CHAPTER IV
SOME MAIN FEATURES OF SWEDENBORG’S ETHICS*

It is doubtful that any philosopher of the modern period had any stronger belief in personal survival, in the sense of a real and eternal life after death, than did Swedenborg. His solemn testimonial was that for the last twenty-eight years of his long life he had frequent and prolonged consciousness of the “world beyond.” His most frequently printed and widely circulated book is Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: From Things Heard and Seen.¹ Therefore it is not surprising that many people, if they have heard of him at all, probably have some vague idea of him as a “mystic.” ²

However, to characterize Swedenborg as a mystic, as the word is commonly understood, will seriously mislead the person intent on understanding the philosophic outlook of this extraordinary man.³ As was noted in Chapter I,⁴ Swedenborg’s works are most

* Continued from the October, 1969, issue.
¹ Op. cit. Hyde’s Swedenborg Bibliography, which includes works published up until 1906, lists over 150 editions of this work, in a number of languages.
² Runes’ Dictionary, op. cit., “Mysticism: Mysticism in its simplest and most essential meaning is a type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, direct and intimate consciousness of Divine Presence...” (p. 203)
³ One Swedenborgian commentator [John Stockwell, Swedenborg: Noetic Mystic, A Prize Volume of Poems, (New York: Avon House, 1940)] tried to ameliorate the image by describing the great Swede as a “noetic mystic,” explaining that “one who, knowing the nature and setting of his experience, is able to describe it rationally.” Dedicatory page.
But this would seem to be a contrived definition hardly capable of overcoming the stereotyped idea of a mystic. (Continued on next page)
⁴ Chapter 1, pp. 238–240.
simply classified as pre-theological (those written 1700-1745), and theological (1745-1772). With the possible exception of the early poems (1700-1715) and the transitional work, Worship and Love of God (1745), the only significant difference in the writing is not one of style, but of content and subject matter. It is a matter of simple observation that he wrote as detachedly and dis-passionately about conversations with angels as he did about mining copper and iron. Herein lies both the charm and the enigmatic nature of the man.

One should not expect to find anything especially occult or mystical in the ethical concepts of the great Swedish seer. In fact, the very simplicity and apparent ordinariness of his ethics may mislead the casual reader into a hasty judgment that there is nothing of special significance in the way of ethical theory in this man’s works. One recent study seems to have committed this error at least in part by concluding:

Swedenborg’s ethical views were more pragmatic and relativistic than the scholastic ethics of his time; however, his ethical norms were based on scholastic ideals.

That the writer was not entirely beguiled, however, is indicated by his insistence on the way in which Swedenborg’s emphasis on

3 Continued.

Horatio W. Dresser, Outlines of the Psychology of Religion (New York: Crowell, 1929) approached the problem head-on by stating:

“Emerson’s guess that Swedenborg was the typical mystic [R. W. Emerson, Representative Men (New York: G. Routledge & Sons, 1850)] was a very poor one; for scarcely a sign of mystical experience or doctrine of the usual sort is discoverable, either in the biography or the works of this plodding, systematic author, who devoted more than a quarter century to developing his thesis concerning the Word as the clue to all revelation.” p. 298.

It seems to me that Dresser more accurately assesses Swedenborg than Emerson or any of the commentators who, apparently solely on the basis of Swedenborg’s claim of other-worldly experience, automatically classify him as a mystic.

5 For a concise chronological list of all of Swedenborg’s extant writings, see Volume II, Posthumous Theological Works, pp. 567-582, Standard Edition, op. cit.

the values of personal freedom and social justice raised him above the usual level of ethics in the schools.7

Misunderstanding or out and out difference of opinion as to the tenor and significance of Swedenborg's philosophical concepts is nothing new. In 1869, Henry James, Sr., published The Secret of Swedenborg.8 This book, reports Marguerite Beck Block,

which treats the writings of Swedenborg as a philosophical system, received unfavorable notice from the ever-watchful New Jerusalem Magazine:

"The object of the book seems to be to prove Swedenborg a greater philosopher than Hegel.—But Swedenborg is not a metaphysician at all. Up to his revelations he was a scientist, and afterwards a religious teacher, merely relating his revelations. The religious idea must be paramount in the mind of him who would justly appreciate Swedenborg. The love and the life of good should guide his inquiry who would seek to know the Secret of Swedenborg. Sin, to him, must be the most terrible of all things; the love of knowing of secondary account, . . . and then it will be found to be not a philosophical doctrine, but grander far,—a religious life."9

Here, interestingly, are two strongly sympathetic views of Swedenborg: the rabidly anti-ecclesiastical Henry James, and the editorial voice of the church organized and based on Swedenborg's religious writings. It may be fair to suggest that each was somewhat myopic, and that the truth may lie somewhere in between. The comparison of Swedenborg as a philosopher with Hegel is hardly justified. Hegel was for a number of years a professor of philosophy and might have been expected to devise a systematic philosophy; Swedenborg, on the other hand, never either taught philosophy or made any pretense at writing a philosophy as such. His philosophy, as has already been noted, is often implicit rather than expressed, appearing for the most part simply as an underlying strand woven through his scientific, anatomical and theological works. But to suggest that he was not at all a philosopher, or did not have a discernible philosophy, would be less justified than the comparison with Hegel.

7 Ibid. "His attitudes toward individual freedom and social justice were far in advance of his times, and individual liberty was perhaps his highest value, since without it man could not exercise his potential for becoming fully human." p. 183.
In addition to Henry James, other able writers have set forth and published a variety of works which clearly indicate that a Swedenborgian philosophy does indeed exist. A number of works have dealt with various aspects of Swedenborg’s ethical concepts—the particular interest of this study. The more scholarly treatises that have been produced would include those of Lewis Field Hite, _Ultimate Reality_; Frank Sewall, _The New Ethics_; and William Frederic Wunsch, _A Practical Philosophy of Life_. Professor Hite’s metaphysical treatment of love as the ultimate reality has already been referred to. Dr. Sewall’s thoughtful essay (subtitled “an essay on the moral law of use”) is concerned to promulgate “the moral law of the universe,” the law of “use” as the term is explicated by Swedenborg. Sewall’s work is especially useful in distinguishing Swedenborg’s ethical concepts from those of utilitarianism. Wunsch’s work, although it most nearly parallels the present study in general intent, sets up a _system_ of ethics, recommended to the reader as _a system_. Thus his ultimate aim appears to be pragmatic, as contrasted to mine, which is to set before the reader certain concepts or ethical principles upon which one may, if he chooses, build his own ethical system.

**The Unique Role of Love**

Paul Tillich once wrote: “I have given no definition of love. This is impossible because there is no higher principle by which it could be defined.”

In one sense Swedenborg would be in agreement with Tillich: there is no higher principle than love. But to say that love is indefinable would have seemed hopelessly defeatist to Swedenborg. He might rather have said that it is the _most_ definable entity of which man has any awareness.

In Chapter 3 it was noted that love is life, and life is love; therefore, love is the ultimate substance or the ultimate reality. Therefore, whatever is of the nature of love is part of the basic substance of life. The sum total of what a person loves is the

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10 Some of the titles are: R. L. Tafel, _Swedenborg the Philosopher_ (Chicago, 1867); Theophilus Parsons, _Outlines of the Religion and Philosophy of Swedenborg_ (revised and enlarged edition, New York, 1903); Eric A. Sutton, _The Living Thoughts of Swedenborg_ (London, etc.: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1944)—one of the “Living Thoughts Library” series.
11 Chapter 3, p. 253.
12 See _ibid._, p. 254 ctd.
sum total of the essence and being of that person. Loves, or affections, can be greatly varied and of great scope. It is necessary, therefore, to have some way of classifying or defining particular affections—especially those which seem to have a definitive influence in the ongoing life of the individual. Something more than the subjective evaluation of the things loved is needed. Man’s natural tendency is to call that which he finds pleasurable “good.” 14 If this were one’s only norm, then his ethics would be that of hedonism 15 and no further consideration of standards would be necessary. But pure hedonism with no teleological accompaniment has been pretty generally rejected as an ethical system. The various self-realization and utilitarian schools of ethics are modifications of the hedonistic principle, but even here there is wide divergence of opinion as to what is axiologically definitive.

It can be stated categorically that for Swedenborg, any ethical theory that is grounded in human intelligence or prudence alone is bound to be defective. The part played by God, together with man’s relating of himself to God, cannot be overemphasized. Thus, the love that is God—Divine Love—is the only ultimate norm. 16 All lesser norms take their place in the scale of values precisely to the degree that they are related to and in harmony with divine love.

In any and every normal adult person there is a dominant or ruling love. And whatever this may be, it colors and influences every lesser love. One graphic way Swedenborg describes this ruling love is this:

In his will it is like the latent current of a river, which draws and bears him away even when he is doing something else, for it is that which influences him. This it is that one man searches out and discovers in another, and thereby either controls him or acts with him. 17

One might think that there could be an endless number of pos-

14 One famous definition of “good” is that of Spinoza, Ethics, Part IV, Definition I. “By good I mean that which we certainly know to be useful to us.”

15 Runes, op. cit., “Ethical Hedonism: A doctrine as to what entities possess intrinsic value. According to it pleasure or pleasant consciousness, and this alone, has positive ultimate value. . . .” (p. 122)

16 St. Augustine is a well known advocate of this same view. However, the question of Swedenborg’s indebtedness to Augustine—which seems to be considerable—is beyond the scope of this thesis.

17 T. 399a.
sible dominant loves. But on analysis it is found that there are only four basic types possible. Any particular ruling love will be found to be one or the other of these basic genera or species. There is also a priority to these loves, a most significant one. Only two of them can lead to self-fulfillment or regeneration. If either of the lesser two predominates, the individual is pursuing a route of certain ultimate disaster. Paradoxically, if one of the greater two holds sway, all four basic loves will fall into an acceptable order of priority.

Without further ado: the four possible ruling loves are (1) love of God, (2) love of the neighbor, (3) love of self, and (4) love of the world. In actual application, the first two tend to blend into one. There is no latent humanism in Swedenborg. He regularly assumes that the love of the neighbor of which he speaks is grounded in love of God. The only priority as such is in the way the love is manifested in the daily life. The good person (and only those in whom love of God and the neighbor rules are "good") may be either a "celestial" type or a "spiritual" type. The celestial type is motivated more by his affecional side—love is more characteristically the deciding factor in his decisions. In contrast to this is the spiritual type who, while by no means being "coldly intellectual," is nevertheless guided in decisions more by his thoughts than by his feelings. Another way of describing these two basic personality types would be to say that the celestial type is the intuitive person, while the spiritual type is the rational person. It is only because people in general fall into one or the other of these basic personality types that there is any question of priority in the two good ruling loves.

Thus, it really narrows down to the sobering fact that for every individual there is only one acceptable ruling love, which, depending on whether his potential is basically that of a celestial or a spiritual type, will be either (1) love to God and the neighbor, or (2) love to the neighbor and God. The one love without the other is unthinkable in Swedenborg's ethics.18

18 Swedenborg frequently validates his conclusions by referring to the ideal example, the pertinent situation in heaven. Note how the following quotation illustrates his concept of the "celestial" and the "spiritual" types:

H. 213-215: "... governments in the heavens differ; they are of one sort in societies that constitute the Lord's celestial kingdom, and of another sort in the societies that constitute his spiritual kingdom; they differ also in accordance with the functions of the several societies. Nevertheless, no other government than the government of mutual love is possible in the heavens, and the government of mutual love is heavenly government.

"Government in the Lord's celestial kingdom is called righteousness be-
It has been noted before that Swedenborg is quite Augustinian in his liking to analyze and describe things in terms of trines. He is convinced that the trine is the basic characteristic of creation. Therefore, we find that in regard to man's ruling love he explicitly states that the loves of God and the neighbor are inseparable by denoting this combined love as "the love of heaven," thus reducing the number to three. He further takes the opportunity to bring in another key term by identifying this love of heaven as "the love of uses." This identification has a twofold practical value: it makes possible defining the love of God in existential, even pragmatic, terms; and it becomes the common bond in the orderly hierarchy of the three "universal" loves (love of heaven, love of the world, and love of self).

Let us try to make these two purposes clear: to love God means "to do uses from him and for his sake." What is implied in cause all in that kingdom are in the good of love to the Lord from the Lord, and whatever is from that good is called righteous. Government there belongs to the Lord alone. He leads them and teaches them in the affairs of life. The truths that are called truths of judgment are written on their hearts; every one knows them, perceives them, and sees them; and in consequence matters of judgment there never come into question, but only matters of righteousness, which belong to life. About these matters the less wise consult the more wise, and these consult the Lord and receive answers. Their heaven, that is, their inmost joy, is to live rightly from the Lord.

"In the Lord's spiritual kingdom the government is called judgment; because those in that kingdom are in spiritual good, which is the good of charity towards the neighbor, and that good in its essence is truth; and truth pertains to judgment, as good pertains to righteousness. These, too, are led by the Lord, but mediately (n. 208); and in consequence they have governors. . . . They also have laws according to which they live together."

19 See, e.g., Augustine, De Trinitate, X.

20 T. 394: The heading over this section reads: "There are three universal loves—the love of heaven, the love of the world, and the love of self." The section reads in part: "For the love of heaven means both love to the Lord and love towards the neighbor; and as each of these looks to use as its end, the love of heaven may be called the love of uses. . . ."

21 D. L. xiii (Vol. 6, E). The heading states the proposition: "So far as man is in the love of use, so far is he in the Lord, so far he loves the Lord and loves the neighbor, and so far he is a man." The first part of the section reads: "From the love of uses we are taught what is meant by loving the Lord and loving the neighbor, also what is meant by being in the Lord and being a man. To love the Lord means to do uses from Him and for His sake. To love the neighbor means to do uses to the church, to one's country, to human society, and to the fellow-citizen. To be in the Lord means to be a use. And to be a man means to perform uses to the neighbor from the Lord for the Lord's sake. . . ." (Emphasis mine.)
this terse definition? "To do uses from God" means to carry on
that type of activity which will foster the perfecting of the rational
plane of man's mind.\textsuperscript{22} This, then, is no spur-of-the-moment,
emotionally motivated act of "charity." This is action methodi-
cally decided upon on the basis of one's best judgment as to what
will strengthen one's character, make one more God-like as a
result.\textsuperscript{23} And the reason for doing it must be primarily to please
God rather than oneself. To please God, however, is to do that
which, again, contributes toward making the creature more like
his creator. There is obviously a degree of tautology here; but
it is a constructive tautology, necessary for man, in his greater
complexity, to relate himself in a significant way to God in His
infinite simplicity.

Ultimately, to do uses from God and for God involves activities
separable only for the sake of analysis. All that man is capable
of doing that is really worth doing is both from God and for God.
All that is good is from God and is God. To love good uses is
to do them. For what a person really loves he does. And this is
what it means to love God. Swedenborg concludes bluntly: "No
one can love the Lord in any other way." \textsuperscript{24} Thus the first pur-
pose of defining the love of the heavenly as the love of use is
made manifest.

\textsuperscript{22} W. 336: "All good things that take form in act are called uses; and
all evil things that take form in act are also called uses, but evil uses,
while the former are called good uses. Now, since all good things are
from the Lord and all evil things from hell, it follows that none but good
uses were created by the Lord, and that evil uses arose out of hell. By
the uses specially treated of in this chapter are meant all those things which
are seen upon the earth, as animals of every kind and plants of every kind.
Such things of both kingdoms as are useful to man are from the Lord,
but those which are harmful to man are from hell. By uses from the
Lord are likewise meant all things that perfect the rational of man, and
cause him to receive the spiritual from the Lord (\textit{recipiat spirituale a
Domino}); but by evil uses are meant all things that destroy the rational,
and make man unable to become spiritual. . . ."

\textsuperscript{23} W. 332: "Uses for perfecting the rational are all things that give
instruction . . . and are called sciences and branches of study, pertaining
to natural, economical, civil and moral affairs, which are learned either
from parents and teachers, or from books, or from intercourse with others,
or by reflection on these subjects by oneself. These things perfect the
rational so far as they are uses in a higher degree, and they are permanent
as far as they are applied to life."

\textsuperscript{24} D.L. xiii, \textit{op. cit.}
The second practical value of this identification is to form a link or common bond between the three “universal” loves in man. Perhaps, however, we should first say a little more about these universal (or fundamental) loves. As has already been noted, love of heaven or the love of uses is equivalent to love of God and the neighbor. This level of loving is the highest potential level of life and spiritual growth possible to man.

Next on the scale of loves (i.e., when these loves are properly arranged) is love of the world (amor mundi). This love includes not only love of wealth and of worldly possessions, but of all things of the world which are pleasurable to the physical senses: beauty that delights the eye, harmonies to please the ear, fragrant odors, delicious food and drink, things pleasant to the touch; also the pleasure that is derived from fine clothing, stately homes, social gatherings, etc.

Last (and also least) in the scale of loves is the love of self (amor sui). This, Swedenborg defines as not merely the satisfaction one gets from receiving honors, glory, fame or eminence, but also the pleasure arising from a position of authority.

Charity (charitas), in the sense of love of use, can link these three loves together in orderly fashion. Man’s love of heaven concerns itself with spiritual uses, his love of the world with natural uses, and his love of self with corporeal or domestic uses. These three loves, according to Swedenborg, are innate and when properly subordinated (as above) become man’s means of personal sanctification or regeneration. If, on the other hand, man wilfully subordinates his love of the heavenly either to love of the world or love of self, these same loves, now out of order, will pervert him. Never one to overlook a striking analogy, Swedenborg here draws on his favorite reservoir of symbolism—human anatomy:

These three loves are rightly subordinated when the love of heaven forms the head, the love of the world the breast and abdomen, and the love of self the feet and the soles.

Implicit in this illustration is the fact of how bizarre—really impossible—any transposition of loves would be. A man, for

25 T. 395: “These three loves reside in every man from creation and therefore from birth.”
26 Ibid.
example, with his head in the *middle*, or under the soles of the feet, would, of course, be no man at all. And this is precisely the impression our author intends to convey. Repeatedly he tries to impress on the reader the incongruity of any life not governed and guided by love of the heavenly at the top, love of the world next, and love of self at the bottom.

Another way he illustrates this triune capacity of man is to say that from his highest "love-capability" man looks to God, from the second level he looks to the things of the world, and from the lowest he looks to himself.\(^{27}\)

Further, he makes a valiant effort to document his thesis that love is the substance and truth the form of the human mind or soul. Bearing in mind that his language was that of the physiologist of the eighteenth century, let us follow his argument; his thesis is:

The affections of the love and consequent thoughts of man are changes and variations of the state and form of the organic substances of his mind.\(^{28}\)

To get some idea of what these changes and variations are, reference is made to the analogous physical functions of the heart and lungs. In both the heart and lungs there are alternate expansions and contractions: in the heart systole and diastole, in the lungs respirations. Other viscera of the body undergo similar changes. The organic forms of the mind, that is, the subjects of man's affections and thoughts, also undergo changes, which, for want of more adequate language, may be called expansions, compressions, reciprocations.

With a certain air of resignation, our author resorts to analogy to try to convey some understandable concept of the changes and variations of these spiritual substances and forms. Let us appreciate the verbal problem he faced as we read his picturesque words:

\(^{27}\) *Ibid.* Cf. T. 405\(^5\): "Since in the perfect man the love of heaven holds the highest place, and forms, as it were, the head of all that follows from it, the love of the world being beneath it like the chest beneath the head, and the love of self beneath this like the feet, it follows that if love of self were to form the head, the man would be completely inverted. He would then appear to the angels like one lying bent over, with his head to the ground and his back toward heaven; and when worshipping he would appear to be frolicking on his hands and feet like a panther's cub. . . ."

\(^{28}\) P. 319.
These can be defined in no other way than that they are vortex-like circlings inward and outward, after the manner of perpetual and incurving spirals wonderfully bundled together into forms receptive of life.29

It seems to me that if a modern physicist can persuade you and me that an apparently solid table is really composed of atoms with small nuclei around which move at high speed countless electrons—and that consequently the “solid” table is anything but solid, then I for one feel no need peremptorily to dismiss Swedenborg’s admittedly symbolic description of the changes and variations that unquestionably take place in human minds. One can read his description as a parable and find it just as meaningful. He continues his analogy by contrasting the vortices of the good man with those of the evil man. The good man’s are turned “forward,” or upward toward God and are open to receive “influx” 30 from Him. Those of an evil man are turned with the open face downward toward earth and hell. Poetic fancy? Perhaps. But when one reminds himself of the earlier noted theory of man as a “receptacle,” capable of receiving and embodying divine love and wisdom, the “vortex theory,” if I may call it that, does not seem inconsistent with the other thoughts that go to make up Swedenborg’s ethical theory.

THE PROCESS OF REGENERATION

In the previous chapter we have noted that the word Swedenborg uses consistently to describe the process of spiritual self-

29 Ibid.

30 A. 6128: “As mention is so frequently made of influx, and perhaps few know what is meant by influx, it is necessary to state what it is. The nature of influx may be seen from a comparison with such things as inflow in nature, as from the influx of heat from the sun into all things of the earth, whence comes vegetative life; and from the influx of light into the same, whence comes what is helpful to vegetative life, and besides is the source of the consequent colors and beauties; in like manner from the influx of heat into the surface of our bodies, and also of light into the eye; in like manner from the influx of sound into the ear; and so on. From this it may be comprehended what is the influx of life from the Lord, who is the Sun of heaven, from whom comes the heat which is love, and the spiritual light which is faith. Moreover the influx itself is plainly felt; for heavenly heat, which is love, causes the vital heat which is in man; and heavenly light, which is faith, causes the intellectual light which is in man; but these are varied according to the reception.”
fulfillment—the goal of one’s ethics—is regeneration. Since, then, the goal of the ethics of Swedenborg is to enable man to achieve personal regeneration, it seems incumbent that thought be given to his concept of the process of regeneration. There can be no doubt as to the degree of importance Swedenborg attached to this teaching, for he discussed it frequently throughout his later writings, from many differing vantage points and in a variety of contexts. The reader of Swedenborg should be forewarned that particular statements regarding the process of regeneration should be viewed not only in the context of the passage before him but with the realization that qualifying or clarifying statements on the subject may likely be found elsewhere. Therefore, an attempt will be made here to draw together in summary the several related approaches which Swedenborg makes to the subject. While no thought of being exhaustive is entertained, it is hoped that the summaries presented will prove typical, and that a valid relationship of the discussions to one another will become clear.

I propose to discuss the subject on three basic levels, related in ascending order, based on the following three concise Swedenborgian definitions:

1. Regeneration is the disposing of all things in man into order.\(^{31}\)
2. Regeneration is a plane for perfecting man’s life forever.\(^{32}\)
3. Regeneration is conjunction with God.\(^{33}\)

1. The first of these definitions closely parallels in its goal that of a stated aim of clinical psychology, the integration of personality.\(^{34}\) It is a useful and uncluttered definition for it avoids all the confusing overtones that surround the words “good” and “evil.” Individual concepts of what is good and what is evil may often prove most difficult to reconcile. But agreement is reached much more readily on the differentiation between order and dis-

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\(^{31}\) Cf. A. 3017.

\(^{32}\) Cf. A. 9334.

\(^{33}\) Cf. P. 92: “Conjunction with the Lord and regeneration are one, for so far as any one is conjoined with the Lord he is regenerated.”

order. It seems fair to say that everyone would admit that a greater or lesser degree of disorder is characteristic of every human being's life. Most of us also agree that a desirable goal of life would be to replace our areas of disorder with order.

It does not seem in any way to be a distortion to say that in some cases at least, that which is good is that which is orderly; conversely, that which is evil is that which is disorderly. One would probably err if he were to try to establish these as unqualifiedly valid definitions. For example, one might conceive of a perfectly ordered but utterly diabolical series of actions or goals. The master criminal, so called, earns his dubious distinction for his ability to order his actions with great cleverness. Therefore, if we can "build in" with our use of the word "order" a concept of morality, we then would seem to have a direct and practical definition of regeneration as the disposing of all things in man into order.\footnote{That Swedenborg does "build in" such a concept is clear from, e.g., T. 65 which reads in part: "Man was created a form of Divine order. . . . There are two things which are the source of order and which give it permanence, namely, Divine love and Divine wisdom; and man was created a recepitable of these, and was therefore created also into the order in accordance with which these two act in the universe. . . ."}

2. The second stated definition, that "regeneration is a plane for perfecting man's life forever," does not differ markedly from the first. Putting one's life in order means much the same as perfecting one's life or, if you will, of integrating one's personality. The difference lies in an implicit religious outlook to this latter definition because of the addition of the word "forever." This word brings to mind the Christian hope of eternal life, the concept of life beyond the grave, of the survival of personality, etc. Without the word "forever," the phrase might have been found in a psychologist's notebook. With it, the reference has a clearly religious orientation.

3. The third definition cited, that "regeneration is conjunction with God," should lead more readily than the other two into a consideration of what Swedenborg, when speaking precisely, conceives regeneration to be. To bring one's life into harmony with God is a widely accepted axiom of the goal of a religious person's life. However, it is one of those things that seems much easier to talk about or give lip service to than to apply effectively to one's ongoing life.
What is involved in coming into closer relationship with God, in putting one's life in order, in becoming regenerate? What kinds of changes are called for in personality structure, in outlook, and in outward actions? It is doubtful that it would be possible to compile an exhaustive list of the changes that might be called for—or, if such a list could be compiled that it would be especially useful. Eventually, each person must find his own individual areas of disorder and work more or less systematically at correcting or changing them. But there are certain typical indications as to where one may stand; there is a kind of yardstick by which to measure oneself in general. This was indicated briefly in the previous chapter in the general introduction of the term "regeneration."

One might be inclined at first to complain that a group of generalizations would hardly seem to be any more useful than a group of specific recommendations. Early in his first major theological work, Swedenborg compiled a kind of comparative table of the contrasting characteristics of the person who is regenerating and the one who is not. At first reading it seems to paint the picture with such broad, sweeping brush strokes that there seems little of practical help in it. However, on further consideration, one is impressed that perhaps a recognizable pattern of motive and behavior emerges after all.

Here, rather than quoting verbatim the somewhat confusing alternating listing of positive and negative attributes, I shall group the positive qualities first, and then the negative ones. It is hoped that in this way the reader will be helped to get a clear perspective of the major differences more readily.

First, then, what distinguishes the regenerating person? He has a conscience of what is good and true, and from conscience he does good and thinks truth. He experiences joy when he acts according to conscience. He has a new (i.e., spiritual) will and a new understanding. Inner dictates take precedence over the promptings toward temporal satisfactions, holding the latter in reasonable restraint. This is possible because the regenerating person is conscious of his higher self and its more worthy motivations. He is, in Swedenborg's terse term, a living person.

\[\text{\textit{Cf. N. 130-139 for a concise statement of Swedenborg's basic views on "conscience."}}\]
The unregenerate not only lacks all the above qualities; he, in fact, exhibits quite contrary ones. He really has no conscience. What may appear outwardly to be the result of conscientious prompting is instead born of a love which regards only self and the world. Swedenborg dubs this "false conscience." The devil’s imprint (one could hardly call it a hallmark) of this false conscience is that it occasions anxiety rather than the joy of true conscience. Sense appetites control the unregenerate’s sense of proportion; he is prone to a great variety of evils, lacks true understanding, and indulges frequently in rationalizations. His life is governed by his lower self, and he is scarcely conscious that he has any higher potentialities. In short, spiritually he is dead.

If these two word pictures vaguely disturb you, if phrases like "angel vs. devil" pop into your head, you are probably on the right track. The fact is that because this is a generalization, it is dominated by stark whites and jet blacks; whereas real life in the world in which we live is composed of infinite shades of gray. Rare, if not completely unknown in this world, is the pure white, fully regenerate person—his proper home is heaven. Equally rare is the utterly black, i.e., completely depraved person—his proper home is hell. But very much with us are the light grays and the dark grays—and all shades in between. Probably it would be accurate to suggest that we all start out at the midpoint—as a sort of neutral gray—and then by our choices and decisions, move toward the light, or away from it.

How, then, does one move upward on the scale? First he must become convinced that it is worth the considerable effort involved. Swedenborg would say that this motivation can only come through knowledge. Here, on the practical plane of life, truth assumes a much more dominant role. It is at the level of outer everyday living that truth must give form to good. Therefore, truth seems to supersede good at this level, but it is only because its role on this plane is dominant. There is no apparent Platonic naïveté on Swedenborg’s part that everyone who knows the truth will unquestionably follow it. But there is the profoundly practical attitude that regeneration will never take place unless one is armed with the necessary truth.

Another thing one must be realistic about is the time factor in the process of regeneration. For all practical purposes, in the
Swedenborgian perspective, once begun in a life, the process of regeneration continues for the rest of one's earthly life. There is no recognized happy terminal point when one may feel with complete confidence that he is "saved." It seems that one lives a considerable part of his adult life in a state called "mediate good," in which the person's will is composed of a blend of natural and spiritual desires—affections for things of the world and affections for heavenly things abide side by side, often with no clearcut priorities. It is strongly suggested that perhaps the best one can do in this world is tip the scale slightly in favor of things of heaven during the course of a lifetime here.

It would probably be tiresome and unfruitful to try to summarize here the several ways in which Swedenborg outlines the process of regeneration. Let me, then, just mention (and give references to) some of the more important ones: He speaks of two states, three steps, four stages, and even of a "circle" of regeneration. His most fully elaborated treatment, however, breaks the process down into seven parts, patterned after the seven days of creation in Genesis. His premise—a most daring

\footnote{Cf. A. 4145: "Every man who is being regenerated is first in \textit{mediate good}, in order that it may serve for introducing genuine goods and truths; but after it has served this use, this good is separated, and the man is brought to good which flows in more directly. Thus the man who is being regenerated is perfected by degrees. For example: he who is being regenerated believes at first that the good which he thinks and does is from himself, and that he also merits something; for he does not yet know, and if he knows he does not comprehend, that good can flow in from some other source, nor that it can be otherwise than that he should be recompensed, because he does it from himself. Unless at first he believed this, he would never do any good. But by this means he is initiated not only into the affection of doing what is good, but also into knowledges concerning good and also concerning merit; and when in this manner he has been led into the affection of doing what is good, he then begins to think differently, namely, that good flows in from the Lord, and that by the good which he does from his own he merits nothing; and at last when he is in the affection of willing and doing what is good, he altogether rejects self-merit, and even has an aversion for it, and is affected with good from good. When he is in this state, good flows in directly."}

\footnote{Cf. A. 4063. Cf. R. 948: "... they who are interiorly good may sometimes be exteriorly evil, for they may exteriorly do evils, and speak falsities, but yet they may repent and desire to be informed of truths... ."}

\footnote{A. 9227; Cf. A. 9274, T. 571.}

\footnote{A. 896; Cf. A. 9286.}

\footnote{A. 4377.}

\footnote{A. 10057.}
one when he first published it in 1749—is that the Biblical creation account was never intended to be anything other than an allegory or parable, relating, not to the creation of the physical universe at all but symbolically to the creation and development of every human being into an image and likeness of God.

Although his exegesis of the Genesis creation myth occupies about fifty pages of his Arcana Coelestia, it can readily be summarized very briefly. It is, in our author's view, a parable of re-creation or regeneration, the six days or periods of creation being interpreted as so many successive states of the regeneration of everyone who freely chooses to follow that path.

The first period is a preparatory one, marked by the coming of "light," or the dawning of spiritual consciousness. The second is that period in which one first distinguishes between the things of God—spiritual things—and the things of man. The keynote word of this period is discrimination. The third period is in many ways the most vital, for it marks the beginning of the active process of regeneration. It involves man's response to his newly found awareness of the spiritual side of life, his yielding of many dearly held ideas and feelings that are essentially earthbound, his initiation into the lifelong reaching out to God known in religious parlance as repentance.

Truly amazing changes begin to take place in the fourth period. One's life motivation is radically altered by the inner consciousness of love shared with God; truths of faith become clearer and brighter than one had ever imagined possible. The motif is illumination. Things begin to fall into proper sequence in the fifth period. The astonishing order of God's creation spreads out before one in panoramic view. With joy and gladness the believer confirms in himself the good and the truth which he has come to know and to love. The true goal of life is perhaps for the first time clear and apparently attainable. The one word which sums it up is aspiration.

Up to this point, although insight has grown, understanding has increased, affections have been purified, there has always been present concurrently a greater or lesser degree of struggle. Self-compulsion has been an ever-present necessity. The sixth day marks the beginning of what is to be an emancipation. From the faith one has now acquired, grounded firmly in love for the truth

48 A. 1-167.
of that faith, the regenerating person begins freely to speak what is true and do what is good. He no longer does so out of fear, or obedience, or a sense of loyalty or faithfulness, but simply because at last he has learned to love this way of life. At the end of this period he is a completed person.

The seventh day is the sabbath of rest—the state of complete fulfillment, of rest in the Lord. At-one-ment has been suggested as the characteristic of the fully regenerate state.\(^{44}\)

Despite all that has been said up to now about the process of regeneration, perhaps the most difficult thing to explain in practical terms is how one goes about the job, what the "tools" of regeneration are, and how one acquires skill in using them.

The "tools" or "means" Swedenborg says are needed in the process may not seem on first consideration to be tools. For example, in his last great summary work he says that regeneration is effected by means of "the Lord, faith, and charity."\(^{45}\) These hardly sound like "tools." Are we intended to use God for our own purposes? Are not faith and charity products of the process rather than tools or means?

This apparent dilemma illustrates what can happen when one quotes statements out of context. By following through the argument, one realizes that what the author really intends to designate the "tools" of regeneration are what he calls the "truths of faith."\(^{46}\) It is truth which enables one to know about God and how to relate to him. It is truth which enables one to develop faith. It is truth which points to the fulfillment which is possible only as one learns to love God and the neighbor (which in turn are what Swedenborg means by "charity").

What follows is a reconstruction and expansion of a passage which outlines how truths of faith are used as tools in the process of regeneration.\(^{47}\)


\(^{45}\) T.618: "There are three means whereby man is regenerated, the Lord, faith, and charity. . . ."

\(^{46}\) A. 5280\(^{a}\): " . . . in order that man may be regenerated he must first be reformed, and this is done by means of the truths of faith; for he has to learn from the Word and from doctrine therefrom what good is. The knowledges of good from the Word, or from doctrine therefrom, are called the truths of faith because all the truths of faith spring from good, and flow to good, for they look to good as the end."

\(^{47}\) Cf. D. 5643.
Every human life is grounded in a wide variety of loves, affections, desires, yearnings, etc. Some are more significant than others, some are potentially heavenly in character. When truths of faith are received into the memory, the intellect sees whenever a given truth is in agreement with or tends to confirm a good desire in the will. Then, if the person is regenerating, he contemplates the potential good—loves it, thinks it, and, when opportunity is afforded, speaks and acts according to it. This is how good is conjoined with truth. Then the truth which had been only in the outer or natural memory becomes implanted in the inner or spiritual memory as a truth of faith which has been experienced.

The way in which this can be done will be different with every person, and will depend on his state, whether he is simple or learned, what his particular employment or profession is, how deep his interest in the Bible reaches, to what extent he has "plunged into the vanities of the world," or to what degree he may already have withdrawn from such indulgences—even whether or not he is of the Christian faith. Everyone, however, can be saved, and it is not God's fault if anyone is not saved; the fault lies in the failure of the person to cooperate with God.

All this might sound fine and logical—and also give the impression that once the process of regeneration starts, all will progress smoothly and confidently to the goal. But common experience tells us that this is not the case, at least as we know it. Swedenborg was evidently aware of this also, for early in his first theological work he wrote that it is usually the case that before

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48 Cf. T. 580: "Every man may be regenerated, each according to his state; for the simple and the learned are regenerated differently; as are those engaged in different pursuits, and those who fill different offices; those who search into the external things of the Word, and those who search into its internals; those who are principled in natural good from their parents, and those who are in evil; those who from their infancy have entered into the vanities of the world, and those who sooner or later have withdrawn from them; in a word, those who constitute the Lord's external church are regenerated differently from those who constitute his internal church, and this variety, like that of men's features and dispositions, is infinite; and yet every one, according to his state, may be regenerated and saved."

49 Ibid. Cf. H., Chapter LV (n. 528ff), "It Is Not So Difficult to Live the Life that Leads to Heaven as Is Believed."

50 Ibid.
anything is reduced to a state of order, the immediately preceding state is likely to be one of chaos—a confused mass, as it were. This very confusion is an aid in distinguishing those mental elements that do not readily cohere. At this stage, it seems, divine providence helps effect the necessary separating and ordering.  

I find this whole idea rather heartening. It suggests that much of the confusion one experiences, many of the frustrating periods in which one seems to be nothing but a mass of cross purposes, may be a normal part of the separating of disparate elements in one's mind, preliminary to the desirable process of sifting and selecting and reducing to order. *Nil desperandum!*  

**THE NEIGHBOR:**  
**IN A NARROW AND IN A WIDE SENSE**

Up to this point we have concentrated attention on those ethical concepts that particularly apply to the individual and his personal regeneration. Mention has been made of the need of love to the neighbor. But even this seemingly unsophisticated concept is carefully examined and redefined by Swedenborg. Discrimination, in a good sense, is called for. Loving the neighbor, like any other worthwhile activity in life, is not something that one can do instinctively. Just as one's conscience has to be educated and developed, so one's ability to love the neighbor is a learned response. It is first necessary (perhaps surprisingly) to learn *who* and *what* the neighbor is. Like the "expert in the Law" who indulgently asked Jesus, "Who is my 'neighbor'?" we, too, may be surprised at the answer offered.

The analyses of "neighbor" in Swedenborg are frequent and often lengthy. There are two key points we need to have before us: the neighbor is not just an individual fellow man; the neighbor is also the collective or composite "men" that make up society: our community, our country, the whole human race, and—highest of all—God. The second point is that in the case of each of

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51 Cf. A. 842.  
52 Horace, *Odes*, I, vii, line 27, "There's no cause for despair!"  
53 Cf. N. 130–139, *op. cit.*  
54 Luke 10: 25 (Phillips trans.).  
55 Some of the more important treatments are: A. 2425, 6023, 6703–6712, 6818–6824, 6933–6938, 7080–7086, 10036; F. 20; N. 84–107; T. 406–419.  
56 Swedenborg varies his listings of the "scale of the neighbor" somewhat in the several treatments. Sometimes he starts with the individual and goes up the scale to God; other times he reverses the listing. In at least one
these “neighbors,” it is not the individual per se, or the state or group of nations per se that we are expected to love; it is the good that is in the neighbor, whether the term “neighbor” is used in a narrow or in a wide sense.

Thus, one of the redefinitions of neighbor is: “Good is the neighbor, because good belongs to the will, and the will is the being (esse) of man’s life.” It is then noted that truth is also the neighbor, but only to the extent that it is in harmony with the good of the will. This is not too startling an idea, our author suggests. If one will but stop and think, generally it is the quality of goodness in a person that leads us to love him. This kind of thoughtful love is the only kind that can properly be called “love of the neighbor.” Admittedly, people appear to “love” others for many lesser reasons—lust, ambition, desire for some favor in return, etc.—but this not only is not love to the neighbor, it is not, strictly speaking, love.

When this same principle is applied to the “larger neighbor,” the doctrine of use is invoked as a criterion of one’s degree of obligation to the particular neighbor. Any given composite neighbor is neighbor in direct proportion to the service which it renders. If its level of service is high and distinguished, then it is eminently the neighbor; if its services are restricted and lowly, it is less the neighbor. If its services are not good at all, but evil, then it is “neighbor” only in the sense that an evil individual is my “neighbor”: viz., that I wish him to replace his evil with good, and, so far as it is within my reasonable ability to do so, I shall work actively to bring this change about. This may, at times, lead to my bringing legal suit against a fellow man who is abridging others’ rights. In the case of the larger neighbor, it may cast one in the role of a member of the “loyal opposition.” Various ways are suggested for one to assess the degree of good of these larger neighbors of ours. In the case of our country, for example, it is first suggested that one think of it as a single entity. Then we should attempt to assess it as to its spiritual, moral and civil good. Thought of as a “body,” the form of its “face” is contingent on its degree of affection for spiritual good, the form of its “body.”

passage he omits any reference to God or the church or the kingdom of God; in others, these become the top three in the scale of neighbors.

57 T. 418. (Emphasis mine.)

58 Ibid.
in particular, then, depends on the state of its civil good, and its manners, speech, etc., reflect its rational or moral good.  

This moral assessment of one's country, however, in no way abrogates the basic "parent-child" relationship between an individual and his native land. Swedenborg feels very strongly that one should both love and serve his country, and he endorses as morally good the laying down of one's life in defense of his country. The reader is reminded that this sentiment is expressed by one who has unquestioned faith in personal survival after death. He states, for instance:

It should be known that those who love their country and render good service to it from good will, after death love the Lord's kingdom, for then that is their country.

In summing up, one may say with equanimity that the only really ethical or moral life, in Swedenborg's estimation, is the spiritual life, the life that leads to heaven. It is characterized by obedience to Law (at all levels: civil, moral, spiritual), disciplined unselfishness, founded on faith in God. Such a person becomes a vehicle (vasa) for and embodiment (corporatura) of divine love and wisdom. This love, guided by this wisdom, seeks to perform uses to the neighbor (at all levels) in every activity of life. Thus such an individual finds his personal fulfillment, his greatest happiness—a happiness which will remain eternally his; in short, he achieves the desired state of regeneration.

69 Charity (Coulson tr.), op. cit., n. 83-84. A similar analogy is used in regard to the levels of laws of the land, as follows in T. 55: "Who does not see that there cannot be found an empire, kingdom, dukedom, republic, state, or household, that is not established by laws which constitute its order and thus the form of its government? In each one of them the laws of justice are in the highest place, political laws in the second, and economic laws in the third; or in comparison with a man, the laws of justice constitute the head, political laws the body, and economic laws the garments; and thus these last, like garments, may be changed."

60 T. 414: "... That one's country should be loved, not as one loves himself, but more than himself, is a law inscribed on the human heart; from which has come the well-known principle, which every true man endorses, that if the country is threatened with ruin from an enemy or any other source, it is noble to die for it, and glorious for a soldier to shed his blood for it. This is said because so great should be one's love for it."

61 Ibid.

SWEDENBORG ON MORAL LAW

It would not be possible ultimately to evaluate Swedenborg’s ethics unless one clearly understood what he believed moral law to be. We have spoken above of the significance in this ethics of *wisdom, truth,* and such specialized terms as *truths of faith, the good of truth,* etc. But it has not been fully established what fundamental ethical truth or moral law comprises.

We have seen that Swedenborg’s ethics, pointing to individual regeneration, demands love to God and the neighbor (or love of the heavenly, or love of use) as the ruling love. Therefore, it would seem consistent if, in his judgment, that moral law or truth which would foster such a love would be the law he would advocate. This is precisely what he does. However, in doing so he immediately makes himself vulnerable to charges of being simplistic. As you may already have surmised, Swedenborg’s thesis is this: “The Ten Commandments of the decalogue contain everything relating to love to God, and everything relating to love to the neighbor.” 63 That he defends this thesis cogently, we shall try to establish here in brief compass. To do this is somewhat of a challenge. There are four major treatments of the decalogue in Swedenborg’s works, adding up to well over two hundred pages of text, 64 not to mention the hundreds of incidental references.

There is, of course, abundant evidence that the set of laws recorded in the Old Testament known as the ten commandments or decalogue 65 were not something new at the time they were given. Killing, stealing, etc., had long been recognized as evils in the civil and moral codes of all nations. Attention has been called to the striking parallels to parts of the code of Hammurabi, for example. Swedenborg insists that the significant difference between the decalogue and all other legal and moral codes is in the Bibl-

63 T. 329.
64 Cf. A. 8859–8912, Life 1–114, T. 283–331, E. 950–1028. (In the last instance, the text on the decalogue is interspersed between paragraphs explicating the Apocalypse. The material on the decalogue has been extracted and separately printed under the title, The Spiritual Life and The Word of God (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1955.) scattered throughout the complete text.
65 Exodus 20: 1–17.
cal preface: "God spoke all these words." 66 The ethical implication of this is that to act contrary to the decalogue is not just to violate man-made laws, it is to disobey the divine command. To disobey God is to sin. And sin stands in the way of regeneration. There is only one acceptable motivation for complying with this moral law: that it is in accordance with the will of God; conversely, that to disobey it is a sin against God. Swedenborg states his doctrine clearly and distinctly: "If any one shuns evils for any other reason than because they are sins, he does not shun them but merely prevents them from appearing before the world." 67

To shun evils because of fear of the law, for instance, is merely to live an outwardly good life. The desire to do wrong may remain deep within, kept in check by that fear. On the other hand, to shun evils as sins is to recognize not only the wrongness of the deed itself but also of the motive which lies in back of the deed. Further, there is, according to Swedenborg, a very practical aspect to this awareness of sin. Evils that are consciously shunned as contrary to the divine will are in time, with divine help, driven completely from the life; the very desire to indulge in the particular evil subsides completely.

But, one might argue, is not this simple, ancient code hopelessly outdated, utterly inadequate for modern complex society? On the surface: yes. But, is it possible that there is a depth to these apparently dated, elementary laws that has not been fully appreciated? Even on the surface, it does not require great mental elasticity to see beyond the "Thou shalt nots" to the positive responses they are intended to elicit. "Nature abhors a vacuum" 68 mentally as well as physically, and evil is forbidden only in order to make goodness possible. Seen in this way, the first table of the decalogue fosters love to God, the second table love to the neighbor. 69

In one of his more concise treatments of the decalogue 70 some

66 Life 53: "... they were promulgated with so great a miracle in order that men may know that these laws are not only civic and moral laws, but are also spiritual laws; and that to act contrary to them is not only to do evil to a fellow-citizen and to the community, but is also to sin against God."

67 Ibid., n. 108.
69 T. 287.
70 Life, n. 21, 27, 32, 42.
of Swedenborg's key points are these: The general law is that in proportion as any one shuns evils, in the same proportion he does goods. If a person is apparently wise about many things, but does not shun evils as sins, he is not wise. In the proportion that one shuns evils as sins, in the same proportion he loves truths, and in the same proportion he has faith and is spiritual. From these premises he concludes:

No man has in him a grain of truth more than he has of good; thus he has not a grain of faith more than he has of life. In the understanding indeed there may exist the thought that such or such a thing is true, but not the acknowledgment which is faith, unless there is consent thereto in the will. Thus do faith and life keep step as they walk. From all this it is now evident that in proportion as any one shuns evils as sins, in the same proportion he has faith and is spiritual.71

Our author is sternly opposed to the attitude toward the decalogue expressed by some Protestants, what he described as a prevailing religious tenet "to the effect that no one is able to fulfill the law." 72 This kind of thinking he ascribes only to the cause that the love of evil has warped such people's judgment. It is not a question of whether or not one is capable of obeying the decalogue (for this, obviously, everyone can do); it is solely a question of one's motivation in obeying. Kant echoes this same stringency in arguing that duty is the only acceptable moral motive. As duty is to Kant, shunning evils as sins against God is to Swedenborg.

To attempt to summarize the Swedish seer's multi-level analysis of each law of the decalogue would extend this study beyond reasonable limits. Therefore, the reader's indulgence is begged for the brief sampling of this exegesis which follows. Each of the "negative" laws (those forbidding killing, adultery, stealing, perjury, and covetousness) is introduced by the formula, "In proportion as any one shuns . . ." followed by a contrasting virtue. Sometimes the choice of a contrasting virtue is at first surprising. This is true in the case of the treatise on stealing. The non-thief is described as loving sincerity (rather than the expected honesty). The author's reasoning is as follows:

The evil of theft enters more deeply into a man than any other evil, because it is conjoined with cunning and deceit; and cunning and deceit in-

71 Ibid., n. 52.
72 Ibid., n. 63.
sinuate themselves even into the spiritual mind of man in which is his thought with understanding. . . . That in proportion as any one shuns theft as a sin, in the same proportion he loves sincerity, is because theft is also fraud, and fraud and sincerity are two opposite things. . . . Sincerity is to be understood as including integrity, justice, fidelity, and rectitude.  

Following this statement, some Scriptures citing the desirability of sincerity are introduced. Then there follows a discussion of the “natural mind” and the “spiritual mind” of man, in order to explain how deceit can work its way up into the spiritual level.  

In other treatments of this commandment, levels of application are noted. The natural level or natural sense would include all obvious, literal cases of theft and fraud. At the spiritual level, to steal means also to “deprive others of the truths of their faith.” The particular example given is of the dishonest or insincere priest who willfully deprives people of the truths of faith which are needed for salvation. The deepest level of theft, designated as the celestial sense, involves claiming to oneself divine power. One way of doing this is to trust only in oneself, even while professing belief in God.  

Perhaps we can best draw this chapter to a close by allowing Swedenborg to speak for himself; i.e., by citing his concise summary concerning the decalogue, as it appears in his great final summary work:

So far as one refrains from worshipping other gods, so far he worships the one true God.
So far as one refrains from taking the name of God in vain, so far he loves what is from God.
So far as one refrains from the wish to commit murder, or to act from hatred and revenge, so far he wishes well to his neighbor.
So far as one refrains from a wish to commit adultery, so far he wishes to live chastely with a wife.
So far as one refrains from a wish to steal, so far he pursues sincerity.
So far as one refrains from a wish to bear false witness, so far he wishes to think and say what is true.
So far as one refrains from coveting what belongs to the neighbor, so far he wishes the neighbor to enjoy his own.

From all this it is evident that the commandments of the decalogue contain all things of love to God and love towards the neighbor.  

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18 Ibid., n. 81–83.
19 T. 318.
20 T. 330.
CHAPTER V

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SWEDENBORG'S ETHICS

Some years ago Walter Marshall Horton offered his estimate of the significance of Swedenborg for contemporary theology.¹ One point he made seems especially relevant to this study. After stating his opinion that today, following a "century of extreme immanantism," there seems to be a danger of reverting to something close to Deism, he then suggested as a possible partial antidote to that trend that steps be taken to restate Swedenborg's philosophy in terms of the best available modern knowledge. It was his opinion that, at least, such a course of action would do as much to convince the public of the continued significance of Swedenborg's thought as the Catholic Neo-Scholastics have done to convince it of the continued significance of St. Thomas Aquinas.²

He may simply have been being kind. He was addressing a group of Swedenborgians. But I should like to think that his observation had validity. Mention has already been made of the "crisis in ethics" which challenges this generation of moral teachers. This crisis would seem to be brought on in large measure by the desire, especially on the part of young people, for "self-fulfillment." Not only situation ethics, but any number of other new or exotic philosophies are in vogue today as potential sources of the answers sought.

Concurrently, so-called orthodox religious ethical norms are being thrust aside as "out-of-touch," or "irrelevant." Hopefully, such judgments simply reflect a current trend, subject to revision at some future time. Swedenborg the theologian may well be rejected by this generation along with the rest of the theologians. But perhaps he can get an audience as Swedenborg the philosopher.

Young people, in large measure, are well impressed with good, logical thinking. This is an obvious characteristic of Swedenborg, if one will take the time to read him. It is abundantly clear to the thoughtful reader that as far as his way of presenting ideas was concerned, the great Swede was a hard-headed scientist and a rigorous thinker throughout his adult years. That Kant thought

² Ibid., p. 19.
of him as a "dreamer," and that Emerson thought of him as a "mystic," is mute evidence that neither commentator was sufficiently well read in this man's works.

Probably more should be done in the way of modern interpretation and presentation of his ideas. I envision this study as just one modest effort to popularize Swedenborg's thought—in the constructive sense of extracting and rephrasing in modern terminology what he has to say on a variety of philosophic subjects.

To my mind, his ethical theory is sane and sensible. Even one who is not theistically oriented can easily follow the logic of the personal advantages of embodying love and wisdom of the highest order into the fiber of one's being—whether or not one is ready to conceive that this level of love and wisdom is divine, is the substance and form of God, as Swedenborg conceived it. The basic premise—that this offers a means of self-fulfillment—is just as cogent a philosophic hypothesis as it is a religious dogma.

That one is able to become a living embodiment of good and truth is, so far as I know, an original Swedenborgian idea. If one can really grasp what this man means when he says that "every man is his own love, and consequently his own good and his own truth," a whole new vista of psychology spreads out before the mind's eye. It doesn't just mean that you know certain facts and love certain things: you are what you think and what you love. A recent writer advertised in the newspaper a book titled, as I recall, You Are What You Eat. Presumably this concept proved useful to people with certain health problems. It would not be extravagant to say that a much greater service to humanity could be performed if the Swedenborgian concept that you are what you love and believe became a widely known and understood term.

It was Jesus who said, "Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach . . . ?" He then went on to say that what

3 S. 100.
4 Jesus's reference here was clearly on two levels: "that which goes into a man" being the physical substances that enter the body (he was answering the complaint that his followers did not wash their hands before eating), whereas his description of what "came out of a man" is obviously linked to words which reflect one's mental state. It is therefore no contradiction of Jesus to say (as I do on page 291) that "what goes into a man on the mental level can indeed defile a man." Cf. Mark 7: 18–23 (where the question of ceremonial washing is implied) and also Matthew 15: 1–11 (a parallel passage where the unwashed hands are expressly mentioned).
came out, in the form of verbalized evils, reflected the true state of the person. One need not be a Christian to see the unimpeach-able logic here. Swedenborg builds on this idea and illustrates at great length and in many different ways his conviction that love is the real substance of the real man. Love, in turn, is given its form by truth. Thus, what one believes and what he loves determine what he is. If the members of this generation really under-stood and accepted that premise, is it not reasonable to suppose that some distinct changes in thinking and loving might take place?

We are faced today with the greatest rash of unexpurgated, undisciplined literature and theatrical fare in the history of communi-cation arts. Herefore vulgar and offensive language has now become commonplace in books and magazines, on radio and television, and in motion pictures. Situationism, as noted before, is rife. Antidotes in large measure are called for. The ethics out-lined here is proffered as one such counterbalance, or cathartic, if you will.

What goes into a man, on the mental level, can indeed defile a man, according to Swedenborg. Yet today it is not unusual to encounter people more concerned with what they eat than with what they think. An early commentator on this type of folly was Epictetus:

If any one trusted your body to the first man he met, you would be indignant, but yet you trust your mind to the chance comer, and allow it to be disturbed and confounded if he revile you; are you not ashamed to do so?  

Swedenborg, starting from the same type of common-sense reasoning, goes on to develop a psychology, an epistemology, and an ethics which carry this premise to its logical conclusion. There are, of course, certain limitations to Swedenborg’s ethical theory, when viewed strictly as a philosophical system. Divorced from its theological overtones it becomes incomplete; but it is an incompleteness which is shared by all humanist philosophies. It was noted earlier that there is no latent humanism in Swedenborg. In his view this is a created world, brought into being and sus-tained moment by moment by God; and we are creatures, related as such to our creator. Thus, the purpose of this ethics is that

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the creature achieve that state which will bring him into the closest possible relationship or rapport with God.

Personal fulfillment of this sort is held out as the only means to lasting happiness. This is not just incidental to the desirable conjunction with God: it is part and parcel of reality; that is the way things are. Ultimately we shall all discover this. But God does not withhold this information till the end of our earthly life; he has made it available to men here and now. It is quite possible to have a foretaste of heavenly joy on this plane of existence. The way to do it is to embody as much as you possibly can of divine love and wisdom.

Too simple? Possibly. But are not all really great principles ultimately simple?

(N.B. In this bibliography the works of Swedenborg are listed by their usual English titles. For the complete original Latin titles, see Hyde's bibliography of Swedenborg's works.)
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