

SPIRITUAL VISION AND REVELATION[†]

Ernst Benz

Alfred Heron, Translator

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Ernst Benz^{*}

Ernst Benz, evangelical theologian and church historian, was born November 17, 1907, in Friedrichschafen, Germany, and died December 29, 1978, in Meersburg. Son of a German railway engineer, he attended gymnasias in Friedrichschafen, Ravensburg and Stuttgart. In Tübingen, Rome and Berlin he studied classical philology and archaeology; he later studied theology, and earned a doctoral degree in philosophy as well as theology. It was Ernesto Buonaiuti (1881–1946) in Rome who interested Benz in theology and especially in its link to church history, and as a consequence he devoted himself to the study of Joachim von Fiore and Franciscan spiritualism.

In Berlin Benz studied under Erich Seeberg through whom he came to understand the history of mysticism, and was inspired to write numerous treatises on it. In 1932 he began lecturing at the University of Halle in the department of church history and dogma, and was assistant professor at the Luther Academy at Dorpat 1934–1935. In 1935 he accepted a post as associate professor at the University of Marburg, and in 1937 he was appointed full professor.

Benz's comprehensive interests embraced a wide spectrum of questions, which extend far beyond the traditional bounds of church history. He engaged himself intensively with mysticism, and also grappled with Asian religions; at an early stage he took an interest in Russian language and literature, in 1957 publishing an important work titled *Geist und Leben der Oster Kirche* (Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church). Besides other

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^{*} Biographical information from the *Biographisch-Bibliographische Kirchenlexicon*: kindly provided by Rev. Thomas Noack of Swedenborg Verlag, Zürich, Switzerland, and translated by Rev. Kurt P. Nemitz.

significant works is his *Beschreibung des Christentum* (Description of Christianity), an original and much-read book. For many years Benz also worked as coeditor of the *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* (Journal of the History of Religion and Ideas). His multifaceted research was honored by the award of several honorary doctoral degrees. The title of the 1981 memorial for Benz—*Religion, Geschichte, Oecumene* (Religion, History, Ecumenicism)—saliently summarizes the activity and interests of the Marburg church historian.

Benz also published works on Swedenborg: *Swedenborg in Deutschland: F. C. Oetingers und Immanuel Kants* (Swedenborg in Germany: F. C. Oetinger und Immanuel Kant); *Auseinandersetzung mit der Person und Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs, Nach neuen Quellen bearbeitet von E. Benz* (Elucidation of the Person and Doctrine of Emanuel Swedenborg, developed from new sources by E. Benz), Frankfurt a. M. 1947; and *Emanuel Swedenborg: Naturforscher und Seher* (Emanuel Swedenborg, Scientist and Seer), München 1948; and *Vision und Offenbarung: Gesammelte Swedenborg-Aufsätze* (Vision and Revelation: collected essays on Swedenborg), Zürich 1979, brought to publication by Benz's former student and friend Rev. Dr. Friedeman Horn.

Alfred Heron: A Biography **George Heron**

Alfred Heron (1908–1990) was an active member of the New Church in Manchester, England, throughout his adult life. At various times he was a lay preacher, a society representative to the General Conference and a leading figure in the Manchester Swedenborg Association.

He linked his commitment to Swedenborg's ideas to an active interest in a range of political and scientific issues of his day: issues as diverse as the virtues of free enterprise capitalism (on which his views radically changed between the thirties and the fifties) and the implications of the theory of relativity. He was an inveterate letter write and campaigner on each issue that interested him, and New Church journals in England published a number of his sermons, articles, and translations.

Alfred Heron worked as a translator for an insurance company in the 1930s and used his linguistic skills as a counterintelligence officer in the Second World War. Friendships made during that period led him to

translate Leo Moulin's book *Socialism of the West* from the French in the 1940s. He ran a commercial translation business from the 1950s to the 1980s. His sale of the business and retirement at the age of 77 were precipitated by the illness of his wife Annie, and much of his time thereafter was taken up with nursing her.

In the 1980s he became a regular correspondent of Friedemann Horn, a Swedenborgian Minister who lived in Zürich. They shared an interest in developing a critique of Kant's attack on Swedenborg, and this led him to read the book *Vision und Offenbarung*: essays compiled, edited and published by Horn from the writings of Ernst Benz. He conceived the idea of translating the book as a contribution to the celebrations of Swedenborg's Tricentenary in 1988. In this work he was ably assisted by his daughter, Barbara Lomax and her husband Jeff. They acted as secretaries and, at times, business managers for the project.

Though a draft was completed within that year, it proved difficult to arrange publication at that time. Alfred died whilst discussions were still in progress. Barbara and Jeff Lomax came close to completing arrangements for publication, but Barbara developed a brain tumour only a few months after her father's death. Her illness and death brought work on the project to a halt.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Alfred Heron

Having since my youth been keenly interested in philosophy, and especially the mind-body problem, I was very glad to acquire, many years ago, two books by Prof. W. McDougall, published by Methuen's, *Body & Mind—A History & Defense of Animism* (1911) and *Modern Materialism* (1929). Unfortunately I lost my copy of the former in the fifties, but after my retirement made strenuous efforts to obtain a second-hand copy, and worked carefully through it. As a keen student of Swedenborg, I was hoping, in view of the nature of the work, to find in it a full examination of the latter's unique claim of personal experience, while still living in this world, of life in the spiritual world for a period of 27 years, as described in his works *Arcana Coelestia*, *Apocalypse Revealed*, *Divine Love & Wisdom*, *Heaven & Hell* and *True Christian Religion*. This experience was part of his mission, as a specially commissioned servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, to make known to the world the teachings of the New Church, that is, a new dispensation of Christian truth, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Revelation of the descent to earth of the bride, the wife of the Lamb, the holy city New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (ch. 2 1: 9 & 10).

However, the nearest thing to such an examination which I was able to find was a long footnote on page 348 [of McDougall's *Mind & Body*], which refers to Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* (Kant's description of Swedenborg) as dogmatically expressing the opinion that empirical evidence of the survival of personality is impossible in principle—which, if true, would have made all McDougall's work on that book superfluous! While McDougall argued against this opinion, as based on circular reasoning, he made no comment on the virulence and bias of Kant's attack on Swedenborg, nor on the accuracy or cogency of its assertions and arguments. He therefore leaves the reader with the impression that, while rightly rejecting Kant's main contention that knowledge of an after-life—though clearly taught by Christ—is in principle beyond the bounds of human reason, he had himself apparently accepted the youthful Kant's assessment in that book of Swedenborg and his teachings.

Moreover, having recently purchased a copy of the *New Everyman Encyclopaedia*, I found that the entry in the name of Swedenborg, though perfectly fair and accurate, finished with the following sentence: "One of his first critics was Kant, who directed *Träume eines Geistersehers* against him." This also is perfectly true, but constitutes another instance of "hearsay" repetition of the fact that Kant criticized Swedenborg, without any consideration of the grounds or justice of such criticism.

I have lived a long life under the valued guidance of Swedenborg's teachings (especially his maxim "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good") so in the light of the above facts I felt it my duty to find out, and make known if possible, how valid or otherwise were Kant's criticisms of Swedenborg in *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, of which I have been able to borrow an English translation, by Emanuel F. Goerwitz (2nd edition, New Church Press Ltd., London, 1915). I was also fortunate enough to acquire a German book, *Vision & Offenbarung* (Spiritual Vision & Revelation), a collection of essays by an independent German specialist in ecclesiastical history, the late Dr. Ernst Benz, which deals very fully with this and related questions. Profiting from my long experience as a translator from German and other languages (finally in the guise of Director of the Spargnapani Translation Bureau, Manchester) as well as the increased leisure resulting from retirement, I decided to translate this book into English, as a small thank-offering for what Swedenborg's teachings have done for me. This task has been carried out with the permission, approval and occasional assistance of Dr. Friedemann Horn of Zürich, the publisher and copyright-holder of the German version. Dr. Horn has also agreed, with the aid of his intimate knowledge of Dr. Benz's career, and in the light of their long personal friendship, to write a special Introduction to the present volume.

I consider it my duty to make two apologies. Firstly, to my readers for my inability to shake off the life-long habit of close, sentence-by-sentence translation, which has perhaps sometimes resulted in excessively long and complex sentences which make for difficult reading. And secondly, for my rather long translator's note at the end of chapter VI. I can only express the hope that the overall result will be found beneficial.

Next I must express my thanks to the many people who have helped me. Apart from the Manchester, Stockport, and Bramhall libraries, these are: the Reverend G.T. Hill, who read the whole text right through, and made many useful suggestions, Mr. J.D. Lomax, who helped similarly at an earlier stage with chapter IV, and undertook the onerous task of proof-reading, Dr. Horn, the Reverend Michael Stanley, Mr. & Mrs. Jungmayr, native German collaborators from my Spargnapani days, the Goethe Institute in Manchester, Mr. D.R. Bradley, who helped with Latin quotations in various parts of the text, and the Scottish Academic Press for permission in relation to various quotations from Dr. Jaki's translations of Kant in chapter II.

In conclusion I am deeply indebted to my wife and our grown-up family for their constant help, understanding and encouragement, and especially their urging me to take the plunge of acquiring an Amstrad word-processor and initiating me into its mysteries.

22nd February, 1989
Bramhall, Manchester

INTRODUCTION

Friedemann Horn¹

ERNST W. Benz (1907–1979) was generally considered to be one of the most important German Evangelical historians of his time in the field of church and doctrinal history. Concerned with the entire range of Christian faith, he started and continued for several decades an ecumenical seminar at Marburg University. It will interest many English-speaking readers to learn that the Editorial Board of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, when they had to have the article on Christianity rewritten for the new 1974 Edition,² entrusted this to Ernst Benz, as a leading German theologian who had acquired an international reputation. Benz always kept in view the whole

¹Dr. Friedemann Horn was the publisher of the German original *Vision und Offenbarung*.

²Reprinted unchanged until 1985.

of Christendom, in all its branches, separate churches and sects, and this never came to light more clearly than in his numerous studies of individual problems in connection with ecclesiastical and doctrinal history. The enormous range of his knowledge covered all aspects of theology and religious history. He was aware of the threat to Christianity from a purely scientific theology, to which the whole field of "charisma" was suspect, and rightly valued spiritual vision and revelation as the actual roots of faith.

He was particularly interested in the history of mysticism as well as that of the Eastern Church, and in contemporary religious movements, not only in Europe, but also in North and South America, as well as Japan, visiting all three territories in pursuit of his studies.

It was the 1930s that saw the beginning of his preoccupation with Emanuel Swedenborg whose reputation had for a long time suffered from the black shadow of ignominy cast over it by Immanuel Kant (as described in chapters V and VI).

Minor studies, such as "Swedenborg and Lavater" and "Swedenborg as the Spiritual Pioneer of German Idealism and Romanticism," served as preparatory work for his full length volumes *Swedenborg in Germany* and *Swedenborg, Scientist & Seer* published in 1947 and 1948 respectively.³ Benz realized very early on that the critical attitude towards him initiated by Kant stood on very shaky ground, and completely overlooked the fact that the Christian Faith was based entirely on visions of the Risen Lord, without which it would be a mere human invention, deserving at the best the name of religious philosophy. This is quite clear from Kant's well known book *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

In the first of the two larger works Benz examines the reception of Swedenborg in Germany, which he illustrates on the basis of the typical examples of Kant and Oetinger. The second study is devoted entirely to the personality and work of the Swedish scientist and seer. It was actually this book which led to a more just evaluation of Swedenborg in the German-speaking world.

³ So far available only in the German original. [*Naturforscher und Seher* will be published in English by the Swedenborg Foundation. Ed.]

But Benz used every available opportunity to take the seer's part in lectures and articles, and tirelessly pointed out that the study of Swedenborg's writings was not only called for on grounds of historical justice, but could also render great service to the church in its present, highly critical, transitional phase.

The present volume is a collection of a number of these lectures and articles, and bears witness to the commitment of its author to the truth in the discussions often conducted in a far from objective manner regarding the Swedish scholar and seer. As mentioned in the Preface to the German original, published in 1980, Professor Benz was keenly looking forward to the publication of that version, and took a close personal interest therein even towards the end of his life, but died before it finally achieved publication.

Ernst Benz employed all his powers of persuasion and his astonishingly extensive knowledge to secure a resumption of the dialogue between theology and revelation. The present collection of lectures and articles about Swedenborg is an eloquent testimonial to this fact.

Disciples of Swedenborg will not always be able to agree with everything he writes, partly because Benz himself does not always cover the entire breadth of Swedenborg's teachings, and partly because they as disciples do not care to see the master placed on a level with others, or even criticized. But it is precisely this "all or nothing" attitude which has hitherto prevented the ideas linked to Swedenborg's name from being more widely adopted in Christendom. Swedenborg himself repeatedly emphasized that only those truths are of importance for the eternal salvation of a man or woman which he or she has adopted in complete liberty and according to reason, not in deference to authority. Hence the disciples of Swedenborg should be grateful if important members of the ecumenical movement such as Ernst Benz ensure that at least decisive parts of the teachings they themselves prize so much get into general circulation. The present work is eminently suitable for achieving this.

CHAPTER I

The Significance of Emanuel Swedenborg for World Christianity

Many of my hearers [and readers¹] will perhaps wonder what the Nordic seer Emanuel Swedenborg has to do with Zürich. Is there any obvious connection between Swedenborg the visionary and spirit seer and the severely rational, anti mystical, deliberately sober yet pious life, the traditions of which were established in this city by *Huldrych Zwingli*?

Actually, Swedenborg has quite a lot to do with Zürich, namely, by virtue of the fact that the most important prelate and Christian author of his time, whose activities were centered here in Zürich, namely Lavater, the Pastor of St. Peter's, was most strongly influenced by him. From the outset of his career Lavater had directed close attention to the visionary phenomena in the religious life of his time, and made the state after death a principal subject of his studies. Especially in his work *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (Prospects for Eternity—4 parts 1768–78) he studied the life and orderly arrangements in the spiritual world, and was most strongly inspired by Swedenborg's teachings on the subject of the spiritual and celestial world.

How closely he was preoccupied by this question in his personal life is shown by the story of his friendship with Felix Hess. This friend of his youth, who suffered from consumption, and expected to die young, had agreed with him that after his death he would visit Lavater and reveal to him the conditions in the afterlife. And when he did actually die on the 3rd March 1768, Lavater waited for a long time in vain for the promised appearance of his beloved friend, who had died in his arms. During this period he had strange, disturbing dreams, which he linked with his friend's promise, and which made him wonder whether his departed friend was trying to communicate with him by means of them. To make sure, he approached Swedenborg in a letter dated 24th August 1768, requesting permission to question him on a number of matters "which seem to me to be of the utmost importance." Firstly, he wanted to know Swedenborg's opinion of his work *Prospects for Eternity*. In addition he asked to be told

¹ This chapter was at first prepared for a public lecture in Zürich. Tr.

his views on answers to prayer, on which Lavater was at that time preparing a paper. He then asked Swedenborg for information regarding the then famous Swedish female visionary Katharina Fagerberg. But his fourth and principal desire was to learn from Swedenborg how things were going in the spiritual world for his departed friend Hess, who as arranged had intended to report himself on his condition there, but had not yet done so. Since at the time of this letter Swedenborg was staying in Amsterdam, Lavater received no reply to his questions, and so he repeated his request in a second letter, imploring Swedenborg not to reject his appeal: would he please speak to Hess and ascertain his present condition. Lavater wanted this matter to be regarded as a test case: the description of Hess's figure and appearance to be given by Swedenborg after his meeting with Hess was to be a sign to Lavater "that God is truly with you." Swedenborg did not reply to this second letter, but it could not have escaped him that in Lavater he had a disciple among German speaking readers who believed in his revelations and teachings. However, one thing is clear: Swedenborg decided in August 1771 to make a journey to Germany and Switzerland, and to take the opportunity to visit Lavater in Zürich. But this visit was never to take place. The journey to Switzerland was never made. Swedenborg entered upon his last journey to those Elysian fields, which were so familiar to him from his visions. He died in London on the 29th March 1772. He preferred the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem to the journey to Zürich.

The permanent influence of Swedenborg is most readily understood in Lavater's great work on physiognomy, in which he adopted the decisive ideas of Swedenborg regarding the spiritual body and the physiognomic original language in his conception of the interdependence of spirit and the human body.

I

The expression "spirit seer" [unlike its near synonyms "visionary" and "mystic." Tr.] has in modern usage lost something of the odor of the sublime which formerly clung to it. This is largely due to the fact that Immanuel Kant, in his short book *Träume eines Geistersehers* (Dreams of a Spirit Seer) subjected Swedenborg to an extremely supercilious and sar-

castic criticism. He claimed therein to have demonstrated, taking Swedenborg as an example, and using typically polemic methods, the fundamental thesis of his philosophy, viz. the impossibility for men to have direct knowledge of the realm of the transcendent. The fact is, however, that Swedenborg was a spirit seer of such a unique nature as to make him seem, especially in our era of such strong belief in science, peculiarly worthy of respect. Actually, Swedenborg was, both as regards his religious education and his professional activity, for the greater part of his life a natural scientist and researcher, who with a unique universality comparable to that of the philosopher Leibniz distinguished himself among his learned contemporaries not only by a preeminent range of knowledge but also by fresh research and discoveries in all the fields of natural science then in existence. He had studied in England and France with the most important natural scientists of his time, and then occupied in Sweden as Mining Assessor a leading position in the Swedish Mining Industry, which he strengthened by many inventions of crucial significance in metal extraction and other branches of metallurgy; he was a leading scholar in the fields of geography and geology, making several important discoveries; he adopted new methods for investigating the pre-history of the earth, by examining the strata of the rocks, and fossils of animals and plants of those periods; he was a leading biologist and wrote a book on the structure of the animal world; he was the first in the field with the physiology of the brain; as a mathematician he dealt with the problems of integral calculus introduced by Leibniz; he was a leading psychologist involved in a critical debate with the psychology of Descartes.

After King Charles XII had discovered his scientific genius, and enrolled him into his circle of intimates, the young scientist felt himself encouraged to undertake epoch making discoveries in the fields of ship-building, canal lock and sluice construction (hydraulics) and also weapons technology. This period covers the design by him, not only of a submarine and a high speed machine gun, but also an aeroplane, a model of which is still on display at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

His achievements won international recognition, and he was not only a member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, but was in frequent correspondence with members of the scientific academies in Paris and

London, to which the great mathematicians, astronomers, geologists and physicists of that time belonged. His research activity was not only extremely multifarious, but also quite indefatigable, as is shown by his frequent journeys to Germany, Holland, France and England, where he visited not only the mines but also the most important museums, scientific collections and technical workshops, and was inspired by the constant novelty of his experiences to ever new projects.

So Swedenborg on his journeys was the eager collector and generous provider of all sorts of information. On his return he published what he had learned in a series of important scientific works, which raised him to the peak of European fame. Scholarly journals in all countries reviewed his new publications, the academies opened their doors to him, and he had more nearly reached his goal of admission to the Olympus of European scholars than he had ever hoped. But then the 56-year-old received the higher call, which led him to another path to knowledge, and induced him to abandon his previous scientific and philosophical work as mere human vanity, and prepare himself for a higher route to the acquisition and promulgation of knowledge. Through all his investigations there can be detected and, indeed, traced back to his youth signs of his striving towards an ideal of religious perception: what he was seeking was the Adamic perception, the complete perception of the original man, of Adam, who possessed “insight into the essence of all Being.” Swedenborg realized that the “Adamic perception” was lost to fallen man. The recognition of the hopelessness of his endeavor to penetrate to the highest knowledge by the scientific methods of experiment and analysis plunged him into a deep religious crisis. The more he undertook independent researches into the various individual branches of the natural sciences, the more he felt the inadequacy of these endeavors, and the more clearly and inspiringly there rose before him the image of our first ancestors, to whose perception the truth flowed in a trouble-free manner, without effort, without teachers, and without geometry or analysis, simply from looking at things themselves. What he then in the year 1744 perceived in relation to himself, after an eleven-year-long crisis in his professional career, was that he had been granted what he had for so long been seeking: he felt as if he had been raised to a new, higher level of vision; the spiritual world had been opened to him, to him alone in this world; he saw himself raised to the throne of

knowledge from which Adam had been removed after his Fall; the gates of heaven and hell opened to the view of his newly opened eyes. The natural scientist became the visionary, who was able to see the present, the past and the future because he had an insight into the essence of Being. From then on he converses with figures from pre-history, he sees the future form of the kingdom of God, he sees the New Jerusalem. His call results in his consecration into a position where he can get to know the lost paradise of the Golden Age.

This consecration is not, however, the outcome in accordance with the ordinary laws of nature of a fierce desire or a methodical system of training, but was granted to him after the collapse of his scientific self confidence, as the consummation of a process of self criticism, which led him first to the path of repentance and then to that of self humiliation before God.

I cannot describe this path in detail here, but will only describe its conclusion: it was his great vision of Christ in the night of the 6th–7th April 1744.

I felt that something holy had come over me. Then I fell asleep, and about midnight or one or two a.m. I was seized by a fit of trembling from head to foot, accompanied by a noise like the clashing together of many winds. I was convulsed by this indescribable wind, and thrown on my face. I fully awoke immediately, and saw that I was lying prone on the floor. I became aware that the following words were put into my mouth: "Oh, Almighty Jesus Christ, Whom it has pleased to come to such a sinner, make me worthy of Thy grace!" I raised my hands in prayer, and then another hand came and firmly pressed them. Continuing my prayer I said: "Oh, Lord, Who hast promised to receive all sinners in mercy, Thou canst not do otherwise than keep Thy word." Then I lay on his breast, and beheld Him face to face. His face had such an expression of holiness that I cannot describe it. He was smiling, and I believe in truth that it was the same as it had been during His earthly life. He said: "Now do it!" And I understood this to mean: "Love me truly!" or "Do what you have promised to do!" "Oh, God, give me grace to do so!" I realized that I could not do so from my own strength. Then I awoke, trembling as before.

This vision of Christ was the prelude to the vision which included his final call, which he experienced in London in the middle of April 1745. The vision began with an experience of purification, in which he was freed from the desires of the flesh. The central event consisted in a vision of God. In the course of it he was informed that God had chosen him to expound to men the internal sense of the Holy Scriptures.

During the night in question, in order to convince me, the World of Spirits, Heaven and Hell were opened to me, and I was able to meet several persons of my acquaintance from all levels of society. From this day forward I abandoned all worldly learning, and worked only on spiritual matters, in accordance with what the Lord commanded me to write. Thereafter the Lord daily opened the eyes of my spirit, so that I was capable of seeing, in a condition of complete wakefulness, what was happening in the other world, and while fully awake to converse with angels and spirits.

Let us emphasize the peculiarity of this call: it was not the commencement of a new revelation, a continuation of those contained in the Old and New Testaments, but rather the special merciful gift of the opening of the internal sense of the Holy Scriptures. His intercourse with spirits and angels was to serve this elucidation of the Holy Scriptures. This is the characteristic difference between Swedenborg's claims and those of Spiritism,² viz. the absence or existence of a third revelation or testament going beyond the Old and New Testaments.

² I have translated "*Spiritismus*," which appears repeatedly in this work, by "Spiritism" rather than the more widely used word "Spiritualism." According to the O.E.D. the latter word was first used in 1831, "in the general sense of tending towards a spiritual view of things," viz. that the most valuable aspects of human life are spiritual (i.e., mental and supernal, rather than animal and physical). It probably implies that our life in this world is followed by an afterlife, as taught by Christianity for two thousand years. And this suggests the possibility which does not mean or imply the desirability of communication between those still living in this world and those who have left it. The word "Spiritism" was first introduced in 1864 to refer specifically to the practice of carrying on such communication despite the Old Testament warnings against it, and Abraham's pronouncement to the rich man: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." (Luke 16: 31). Swedenborg also specifically, condemned the practice not only in *Heaven and Hell*, n. 249 (which begins: "To speak with spirits at this day is rarely granted, because it is dangerous") but also elsewhere, e.g., *Apocalypse Explained* n. 1182, Continuation. Tr.

Swedenborg's experience of his call is by no means anything like so rare within the history of Christian piety as one may be inclined to believe. From the second century onwards the Church did not tolerate the practice of free prophecy and the spontaneous continuation of the revelation, but imposed a barrier to it by limiting the tradition of the apostles to their writings and the creeds. The only form of prophecy which was still tolerated in the church excluded the free expansion of the revelation on the basis of direct inspiration, being limited to forms tied to the letter of the Holy Scriptures, and recognizable as explanations and expositions of the prophetic sense of the sacred text. The experience here reported by Swedenborg is therefore typical of the post apostolic form of Christian prophecy, of which I could give many examples.

Swedenborg considered this vision of his call as the end of his crisis. In the course of his struggles he had had an idea that God had chosen him for a special task, and he understood his previous life as an internal and external preparation for this work. Now at the end he learns what this work is to consist of. Although he had earlier, during his scientific studies, endeavored to base the divine revelation on the Book of Nature, he now finds himself referred to the Holy Scriptures as the highest form of the divine revelation, and considers himself empowered to draw the inner sense, the kernel, from the figurative, parabolic shell of the literal sense. His special endowment consists in the fact that his prophetic theology is based on his insight into the world of spirits and angels. From now on his religious self confidence is determined by this vision of his call. In a letter dated 23rd September 1766 he writes to the prelate Oetinger, the founder of Christian Theosophy at Württemberg, that Oetinger could see from his work, *Apocalypse Revealed*,

that I converse with angels, since not a single verse in the Apocalypse can be understood without revelation. I solemnly affirm that the Lord Himself appeared to me and that He commissioned me to do what I am doing, and that to this end he opened the internal of my spirit so that I could see things in the spiritual world, and hear those who are there, and this now continuously for a period of 22 years.

And a later letter read:

Why I as a philosopher was chosen to reveal the secrets of Heaven? This happened so that the spiritual things which are now being revealed should be taught and understood in a natural and reasonable way. Because the spiritual truths stand in a correspondential relationship to the natural truths, as do causes to their effects, and come to rest in them. For this reason I was first introduced into the natural sciences, and so trained beforehand, and this happened from the year 1710 to 1744, when Heaven was opened to me. (Letter to Oetinger, 11th November 1769)

II

The great significance of this visionary experience of Swedenborg's lies in the fact that in him and through him the knowledge of the transcendent world was restored. The early Christian promise of salvation was dependent on the coming of the Kingdom of God. The image of the approaching Kingdom of God, the Heavenly City, New Jerusalem, which is in heaven and was to come down from heaven, was the cloud of fire which went before the Christian church throughout all its history. The church lived by looking up to the kingdom of God, the goal and origin of our salvation; Faith was constantly renewed in contemplation of this heavenly goal, both by the church and the individual believer.

Only in the course of time was this image of the heavenly kingdom secularised and brought down to earth. During the period of the Reformation in the 16th century the image of the kingdom of God changed for the first time into that of a social utopia, and became the theme of a theology of revolution. Thomas Müntzer was the first to declare that men should no longer wait for the coming of the kingdom of God, but first get rid of its opponents on earth by force in a bloody revolt, and then it would come of itself. Thus for the first time revolution appeared as an accelerator of the conception of the kingdom of God, which was no longer understood as the kingdom of heaven, but as a social utopia.

This process of a change of the expectation of the Kingdom of God into a social utopia in this world has made more and more progress in recent centuries. The Christian expectation of the kingdom of God was trans-

formed in the 16th and 17th centuries by the utopians into the conception that the kingdom of God as the ideal society of earth must be capable of manipulation with the help of modern science and techniques. Christian theology participated in this attitude in the middle of last century by developing a so-called "social gospel" from the teachings of Christ.

Christian ethics received as a new content the task, instead of preaching the coming of the kingdom of God, of first establishing on earth such social conditions as would be acceptable to Christian ethics and a Christian understanding of man. This development was soon overtaken by modern socialism of a Marxist stamp, which, on the basis of the religious philosophy of Feuerbach, denied religion any competence or right to take part in the construction of a new social order. The Church responded to these criticisms by an endeavor, on the one hand to emphasize even more strongly its social efforts, and to prove its right to exist by a pronounced increase of its activity in the field of social ethics and social philosophy, but at the same time allowed the contents of its Divine Message, against which the objections of their Marxist and Rationalist critics were directed, to recede more and more into the background, and disappear.

Thus a process of internal secularization commenced. The old process of waiting for "the last things" ("the End of the World") which was directed towards heaven, the kingdom of God above, was turned on its head, into a "horizontal," this-worldly, waiting process, which hardly differed in content from the prevailing political or socialistic social utopias.

III

Swedenborg sets the earthly world back in its correct relation to the world above, the earth to heaven, not in the dualistic, platonic sense of an antithesis, but in the sense of correspondence. There is an agreement—a correspondence—between the things of the celestial, spiritual and earthly worlds. The relationship between the divine, spiritual and natural Kingdoms is that of the idea, the image and the shadow. Every natural thing is a representation or correspondence of a spiritual and a divine thing; it speaks not only of itself, but refers to its spiritual image, whose shadow it is, and the spiritual image, for its part, is the representation of an original

divine idea. All things of the lower world provide evidence of, bear witness to, the higher world: divine idea, spiritual image, mirror image, shadow, which is produced in accordance with this Mirror Image. Thus the sun up in the sky does not represent only itself, but also the celestial sun of the kingdom of God, the Lord, and the manner in which it illuminates the earth, and infuses its light everywhere, represents at the same time the influence of the Lord on the celestial and spiritual worlds.

In the light of this idea of correspondence, for Swedenborg the earth is transformed in a wonderful way. Nothing in this world is merely what it seems to be in accordance with its name and its form, but it refers back to a higher field of being. Each speck of dust of itself preaches the secrets of heaven. To him who possesses the key to correspondences the dust proclaims heavenly truths, and he can rise on the wings of his perception of the earthly world into the realm of heavenly freedom and wisdom. Inside everything there slumbers a divine secret. If we had the power to unlock these secrets, the perishable would reveal the miracles of eternity.

This relationship of correspondence applies not only to things themselves, but also to their designations. For modern men words have faded into serial arrangements of sounds or signs which designate particular natural things or actions. Originally however, they were not mere conventional coinages, but they expressed the inner essence, the original divine image. Words were charged with a representative content. For present day humanity the Bible, the divine Word of the Holy Scriptures, is the book which in a special sense has a representative character, which can be opened only by a man commissioned for the task by God.

This makes clear the connection between the doctrine of correspondence and Swedenborg's call: by the latter he was commissioned to open up the inner sense of the Holy Scriptures, and God Himself opened the eyes of his spirit and granted him access to the inhabitants of the spiritual and celestial worlds to facilitate his learning of the spiritual meaning and correspondence of every word of Holy Scripture. Now the words of Scripture opened their inner meaning to him, natural things spoke to him of the spiritual images and celestial truths which they represent. Now for him in the literal sense the spiritual and celestial worlds depicted therein are transparently visible to him. Now he knows himself to be in possession

of a knowledge of correspondences from below and from above. Thus for him after his call the doctrine of correspondences becomes a science of the divine Word. This Word, which is present in the Holy Scripture, seems to him to be the visible representation, intended for the sensual method of conception of mankind, of heavenly truth. The literal sense of the Word is the basis, shell and support of its spiritual and celestial sense. The literal sense of the Word is the containant of the spiritual and celestial senses in the same way as the earth is the containant of the higher spiritual and celestial life. The literal form is the body of the heavenly Word, in which it is clothed on this earth in a manner which makes it accessible to mankind. The opening of the inner sense by the unlocking of the correspondences therefore represents the direct conjunction of men with God.

This conception of the Word involves a fundamental correction of the widespread attitude to the Scriptures current in the world of today, which is indicated by the term “demythologization.” Its premise is the assertion that modern man, who as a result of the development of modern science with its prevailing influence on all spheres of life, thinks scientifically, i.e., in exact terms, is nowadays quite incapable of understanding the mythological methods of self expression, rich in imagery, in which the Christians of the first century thought, and in which the writings of the Bible were composed. Indeed, it is considered quite inconceivable that a modern man or woman, living in the climate of modern scientific thinking, should accept the teachings of the Christian creeds in their mythological form. If they have any meaning at all for him or her, the thing to do is to reduce their mythological content to a few statements which can be readily formulated in comprehensible terms. Very little remains, for the whole range of the Christological stories—comprising the incarnation of the Son of God, the virgin birth, the whole series of miracles, the resurrection, the ascension and the second coming for the last judgement—constitute an inconceivable myth. The “Theology of Demythologization” initially left intact one part of the Gospel message, viz. the so-called “Kerygma,” the message to the Father and the Son, but it soon became clear that it was impossible to preclude a specific “protected area” of dogma from the general process of demythologization, and there was nothing left, when the Father and the Son were also shown to be “mythical”—but as this

“nothing” was designated in theological terms—“a theology after the death of God.” Thus theological dialectics has literally eaten up its very own foundation.

This whole “Theology of Demythologization” rests on a fundamental error, viz., on the image of a purely rationalistic man, as conceived in the Enlightenment of the 18th century, but long abandoned by modern anthropology and psychology. There is in fact no such thing or being as a man who thinks only in scientific concepts; such a man is a rationalist fiction, constructed only on the model of a computer. But when the man who operates a computer, and translates facts into the abstract sign language of mathematical logic, switches off his computer at 5:00 p.m. and closes his office door behind him, and begins to think of himself or his wife and family he no longer thinks in the abstract concepts or symbols of mathematical logic, but in pictures. Our language itself consists in its original stratum, of pictures, because pictures are the original form of human perception. The history of the main languages of mankind, in particular German, shows that the formation of abstract terms stands at the end of the development of the language, after it has passed through a long process of dialectical development. The abstract conception is always the last stage of the development of a language, and itself shows the effect of pictures in such development, for it is an “abstraction” [German: “*Abstraktion*”] when the antediluvian hunter strips off [German: “*abstreift*,” Latin “*abstrahit*”] the pelt from the bear he has slain, and a “conception” [German: “*Begriff*”] is what one can grasp with the hand [or mind, Tr.] and make one’s own, to produce at will before the senses of the memory.

The ecumenical significance of Swedenborg lies in the fact that he leads us back to the original sense content of words, to the correspondential character of language. Language is not information through the use of agreed abstract conceptions, which circulate like coins, but it is the unlocking of the secret inner sense of a word, which refers beyond itself to its original spiritual and celestial image. Irrespective of whether we accept his particular interpretation of the individual biblical words, Swedenborg points us to the recognition of a lost and artificially hidden character of language. The doctrine of correspondences appears here as the creative art with the help of which the unity and fullness of the divine life, its self demonstration and self-revelation, opens or can be opened from the di-

vine Word, in the various areas of the natural, spiritual and celestial senses in nature and history.

IV

Let me now briefly mention a few main thoughts which Swedenborg derives from this understanding of the revelation of God in His Word and which are of special significance, particularly in our present situation, where we are faced with the loss of the Transcendent.

The question: why do men exist at all, why has God created this creature and given him life, has received a variety of different answers from the pious thinkers of the Christian religion. According to St. Augustine, and after him, St. Thomas Aquinas and those of his school, the creation of man was an act of self love on God's part. God created the world and man in it for his own glorification, with the object of setting up a Kingdom of God, in which the elect would freely and voluntarily praise the splendor of their Creator, and devote themselves to His honor. In the last resort man's love of God is an echo of God's self love.

The mystics, such as perhaps Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Angelus Silesius thought otherwise. It is among the most important experiences in the field of the meetings of these mystics with God, that the mystic feels within himself how God pleads and wrestles with him, how God longs for the love of men. God and man are dependent on each other. Both need each other for their fulfillment; as Angelus Silesius puts it:

God cannot live a single moment without me,
Were I destroyed, He too would cease to be.³

We find the key to the understanding of this thought in the interpretation of the text: "God made man in His own image, in the image of God created He him."

For the mystic this means that man's is the form in which God Himself clothes the incomprehensibility and overwhelming power of his Being in a finite figure, the image in which He reveals Himself as a person. God

³ Lit. "He would have to give up the ghost in despair." Tr.

creates man in accordance with His own image as a person, in order to be able to realize Himself on His personal side, as a person. His love is not self love, but in its very essence altruistic love, which seeks fulfillment in a free return of love from its beloved, and therefore needs that beloved to love. Love is not existence for oneself, but existence for another.

This thought is further developed by Swedenborg, namely, under the direct influence of his vision of Christ. According to him, the human is founded on the Being of God Himself. The human, which means personal life, is something which is not strange to, or remote from, God, either in His essence or His nature, but belongs, like His incarnate form, to His perfection. God is dependent on man, inasmuch as the human itself belongs from the outset to His inmost Being. The Lord, the Son, is God in His Humanity. God in Himself is a consuming fire, and a blinding light, but the inexhaustible exuberance of His Being is contained in a concrete form, and becomes personal willing, loving, action and knowledge in His Humanity.

From this point Swedenborg takes a further bold step: as God Himself is in His essence a man, therefore the Humanity in Him is at the same time the original form of the life of all created spiritual beings, not only the men of this earth, but absolutely all spiritual beings, including angels. "In view of the fact that God is human, therefore all angels and all spirits are men in complete form." The kingdoms of heaven, the world of spirits and the natural world are held together by the revelation of God as a man. The making of man in the image of God applies not only to his spiritual side, but extends to the least and apparently smallest and most corporeal detail of his humanity. Everything in man, the highest and the lowest, the most spiritual and the most corporeal, is an image of the humanity in God. God becoming man is Incarnation, but Incarnation is not something strange to God, for humanity is part of his Being.

The idea of the significance of the human as the original form of all spiritual existence leads Swedenborg to a demonstration which appears at first glance just as remarkable as his teaching regarding the humanity of God, viz., that not only does every spiritual being bear as a person human features and the human form, but the spiritual beings form themselves into groups, and organize themselves into communities of angels which are also in the human form. Indeed, the individual communities of angels

in the human form join together to form a "Grand Man" (or "Universal Human"), the *homo maximus*, which comprises the whole of Heaven. The human in God is therefore not only the original and basic form of the individual spiritual personality, but at the same time the original and basic form of the community of all individual personalities. "Heaven as a whole and in its parts has the form of a man" and this Heaven "remains always the same in its largest and smallest form."⁴

These ideas of Swedenborg's, which may at first sight seem strange to us, are also the outcome of his vision of Christ. Moreover, the apostle Paul speaks of the church in several of his epistles as "the body of Christ." We close the door completely to the understanding of this idea if we think of it merely as a parable. A number of pre-Christian authors also occasionally compare the State to the human body and its social groups to the limbs and other organs of the body. But in the case of Paul it is not a question of a parable; he has rather the realistic conception that the individual believers who belong to the church actually do form the body of Christ, that the church is really His body, "the temple of the living God, built from living stones" (see also I Peter, 2:5). Here therefore already is the vision of a universal personality in a spirituo-corporeal form, which embraces in itself a community of various persons as its living cells, living building blocks which consist of personalities, and which in their turn combine together to form a still higher personality. Just as in Paul the text "He is the head of the body, the Church" (Col.1:18) is understood not figuratively, but literally; similarly Swedenborg also understands quite realistically the incorporation of the communities of angels in heaven and of the spirits in the world of spirits to form the universal personality of the Grand Man, the *homo maximus*. This aeonic being, the universal human, is the form into which the redeemed spirits conjoin themselves together into a personality, which is at the same time an organ through which the Divine Life is radiated through all spheres of life.

The human form is not therefore any old random choice from the manifold forms in the universe, *not just any form of life among countless others*, but the original and basic form of the Divine Love Itself, and bears

⁴This idea also recurs in Swedenborg's cosmology. See Ch. II, p. 651 ff. below: "Swedenborg and a Plurality of Worlds."

in itself Divine features, the image of the personal spiritual nature of God; it is the side of the Divine Being in which the unknown, overwhelming, awe-inspiring facets of the Divine Nature are clothed in the form in which God reveals Himself in His fullness.

This conception signifies an extraordinary deepening of the image of man, and closes at once all the paths of error on which the modern materialistic theory of descent which has already had to abandon again its claim to primacy has embarked. The highest form of life is not a product of the lowest, not the last in a chain of chance developments and mutational leaps, but is the first and the origin of all, which operates as the original form, the prototype and the initial entelechy in all forms of life. All realizations of life have their origin in the “Universal Human,” and all in their enhanced and redeemed form return to it together at the end.

V

Swedenborg’s view into the future is contained in his vision of the “New Church.” The culmination of his interpretation of the Apocalypse of John is his exposition of the words in which the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven is there described. Of this holy city it is stated: “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22).

This signifies that in this Church there will be no external separate from the internal, because the Lord Himself in His Divine Humanity, from whom everything relating to the Church derives its existence, is alone approached, worshipped and adored in prayer. By the words “I saw no temple therein” is not meant that in the New Church, which is the New Jerusalem, there will be no temples, but that in it there will be no external separate from the internal . . . Therefore it is said: “for the temple of it is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb,” which signifies the Lord in His Divine Humanity.

“The Lord God Almighty means the Lord from eternity; Who is Jehovah Himself, and the Lamb signifies His Divine Humanity” (AR 918). It is also stated in the exposition of Ch. 22:5: “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.” “This signifies

that in the New Jerusalem there will not be any falsity of faith, and that men will not be in knowledges concerning God from natural light, which is from their own intelligence, and from glory originating in pride, but will be in spiritual light from the Word, derived from the Lord alone" (AR 940). The men of that Church will not be in self love and love of their own intelligence, thus not merely in natural light, but solely in spiritual light from the divine truth of the Word.

Swedenborg has expressed various opinions regarding the descent of the New Church and its relation to the different existing branches of the Christian Church. As one familiar with ecclesiastical history he occasionally expresses the pessimistic opinion that the New Church, the New Jerusalem, will hardly arise from the historically existing bodies, but may have to be formed afresh on a new basis from heathens, i.e., non-Christians. Thus he writes for instance in *Arcana Coelestia*:

Furthermore, it should be known that when any Church becomes no church, that is, when charity perishes and a new church is established by the Lord, it is seldom, if ever, that the New Church is instituted with those amongst whom the old church existed, but with those amongst whom there was previously no church, that is with the Gentiles. This was the case when the Most Ancient Church perished; a new one which was called Noah, or the Ancient Church which arose after the flood, was then established amongst the Gentiles, that is, with those amongst whom no church had previously existed . . . Then followed the Jewish Church. When this Church also perished, the First Christian Church was established from amongst the Gentiles. The case will be the same with this, which is called the Christian Church. (AC 2986)

This train of thought therefore leads to the expectation of the creation once more of a New Church.

But Swedenborg did not develop this idea into a one-sided polemic. In fact his criticism of the Christian denominations of his time makes it clear that he assumes the existence in all the churches of true Christians who have been captivated by the spirit of the New Church, are receptive of the vision of the spiritual church, and are preparing themselves for the New Jerusalem; and on this basis a new ecumenical theology is being devel-

oped. Significantly it was from the disciples of Swedenborg in the middle of last century, at a time of constantly increasing petrification of confessionalism, that a first attempt was made to produce an ecumenical theology. This can be seen in the work *Friedenstheologie* (Theology of Peace) of *Johann Immanuel Tafel*, Professor of Philosophy and University Librarian at the University of Tübingen, published in 1852. Its contents are made clear from its subtitle:

An Investigation How Far:

- (1) Despite all the differences of opinion, an internal unity of all true Christians already exists,
- (2) Whilst retaining the differences in teachings and customs a certain external union of the separate religious groups could at once be effected,
- (3) Preparations could and should be made for a gradual internal and external unification on the basis of one and the same teaching.

Tafel did not therefore wish to achieve a forced unity, but to allow unification to develop gradually with the growth of a common understanding of the internal sense of the Holy Scriptures and the teaching contained therein. In the light of the results of earlier efforts to bring about an ecumenical unification of the separated sects, he writes:

The theology of peace has met with contempt mainly because it was usually construed as requiring something impossible of achievement, and perhaps also immoral, viz. mere agreement on one uniform teaching, with a compulsory creed, whereas very few people are immediately ready for the true doctrine, and no one has the right to force something on to another in religious matters; on the contrary, it is the highest law of Christianity, whose first two commandments are the love of God and of the neighbor, that judgement of, and relations with, others should be based on the essentials of Christianity, which are belief in Christ and keeping the commandments, whilst everything else should be left to the conscience of each individual, and the entirely free agreement of all groups of individuals. It automatically follows from this that between all true Christians, provided they really are such, an internal agreement

already exists, and this must also result, despite the retention of their various teachings, institutions and customs, in a certain external cooperation to achieve the main common purpose, unless they are prevented from doing so by being associated with, and betrayed by, merely nominal Christians with an overwhelming influence.

Thus Tafel sketched out the route for progress, which has actually been followed by the ecumenical movement called into life in the twentieth century.

VI

Some of my readers may protest as follows: "Should we, now that ESP has become so popular, suddenly allow ourselves to be deceived—and the church congregations by the church—by the substitution of a visionary's ESP for x the unknown quantity? Are visionaries and spirit seers the latest trend in Christian apologetics?"

But this line of protest completely fails to understand the actual spiritual situation of the church, as well as the present position of mankind. It is not the case that the church now has grounds for suddenly discovering the gift of prophecy as something new and strange. The gift of vision and prophecy is one of the original spiritual gifts of the church, with which it knew itself to be equipped by its Lord, in order to protect and maintain itself on this earth. Paul recounts in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 12:7ff, the various spiritual gifts with which the church is equipped:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another Faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions them to each one individually as He wills . . . for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Here appear the gift of knowledge and the gift of prophecy, also the ability to distinguish between spirits, as gifts of the one Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact the Christian church throughout its history has always been accompanied by repeated manifestations of these spiritual gifts. The free manifestations of the Spirit have, however, in the course of ecclesiastical history been judged in a more and more restrictive manner and with increasing mistrust, the more the institutionalization of the church and the adoption of specific religious teachings and dogma, and also particular church law, proceeded. Therefore the seers and the prophets within the church have always encountered difficulties, and were frequently exposed to persecution. This applies both to the great prophetesses of the medieval church, such as St. Hildegard of Bingen and St. Birgitta of Sweden, as well as to the later prophets and visionaries of the Thirty Years' War, whose prophecies were published by Amos Comenius; besides Swedenborg, who was himself exposed to the severest persecution by the Lutheran established church of Sweden, his disciple and defender in Germany, the Prelate Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, was punished by the Stuttgart Consistory for his defense of Swedenborg.

It is here that the peculiar effect of the Holy Spirit becomes noticeable: on the one hand the Holy Spirit creates law, for what has been spoken by the mouth of a prophet or apostle in the name of the Holy Spirit retains its significance and validity by virtue of the authority of the Holy Spirit, Who has laid down this or that rule for His church. Not only does the Holy Spirit justify its authority with the claim that it knows itself to be *theopneustos*, inspired by the Holy Spirit, but also the individual rules regulating the community, and even the articles of the creed, appeal to the authority of the holy (inspired) fathers who drafted them.

On the other hand, however, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who by virtue of His authority breaks the law and creates new law, which He does whenever a regulation or a rule within the tradition of the church has itself become an obstacle to the living development of the Holy Spirit within the church. Then the case can arise for the Holy Spirit Himself to break the law, to destroy what has previously been provided, to pull down old walls which stand in the way of its realization, and promulgate a new law.

This had occurred in Swedenborg's time, the period of rationalism. The church had forgotten—"filed away"—a large part of its message. It left the kingdom of heaven to the angels and saints, and turned to the problems of this world, the preachers visibly occupying themselves more and more with social, economic and political questions, and problems about the education of children; they preached "enlightenment" sermons about modern potato cultivation and other "progressive" agricultural and ecumenical subjects. Making use of rationalist criticism of the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the church, they produced an early form of demythologization, trying either to declare the mythical or legendary contents of the Bible non-genuine or to give them a rationalist interpretation. Our present-day *demythologists* are by no means so modern as they believe, but often have their more important precursors in the theologians of the Enlightenment, above all the Berlin "Neologists."

Then as now the vital issue was the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the message of the coming of the kingdom of God, which had already begun with His ministry. The theologians of the Enlightenment interpreted the kingdom as a new social order in this world, a new political form of existence and community; they forgot that in the message of Jesus the kingdom of God was the *kingdom of heaven*, that it had heaven as its origin, that its permanent model is the heavenly Jerusalem which comes down from heaven, the heavenly city with its walls of jasper, clear as crystal, in which flows the pure river of living waters, on whose banks grows the tree of life, and which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb as its source; the New Jerusalem, in which no sun shines, because it is lit by the glory of God and its lamp is the Lamb.

Swedenborg recognized the inalienable celestial and spiritual basis of the Christian eschatology (the teaching regarding the "last days" —of the Second Coming and the Last Judgement). He brought once more to the fore in an uncommonly impressive form the lost dimension of Christian prophecy, in the period of scholastic theology on the one hand, and Enlightenment theology on the other. In him the ancient visionary charisma which during the history of the Church had been buried for so long under the rationality and systematic logic of the theologians was restored to life. He did not however regard this as his own achievement, but as a

unique endowment from God, which he himself identified with that entrusted to the prophets and seers of the Old and New Testament.

The situation which I described previously is repeating itself in our times on a similar plane of historical consciousness. I am anxious to avoid quick critical generalized judgements, but about one thing there can be no doubt: we also are living in a time when the church, attacked from all sides as regards its fundamental beliefs, and with its right to existence called into question, has gone over to seeking its self-justification and its justification before a critical public in the fact that it has increasingly transferred its attention to the field of social and socio-political activities, and reduced the message of the kingdom of heaven to the horizontal expectation, to an active contribution to the improvement or revolutionary change of social relationships in this world. Moreover, it has to a large extent devalued, or even abandoned, the other life, i.e. the questions raised by the Christian faith regarding another life as our origin and goal.

This tendency was strengthened by the church's alarm at the tormenting criticism from Marxist religious philosophy, which of course declares the whole of religion in view of its aim being directed towards the afterlife, its conviction of a transcendental origin, and its sights being set on a transcendental (or rather, let us say it quite frankly, a *celestial*) goal—to be “the opium of the people”—nothing but an opiate cloud to lead mankind astray, so that it is diverted by all this talk about a so-called heavenly goal from the solution of its earthly task of establishing a perfect society. This accusation has so upset the churches that they have preferred to transform their teaching about the kingdom of God into a “social gospel” of a more or less social revolutionary character. The kingdom of heaven, the extensive kingdom of the so-called “last things,” involving the questions of life after death, the kingdom which we shall enter when we die and the fate that awaits us there, has been passed over in embarrassed silence, or simply written off. Even dogma has taken this development into account. The bleak, comfortless teaching that on his decease man dies completely, becomes as dead as a door nail, then suddenly, after an inconceivably long epoch, awakens to a new life and goes to judgement, deprives the characteristic fundamental idea of the Christian image of man, the continuity of personality which is the essence of the image and likeness of God—of all

its force, and makes it as difficult to believe in the last judgment, as in this deferred resurrection of mankind.

Thus reflection on the teaching of Swedenborg on this subject has an ecumenical topicality of which there are indications everywhere.

VII

However, drawing attention to these questions regarding the “last things” involves a great danger—that of drifting over into spiritism. When once curiosity about this sphere of the spiritual and celestial world has been aroused, a demand arises to learn more and more about it and with the help of mediums to enter into regular contact with the sphere of the beyond, in order to receive more and more revelations and clarification about the life after death and extend intercourse with those who have passed on. Three comments are necessary on this matter:

1. Swedenborg considered the opening of his spiritual sight, enabling him to see into the spiritual and celestial world, to be an absolutely unique charismatic endowment. In this respect he regarded himself in all humility as a chosen tool of God, Who at that time wished to impart special guidance to mankind, which was necessary for the renewal of the church. From this fact he drew the necessary conclusions which provide us with confirmation as to how responsible was his attitude to his appointment as a seer.

2. He never offered to provide information about particular inhabitants of the other world, even if this favor was requested of him by highly placed persons of his time, such as princes and ministers. We have reliable evidence provided by himself and from other sources that he firmly declined such requests for the abuse of his spiritual gift for purposes of fortune-telling or sorcery. He also gave stern warnings against carrying out experiments for the purpose of establishing connections with the world of spirits, and emphatically forbade attempts at mediumistic spiritism as impious. Although the formation of spiritistic circles developed from the Swedenborgians of Stockholm near the end of the 19th century, being taken up in France in the form of the cult of mesmerism, this took place contrary to the personal intention and the personal warning of Swedenborg.

3. Above all, however, his “things heard and seen” were always concerned with the interpretation of the divine Word and the illumination of its spiritual inner sense; there was no intention that they should form the basis of a fresh divine Word, or an addition to it.

On the other hand, however, it should be stated that due to the fact that the church did not accept Swedenborg’s reports on his “things heard and seen” and their theological interpretation, and was moreover silent about the whole range of subjects which his revelations illuminated, and avoided the important matter of a criticism of the revelation, she herself created the spiritual vacuum, in which spiritism could take root, and is still spreading to this day. The founder of so-called “scientific spiritism,” a Frenchman named Hyppolite Denis Rivail, who later published his books under the name Allan Kardec, was a pupil of the great Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a deeply pious Christian and herald of the Christian life even in his professional work. After spending several years with Pestalozzi at the latter’s Educational Institute at Yverdon, Switzerland, Rivail set up a similar institute in Paris, which led to his financial ruin, after which he became a spiritist under the influence of pupils in Paris of Anton Mesmer, the apostle of Animal Magnetism. In his writings the basic thought was expressed which threw to the winds all the warnings of Swedenborg, namely, that spiritism was the “third Revelation”—the successor to the first, or Old Testament, and the second, or New Testament—which claims to give information about those spheres of life regarding which the first two revelations were silent, viz., the life after death, also the spiritual world and its higher and lower orders or degrees.

Now it is plainly untrue that the Bible says nothing about the sphere of the kingdom of heaven, and the spiritual world. But in the face of the abandonment of this whole subject as a result of the church’s pronouncement that it should be ignored, plus its increasing devaluation, and finally the surrender dictated by alarm at the attacks of the Marxists, it is no wonder that a “third revelation” developed in this vacuum, asserting the right, by the use of experiments with mediums, to make the same claim to the use of the scientific method as do modern physics and chemistry through their use of physical and chemical experiments, and hence claiming the title of “scientific spirit(ual)ism,” while evading the difficult task of a “critique of the revelation.” Hyppolite Rivail represented his teaching

and practice as being essentially Christian, and has written a book called *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, which in Brazil alone has been published in an edition which far exceeds that of the Bible. The last word as between the Christian faith and spiritism will not have been spoken so long as the church maintains its purely negative attitude of prejudiced rejection of Swedenborg's revelations without examination.

We should not therefore reject Swedenborg because he is believed by some people, contrary to his own wish and against his strictest warnings, to be an advocate of spiritism, but should follow Oetinger's advice, and, in the words of St. Paul, "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecying, but test everything, and hold fast what is good."

Postscript

Introduction to an essentially similar lecture in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche), Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, on the 11th October 1975.

It seems to be a most unusual circumstance for a lecture about the Nordic seer to be given in an evangelical church in Berlin, yet it is not quite such an exceptional occasion as it may seem at first. For the discover, of Swedenborg for the benefit of the scholars of central Europe was first made in Berlin or, to be more exact, Potsdam, actually, by Perneti, the librarian of Frederick the Great. Perneti was a member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, and translated Swedenborg's work on the inhabitants of the planets (*Earths in the Universe*) into French. Perneti also made a strong contribution in other respects to the dissemination of Swedenborg's ideas, which in particular made a deep impression on the circle of the Berlin Romantics (to which Schleiermacher also of course belonged) and above all found enthusiastic disciples among members of the medical profession who were interested in mesmerism. It is therefore no stranger about whom we shall be talking this evening in Berlin.

CHAPTER II

Swedenborg's Teaching of a Plurality of Worlds

Now that space travel has made it possible to photograph from the moon or from a space vehicle used for lunar travel the globe of our earth hovering in space and shimmering in a bluish light, the Copernican system, which regards the earth as a planet in the solar system in the middle of an immeasurable number of other solar systems and galaxies, has inevitably achieved universal acceptance. It may even be said that the Copernican view of the universe has only now through our entry into the space age become a basic component of our general world consciousness and feeling about nature. This is the conclusion of a centuries-long process, which in fact began at the end of the 15th century. Why then did the discovery of Copernicus, later extended and refined by Galilei and Kepler, actually cause such a shock, the first public expression of which was the condemnation of Galilei in the year 1633? We humans wish to live, on the basis of a strong internal impulse of our human nature, in a *logical* world, in a logically ordered environment, which determines our general conception of the world, of life and of nature. For the believers in pre-medieval European Christianity this earth was a logical whole. It was actually the central product of divine creation, and man was the main creature of this earth, the only creature made in God's own image. The maintenance of this earth and the realization of His plan for the salvation of mankind were, if we can use such language, God's main concern. It was on this earth that He became Man as Jesus Christ, and from the elect of this earth that the kingdom of God was to be established; the sun, moon and stars illuminate this scene of God's activity in a divinely determined rhythm. That was the convincing and logical foundation for the conception of the world based on pre-medieval and medieval Christianity, confirmed by the evidence of this old-fashioned conception, derived from Ptolemy. For in the mornings the sun rose, in the evenings it set, and the moon and the planets shone forth in the rhythm of their individual movements against the gleaming firmament of the fixed stars.

The Copernican Shock

It was inevitable that knowledge of the Copernican conception of the world would cause deep unease among Western Christian humanity, shattered to the core of their beliefs by the new ideas. This earth, formerly the only field of God's activity, now appeared as a grain of dust among an enormous sea of suns, around which were possibly circling satellites similar to the planets of our solar system. Men themselves appeared merely as even tinier specks of dust on this grain, while the Incarnation of God Himself as Jesus Christ, the main event in the whole history of Salvation, paled into a minor episode in a side-show of the cosmos, and became fundamentally questionable. Why, men wondered, use such a gigantic salvation apparatus for such a bagatelle? All the conceptions on which man's structure of belief had rested, i.e. their self-consciousness and their consciousness of their environment, simply collapsed. That is the process which we describe as the Copernican shock. Humanity, torn away from its old structure of belief, was faced with the task of coming to terms, spiritually, psychologically and emotionally, with its new position in the scheme of things—an enormous task, still not completed centuries later.

This shock did not of course strike humanity overnight; on the contrary, it took effect only slowly, because men did not at first understand what was taking place. The new conception of the world, and man's place in it, remained for decades the secret of a few astronomers. Even when the teachings of Copernicus penetrated a wider circle of scholars, and at last came to the ears of a few theologians who were capable of measuring the effects of this new-style thinking on the old-style biblical thinking, the suggestion was put forward by leading personalities in the Catholic Church that the new conception should not be forbidden, but permitted as a *scientific hypothesis* for astronomers, which, along with other theories, affords a better explanation of various astronomical phenomena which had hitherto been found puzzling. Only when the astronomers, like Galilei, for their part insisted that their astronomical discoveries were by no means hypotheses, but the scientifically proven truth, that the structure of the universe was as they had stated, that the old earth-centered conception was objectively incorrect, and had been scientifically refuted, did the resistance begin.

This was, as we must nowadays admit, inevitable at this stage. The church was not the upholder of the resistance to the Copernico-Galileian conception simply because a few obstinate and poorly educated theologians were unable to follow the new astronomical theories and mathematical calculations, but because they had to defend the previously accepted *raison d'être* of the world, on which their conception of God and man, of creation and redemption, of life and death, of salvation and damnation, and of heaven and hell, were built. The theologians, including Martial Luther and Melanchthon, who fought against the Copernican system, were thereby representing Christianity's reaction to the shock of the discovery of the new astronomy.

As previously mentioned, this shock at first spread only slowly, indeed, only *pari passu* with the spread of scientific thinking itself. Ortega Y Gasset in his book *The Crises in World History* draws particular attention to this fact. It was in fact Giordano Bruno, the almost intoxicated apostle of infinity, who was burnt at the stake on the Campo dei Fiori in Rome in 1600 because he taught a plurality of worlds, who was the first to shatter the old doctrines, showing each fixed star to be the core of new systems of suns, continually burning out to eternity. If we really wish to understand the psychological effects of the Copernican astronomy, we shall be best advised to have recourse to the evidence of documents which provide glimpses of recognition of the consequences of this new vision of the physical universe in the religious experience of pious individuals in the 17th and 18th centuries, who were at first deeply upset by their gaze into the immeasurable profundities of the new world. In the spiritual poetry which we find in the hymnbooks of the churches, from the 17th century onwards quite new thoughts are expressed. Let me just mention the choral of Johann Rist, the highly celebrated Imperial poet laureate from Wedel in Holstein:

Eternity, thou dread parole,
 Thou torture, drilling through the soul,
 O beginning without an end!
 Eternity, thou timeless Row,
 In my sadness I do not know
 Whither for solace I should wend.

Here the sadness is expressed as a reaction to the dawning of a completely new, unsuspected dimension of depth.

We find the expression of similar feelings in the works of Jakob Boehme, who described his condition before his elision into the Essence of All Being was opened, when the world appeared to him as a new, logically connected whole, as “dismay on scanning the dark abyss,” and who described how he was overtaken by

a harsh melancholy and sadness, when I was faced with the great profundity of this world; when I considered in my spirit the whole creation of this world, I became extremely melancholy and sorry for it, and none of the texts I knew could console me. Then certainly the devil who often on such occasions drummed heathen thoughts into my head could not have been in cheerful mood. But I prefer to keep silence about these.

So such a simple layman feels the same melancholy, and is dismayed to feel heathen, godless nihilistic thoughts rising within him as a result of the collapse of the old, orderly world, leaving him face-to-face with this new enormous and frightful depth of the dark abyss. We could quote many other examples, but I will keep it short. What Boehme does not dare to utter regarding his melancholy and desperate sadness, conjoined with heathen thoughts, is made clear in an admittedly later document by the more powerful language of Jean Paul’s⁵ attempt to convey the nihilistic side of the Copernican shock in his *Speech of the dead Christ from the Cosmic System, to the effect that there is no God*.

I went through the worlds, I climbed into the suns, I flew with the galaxies through the wildernesses of space, but found no God. I climbed down as far as existence throws its shadow, and gazed into the abyss, and cried: “Father, where are you?” But I heard only the continuous storm with no-one to control it, and saw only the shimmering rainbow of protoplasm standing on its twin legs, without any sun to call it into being, above the abyss, and dripping down. And when I looked up to the

⁵Jean Paul Friedrich Richter—Tr.

immeasurable cosmos for the eye of God, it stared at me from an empty bottomless socket, and eternity lay on the chaos, and gnawed at it and chewed the cud. Go on crying, discord, smash the shadows with your noise, for He does not exist! Then the discords screamed louder, the trembling temple-walls parted, and the temple and the children sank down, and the whole earth and the sun sank after them, and the whole cosmic system with its immeasurability sank past us, and there on the top of immeasurable nature stood Christ and looked down on the shattered cosmos with its thousand suns, and also into the mine excavated in the eternal night, in which the suns move around like miners' headlamps and the galaxies thread their ways like veins of silver. And when Christ saw the crowding press of the worlds, the torchlight dance of the Heavenly Will-o'-the-wisps and the coral reefs of beating hearts, and when He saw how one planet after the other emptied out its glimmering souls into the sea of the dead, like a goldfish bowl spreading shimmering lights on the waves, then, standing as tall as the largest of the mortals, He raised His eyes against the nothingness and against the empty immeasurability and said to them: "Rigid, dumb nothingness, cold eternal necessity, mad, blind chance, does one of you know this? When will you destroy the system and Me? Do you, blind chance, yourself know if you will march with your hurricanes through the starry snow-flurries, and blow out one sun after another, or if the sparkling den of the stars will twinkle as you pass by—how lonely is everybody and everything, in the spacious, yielding burial-vault of the universe!"

Any word of commentary on this is superfluous—here the nihilism spreading into the cosmos appears to be the only way out from the post-Copernican fright at the expansion of the world (universe) into an unknown, bottomless deep, into which our old conception of God no longer fits.

But even before Jean Paul, in some of the hymns of pious poets, a way out of this condition is indicated. I append here as a single example a quotation from the poems of Barthold Heinrich Brock: *Irrdisches Vergnügen in Gott, bestehend in physikalischen und moralischen Gedichten* (Earthly Pleasure in God, consisting of Physical and Moral Poems) 1721. There we have

a magnificent poem entitled “Das Firmament,” which at first shares, in the same way as we see it later in Jean Paul, the fright at the impenetrable universe:

When recently my eyes sank into the sapphire depths,
Unbounded by banks or shore or goal or end.
Into the unexplored sea of empty space,
While my ineffective gaze wandered back and forth,
But sank ever deeper—my spirit was dismayed!

My eyes went giddy, my soul stood still.
Does the deep and endless immeasurable vacuum,
Which is rightly deemed an image of eternity,
Come just from God alone, without beginning or end?

The space of the abyss closed in a moment
Over and round my spirit,
Like the flood of a bottomless sea
Round a lump of solid iron!

The enormous pit of the deep, dark light
Of the unbounded gleaming darkness
Even swallowed up the world,
And buried my thoughts!

My whole being was a speck of dust,
A point, just nothing—and I lost myself,
My personality.

This suddenly struck me down.
My confused breast was threatened with despair.

Alone!—Oh, healing Nirvana, oh, happy self-immolation,
self-abnegation!
Oh, omnipresent God, in Thee I found myself again!

As we can see, the main part of this poem is also a description of the loss of the self, laden with despair, in the meaningless abyss of the planets, of empty space. But in the end this empty space turns out, in the way described by the old mystics, whose comment thereon is: *Abyssus vocat abyssum* (The abyss calls to the abyss), to be suddenly filled with the presence of Almighty God, Who now appears to His worshippers as that Greater God Who fills the empty space of the greater cosmos, and Who constitutes the fullness of this cosmos, previously believed to be empty. This is what is behind such ideas as the speculations of Newton about space being the sensory of God.

This represents the preparations for a transition, which was finally effected by Swedenborg. Swedenborg was the first to find again in the greater universe, not only the Greater God, but also the Greater Christ!

Early Speculations about the Inhabitants of the Planets

But before we turn to this subject, we must accept another consequence of the new conception of the universe. The feeling expressed by Jean Paul—"How lonely is everybody, and everything, in the spacious burial-vault of the universe!"—is obviously an element in man's attitude to life, which is just as strong as the *sensus numinis*, the religious feeling of the presence of the transcendent. Man cannot bear to be alone, and can bear it even less to be alone in such an endlessly expanded cosmos. Significantly, with the spread of the Copernican conception, the idea arises that it is impossible that in this great universe of suns and galaxies this earth of ours should be the only planet to be inhabited by thinking beings. There must be creatures on other planets, which we must assume to be circling around other suns, which have similar, if not higher, qualities, compared to those of the main creature on this earth, man. Naturally, the thinkers of those times thought first of the planets of our own solar system as perhaps being suitable places for habitation by thinking beings, but it did not take long for the idea of dwellers on planets orbiting in remote stellar systems to take root.

These ideas were not derived from religious phantasies of any kind, but came from the prominent astronomers of the time, which I shall go into shortly.

As a result of the theory that some of the planets may be inhabited, the once-so-frightfully-empty Copernican universe as gradually, so to speak, “repopulated” and became, at least in this respect, accessible—if not as a home, yet still meeting the need of mankind to live in a community, and not in the bleak loneliness of an empty universe. On all sides among the natural scientists and philosophers of the 18th century speculations crop up regarding the inhabitants of other planets, which according to scholars educated in astronomy claim the character of scientific probability, that is, as they state themselves: these speculations are not merely creations of imagination, but are supported by scientific arguments. Obviously we are actually involved here with the expression of a kind of cosmic community feeling and a consciousness of human solidarity. The inhabitants of the planets take the place, so to speak, of the angels, which cannot be accommodated in Copernican space. (But nevertheless there are still beings there whom we can understand.)

It is no wonder today, when the Copernican system has at last been so widely accepted that it determines our general attitude, that also the idea of communication between our earth and inhabitants of other planets, the “Planetarian,” is spreading to such an astonishing extent as a kind of world religion of “flying saucers.” C.J. Jung has of course described it as a very important subconscious phenomenon, and Heimar von Dietfurth in his comments has put the whole matter very succinctly: “Behind the passionate interest with which the public gratefully takes note of the most transparent canard about the appearance of a flying saucer, is concealed the relief inspired by the thought that we are not alone in the cosmos.”

Swedenborg’s Visionary Account of the Inhabitants of the Planets

The above remarks serve merely as an introduction to what Swedenborg has to tell us. He has linked together his beliefs about the arrangement and spirituo-corporeal organization of the higher world and his cosmological and astronomical ideas and brought them together in a teaching, developed in great detail, about the inhabitants of the planets. Remarks of this kind appear in numerous works from his visionary period, but a systematic account of the subject is contained in his short book

entitled *Earths in our Solar System, which are called Planets, and Earths in the Starry Heaven, their Inhabitants, and the Spirits and Angels There*.

This book, as the first of Swedenborg's books to be translated into German, had actually a wide circulation in Germany. It was also one of his first books to be translated into French—actually by Perneti. This shows how ready were the times for such things. The German translator—you would hardly guess it—was Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, the great Swabian theosophist. In the year 1770, to the great astonishment and resentment of the Stuttgart Consistory, he published anonymously a book, the complete title of which was as follows:

The Earths of the Dwellers in the Starry Heaven, in which information is given about their manner of thinking, speaking and acting, their form of government, police, Divine Service, marriage, dwellings and customs, from accounts of the same spirits through Emanuel Swedenborg. A work in which to check what is true and probable, from which at least much wisdom can be learned as regards philosophy and theology, physics, morality, metaphysics and logic, translated from the Latin and accompanied by the reflections of one who loves science and good taste.

At this point, even if we were to accept the validity of all the earlier speculations of the astronomers regarding the inhabitants of the planets as “scientifically probable” hypotheses, the visionary gift of Swedenborg seems to verge on the field of fantasy. This fact has frequently been coyly passed over in accounts of Swedenborg's teaching, obviously with the object of avoiding further detrimental judgement of Swedenborg, who had been so often subjected to criticism from theological and philosophical sources.

But—today we need have no fear of saying so—this linking of his teaching about the spirit world with his cosmological conceptions is not so wide of the mark as it may at first sight appear. Swedenborg is not by any means unique among his contemporaries in his ideas about the habitation of the planets of our solar system and the starry heavens by personal spiritual beings, but is among a highly respected company of leading astronomers, such as for example Kepler, Huygens, Lambert (the famous astronomical colleague and correspondent of Kant), Fontenelle (who wrote

La Pluralité des Mondes) and above all Kant himself. All these researchers have expressed views on the habitation of the starry skies. From those named I shall select Kant, because in the light of our general image of him we should be least likely to expect him to embark on such fantastic speculations, and because in the case of Kant, who was later a bitter critic of Swedenborg, it emerges that he himself was thinking along lines in the direction of which Swedenborg subsequently claimed to have found the answers and solutions.

Kant's Ideas about the Inhabitants of the Planets

Kant's views about the inhabitants of the planets are to be found in the work which contains his scientific theories of the structure of the universe, viz. *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens, or An Essay at the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Entire Cosmic Edifice, treated in accordance with Newton's Principles*, which was published in 1755, that is, three years before Swedenborg's short work on the earths in the universe. Of this work of Kant's, which is described by astronomers as the basis of the development of modern astronomy, as a rule only the first part, with its famous "Outline of a Systematic Constitution among the Fixed Stars," and the second part, "The First State of Nature, the Formation of the Celestial Bodies, the Causes of their Motion and the Systematic Relation between them in the Planetary' Edifice, as well as in respect to the Entire Creation," are known. On the other hand, modern histories of science in general, and astronomers in particular, have kept silent about the third part, which immediately follows these, and contains: "An Essay at a Comparison, based on the Analogies of Nature, between the Inhabitants of Various Planets." That is Kant's contribution to the subject. It is true that he was cautious enough not to ascribe to his theory regarding the inhabitants of the starry heavens the character of scientific evidence; he puts it forward as a hypothesis, which he nevertheless clothes with a certain degree of probability on the basis of the relationship (in position and formation) of the other planets to our earth. Kant bases this scientific probability on the distance of the respective celestial bodies from the sun, which seemed to justify conclusions regarding specific conditions on the

various planets and also the state of their inhabitants. First he premises a point which Swedenborg had also mentioned in his *Principia*:

The organization of the starry universe is not such as to compel the assumption that all the planets must be inhabited at the same time. The fact is rather that the existence of such inhabitants depends on the conditions on the individual planets, and observation confirms that the latter have periods of youth, maturity and old age, which do not develop simultaneously on different planets.

“Observation reveals young and old planets adjacent to each other; therefore” says Kant “it is not necessary to assert that all the planets must be inhabited, although it would be sheer madness to deny this in respect of all or even of most of them.” Kant now uses his knowledge of astronomy to suggest that conditions on Jupiter hardly permit the supposition that thinking beings have already developed there. “However,” Kant continues, “it can be more satisfactorily supposed that although it is not now inhabited, it will be in due course, when the period of its development is completed.” That a planet achieves this perfection a few thousand years later—Kant considers colonization by men as perfection—is not in the least detrimental to the purpose of its existence: “It will in consequence in future remain longer in the perfection of its constitution, when once it has reached it.”

The decisive factor for the development and variation of the life-forms of the inhabitants of the individual planets is, according to Kant (and that is an uncommonly interesting idea, the distance from the sun, and this in the inverse sense from what we should imagine. “The material,” says Kant,

from which the inhabitants of different planets, as well as the animals and plants on them, are formed, must be altogether of a lighter and finer nature, and the elasticity of the fibres, as well as the advantageous arrangement of their structure, must be so much the more perfect, the greater their distance from the sun.

This means that a creature living on Uranus, where the difference between day and night is very slight, and extremely low temperatures prevail, must be much more finely organized to be able to live at all under these conditions. And this statement applies not only to the bodily organization of such creatures, but also to their faculties of understanding; not only the physical, but also the mental perfection of the inhabitants of the planets increases in proportion to the distance of the latter from the sun.

Kant writes:

We can conclude as a more than probable assumption that the excellence of the thinking beings, the swiftness of their perceptions, the clarity and vividness of the ideas which they receive from external impressions, as well as their power of bringing these ideas together, and finally also their agility in actual execution, in brief, the whole extent of their perfection, are subject to a certain rule, by virtue of which they all increase in excellence in proportion to the distance of their abode from the sun.

And now Kant describes in detail very graphically how the inhabitants of planets which are situated further from the sun have good reason to look down on the inhabitants of planets which are nearer to it.

If the conception of the more exalted classes of the intelligent creatures which inhabit Jupiter or Saturn arouses their envy [that of mankind. Tr.], consideration of those on lower levels of development—i.e. on Venus and Mercury, whose state is far below the perfection of human nature—may calm and reassure them. What an admirable view! On the one hand we see thinking creatures (on Venus and Mercury) among whom a man from Greenland or a Hottentot would be a Newton, and on the other hand (on Jupiter and Saturn) other thinking creatures, who would consider Newton an ape!

Thus we have a scale of planetary inhabitants. Anyone living on a “lower” planet, [i.e. one nearer the sun—Tr.] may have reached the highest level of development, may be a Newton, but in the eyes of an inhabitant of a “higher” (more remote) planet, he is an ape. Let us not go into this in greater detail, but I should like to mention that Kant linked all this up

with the orbit periods of the planets, and drew conclusions therefrom about the age of the planets. "It is to be believed," he says,

that although decay gnaws away at even the most perfect natures, nevertheless the advantages from the refinement of the material, the elasticity of the vessels, and the quality of the fluids from which (and the facility with which) those more perfect beings who live on the more distant planets are formed, greatly delay their susceptibility to such attack (which is a consequence of the inertia of a coarse material) and give these creatures a longevity whose duration is proportionate to their perfection—in the same way as the frailty of the lives of the men of this earth is directly proportionate to their unworthiness.

Although these ideas fall within the scope of the conclusions derived by analogy from a comparison of the material constitution of the inhabitants of different planets and their relative position in relation to the sun, the question whether sin also prevails among the more perfect inhabitants of the remote planets leads Kant into the realms of theological speculation. He is aware that here he is going beyond scientific probability, but characteristically he cannot refrain from asking such questions. "Who is bold enough to risk an answer to the question whether sin exercises its dominion also in other globes in space, or whether virtue alone prevails there?" Here he quotes Albrecht von Haller; who also has written very impressive poems to demonstrate that he has overcome the Copernican shock. He says:

The stars may be the home of a more enlightened race,
And though here vice abound, virtue prevail in space.

After this quotation Kant continues:

Is not a certain golden mean between wisdom and stupidity linked to the unfortunate faculty of being able to sin? Who knows, perhaps those who dwell in those remote earths are not too noble and wise to let themselves be degraded into the folly of sin, while those in the less remote ones are too closely tied to matter, and too inadequately provided with spiritual

faculties, to bear the responsibility for their actions before the seat of judgement? In this way the Earth, and perhaps also Mars (so as not to deprive us of the sad consolation of company in misfortune) would be alone in the dangerous middle road where the temptations of sensual stimuli [in rebellion] against the supreme sovereignty of the spirit have a strong tendency to lead us astray. But I prefer to leave consideration of this problem to those who feel more at home with propositions which cannot be proven and have more inclination to undertake the responsibility.

With these speculations—which touch on the questions: are not the stars the home of a more enlightened race, are they not stages of men’s progress towards a higher level?—Kant approaches very close to the territory of Swedenborg’s visions, even though he puts them forward under the reservation of a “who knows?”

“Will the immortal soul,” he writes—and this also is a speculation which we should not have expected of Kant—

in the whole infinity of its future duration, which the grave itself does not interrupt, but only transforms, remain for ever anchored to this particular point in the universe? Will it never be granted the opportunity to share a closer view of the other miracles of Creation? Who knows, has it no prospect of getting to know sometime from close at hand those remote globes of the cosmic edifice, and the excellence of their arrangements, which have so aroused its curiosity from a distance? Perhaps some globes of the planetary system are in course of being developed to prepare new habitats for us in other heavens, after expiry of the period which is prescribed for our stay here? Who knows whether those satellites orbiting Jupiter will not one day provide moonlight for us?

Here Kant is already getting close to those religious conceptions which lead to the idea of reincarnation—that Kant who later, as the great critic of Swedenborg, wrote *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* to expose Swedenborg’s spiritual visions as “chimerical intention,” on the ground that man can have no insight into the realm of metaphysics!

Swedenborg's Scientific Ideas on the Plurality of the Worlds

In the case of Swedenborg himself this whole subject of life on the planets acquired an entirely new aspect when he maintained that he had had intercourse with spirits from these other planets in our or other solar systems and heard from them regarding their circumstances in these other worlds. On this matter it is necessary in my opinion to preface the following comment: Swedenborg's attention was not drawn to the subject of life on other planets only after he became aware of his visionary gift—which of course happened at a later stage of a life of great scientific effort as a student of natural history—but this question plays an important part in his writings on natural science as part of his cosmological and astronomical research. Above all, in the third volume of his *Principia*, dated 1734, that is, as long as ten years before his call as a seer of and reporter on spiritual worlds, we find such questions treated in a similar manner to that of Kant as scientifically probable theories, and there is reflected the enormous influence which his vision of the immeasurable depth and variety of the starry heaven made on him, and the feeling of great humility which it aroused.

What makes thee so big, so puffed out with pride, when thou beholdest a Creation so multitudinous, so stupendous, around thee? Look down upon thyself, thou puny manikin! Behold and see how small a speck thou art in the system of Heaven and Earth; and in thy contemplations remember this, that if thou wouldst be great, thy greatness must consist in this—in learning to adore Him who is Himself the Greatest and the Infinite.

The awe-inspired worship of the Infinite then gives rise to the song of praise to the sweeping, inexhaustible life-force which permeates the entire universe and brings forth the incomprehensible variety of the worlds:

If we now admit that new worlds may thus be originated, that they arise from the same causes as the others, and in the same manner; then they are subject to the same contingencies and experience the same vicissitudes as those which appertain to our own planet. We may also conjecture that each earth in its infancy would be similar to ours in its infancy. (Clissold trn. 1846)

Like Kant, Swedenborg therefore saw the universe as the constant generation of fresh worlds—some are seen in their infancy—others in their youth, others have reached maturity, and yet others a condition of senile decay. Similarly it must be assumed that the inhabitants of the planets orbiting the new stars must be formed under similar conditions. This idea also caused Swedenborg in his scientific writings, like Kant, to go further with his speculations, and indulge in detailed thought about these inhabitants of other planets. And here he is actually more logical than Kant. He states:

Nature, consequently, cannot be constituted in one world in the same way in which she is in another, nor are the beings in one world capable of being modified in the same manner as those in another. Mechanics presents itself under different conditions, because ratios, moments and degrees are different. All objects have different configurations, and thus analysis exhausts all their analogies. In other worlds the air and ether, if there be anything similar to them, do not undergo the same vibrations; the organs of sight and hearing are affected by them in a different manner; and perhaps our organs are not capable of receiving the undulations of their elements, because they are not constituted in accordance with their mechanism and motions. (*Principia*)

Swedenborg therefore opened up the prospect of a much wider range of differences from the inhabitants of other worlds, who might have quite different sense organs, and quite different ways of reacting. He writes:

The grandiloquent Archimedes, who proposed by means of his lever mechanism to raise the earth by means of the fulcra, would no doubt, if he had been placed on another earth, have had to consider more modest matters and ask where he should employ the genius of his mechanism, and would have no idea how he would have to apply his leverage, and if he wanted to try it there, he would have to educate himself afresh by means of phenomena of that world from its first principles and elements.

These are the same ideas as were expressed by Kant, who summed them up in a well-known quotation from Pope. Pope wrote:

Superior beings when of late they saw
A mortal man unfold all Nature's law,
Admired such wisdom in an earthly shape,
But viewed our Newton as we view an ape.

(Essay on Man)

Those are a few of the thoughts—presented in a very abbreviated form—which Swedenborg expressed on this subject during his scientific period.

Swedenborg's Visionary Intercourse with Spirits from Other Planets

The new feature of his visionary period is that the spirits of these other worlds visit him. And this entirely corresponds to the fundamental instinct which this inner conversion brought about within him. His conversion was of course, as previously mentioned, due to a deep crisis in his scientific consciousness. He had been active in all the sciences extant in his time, had discovered marvelous new knowledge—for example, in the fields of research on the brain, anatomy, physics and psychology—but he found that despite all his efforts in these directions he could not succeed in understanding the essence of all Being. He was led everywhere to the frontiers of human knowledge, and this very experience awoke in him a longing to break through these frontiers. His new visionary experience was a vision of Christ, a view of God become Man, and in Christ he was able to know the whole universe.

Let us simply take note of these things as phenomena and keep in view what thoughts came to his mind during his description of this plurality of worlds from the reports of their inhabitants themselves. As stated, no fantastic journeys made by him through the Heavens were involved, but among his countless conversations in the spiritual world, which he was convinced was opened to him, there cropped up spirits of the planet-dwellers. In these conversations we must seize on the connection between his visionary experience and his scientific knowledge. For the spirits themselves confirm to him what he had previously pointed out in the following terms,

that a man of sound understanding may conclude, from many things which he knows, that there are more earths than one, and that there are human beings upon them. For it is an inference of reason that such huge bodies as the planets, some of which greatly exceed the earth in magnitude, are not empty bodies, merely created to circle round the sun and to shine with their scanty light for the benefit of one earth only; but that they must have a nobler use than this.

This is actually, as was perfectly clear to him himself, only the repetition or confirmation of his own theory. All these arguments, based on natural science, have only one purpose, viz. to demonstrate the priority of humanity even in the universe, as infinitely enlarged by the new cosmology.

He who believes, as everyone ought to believe, that the Divine created the universe for no other end than the existence of the human race, and of a Heaven from it (for the earth is the seminary of Heaven) cannot but believe that wherever there is an earth there are humans . . . I have, moreover, spoken with spirits . . . [He gives details.] From these considerations a rational man cannot but think that a means so immense to an end so great was not provided for a human race (and a Heaven therefrom) on one earth only. What would this be to the Divine who is infinite, and to whom thousands, yea, myriads of earths, all filled with inhabitants, would be but a little thing, and almost nothing?

From this context let us select a few thoughts. There is in the first place the idea that in these inhabitants of other earths their humanity specializes in a particular way, which he demonstrates for instance by the powers of the understanding in one case, and the method of divine revelation in another. There are quite varied forms of cognition and knowledge, just as there are quite different methods of sense-perception. Thus Swedenborg describes for example the stage of intelligence of the men of Mercury as a specialization of thought, not in the cognition of material things, but of spiritual realities, of which the material things are the image. In that planet therefore the cognition finds its expression in the fact that men perceive what Jakob Boehme called the signature of things—or what we call their

kernel. "They are averse to the language of words, because it is material." A word is always of course only the shell of a conception. "Therefore when I conversed with them without the aid of intermediate spirits, I could only do so by a kind of active thought." He himself conversed in the same way by transmitting his thoughts to them directly [i.e. by extra-sensory communication—Tr.].

Because their memory consists of realities and not material images, it presents the objects of thought more closely than verbal images. Accordingly they are not familiar with the written word, and scoffed at our method of communicating knowledge by means of books, uttering the derisive thought that paper, among us, knows what men do not know.

What an attractive idea: there are worlds in which there are no authors, no publishers and no graphics and printing trade unions!

The specialization of the inhabitants of Mars consists—and this also is a very interesting thought—in their "physiognomic language" (the communication of ideas by means of facial expression). They present images of their thoughts in their faces, which are more mobile and expressive than those of men on this earth.

Men on this earth have a mask in which certain fundamental features of our being have become relatively rigid, but the Martians have an elastic face with much more mobile muscles . . . Their speech is not sonorous but almost tacit, insinuating itself into the interior perception by a shorter path, and because of this fact is more perfect and richer in thought conceptions, thus approaching nearer to the speech of angels. Even the sentiment within the speech is imaged in the face and the thought in the eyes.

He then describes this "physiognomic language" as it is in its greater perfection among the inhabitants of Jupiter.

The affections are revealed through the play of the facial expression and the thoughts through its changes, in accordance with the form of the internal thought. They also have in addition a verbal language, but it is

not as loud as with us; one form of language supports the other, and liveliness is imparted to the verbal language by the language of facial expression.

It can be seen how from these models of the dwellers on particular planets very different forms of variation of the spiritual faculties of expression and perception of the human are very graphically developed as models for which on our earth the concrete illustrative images are lacking.

A second thought dominates the representation of the individualization of human life in the starry heavens. All spiritual beings among the near and remote stars are not only themselves in the human form, but together they form the “Grand Man,” the cosmic universal man. The universe is far from empty, but its fixed stars and galaxies form together a large macrocosmic man; they are the living cells from which the external and internal organs of this macrocosmic man are constructed. Swedenborg had already elaborated these ideas in connection with his earlier scientific studies—he was of course a great biologist and anatomist, who had written a book about the anatomy of the human organism—but now he is describing the cosmos, and in the course of doing so indicates the organic functions of the individual planets in this macrocosm. However absurd the individual statements may appear to us, detached from their basic idea, they nevertheless confirm Swedenborg’s fundamental thought, which sees in the human form simply the originating and highest form of life, and the highest principle of organization and activity in the universe, both as regards its spiritual aspect and its very essence. The universe is not only like a man; it is human itself, derived from the Divine Human. The miracles of the human spirit, the human soul and the human body are at the same time the miracles of this cosmic universal man, the universal human in which all spiritual and personal life are comprised. The miracle of life is reflected in the largest and the smallest, and the essence of that miracle is man, the human, the image of God, the spirituo-physical form, in which the divine life is differentiated into an inconceivable wealth of individual forms within these various global figures. This seems to me to be the elevation to the highest potential of the idea of humanity and divine incarnation.

In conclusion, this is brought out particularly clearly by the manner in which he presents the religions of the dwellers in the starry heavens. And here something really quite new is introduced. He is the first and only one to try to understand the *Christian gospel as a macrocosmic event*, the descent of the humanity in God which takes place in the various solar systems—it is everywhere the same Lord who reveals Himself in the great universe, the Greater Christ in the greater universe— but everywhere in a different way. The incarnation, the embodiment, the realization in the physical body, is the specific form of the appearance on this earth, in accordance with the method of cognition of the earth-man, i.e. by the sensual perceptions, which are attuned to the vision of external corporeal things. That this is the form of our sensual perceptions necessarily means that we can experience the Divine only in Its corporeal realization. On other planets it is different. The epiphany of the Lord differs according to the various levels of cognition of the planet-dwellers.

For instance, Swedenborg maintains, so far as the men from Mercury are concerned, that they have no need of books, not even Bibles, since they are unfamiliar with the representation and veiling of the internal sense of the words and letters. The fact is that the Divine Word is accessible to them by the direct intuitive understanding of its real inner content. They therefore need no incarnation. It is the spiritual intelligence which is there to a certain extent the general form of revelation.

Those who live on Jupiter also live with a direct vision of the Lord in His epiphany as a man, but in a different form of revelation; the internal sense of the Word is communicated by an angel (I will not describe this in detail) and in every case the manifestation of the Divine Human is revealed in a form of cognition appropriate to the human race on each individual planet. But it is always the One Lord Who is worshipped, prayed to and appears in all the planets, and the various forms of the appearance of the Divine all represent the revelation of only the one Lord.

Prospect: Swedenborg as the Pioneer of a Cosmic Christology

I have practically finished my remarks, and will only add this: What we have been considering constitutes a first attempt to break away from

the biblical and Ptolemaic view of the world, and to set certain fundamental Christian ideas into the modern context of a greater universe—to move forward to a Greater Christ. Unfortunately, however, what has happened is that although the Swabian theosophists Oetinger, Michael Hahn and Fricker, in particular, have taken up these ideas of Swedenborg's, Christian theology in general has resisted any such introduction of Christianity into the new cosmology. This is probably due to the fact that since the theology of the Reformation with its concentration on the problem of the relation of the individual believer to his God, the whole of cosmology and of natural theology has been dropped from the sphere of current theological investigation. It is interesting to note, however, that these ideas have succeeded in making progress on the fringe of ecclesiastical Christianity—to a quite astonishing extent, for instance, in the case of Goethe, who was frequently, as he occasionally indicated secretly, much taken up with the idea of the further education of human beings on other planets. We have a report of a conversation with Falck on the occasion of Wieland's funeral on the 25th January 1813. Falck found Goethe in a remarkably sad, almost melancholy mood. (Goethe of course hardly ever attended funerals; he was sitting at home during the funeral of his friend, with whom he had often spoken about reincarnation.) Goethe began, in an almost hazy consciousness, to apply his thoughts on reincarnation to Wieland himself. Goethe distinguished between various grades or levels of souls and "monads."

Immortality is a quality which is not ascribed to every grade of soul and does not belong to the riff-raff "monads" among which we have landed in this corner of the planet. But some "monads" develop into higher forms, even into world-figures, which gather up into themselves the qualites of their earlier incarnations.

"If we wish to indulge in suppositions," continued Goethe,

I really cannot see what the "monad" which we owe to Wieland's appearance on our planet needs to avoid in order to enter in its new condition into the highest combinations of this universe. By its diligence, by its

eagerness, by its spirituality, through which it has absorbed so many qualities of world history, it is entitled to any and every thing.

Goethe was in an unusual mood, but even so, these things come out. They also come out with Schelling, and many others. Modern theology has so far hardly troubled to free its fundamental ideas from the trammels of the Ptolemaic background of the Old and New Testaments, and to bring them into harmony with our modern cosmology. In view of this fact the “heretic” Swedenborg and his outline of a new cosmology of salvation have earned—in spite of what I consider a few peculiarities of certain ideas—a pioneering significance, as under the influence of his scientific knowledge and his visionary experiences he has provided the impulse towards a new cosmic Christology, showing the way to a new cosmic conception of the gospel story, and an expectation of a hereafter extended to the entire cosmos, which could certainly form a model (unless it is already too late) for contemporary and future investigations—whether positive or critical—which Christian theology cannot permanently avoid.

Let me close with a few words from Oetinger, taken from his book on Swedenborg, in which he gives expression to this new conception of the world, and its theological content.

I am terrified at my smallness within immeasurable nature, and in comparison with the even more immeasurable Divinity. This solar vortex is a grain of sand, this earth is a speck of dust, a pinpoint—and I on this earth, what am I? I am something only by virtue of the fact that I can appreciate order, and in that appreciation can rise to the source of all forms of order. I feel that I am destined for such heights, and it will be my constant endeavor to scale them. I shall not give up until I have pursued beauty to its initial source. Then my soul will be at rest, all its faculties will be satisfied and its motives at peace; basking in Divine Light, and, delighted with my worship of and prayers to the Highest Universal Perfection of Everything, on a lower level I shall achieve self-forgetfulness.

(To be continued)

