it has the power to transform an individual, to induce regeneration. The act of magnetizing becomes “chiefly a moral act” related to uses, where the operative cause is the magnetizer’s “strong desire to benefit his neighbor,” and the effect is that of “removing or expelling the influence of the disease.”<sup>7</sup>

It was thus at the level of spiritual gnosis that the true significance of magnetic cures was revealed, as a vehicle for bringing about the “New Jerusalem,” an internal transformation and regeneration of the individual. To Baron Silfverhjelm and other Swedenborgian spiritists, the real benefit of Magnetism was the revelation of divine truth and wisdom, for although healing was its immediate effect, it could “extend the Kingdom of the LORD both in breadth and width.” Magnetism was therefore not just an “introduction to Heavenly matters”; but properly applied, with a spiritual motivation based upon uses, it might serve also as a way to turn one’s heart to God.<sup>8</sup>

This paper explores some of the complex strands that informed this outlook, one shared over the following century by a small but significant proportion of the New Church membership in England and in the U.S., to whom it suggested a critique of Swedenborg’s Revelation. Among the most determined in this view was William White, the main English supporter of the Rev. T. L. Harris.<sup>9</sup> The tensions generated internally and

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<sup>7</sup> Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg*, 265–7.

<sup>8</sup> “både på bredden och höjden utvidga HERRENS rike” to “extend the Kingdom of the LORD both in breadth and width.” Magnetism was not just an “Introduktion i Himmelska saker” (“introduction to Heavenly matters”), Robert W. Rix, “Healing the Spirit: William Blake and Magnetic Religion,” *Romanticism on the Net* 25 (February 2002) (online), 2.

<sup>9</sup> On William White and Thomas Lake Harris, see Edward Brotherton, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg and the New Church* (London: William White, 1860), 25–6 and *passim*, and Freda G. Griffith, *The Swedenborg Society 1810-1960*. London: Chiswick Press, 1960, 22.

externally, especially the rapid rise of Spiritualism in the 1850s led to an eventual resolution, when in 1860 the Church of the New Jerusalem officially condemned Spiritualism.<sup>10</sup>

The central issue raised by the Stockholm Society's brief venture into the dangerous waters of spiritism was twofold: whether it was possible to cure diseases via "somnambulist" means, through contact with a magnetized patient's "guardian spirit," and obliquely related to this, given the means thus revealed to communicate with other dimensions of Being, whether Swedenborg's Revelation could be regarded as final, or should now be supplemented through such mesmeric "instruments," who might draw on the direct authority of a celestial Emanuel Swedenborg or other exalted being. Although the Stockholm spiritists did not press this second proposition, it was quickly inferred by a substantial number of adherents, and added to the looser confederation of Magnetists, Illuminist Freemasons, Kabbalists and others who selectively appropriated Swedenborg's message, especially his intromissions and descriptions of the spiritual spheres, this would precipitate severe periodic ructions within the New Church for the better part of a century. There were other controversies, such as over the "Third Gospel" and the furore concerning Swedenborg's views on "concubinage," an issue that in the 1790s was the cause of an early schism; but the issue of spiritism and, related to this, the status of Swedenborg's revelation, would remain the most enduring and permeating controversies of the century within the New Church.<sup>11</sup>

At its most radical edge, this view allowed the inference that the mere possibility of contacting a spiritual realm like the World of Spirits Swedenborg had taught might serve to "update" his revelation. Swedenborg of course had warned against invoking such denizens by

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<sup>10</sup> See Alfred J. Gabay, *The 'Covert' Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Counterculture and its Aftermath* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2004), especially Ch. 7; W. F. Barrett, "Open intercourse with the spiritual world—its dangers and the cautions which they naturally suggest," *The New Jerusalem Magazine* vol. XIX (Sept. 1845): 13–28; (Oct. 1845): 50–64; and (Nov. 1845): 89–104; B. W., "Modern Spiritualism," *The New Jerusalem Magazine* XXIX (Feb. 1857): 369–379; Rev. John Goddard, *Swedenborg and Modern Spiritualism*, Philadelphia (American New-Church Tract and Publication Society, c. 1880); G. B., "Pseudo-Spiritualism," *The New Church Repository and Monthly Review* 5 (July 1852): 334–8; (August): 373–7; (Nov): 509–14; (December): 533–48.

<sup>11</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, pp. 99, 127.

those “unprotected by the Lord,” cautioning against discourse with angels and spirits “unless he be of such a quality that he can consociate with them as to faith and love,” but this caveat was ignored by the Stockholm spiritists and by later experimenters.<sup>12</sup> While these issues weighed on the minds of many members (how many it is impossible to say), that the number continued to be significant can be inferred, for instance, from the tension that attended the reception some sixty years later of *Mesmer and Swedenborg* (1847) by the Reverend George Bush. This work skirts some of the alleged similarities between Swedenborg’s experiences and the “mediumistic” trance being then produced by the “Poughkeepsie seer,” Andrew Jackson Davis; his bold claims to have gained access to Swedenborg’s wisdom and even transcended it, and Bush’s seeming concordance created interest and alarm, both within the New Church and without.<sup>13</sup>

George Bush was an eminent New Church theologian, who angered many of his New Church colleagues when he endorsed the functionally illiterate twenty year old youth Davis as the mouthpiece of the great Swedish seer. That Bush retracted his endorsement within a year is less important than the furore it caused within the New Church in the U.S. and in England.<sup>14</sup> Hence the magnetic methods put forward by the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society principally to heal disease, and in their view finding confirmation in Swedenborg, endured as a point of dissention.

The Society’s 1787 letter was sent from Stockholm, in Swedish and in French, with an attached brochure arguing for the spiritual origins of the phenomena associated with Animal Magnetism. The date, 19 June 1787, is imbued with profound significance for the New Church faithful, being the seventeenth anniversary of the publication of *True Christian Religion*, which marks the commencement of the era of the New Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> While it

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<sup>12</sup> E. Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, § 5863, § 9438; the Rev. John Clowes, for instance, admitted receiving some of his sermons and published works under spiritual influence; Brotherton, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg and the New Church*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg*, pp. 29, 69.

<sup>14</sup> “Bush’s Mesmerism,” review, *The New Church Quarterly Review*, vol. I (1847); “The Professed Revelations of Davis,” review, and “Publication of Strictures on the Case of Davis,” *The New Church Quarterly Review*, vol. II (1848).

<sup>15</sup> E. Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, vol. 1, §§ 3, 4.

sparked bemusement and some ridicule in learned universities like Jena and Weimar, and at the Marquis de Puységur's influential mesmeric *Société des Amis Réunis* in Strasbourg,<sup>16</sup> the uneasy proximity of spiritistic conceptions emanating from the melding of eighteenth century Mesmerism and the new cosmology revealed by Swedenborg's open vision of the spiritual and celestial spheres of existence, created doubts in some hearts concerning the sufficiency of Swedenborg's revelation.

To understand the perceived need for this document, to examine the long term ramifications of this early congruence between Swedenborgianism as interpreted by Silfverhjelm's coterie, and the rising influence of Animal Magnetism (or Mesmerism, or Magnetism, as it was beginning to be called),<sup>17</sup> it is necessary to establish a context across time, beginning with the early Swedish colonies in the New World in the previous century.

In 1693 King Charles XI of Sweden received a letter from Fort Christina, the first of three settlements established from 1638 on the western bank of the Delaware. New Sweden came under Dutch control in 1655, but life went on for the Swedes pretty much as before.<sup>18</sup> Charles XI enjoined the assistance of the Rev. Jesper Svedberg of the Swedish consistory, father of Emanuel Swedenborg and Professor of Theology, and later Bishop of Skara, who sent the ministers Jonas Auren, Andrew Rudman and Eric Björk. Until his death in 1735 Bishop Svedberg remained "the special guardian of the Swedish church on the Delaware."<sup>19</sup> This fascinating if elliptical connection with Swedenborg shows the smallness of the Early Modern world, and reminds one of the reflexive influence of mundane affairs like colonization and wars in the diffusion of Swedenborg's teach-

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<sup>16</sup> Frank Podmore, *Mediums of the 19th Century* (2 vols) (New York: University Books, 1963), originally published in London as *Modern Spiritualism*, (2 vols), vol. 1, p. 62; Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious, The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 102.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Crabtree, *Multiple Man, Explorations in Possession and Multiple Personality* (New York: Praeger, 1985): 5, states that Puységur's important discovery of "magnetic sleep" crossed into the psychological realm, and soon this phenomenon was compared to the suggestible state of sleepwalking, and became known as "artificial somnambulism."

<sup>18</sup> Conrad J. I. Bergendoff, "The Swedish Church on the Delaware," *Church History* 7: 3 (Sept. 1938): 216–17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222, 226.

ings between Europe and America. In 1664 the area passed to English control, forming part of the grant to William Penn who established Pennsylvania, with its capital Philadelphia lying where Fort Christina had once existed. By 1775 King Gustavus III had greatly reduced expenses and gradually the settlement ceased to exist, absorbed in the great melting pot of the new Republic.<sup>20</sup>

Thus before the English hegemony of the eighteenth century, the Delaware region was a seedbed for Swedish and Dutch influence. The tolerant Quaker colony encouraged various Tunkers (or Dunkers), Moravians, Mennonites and other Pietist and Separatist sects from Germany and elsewhere to settle there. Earlier in 1683 the Dutch Labadists had followed an austere communal discipline at Bohemia Manor in Maryland, and a decade later the followers of Zimmerman, founder of the mysterious Chapter of Perfection, arrived in Pennsylvania. Seeking the "Woman in the Wilderness" from *Revelations*, they prepared for the imminent Millennium that would arrive the following year.<sup>21</sup> This small group quickly disappeared but thirty years later, when Conrad Beissel came in search of the Chapter, he founded Ephrata instead, the longest lasting German Pietist commune, which endured well into the nineteenth century. The Declaration of Independence and the early currency of the Republic were printed on the Ephrata presses. The westward expanding nation continued to draw migrants seeking religious freedom and Rappites, Zoar and the Ebenezers came later, as well as French and German Swedenborgians who dispersed throughout the frontier in places like Ohio, Michigan and rural Iowa.<sup>22</sup>

The principal route for the introduction of the Writings to America was through the polyglot merchant James Glen, an original member of the recently formed Theosophical Society. Glen lectured in Boston and Philadelphia in 1784 en route to inspect business interests in South America.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> See John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire, The making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844*, New York, Cambridge University Press (1994).

<sup>22</sup> John E. Jacoby, *Two Mystic Communities in America*, Paris, Les Presses Universitaires de France (1931), p. 14; see also É. O. Randall, *History of the Zoar Society, from its Commencement to its Conclusion, a Sociological Study in Communism*, Columbus, A. H. Smythe (1899), and John S. Duss, *The Harmonists, A Personal History*, Philadelphia, Porcupine Press (1972).

Miss Hetty Barclay, a boarder in the house at Philadelphia, used the books Glen had left there and with Francis Bailey formed a Swedenborg study group, believed to be the first society of the kind in the U.S.<sup>23</sup> The diffusion of the Writings proceeded slowly. Francis Bailey, a draper, placed pages in the rolls of cloth he sent to the West, as later John Chapman in his fruitful journeys would spread a “twofold gospel,” planting apple seedlings and the Heavenly Doctrine throughout the frontier districts. Bailey also funded the first American translation of Swedenborg’s works, and among the subscribers were Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris and Thomas Jefferson.<sup>24</sup> Yet there was arguably an earlier diffusion of the Writings, most likely through receivers connected with the Swedish Mission, and later European migrants. The Swedish settlers from the seventeenth century had, like all migrants, brought ideas from their Old World culture, and though the evidence is sketchy, this is almost certainly where the Rev. Jacob Duché, as we shall see a pivotal figure in the diffusion of Swedenborg’s theology and moral philosophy, first encountered the Writings. There were other links, such as the Rev. Nicholas Collin of the Old Swedes’ Church, who had known Swedenborg while a student at the University of Upsala, and Lord Thomas Fairfax, who arrived in America in 1746, and owned copies of Swedenborg’s scientific and theological works.<sup>25</sup> While it is not certain when the busy cleric made the switch from William Law and adopted Swedenborg, the likelihood is that it was within the perfervid atmosphere of the American colonies in the years preceding the Revolution. A leading promoter of cooperation between the churches, he worked closely with Carl Magnus Wrangel, provost of the Swedish mission on the Delaware, and one may speculate that this is where Duché might have first been introduced to Swedenborg’s doctrines.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church in England, America, and other Parts* (London: Hodson & Co., 1861), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Hawley, “Swedenborgianism and the Frontier,” p. 210; Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 115.

<sup>25</sup> Block, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Clarke Garrett, “The Spiritual Odyssey of Jacob Duché,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119:2 (April 1975): 144. I am grateful to Rev. Stephen Cole for this reference.



The diffusion of the Writings beyond the Alleghenies came mainly via French and German immigrants. In 1826 Frenchman Guillaume Oegger, formerly a vicar at Notre Dame in Paris and confessor to the Queen, gave up all connection with the Catholic Church and accepted Swedenborg. It was Oegger whose *Rapports Inattendues entre le Monde Materiél et le Monde Spirituel* (1832) first brought Swedenborgianism in France into active alliance with Animal Magnetism and spiritualism. He wrote the controversial *Le Vrai Messie* (The Real Messiah) which he brought to New Orleans, Louisiana.<sup>27</sup> The Mississippi and steam power were the vehicles of the westward surge, and within that surge came European receivers. In 1844 German migrants fleeing the oppression of the Lutheran state church carried Tafel's translation of Swedenborg's works to St Louis, a staging post throughout the history of the West and important enough to support a German Swedenborgian paper published in Baltimore, *Der Bote der Neuen Kirche*. Moving north, they brushed against the remnants of the earliest communal experiment within the New Church at Yellow Springs, Ohio, founded in 1824 by Cincinnati Swedenborgians after they were inspired by a visit from Robert Owen.<sup>28</sup> Another German group led by Hermann Diekhoner moved to rural Iowa in 1850 to form the Jasper colony, taking its name from "Jaspis" in Rev. 21:19: "Der erste Grund war ein Jaspis." They interpreted Swedenborg's teaching as communism, and stoutly opposed Negro slavery. As at Yellow Springs and the later experiments at Leraysville, Pa. and Canton, Ill., the communistic principle was soon abandoned, and the land was divided among the settlers.<sup>29</sup>

In 1855, when the Fourierist wave in America was waning, French followers the Icarians were settling in nearby Corning, Iowa, while the German Ebenezers came to Iowa and settled "Amana" beside the Jasper colony on twenty-six thousand acres.<sup>30</sup> Although both were German, these

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<sup>27</sup> Hawley, "Swedenborgianism and the Frontier," p. 213.

<sup>28</sup> Bergendoff, "The Swedish Church on the Delaware," p. 225; on the Yellow Springs community, see John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1870): 59-61; Block, *The New Church in the New World*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>29</sup> Hawley, "Swedenborgianism and the Frontier," p. 217; the description is of the first foundation of the New Jerusalem, with one wall made of jasper.

<sup>30</sup> Hawley, "Swedenborgianism and the Frontier," p. 220.

neighboring colonies differed greatly, as the separatist Ebenezers claimed to have been guided for some 200 years by a spiritual being whom they called “the Lord,” who had inspired their emigration first to land near Buffalo, New York, then to the distant Iowa territory. The numbers of the Jasper colony declined slowly. In 1880 they dedicated the first Swedenborgian church in Iowa. The colony endured into the early twentieth century, while the Amana commune prospered in Iowa, and was only disbanded in the 1930s.<sup>31</sup>

In these and similar frontier experiments like those of the Shakers and the Jemimakins, the impetus was to organize a communitarian way of life and to appeal to an authority beyond the Scriptural, whether of a spiritual being or through a charismatic leader who invoked spiritual authority, and frequently this was mixed with the expectation of an imminent Millennium. This continuing trend provides a cultural context, a pattern for understanding the enduring appeal in America of transmundane authority, that is, a core belief in the efficacy of spirit communion, fed by a strong individualism in religious matters. With the rise of the Spiritualist movement in the 1850s, this trend would extend beyond specific groupings to embrace popular culture.<sup>32</sup>

In Pennsylvania the heady amalgam of “Dunker,” pietistic and millennial currents reached sophisticated Philadelphia; important too were the Dutch revivals in New Jersey in the 1720s, the “log cabin” evangelists and the early Presbyterian awakenings in Virginia, culminating in the Great Awakening and the waves of revivals that rumbled throughout the thirteen colonies.<sup>33</sup> While the diffusion of the Writings within this cultural maelstrom was widespread, inevitably much of the evidence has not survived historical memory. Its early effects however can be inferred not only in the inexact tracing of waves of emigration of receivers from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. A more compelling connection to the origins of the New Church can be ascertained from the character, interests

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<sup>31</sup> See Bertha M. Shambaugh, *Amana That Was and Amana That Is* (microfilm), Iowa City, State Historical Society of Iowa (1932); Hawley, “Swedenborgianism and the Frontier,” pp. 220–21.

<sup>32</sup> See Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, New York, Schocken Books (1969).

<sup>33</sup> William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth, and Decline* [c. 1944], Gloucester, Mass., P. Smith (1965), 28.

and activities of the Rev. Jacob Duché and his milieu, within the heated political and religious atmosphere of 1770s America.

The Anglican minister the Rev. Jacob Duché imbibed these and other influences. Born into a prominent Huguenot family, the son of a merchant and former mayor of Philadelphia, he received a patrician upbringing and was educated at the Philadelphia College before studying theology at Clare College, Cambridge. Ordained there as an Anglican clergyman, Duché returned to the colony where he was appointed assistant, then rector in Christ Church and St. Peter's at Philadelphia.

Jacob Duché was a popular preacher; his elocution was judged "uncommonly graceful, and his sermons oratorical"; Benjamin Franklin commented on his "singular eloquence in the Pulpit." In 1763 he endorsed the preaching of George Whitefield, and even allowed him the use of Christ Church.<sup>34</sup> Attracted from an early age to "mystical divinity," especially to William Law's translations of Jacob Boëhme's mystical tracts, the young Duché wrote a poem on the Dunkers and, after a visit to the Ephrata cloister in 1771 he praised their music, which though having "little or no air or melody" but consisting of "simple, long notes, combined in the richest harmony," yet thrilled one to the very soul. He recalled that "I almost began to think myself in the world of spirits, and the objects before me were ethereal"; the impression made upon him was so marked that it "continued strong for many days."<sup>35</sup>

In 1774 Duché was brought suddenly into prominence. At a contentious moment of debate concerning the varied religious convictions of the delegates to the Continental Congress, he was unexpectedly promoted as a man of "piety and virtue" by Samuel Adams of Boston. Jacob Duché dutifully came the next day and read the 35th Psalm, along with a moving impromptu prayer, and eventually he was made Chaplain to the Continental Congress.<sup>36</sup> He was among the first clergymen to strike out prayers for the King from the liturgy. However the British occupation of Philadel-

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<sup>34</sup> Garrett, "The Spiritual Odyssey of Jacob Duché," p. 144.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in E. G. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counterculture* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985): 115 (online).

<sup>36</sup> Garrett, "The Spiritual Odyssey of Jacob Duché," p. 147.

phia in 1777 was having dire effects, and Duché resigned the chaplaincy and wrote a letter to George Washington, protesting that “Independency was the Idol they had long wish’d to set up, and that rather than sacrifice this, they would deluge their Country with blood.” He urged that the resistance be discontinued, and unwisely requested Washington “to represent to Congress, the indispensable necessity of rescinding the hasty and ill-advised declaration of Independency.”<sup>37</sup> It was a serious error that now made him *persona non grata* with the Revolutionary elite, and Duché made a hasty egress to England where through the patronage of the Bishop of London, he was eventually appointed chaplain at the Female Orphan Asylum in Lambeth.

Duché’s fourteen years in London were fruitful; the Swedenborgian study group held in his apartment on Sunday evenings did much to inspire like minded persons to inaugurate the first Swedenborgian society, although as an Anglican clergyman he did not himself join.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, by 1785 Jacob Duché had a deep and abiding commitment to Swedenborg’s teachings. He declared in a letter to his mother-in-law that “The New Church from above, the Jerusalem of the Revelation, is come down upon earth’, and he advised her to ‘Look henceforward for an *Internal Millennium*.”<sup>39</sup> And a 1790 tract makes an unmistakable commitment to Swedenborg’s teachings on Correspondences and Influx, contrasting the ordinary Naturalist with:

... the Divine Naturalist, whose inward eye is opened and illuminated by the Light of another world, [who] can see, and contemplate, and adore that Universal Principle of Life, which is perpetually manifesting Himself to every object of universal nature, according to its capacity or aptitude to receive His enlivening beams. . . .<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Rev. Jacob Duché, letter to George Washington, Philadelphia, 8 October, 1777, *Discourses on Various Subjects* (London: T. Cadell, 1790).

<sup>38</sup> Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob Duché to M. Hopkinson, 5 May 1785, quoted in Clarke Garrett, “Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment in Late Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (January 1984): 72–3.

<sup>40</sup> Rev. Jacob Duché, *Discourses on Various Subjects*, (London: T. Cadell 1790), 349.

It was principally through Duché's discussion group that English Swedenborgians were inspired to form the Theosophical Society, a precursor to the establishment in London of the first New Church chapel, an event that had its gestation in America, albeit indirectly.<sup>41</sup> In this circuitous way, Duché was pivotal to the fortunes of the early New Church, especially in England. The deep interest of this Episcopalian minister in Swedenborg's theology and moral philosophy parallels that of his contemporary the Rev. John Clowes at Manchester, an Anglican prelate who had also been drawn first to William Law's translations of Jacob Boëhme. While remaining a minister within that communion, Clowes worked tirelessly for the advancement of Swedenborg's teachings, even refusing a Bishopric from William Pitt so that he could devote himself to propagating the Writings.<sup>42</sup> Swedenborg had not intended to found a new denomination, and Duché, like Clowes, saw no contradiction in remaining within the Anglican communion while promoting Swedenborg's doctrines.

The question remains: how did Duché come to attract the burgeoning group of enthusiasts for Swedenborg to his Sunday evening discussions? Most likely it was from the numerous artists and artisans who were among the first converts to the Heavenly Doctrine, a subculture that was fascinated with mysticism and occultism. Clarke Garrett suggests that the initial contact with this subculture may not have been with Duché himself, but with his very talented but tragically ill son Thomas, who would succumb to tuberculosis within two years. Thomas Spence Duché was a student of Benjamin West, an American by birth but now court painter to George III, and he may well have met Swedenborgians at West's studio or at some other gathering place. This lively subculture flourished in late eighteenth century London, and included printers like Robert Hindmarsh, engravers such as William Sharp, the sculptor John Flaxman and a multitude of painters, musicians and others, children of the Enlightenment who

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<sup>41</sup> The first society was the Manchester Printing Society, founded the year before by Rev. Clowes; Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 63; the Theosophical Society is not to be confused with Mme H. P. Blavatsky's venture a century later.

<sup>42</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 65.

had grown alienated from the Established Church but still craved the life of vital religion.<sup>43</sup>

After falling foul of the Revolutionary elite and exiling himself to London, Duché's discussion group dramatically increased the popularity of Swedenborg among these urbane Englishmen. Gathered together were a variety of individuals, illuminist Masons, pietists, political radicals, spiritists, alchemists and Kabbalists among them. Some of them, like Robert Hindmarsh and his father James Hindmarsh, a former Methodist minister who in 1788 would be chosen by lots to be ordained the first New Church minister, Frenchman Dr. Benedict Chastanier, an original member of the Avignon Society but soon to renounce that association, and the peripatetic merchant James Glen, became the core of the Theosophical Society founded in 1783, and of the New Church inaugurated five years later. William Sharp, perennial radical and member of Thomas Hardy's London Corresponding Society probably on occasions brought his friend, the fellow engraver and radical William Blake; Sharp would later champion the ravings of Richard Brothers and then become a follower of Joanna Southcott. Also participating were General Rainsford, inveterate joiner of many millennial, Masonic and other societies and later Governor of Gibraltar, along with a number of musicians and artists, among them the sculptor John Flaxman and the painters Philip de Loutherbourg and Richard Cosway, who created a famous portrait of George IV. Robert Hindmarsh recalled those Sunday evenings with Duché at the Female Asylum when upwards of thirty persons, male and female, had spent the evening "in a truly delightful manner, receiving from his lips the most impressive lessons of instruction . . ." <sup>44</sup> Five years later they formed the first New Church chapel in Great Eastcheap, London; its first General Conference held on 14–17 April 1789 was attended by seventy-seven persons, among them William Blake and his wife Catherine, who signed as sympathizers the forty-two propositions for separation from the Established Church. Mean-

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<sup>43</sup> Garrett, "The Spiritual Odyssey of Jacob Duché," pp. 151–2; Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 63.

<sup>44</sup> Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*, pp. 21, 40 ; Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly, Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975): 158–9; J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming, Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 75.

while, at Manchester working class interest in Swedenborg was being sparked by the efforts of the Rev. John Clowes.<sup>45</sup>

Duché's group was also an important nexus for what some historians have called a "Millenarian International," in its appeal to quasi-Masonic conclaves like the Avignon Society and the Stockholm Exegetic and Philanthropic Society, both having roots in Illuminist Freemasonry.<sup>46</sup> A parallel development had been taking place within Freemasonry since its reorganization in 1717 when Desaguliers formed the Grand Lodge of London. As the orthodox Craft shook off its "occult" associations, other lodges like the "strict observance" Templars were formed by Baron Charles Hund, Chevalier Michael Ramsay and others.<sup>47</sup> It was these new esoteric and semi-secret lodges that served as a "short circuit," a conduit for heterodoxies of all kinds through their fraternal bonds and frequent correspondence, so that with a considerable traffic flowing between them, the cross-pollination of ideas created further momentum toward an "occult revival."

The three major trends of this revival known as the 'covert' Enlightenment in the closing decades of the eighteenth century were the recovery of ancient knowledge such as Animal Magnetism, the millenarian imperative, and the alleged contact with a Higher Reality. To each of these trends, the Enlightenment thinkers Swedenborg and Mesmer contributed significantly. Within European high culture their concepts were frequently perceived as being interrelated, assuming vast significance in the broader atmosphere of *fin de siècle* cultural debate, perhaps at the very inception of that famed struggle between science and religion that endured over the next century. I have argued elsewhere that a profound synthesis was effected during the "covert" Enlightenment, based upon such specific

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<sup>45</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 66, Robert Rix, "William Blake and the Radical Swedenborgians," *Esoterica* 5 (2002) (online): 95; see also Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood, Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, p. 109; on the Avignon Society, Joanny Bricaud, *Les Illuminés D'Avignon, Étude sur Dom Pernety et son Groupe*, Paris, Librairie Critique Émile Nourry (1927).

<sup>47</sup> M. K. Schuchard, "Swedenborg, Jacobitism and Freemasonry," in Erland J. Brock et al (Eds), *Swedenborg and His Influence* (Bryn Athyn: The Academy of the New Church, 1988), 365; Richard William Weisberger, *Speculative Freemasonry and the Enlightenment: A Study of the Craft in London, Paris, Prague, and Vienna* (Boulder: East European Monographs. 1993), 71.

understandings of connections between the insights of Mesmer and Swedenborg, just as in the next century Brook Farmers and other “Associationists” would discern connections between Fourier and Swedenborg.<sup>48</sup>

The Avignon Society in France was the most radical in this lush undergrowth of the Enlightenment, connected at various times with eighteenth century illuminist Masons such as J. C. de Saint Martin, the Marquis de Thomé, Count Grabianka, and Cagliostro, all honorary members of the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society. Avignon was founded by the Abbé Pernety, an illuminist high ranking Mason. In 1782 he translated Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* into French, for which he obtained biographical details of Swedenborg from Augustus Nordenskjöld, eminent chemist and mining engineer. The Society was conceived firstly as a centre of alchemy and hermetic philosophy under Pernety, but took a distinctly chiliastic direction with the arrival of the Polish Count Tadeusz Grabianka who promoted an imminent Millennium. By 1790 they had become what one New Church commentator scornfully referred to as “mystico-cabbalistico-magnetical practitioners.”<sup>49</sup>

In London, one group of mystical international Masons in particular was important to the fortunes of the Swedenborgians, becoming in effect the centre of a range of activities connected with Freemasonry, the Theosophical Society, Duché’s group and even with the Stockholm faction. The London Universal Society was formed in 1776, partly on the initiative of high-ranking Masons Dr. Husband Messiter, who had been Swedenborg’s personal physician, and Dr. Benedict Chastanier, now residing in London. In 1768 Chastanier discovered Swedenborg, being among the first Frenchmen to adopt his teachings, and moving to London he carried also the Masonic system of Theosophic Illuminati (*Illuminés theosophes*) developed at Avignon, which he introduced to England. However by the early 1780s disagreement with Pernety’s interpretation of Swedenborg and unease at a new premillennial flavor introduced by Count Grabianka led him to

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<sup>48</sup> Hawley, “Swedenborgianism and the Frontier,” p. 217.

<sup>49</sup> Rix, “Healing the Spirit,” p. 5.



renounce the Society, after which like his former Avignon colleague William Bousie, he became more thoroughly involved in the New Church. The April 1790 *New Jerusalem Magazine* regarded the Avignon Society as “the antipodes of the New Church, erected on the very borders of Babylon.”<sup>50</sup>

The Universal Society, now working for Universal Regeneration, had a permeating influence on the reception of Swedenborg in London throughout the 1780s. Among the papers left to the Swedish Academy on Swedenborg’s death in 1772 were various draft manuscripts. The Finnish Freemason Augustus Nordenskjöld had some of these texts copied, and in 1783 his brother Carl Nordenskjöld brought these copies along with some of Swedenborg’s original manuscripts to London, and entrusted them to Benedict Chastanier. Carl Nordenskjöld stayed three years in England before returning to Sweden, where he helped establish the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society (apart from the exegesis of Swedenborg’s works, the concept of “philanthropic” work was then common within Masonry). In 1788, perhaps alarmed at the unsettled state of the Stockholm Society, Carl Wadström brought more manuscripts to London, including the *Spiritual Diary*. Wadström was baptized that year into the New Church, and with Augustus Nordenskjöld he penned a treatise outlining plans for a free community to be established on the West coast of Africa, inspired by Swedenborg, who was among the first to develop the concept of a “noble savage.”<sup>51</sup> The Sierra Leone colony was endorsed by the King, but it had a brief and troubled existence. Wadström continued his work against the evil of slavery, cooperating with Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp in the African Institute. He had a significant input in providing William Wilberforce with material to present to Parliament, that ultimately led in 1807 to an end to the slave trade within the British Empire, although that was achieved by the Foxite Whigs.<sup>52</sup> Chastanier also published the *Journal Novi-Jerusalemite*, a broadsheet in which he called on all Masons to accept

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<sup>50</sup> Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> Hawley, “Swedenborgianism and the Frontier,” p. 208.

<sup>52</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 55; Christopher Hobhouse, *Charles James Fox* (London: John Murray, 1964), 204.

Swedenborg's teaching. As noted, he was important in establishing connections between English Swedenborgianism and mystical Catholic Freemasonry as practiced at Avignon; this rapport ceased after 1782, as a result of the new chiasm, exacerbated on the other side by conflicts over *Conjugal Love*, which Avignon regarded as a "damnable book," but which many among the international Masons gathered in London tenaciously promoted.<sup>53</sup>

In the mid-1780s Chastanier briefly served as chief assistant to the leading English magnetizer, J. B. de Mainauduc. As a medical man Chastanier insisted strongly that Swedenborg was the real discoverer of Animal Magnetism, and calling it "Religious Magnetism," he argued for its importance toward regeneration. Chastanier argued that the regenerate spirit is shown to be powerful in the evolution of good, because it is in the Divine; the communication of health was for him simply that of "a sound mind giving of itself through a sound body" that must result in "a restoration of order in the voluntary recipient" of magnetism.<sup>54</sup> Thus in Chastanier, and also others connected via Masonic and similar ties, we observe the principal currents of the "covert" Enlightenment: Swedenborgianism, Magnetism and Illuminist Freemasonry, and as with the Stockholm group, Swedenborg and Mesmer were bracketed together in the minds of numerous English aspirants.

Over the 1780s decade, the Theosophical Society and Duché's gatherings together became a conduit for the Masons' heady blend of mystical ideas and radical politics. Universal Society members were regular guests at Duché's Sunday evening discussions, and some also attended meetings of the Theosophical Society, with whom they cooperated in publishing Swedenborg's works, even sharing the same printing press. Their presence facilitated the visits of many international high-ranking Masons. Count Grabianka, using the pseudonym Suddowski, spent the whole of 1786 in London to recruit like minded persons in preparation for the imminent Millennium; he was a "frequent and welcome" visitor to Duché's

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<sup>53</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> R. McCully, "Benedict Chastanier: an early New Church Worthy," *New Church Magazine*, vol. IX (1890): 533.

Sunday evening discussions, and Hindmarsh printed his “*Letter from a Society in France, to the Society for Promoting the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem in London*” (1787).<sup>55</sup> Another visitor was Count Cagliostro, and the Swedenborgian Mason and philosopher Claude de Saint-Martin who had intimate connections throughout the whole of the European esoteric and Masonic community. He was spiritual advisor to the Strasbourg Magnetists, and with J. B. Willermoz had been an original member of the mystical Order of the Elect Cohens, after the Hebrew word for priest. While in London, Saint-Martin visited the Theosophical Society, and in 1787 he was elected an honorary member of the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society.<sup>56</sup> Thus as Robert Rix has observed, it was “a specific Masonic version of Swedenborg that dominated London Swedenborgianism throughout the 1780s.”<sup>57</sup> Jacob Duché, who had imbibed the strains of mystical Divinity and had discovered Swedenborg’s Writings in America, returned to the city where the great Teacher had published and lived out his last years, where he inspired Receivers to form the first New Church society.

The third principal element in the “covert” Enlightenment, Magnetic Somnambulism, formed a dialectic with the Swedenborgian and Masonic factors already introduced. This arose from the enormous popularity being enjoyed at this time by F. A. Mesmer’s curative practice of applying Animal Magnetism and his induction of “crises” in patients. Mesmeric practice became a catalyst, bringing together Swedenborg and Mesmer’s ideas by providing both the conviction of the existence of spiritual realms based on Swedenborg’s witness, and putatively a method for accession to these realms. As twelve or fifteen persons were gathered in a large oaken tub or *bacquet* holding hands while attached to metal rods, Mesmer or one of his *valets toucheurs* would generate the Animal Magnetism from their own person, conveyed sometimes by touching the affected parts with an

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<sup>55</sup> Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, pp. 101–2, 109.

<sup>56</sup> McIntosh, Christopher, *Eliphas Levi and the French Occult Revival* (London: Rider & Co., 1975), 125.

<sup>57</sup> Robert W. Rix, “William Blake and the Radical Swedenborgians,” *Esoterica* 5 (2002) (online): 104.

iron wand, or at other times by the “gaze” or the famous “passes.”<sup>58</sup> While undergoing this regimen, some patients experienced abreactions along with the repeated “crises,” and this at times precipitated a state of dissociation that was of especial interest to some of Mesmer’s disciples in the *Société d’Harmonie* and to the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society. This entranced state was likened to somnambulism, and thus “artificial somnambulism” or “magnetic sleep” yielded strange, liminal states where some experienced visions, or claimed to see into the future; on occasions others like Puységur’s patient Victor Race, a young shepherd on his estate, while in the somnambulist trance would even diagnose and prescribe lasting cures for their own disease.<sup>59</sup>

The physician F. A. Mesmer avowed that in Animal Magnetism he had rediscovered a form of healing known to the Ancients but long abandoned, yet he insisted on its physical provenance. The “occult” implications of his discovery were seized upon firstly by his disciple the Marquis de Puységur and then by a multitude of mesmerists and occultists who rapidly extended the practice. Their manipulation of somnambulist phenomena went beyond a therapeutic technique, evolving into a vehicle for communication with a Higher Reality or Realities.

Puységur became convinced that his technique of “magnetic sleep” had uncovered the pathway to the soul. He founded the *Société des Amis Réunis* at Strasbourg, where his “psychological” techniques produced a dissociated state and opened the door to a mode of psychological healing wherein Mesmer’s *bacquet*, the crises, and even the magnetic fluid were soon abandoned for the control of the subject’s will. As Hypnotism this has survived to modern times, now transformed into a technique to contact what in modern parlance is called “the hypnotic substratum” of the mind.

The praxis at the Strasbourg *Amis Réunis* induced a dissociated state in a number of patients, and frequently made use of diagnoses provided in that state by patients themselves. A Madame Schmitt advised that her

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<sup>58</sup> Claude-Anne Lopez, *Mon Cher Papa, Franklin and the Ladies of Paris* (London: Yale University Press, 1967), 170–1.

<sup>59</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Americans and the Unconscious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 30; Podmore, *Mediums of the 19th Century*, vol. 1, pp. 56, 60.

malady, an obstruction of the liver, was the result of a mass of bile that could not dissipate, because of her low vital force. A Miss Rotherflus, fifty-three years old and suffering from violent convulsions of the stomach, upon being touched by the magnetizer fell into a crisis, and in this state she answered questions regarding her own condition, stating that she would be made well "in 5 days," and that for this remedy she should require "nothing but your [magnetized] water." On the following day she felt marvellous, and reported that she was now sleeping well.<sup>60</sup>

Nor were such abilities confined to patients of normal intelligence. Anne marie Schwing from Illkirch, aged about thirteen years, had lost her reason little by little, to the point that she became incapable of understanding either reading or writing, and was rendered "entirely useless for housework." Yet in a magnetized state in February 1786 that induced a "crisis" she was able to see with eyes closed, and gave consultations for other patients. Like Victor Race, her answers to questions while magnetized were well reasoned and characterized by zeal and precision, and they dramatically exceeded her normal intelligence. Such phenomena would later prompt Janet and other researchers to posit a powerful subconscious existing within the human mind.<sup>61</sup>

An affliction of the hypochondria in the ventral area was reported in a Madame de Tschiffely from Arberg, aged forty-two years. She had suffered since the age of twelve from a condition that continually produced spasms of the hypochondria, believed to be coming from obstructions formed in the viscera of the lower gut, and from internal hemorrhoids. She received magnetic treatments in the *bacquet* at the Strasbourg *Société*. Her treatment commenced on 9 November 1785, and she soon fell into a crisis, and after exhibiting convulsions at her mouth, the spasms ceased. Madame de Tschiffely wrote glowingly of her cure, extending:

the infinite obligations that I owe you, for having regained my health; I shall never stop singing the praises of the greatness of soul of your

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<sup>60</sup> *Exposé de Différentes Cures Opérées Depuis 1e d'Août 1785, Société des Amis Réunis*, 1785–86, [microfilm], (Strasbourg: Lorenz & Schouler, 1786), case no. 56, p. 117; case no. 2, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Exposé de Différentes Cures*, no. 46, pp. 83–4.

sublime enterprise, with no other end but the satisfaction of doing good; . . . in seeing me, one regards me as one who has been resuscitated . . .<sup>62</sup>

Among the other dramatic cures reported within the *Amis Réunis* was the healing of a “fluxion in the ear,” a painful condition suffered by a Mrs Klingler from Blaesheim. The fluxion or flow of serum in the ear had extended to the throat, and for some years had caused her horrible suffering in the cold weather, so that she could not venture into the outside air without suffering aigues, and this would last until the Spring. In October 1785, when surgeon F. D. Kraus placed her into a magnetized state she sensed a great and immediate relief; and some months later, she had not had a relapse of the fluxion. This testimony was signed by the Magnetiser, F. D. Kraus, surgeon, and witnesses, including her husband George Klingler, Mr Nestler, Miss Wilhelmine De Bock, and Mr Roessel.<sup>63</sup>

This somnambulistic trend had unexpected results, especially in the work of Puységur at Strasbourg and J. B. Willermoz at Lyon. There was a common and fluid membership between the Stockholm Exegetic and Philanthropic Society, fraternal orders like the Templars, the *Illuminés* at Avignon and other fringe quasi-masonic conclaves. These strands of common interest are many and complex: through their fraternal connections individuals like Gen. Rainsford and the Marquis de Thomé, librarian at Versailles, carried the new science of Animal Magnetism and the theology of the New Jerusalem to diverse corners of Europe. Strasbourg came to believe that Magnetism afforded a window into the soul, while for Willermoz as for Pernety at Avignon it evolved into a vehicle for esoteric teachings, where entranced sensitives received hieroglyphic messages from sublime spheres that purported to uncover ancient wisdom.<sup>64</sup> For the magnetists at Strasbourg and Lyon, the positing of mental acts that occur “within human beings but outside of and unavailable to consciousness”

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<sup>62</sup> *Exposé de Différentes Cures*, no. 48, p. 99; no. 51, p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> *Exposé de Différentes Cures*, no. 60, p.129.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 68.

was a result of direct Gnosis, the operation of a deeper state of consciousness coeval with the soul.<sup>65</sup>

It was but a short step from the accession of sublime levels of the human mind to the merging of its consciousness in the dissociated state with Higher consciousnesses. With the mooted assistance of spiritual beings a mode of trance healing had evolved, and soon entrancement became an end in itself, leading more or less directly to the advent of the "medium" of mid-nineteenth century Spiritualism. Mesmer's curative praxis and its physical basis was quickly being transcended to open "occult" doors into which a multitude of Freemasons, Magnetists, and not a few Swedenborgians entered.<sup>66</sup>

Hence what recent historians have called the core of the "covert" Enlightenment was defined by a bewildering range of varied yet interrelated interests of Swedenborgians, pre-millennialists, Kabbalists and hermeticists, Freemasons and Magnetizers, who constituted a circuit that disseminated ideas and magnetic practices throughout Europe. Before the calamitous Revolution in France, these were exciting fruitful years for heterodoxies. Duché's group in London was inspiring the first New Church society and attracting international Masons and occultists like Grabianka, while at Strasbourg Puységur was moving toward a psychological praxis for "Magnetic Sleep," and Willermoz at Lyon was employing similar channels to receive oracular messages. In this heady atmosphere arose also the Stockholm spiritists, sharing neither the doctrinaire physicalism of Mesmer nor the millennial effusions of Grabianka, and offering what they sincerely believed was a correct explanation for the strange phenomena that were being revealed, and more fruitful uses for these wonders.

Against this background we return to the Exegetic and Philanthropic Society, inaugurated in 1786 with about 200 members. The intention of the

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<sup>65</sup> Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, pp. 110–11; Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud, Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 72, writes that: "Needless to say, thinking about magnetic sleep had not yet developed to such a sophisticated stage. It would be much later, when a new form of spiritism (American spiritualism with its table-turning phenomena) met with a more advanced form of animal magnetism (magnetic and hypnotic experiments with double consciousness), that this mystery at the heart of magnetic sleep could be solved."

<sup>66</sup> See Jess Stearn, *The Sleeping Prophet: the life and work of Edgar Cayce* (London: Muller, 1968).

Silfverhjelm clique was the study of hermetic wisdom and Animal Magnetism. This had not been the original aim of the Society, but it does underscore the historical judgment that “mystical enlightenment was a preoccupation of the Swedish intelligentsia throughout the 18th century.”<sup>67</sup> They recognized early on a possible relation between mesmeric practices and their special insights into the nature and cure of disease, which they owed to Swedenborg, who taught that we are subject to the “exhalations” of both angels and devils, and that disease was often caused by evil spirits and other nefarious influences. In offering the fruits of their mesmeric experiments according to their understanding of the Word based on Swedenborg’s teachings, they also believed themselves vindicated by the methods of experimental science.

Silfverhjelm’s 19 June letter opened with a prayer, praising God “who had given this boon to men as a means of again gaining communication with the spiritual world.” As Swedenborgians they saw themselves essentially as faith healers curing the underlying moral disease of the patient that had manifested as somatic symptoms. In their experiments, angels had possessed the inner beings of somnambulists in Stockholm, whereupon they had communicated “an adumbration, though feeble, of the first immediate correspondence with the invisible world,” by which he means Swedenborg’s own intromissions. It is firmly maintained that Mesmerism and Swedenborgianism complemented one another perfectly, whereupon a solution is offered for these puzzling phenomena:

... it seems to be impossible fully and rationally to explain them, unless we once for all, and without shrinking from the shafts of ridicule, take it for granted that spiritual beings exert an influence upon the organs of the invalid during the time that the power of Magnetism has produced a partial cessation of the functions of the soul, and that these spiritual agents, in virtue of the higher degrees of knowledge which they possess, originate these wonderful and otherwise inexplicable phenomena.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, pp. 155, 114.

<sup>68</sup> Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg*, p. 262.



We note the defensive tone, and the "ridicule" referred to was coming from the Harmonial societies like Puységur's, who could not countenance a Swedenborgian explanation for these phenomena. While they were ever concerned to preserve free will, the Stockholm spiritists regarded Magnetism as a necessary method for inducing a "partial cessation" of perception, discrimination and other normal functions of the intellect, so as to afford the benign spiritual beings a chance to do their work.

It is argued that the soul can be operated upon by spiritual agents, just as disease itself is sometimes produced by evil influences. The "spirit sleep-talker" in these operations was a being completely independent of the magnetized patient, and the essence of this praxis was that "a Magnetizer speaking only to the spirit as to another person, and not to the sleeper, can, by rational, directed, and well-digested questions, render it practicable for the spirit to make itself known as a being different from him whose tongue it makes use of . . ." <sup>69</sup> Swedenborg's teaching on spiritual "exhalations" had prompted the conviction that disease is caused by malevolent spiritual beings, and that a cure depends upon their dislodgment, which in turn relies upon the dissociation of the magnetized subject's will and intellect. It was in effect a form of exorcism carried out with the help of benign spirits, though neither their nature nor identity is explained.

In accord with Swedenborg's doctrine of "uses," the moral condition of the magnetizer, together with the dissociative state of the magnetized subject, created the conditions for the expulsion of unwanted influences that manifest in disease. Silfverhjelm insists that "what is said and done through the sleeper's organs, is not the act of his soul, but of some other being, who has taken possession of his organs, and operates through them." Alluding to Mesmer's famous induced "crises," he notes that paroxysms and the like denote that the spirit of disease is still present; but when the subject begins to talk in his "sleep," that is, under magnetic influence, this signifies the presence of a friendly spiritual being, his guardian-angel or good genius, who possesses the same measure of goodness and wisdom as the patient. The source or conditions for disease are

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<sup>69</sup> Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg*, p. 263.

not explained, only that the guardian angel speaks through the somnambule, once the spirit of disease is dislodged.<sup>70</sup>

Silfverhjelm's letter thus offered a new explanation, deriving from a broader Swedenborgian framework that comprehends the human experience as a battleground between good and evil; all beneficial effects were attributed to the work of wise and helpful spirits who, upon the induction of magnetic sleep, were given the opportunity to act. Disease, being the result of an evil spirit adventitiously lodged within the body of the patient, was healed by good spirits acting through the mechanism of induced somnambulism, which culminated in the ejection of the evil influence.<sup>71</sup>

But criticism soon arrived from within the New Church. The printer Robert Hindmarsh, leader of the Great Eastcheap congregation, published in his *New Magazine of Knowledge concerning Heaven and Hell* a series of hostile letters and articles that officially denounced all Swedenborgians practicing Magnetism to procure visionary experiences. A May 1790 letter to the Editor speaks negatively of "the numerous persons who now practice animal magnetism ... in the habit of conversing with spirits." The correspondent warns that "obtaining information concerning the spiritual world, by means of animal magnetism, is highly dangerous" and ought not to be pursued, because during elevation in trances "the removal of liberty and rationality, which are the residence of the Lord in man, insinuates things contrary to divine order." The result was that only "enthusiastic spirits converse with Enthusiasts."<sup>72</sup>

Two further aspects of the culture surrounding the coterie of Swedenborgians and their supporters in London can be noted: the militant aspect of revolutionary change sparked by the events in France, and their relation in some minds to the onrush of the breakup in the World of Spirits and its attendant changes in this world after 1757; and the sexual and magical aspect in Swedenborg's Writings, especially following the English translation of *Conjugal Love*, which caused the first schism within the New Church. These two issues caused the Eastcheapers to abandon a politically

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<sup>70</sup> Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg*, p. 268–9.

<sup>71</sup> Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> Rix, "Healing the Spirit," p. 4.

inspired understanding of Swedenborg's message as championed especially by the mystical Masons like the Nordenskjöld brothers. The Abbé Barruel, Jesuit and former Mason, had produced a hysterical philippic warning of the hidden meaning behind claims for spiritual regeneration, which were really intended "to sweep from the earth every prince and every king, that the God of Swedenborg may reign." Yet it contained some germ of truth when understood in relation to the Last Judgment, in the conviction that the revolution in France was "the fire that was to purify the earth to prepare the way for their new Jerusalem."<sup>73</sup> Not only was the "speaking illustration" one means whereby the reality of the spiritual realms could be made known, but the arrival of somnambulism itself was seen as confirming the trend of the new Revelation, whose embodiment is the Church of the New Jerusalem. In developing the point that the new phenomena then bursting forth throughout Europe held a far deeper, and a cosmic, significance, the 1787 letter asserts:

The transition which the natural world is undergoing ... renders it probable, as our sleep-talkers have declared: that supernatural gifts and powers will be bestowed upon such, who abstain from all known and deliberate sinning, and in their hearts sincerely and humbly desire and pray, that the Lord's will may be done in everything, and theirs only in as far as it shall be perfectly conformable to His.<sup>74</sup>

This "transition" of the natural world is an allusion to the events following the Last Judgment in 1757. Swedenborg taught that from the time of the early Church Councils, the gift for healing had ceased because the Christian world had perverted pure religion through "the spurious glosses and additions" of later ages, until by Swedenborg's era, the Divine Influx was being obstructed by the multitudes now existing in the intermediate World of Spirits. However since 1757 great progress had occurred, along with an unprecedented revolution in habits of thought and action. Thus James Glen in 1795 could regard the French Revolution as "sweeping a way for

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<sup>73</sup> A. Barruel, *Memoirs, illustrating the History of Jacobitism*, quoted in Rix, "William Blake and the Radical Swedenborgians," p. 102.

<sup>74</sup> Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg*, p. 268.

the New Church of the Divine Human,” and Chastanier declared that Swedenborg’s millennial expectations were now being realized through contemporary political developments.<sup>75</sup> Around the same time American Swedenborgians, like Robert Carter of Virginia, began to think they were living in an era when society and culture were undergoing a major transformation; from 1792 Carter instituted a gradual manumission of his 500 slaves.<sup>76</sup>

The French Revolution appealed to some like Augustus Nordenksjöld as confirmation of regeneration; but it was unlike the apocalyptic millennial expectations of Richard Brothers or Joanna Southcott, or the grandiose plans of Grabianka, that presaged his ascension to both the Polish throne and the throne of Israel when at the End Days, the Ottoman Turks would be driven from the Holy Land.<sup>77</sup> These radical Swedenborgians believed that since 1757, they were living in a post-millennial world, and that these events ensued from the general purification within the World of Spirits. In 1790 Saint Martin, in collaboration with Göran Silfverhjelm published *Le Nouvel Homme*, a Swedenborgian tract influenced by the events of the Revolution, with the “aim to describe what we should expect in regeneration.”<sup>78</sup>

The second controversy at Great East Cheap was over “conjugal” love advocated by some of the Scandinavian supporters like Augustus Nordenksjöld, precipitating further the rejection of foreign inspired interpretations of Swedenborg’s work. Just as the promotion of spirit communication through Magnetism served to challenge the finality of his Revelation, so at this time when all subjects were being judged at the bar of Reason, some persons found solace in varying interpretations of the Swedish seer in revolutionary or ‘occult’ directions, while others sought to counter those interpretations by proclaiming an “orthodoxy” of interpretation.

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<sup>75</sup> Rix, “William Blake and the Radical Swedenborgians,” pp.107–8.

<sup>76</sup> Shomer S. Zwelling, ‘Robert Carter’s Journey: From Colonial Patriarch to New Nation Mystic,’ *American Quarterly* 38: 4 (Autumn, 1986): 629.

<sup>77</sup> Cecil Roth, *The Nephew of the Almighty, An experimental account of the Life and Aftermath of Richard Brothers, R.N.* (London: Edward Goldston, 1933); on Southcott’s influence in the north of England, see Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits, Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850–1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

<sup>78</sup> Rix, “William Blake and the Radical Swedenborgians,” p. 106.

Augustus Nordenskjöld supported the efforts of the French Illuminist Masons, including Grabianka, to “radicalise” the London Swedenborgians and to promote kabbalistic theories of spirit communication and conjugal love. His libertine views on concubinage were expressed in *A Form of Organization in the New Jerusalem*. Wadström arrived in London in 1788 with more of Swedenborg’s manuscripts, including the Spiritual Diary, whose erotic and magical elements horrified the English Swedenborgians. According to Marsha Keith Schuchard, their distrust of foreign revolutionary leanings led them to establish the chapel at Great Eastcheap. This Hindmarsh and his followers did by effectively severing ties with the Illuminists and the Kabbalists. In the tense atmosphere that followed, several pages were torn out of the minute book and six members, including Augustus Nordenskjöld, Carl Wadström and Robert Hindmarsh himself were suspended, but this was only temporary.

The relevance of these events to the current story lies in the early schism or near schism that occurred between the Swedenborgians and the Universal society. The schism occurred either after the inauguration of the New Church chapel at Great Eastcheap, or perhaps it was the principal reason for its formation. The controversy was over a proposal by Augustus Nordenskjöld and other Universal Society Masons, to produce a translation of *Conjugal Love* from the Latin into English. Some members of the London Universal Society became foundation members of the Theosophical society. Richard Cosway, for instance, who moved initially in Moravian circles, lived while a student at Dr. Messiter’s home, and Augustus Nordenskjöld was active in the Universal Society and shared a home initially with Dr. Gumpertz Levison, a Kabbalist and Swedenborgian Mason. The erotic language and especially Swedenborg’s statements like “because virile potency is crucial to spiritual vision,” there were cases when single men could take a mistress; and married men in an unsatisfying connubial union could keep a concubine. A later era would sense a similar dangerous resemblance between Fourier’s “passional principle” and Swedenborg’s “conjugal” love.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Schuchard, “Why Mrs. Blake cried,” p. 15; Hawley, “Swedenborgianism and the Frontier,” p. 217.

The Great Eastcheap group were thus facing formidable opposition from several quarters; not only were they concerned about the “foreign” influences from French and Swedish enthusiasts relating to sexual libertinism and to radical political opinions, but they were also concerned about the domestic sphere. The activities of Rev. John Clowes and some of his followers in Manchester and Whitefield claiming contact with angels, were causing dissensions over Animal Magnetism and spiritualism. Other points of dissention were that the Manchester group were opposed to separation from the Established Church, believing that Swedenborg’s wisdom should instead permeate the existing communions, and some members also regarded the choice by lots of the Rev. James Hindmarsh as the first New Church minister as “disorderly.”<sup>80</sup>

The enthusiasm of Clowes and his acolytes had long caused concern to the London group. In 1784, the same year that “Magnetic sleep” was making an impact at European courts, John A. Tulk, who financed Tafel’s translations of Swedenborg, could write to James Glenn that “several persons in Manchester are having open communication with the spiritual world and receive ocular and auricular proofs of the statements of Swedenborg.”<sup>81</sup> Thus the unpopular opinions of Stockholm spiritists like Silfverhjelms, of libertine Masons like Augustus Nordenskjöld, and of the varied political radicals and Millennial promoters like Grabianka, together were straining the fabric of interpretation of Swedenborg’s teachings, to the point that the conservative and separatist London Swedenborgians felt they had to act to forestall these dangerous developments.

While they espoused spirit communion, the conservative Swedenborgians, including John Clowes, preached caution in relation to conjugal love. Nordenskjöld favored forming a more radical Masonic interior order, while Clowes and others worried about “opening the flood-gates to immorality,” and he was especially hard on those members who “utilized animal magnetism to speed up the production of erotic trances.”

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<sup>80</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, pp. 65–6; for the New Era view, see Worcester, “A Letter to the Receivers of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem,” p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, pp. 56, 70.

The diplomatic Chastanier helped to heal the breach between the Eastcheapers and the Universal Society.<sup>82</sup>

Becoming entwined in the minds of those occultists, Freemasons, and Illuminati who had always been a significant part of the European intelligentsia, was a merging of ideas and beliefs, an “occult” and dispensational *mélange* of new and old traditions, and these had links with societies like Avignon. They all drew on the usual kabbalistic and hermetic lore, but also on Catholic mysticism in the cult of the Virgin Mary, on spiritualism of numerous varieties along with the theories and practices of Animal Magnetism, and on Swedenborg’s Writings, the accounts of his intromissions no less than his cosmology. It was part of the continuing merging of ideas ostensibly dealing with different orders of reality, that were being adapted to other purposes, within differing frameworks and under changing conditions. And whereas curative therapies were the chief concern of the originators of “magnetic somnambulism,” the fashion for direct knowledge of other levels of Being (surely an Enlightenment concern in its quest for empirical certitude) of the 1790s led to the appropriation of this ready conduit to the inner self, not yet widely known as the “unconscious” or “subconscious,” to communicate with the denizens of those alleged spheres. Observed from the obverse of the proposition Swedenborg’s teachings—undertaken to declare a new Christian Dispensation and to announce an Immanent Millennium allowing a deeper penetration into the Word—were being employed as a general confirmation of already conceived beliefs among many late eighteenth century occultists. There was also a large seepage of selected parts of Swedenborg’s Writings, which eventually found their way into both secularised and pantheistic versions of plebeian Spiritualism, and the Christian Spiritualism that flourished briefly during the 1850s. During that decade and especially in England, middle-class Spiritualists like those of the Howitt circle developed a philosophical Spiritualism that was well acquainted both with the system of Swedenborg and with mesmeric phenomena.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Schuchard, “Why Mrs. Blake cried,” pp. 17, 19, 25; Rix, “Healing the Spirit,” p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> See Mrs Howitt Watts, *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation* (London: The Psychological Press Association, 1883).

By 1860, the New Church had closed ranks. It was after the Worcester and Weller episodes, and particularly following the grandiose claims of A.J. Davis and T.L. Harris of a new ground of inspiration and a new or supplementary revelation, attracting significant numbers of their membership, that the New Church denounced Spiritualism.<sup>84</sup>

The consequences of the “covert” Enlightenment were, in the long term, both profound and varied. The diffusion of leading “occult” ideas in late eighteenth century Europe was instrumental not only to the direct lineal groupings like the Harmonial societies; as we have seen, it also influenced the origins of the New Church in England. Revitalized and transformed through their exposure to American conditions they took there a new form, congenial to the secular and reform-drenched *mentalités* of the generation of Americans who came of age in the 1840s. This conjunction brought forth the secular religion of Spiritualism, which resulted in turn in a new range of reactions and formulations, among the most significant being the taking up by one small branch of science, mostly physicists, of the investigation of spiritualist phenomena. While it brought strong denunciations of the alleged phenomena by the majority of scientists in Europe, from the 1870s this led to the formation of the Society for Psychical Research. And a few years later, the medical branch of European science took up the study and practice of what James Braid now called Hypnotism. Therefore we observe the appearance of an interesting cyclic phenomenon, where two disparate world views, those of Mesmer, the medical scientist, and of Swedenborg, the scientist turned theologian, merged in the understandings firstly of an educated élite of “occultists,” then poured forth in the maelstrom of popular culture as carnival hypnotism, popular mysticism and spiritualism, only to be reconsidered by an educated and professional class for its therapeutic efficacy and its theoretical implications. It was the re-separation of what I have called the two alternative paradigms, of consciousness and cosmos, that had been transformed during the “covert” Enlightenment from an alternative modality of healing to a means of exploring both the inner world of the human mind, and the outer universe. □

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<sup>84</sup> Block, *The New Church in the New World*, pp. 142–3 and *passim*.



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