

SWEDENBORG'S PREPARATION⁴

Alfred Acton⁵

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As your Chairman has stated, we are met together to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the publication of the *Arcana Caelestia*. Swedenborg commenced the writing of this work in November 1748, at a place not far distant from the very centre of this city, and it was published in the following summer. This publication was the culmination of an event which had happened three years before. In April 1745, the Lord appeared to Swedenborg and announced that he was to be appointed the servant of the Lord to reveal to the Christian world the spiritual sense of the Word and the nature of the spiritual world, and that for this purpose he was to be admitted into the spiritual world at the same time that he was present in the natural world.

There have been many men who have claimed to be revelators, but most if not all of these men have received their revelation by a dictation of some sort, and have at once proclaimed their mission and promulgated their so-called revelation. In this respect Swedenborg was unique-- for it was three years from the time of his call before he put his pen to paper to write the first of those works that mark the Second Coming of the Lord. In those three years he laboured; he wrote thousands of pages of manuscript; he read the Bible through and through many times; he wrote and indexed his experiences in the spiritual world, and he studied and mastered the Hebrew language. These three years constitute the last stage of Swedenborg's preparation for his mission as Revelator. Such preparation would not have been necessary for a dictated revelation, but for a rational revelation it was indispensable.

As I have said, these three years of arduous study were the last stage in Swedenborg's preparation. But preceding them were many years of

4. Address given by the Right Rev. Alfred Acton, M.A., D.Th., at 200th Anniversary Celebration of the Publication of *Arcana Caelestia*, Victoria Hall, London, June 21st, 1949.

5. Reverend Alfred Acton was born on December 29, 1867, in Liverpool, Lancashire, England, United Kingdom. His father, Edward Acton, was 48 and his mother, Charlotte Parry, was 34. He married Emeline Carswell on September 14, 1893. They were the parents of 5 sons and 4 daughters. He lived in Moreland, Pennsylvania, United States in 1910 and Lower Moreland Township, Pennsylvania, United States in 1920. He died on April 27, 1956, in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, United States, at the age of 88, and was buried in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, United States.

preparation in the field of science and philosophy; for the revelation now given to the New Church is a revelation of spiritual truths clothed in rational language and confirmed by philosophic and scientific truths, and such a revelation could not have been given save by means of a man whose understanding had been formed by a true science and a rational philosophy.

It is of this earlier preparation of Swedenborg, prior to the commission which he received from the Lord in April 1745, that I wish to speak this evening.

Listen now to what Swedenborg himself says on this subject: "The things represented spiritually by the acts of life do not come to the knowledge of the men themselves unless this be the good pleasure of God Messiah. Sometimes it occurs a long time afterward, as was also the case with me. . . . At the time I did not perceive what the acts of my life involved, but afterward I was instructed concerning some of them, nay, concerning a number; and from these I could at last plainly see that the tenor of Divine Providence has ruled the acts of my life from my very youth, and has so governed them that I might finally come to the present end; that thus, by means of the knowledge of natural things, I might be able to understand those things which lie more interiorly within the Word of God Messiah, and so . . . might serve as an instrument for opening them."⁶ It is this preparation that I would dwell on.

But first let me speak about his health. It was very necessary for a man who was to engage in the very arduous work that occupied Swedenborg during the whole of his life that he should enjoy good health. His father lived to the age of eighty-two, and he himself to the age of eighty-four. He came of a sturdy stock, the Dalecarlian, a mining stock, one of the most healthy stocks in the land of Sweden. His grandfather was a man of great enterprise, and his father a man of vigorous health. Swedenborg could not possibly have done his work nor could he have made the many wearisome journeys which he undertook unless he had been in good health. During his whole life, only two sicknesses are recorded, one in Paris when he was twenty-five, and the other in London shortly prior to his death.

Another characteristic that can be traced to his Dalecarlian ancestry is his independence of thought. The Dalecarlians have been noted in Swedish history for their vigorous independence. In the words of a Swedish author,

6. *The Word Explained*, n. 2532.

“the cold skies under which the Dalecarlian lives, the thankless earth which he ploughs, the hard rock from which he mines his living, have given him a free and strong soul, independence in his being, seriousness of mind, and have made him a man for himself, honourable in behaviour, fearless in deed, a stranger to fear, and unbendable in his opposition to despotic power.”⁷ It was Engelbrecht, the Dalecarlian, who, in the middle of the fifteenth century, led his people against Danish tyranny and shook off the Danish yoke; and in Swedish history, the Dalecarlians have ever risen up in rebellion when their liberties were threatened.

It was necessary that Swedenborg should have this inheritance of fearlessness and independence; for while in the beginning of his literary career he was admired by his contemporaries for his profound learning, and his works were widely reviewed by the learned journals of Europe, yet, as he developed his doctrines concerning the soul and its operation in the body, with the related doctrines of degrees and correspondences, his fame suffered. The reviewers, unable to understand him, characterized his doctrines as silly trifles. Swedenborg was fully aware of this decline in his reputation as a learned man, for he read the reviews. Yet he continued to write and publish; and in his writings he continued to develop those very doctrines which he knew would be viewed with disfavour and even ridiculed. “I know that I speak strange things (he writes in one of his unpublished works⁸), but what does it matter since they are true.” For a man of Swedenborg’s ambition thus to face the lessening of his fame, required not only deep conviction but also courage and independence; and Swedenborg had both. It is also significant that Swedenborg came from a mining family and began his studies with researches into the mineral kingdom, the ultimate kingdom of nature.

Swedenborg came of a deeply religious family, and his early years were passed in a home of true Christian piety. His father was a pious man—not a pietist in any false sense of the word, but a pietist in the sense that he believed a truly Christian character depended on obedience to the Ten Commandments. He enjoyed his glass of ale and his games, but above all he preached and observed the doctrine of charity. He had no patience with dogmatic theology, and viewed the Bible and the Church, as being

7. Svensk Konversations Lexicon, s.v., Dalarna.

8. *The Fibre*, n. 520.

solely for the cleansing of the heart. At a time when the Lutheran Church in Sweden, in common with that Church in other lands, had become more and more formal; when the clergy had little regard for the good of life, and the learned among them gave their greatest thought to dogmatic theology; Bishop Swedberg's sermons and books were devoted wholly to the teaching of obedience to the Word of God.⁹ Verbal theology (he says in his Autobiography¹⁰) has never been a pleasure to me, but real theology"; and earlier in the same work,¹¹ he declares, "I have never had any liking for disputatious writings, but the utmost repugnance for them." His sermons were always in simple, homely language and filled with telling quotations from the Bible.

When we consider the aversion which Swedenborg's father had for "verbal theology," an aversion which the freely speaking Bishop was never tired of expressing, we find some added significance in the words which Swedenborg wrote, many years later, in a letter to Dr. Beyer:¹² "I was forbidden to read writers on dogmatic theology before heaven was opened to me, because thereby unfounded opinions and inventions might easily have insinuated themselves which afterward could have been removed only with difficulty."

Bishop Swedberg was also a determined enemy to the doctrine of faith alone, which he called *hjernetro* in contrast with *hiertatro*—a play on the words *hjerne*, the brain, and *hierta*, the heart. "This damnable faith (he says) now rules everywhere in Christendom, especially with those who are called Lutherans." "If a man goes to church at set times in the year, partakes of the Holy Supper, and with all this lives in all kinds of corporeal sins, there is no need of aught else. Faith alone, the great faith, will accomplish all. None shall tell them aught save that they are good Lutherans and Christians and will without doubt be blessed. In a large congregation are hundreds of Lutherans; in a great city many thousands; in the whole Lutheran world countless thousands. Go and ask any one of them, yes, indeed, each one, 'Do you feel yourself saved?' Certainly, I have faith."¹³

9. p. 396. + p. 115.

10. Feb. 1767 (2 Doc. concern. Swedenborg, 260)

11. Brain faith and heart faith.

12. Lefvernes Beskrifv., p. 488.

13. *ibid.*. p. 89.

Bishop Swedberg condemns Paul for introducing the word “alone” in his translation “Man is justified by faith alone,” and points out that the word “alone” is not in the Greek text. Its introduction by Paul (he continues), “has raised up endless and heated verbal contentions between us and the Papists.” Swedberg also, in one of his works, pronounces the same condemnation, saying, “I believe that never in his life did Luther commit a greater sin than when from himself he added the word “alone.”¹⁴

Bishop Swedberg was so interested in training the young in the Christian life, rather than in dogmatic theology, that he took a special interest in the education of children, and especially in the training of their will. The schools (he says), both elementary and advanced, give all their attention to teaching the understanding; but that the will shall be broken, bent, held in check, and directed from evil to good—lo, one cares little for that.”

Moreover, he rejected the idea of three Persons the idea namely, that there is one God in three distinct Persons. He writes: “God decreed from eternity that man should again be united with God, and God with man. God became Man, and the two natures were so bound together that from them there became one Person.”¹⁵ Again he writes: “Christ is God and Man in one Person.”¹⁶ Here we find significance in the words written by Swedberg in the last work which he published: “From my infancy I could not admit into my mind any other idea than that of one God.”¹⁷

Bishop Swedberg left Upsala in 1696, when his son Emanuel was eight and a half years old, and for the next ten years, except for the holidays, the latter, pursuing his studies in Upsala, lived in the home of his learned brother-in-law Eric Benzelius. But during those early years of childhood, when living in his father’s home, the idea of the life of charity and of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one Person in whom God is revealed, must have been deeply impressed on his mind. Significant then is the account of his “first youth” which Swedberg wrote in 1769, in a letter to Dr. Beyer. These are his words: “From my fourth to my tenth year I was constantly engaged in thought upon God, salvation, and the spiritual diseases of men, and several times I revealed things at which my father and mother wondered, saying

14. *Faith and Good Works*, n. 3 (in *Psych. Trans.*, p. 12), *ibid.*, p. 368. *Lefvernes Beskrifv.*, p. 223.

15. *ibid.*, p. 480.

16. *ibid.*, p. 492.

17. *True Christian Religion*, n. 16.

that angels must be speaking through me. From my sixth to my twelfth year I used to delight in conversing with clergymen about faith, saying that the life of faith is love to the neighbour. At that time I knew nothing of that learned faith which teaches that God the Father imputes the righteousness of His Son to whomsoever and at such times as He chooses, even to those who have not repented and have not reformed their lives; and had I heard of such a faith, it would have been, as it is now, above my comprehension."¹⁸

Significant also of the influence brought to bear on Swedenborg's mind when as a child he lived in his paternal home is the fact that his father had implicit belief in the reality of the spiritual world. One night, when Jesper Swedberg was thirteen years of age, he had what he called "a revelation or vision—which it was (he says), I know not"¹⁹ in which he saw two houses connected by a passage. Near the passage was a large tub filled with water. At its side stood the Saviour. Crowds came, some were washed by the Saviour and sent to His glorious room on the right. The others He drove to the room on the left. Jesper Swedberg stood in fear and trembling and prayed that God would deem him worthy. He was chosen, washed, and sent into the room on the right. There he recognized many, and there he heard things which no human tongue can utter. When all had been judged, the Saviour took Jesper Swedberg by the hand and led him to the house at the left or west, where the devils were. In the murky light of that horrible room, he saw men and women dancing with lewd motions. In the middle of the room he saw a deep hole burning with fire and brimstone. Men, tortured by the flames, were trying vainly to climb out, but were pushed back, making frightful screams. In the room was also a pulpit occupied by a man with a large hat coming down to his ears, but Jesper did not hear what he was preaching, for the Saviour led him away, saying, "Thank thy God that thou comest not here." Coming to the heavenly house, he joined the others in singing with a loud voice, "Holy, Holy, Holy"; and then he awoke.

This dream or vision made a profound impression on the mind of the thirteen-year-old child, and it led to his determination to study for the ministry.

Seven years later, he was confirmed in this determination in a singular way. It was in a large village. There, in the morning, he had entered into

18. Nov. 14, 1769 (2 Doc., 279).

19. *Lefv, Beskrifv.*, p. 47 seq.

the work of the ministry by preaching his first sermon. In the evening, the church was closed, yet from it he heard the sound of an organ and voices singing godly Psalms, This was heard, not only by Jesper himself but also by all the villagers; yet the church was empty and it contained no organ.²⁰

Jesper Swedberg lived in a superstitious age, but he himself was not superstitious. He had a firm belief in the actuality of the spiritual world. He believed also that it may be possible at any time for the presence of the spiritual world to be manifested to men on earth. Certainly, the few visions of which he speaks did not lead him into any visionary ecstasy. They did not lead him to seek visions or even to desire them, but served only to confirm him in the truths of the Word.

When he heard of supernatural experiences, he was at pains to examine the evidence as to their reality. “As I have always believed in God’s clearly revealed Word (he writes in his *Autobiography*), I have never asked for any miracle; neither have I ever been credulous when told that a miracle had taken place. Yet I have always been of the opinion that when it pleased God to perform a miracle, one should not wholly reject it, when one is sure that it is not something natural or something made up, or the sport and deception of Satan.”²¹

Now it is not surprising that the father of Emanuel Swedenborg not only should believe in the spiritual world but should have some experience of the presence of spirits. If it takes several generations to make a gentleman, we should not be surprised at there being an hereditary tendency which prepared Swedenborg to be in both worlds at the same time.

Swedenborg’s spiritual experiences involve a latent ability to abstract the mind from external surroundings; and who shall say that this ability was not the result of his pious Dalecarlian ancestry. Such ability, moreover, must rest on some special form induced on the finest organic substances of the mind—a form that would come by inheritance. Such an heredity must be assumed if we are to account for a phenomenon experienced by Swedenborg which is both striking and unique, I refer to the tacit breathing which he experienced, even as a child, the breathing of the lungs being almost suspended. We know that when the passions of the animus are aroused, a man’s breathing is stertorous and harsh; and, on the other hand,

20. *ibid.*, p. 46.

21. p. 538.

when a man thinks deeply, his breathing is quiet and peaceful. The reason of this is because, when the passions of the animus or external mind are aroused, those passions have their seat, and manifest their presence, in the body itself, whereas, when the thought is profound and abstracted, the passions of the animus are allayed, as it were, and the spirit itself breathes almost apart from the body. This breathing of the spirit is not an abstract thing but is an actual breathing; it is the animation of the finest substances in the brain where is the seat of the spirit.

Swedenborg himself says that he could not have thought profoundly unless he had been able so to separate the breathing of the spirit from the breathing of the lungs that the breathing of the lungs was almost tacit; and, furthermore, that the ability to do this implies some peculiar formation in the inmost substances of the organic mind. Such a formation cannot be separated from heredity.

Here are his own words, as written in his *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*: "To search out the causes of things from given phenomena is a peculiar gift into which the infant's brain is in a way inducted from its first stem, and into which it is later imbued by many stages of use and cultivation."²²

Later, when writing in his *Memorabilia*, concerning the respiration of the men of the Most Ancient Church, he says that he could perceive and believe that this respiration was varied according to the state of their faith, "because my respiration has been so formed by the Lord that I could breathe internally for some length of time without the help of the external air, so that the breathing was directed within and yet the external senses remained in their vigour and also the actions. This could not be the case save with those who have been so formed by the Lord." That the respiration is in correspondence with the thought (he goes on to say), of this it was granted me to have much experience, before I spoke with spirits, and when, in infancy, I purposely wished to hold my breath when praying in the morning or evening . . . and also later, when I was writing in imagination, when I observed that I held my breath; it was tacit, as it were."²³

A little later, in October 1748, thus a few weeks before commencing the *Arcana Caelestia*, he writes: "I was first accustomed to breathe in this way in infancy when saying morning and evening prayers, and also at times

22. No. 19. + n. 3317.

23. *ibid.*, n. 3320.

afterward when explaining the concordance of the lungs and the heart, and especially when, for many years, I was writing from my mind the works that have been published. I then observed frequently that the respiration was tacit, almost insensible. It was later granted me to think and to write concerning this. Thus I was introduced to such respiration throughout many years from infancy, and especially by intense speculation, in which the respiration became quiescent; otherwise, an intense speculation of truth is not possible. Sufficient air was drawn in to enable me to think. By this means it is granted me to be with spirits and angels."²⁴

And now I turn to a phase of Swedenborg's life that must be peculiarly interesting to Englishmen, especially to Londoners. In 1766, Swedenborg was asked by a Prelate of Germany, why, from a philosopher, he became a theologian. His answer was as follows: "The reason in, in order that the spiritual things now being revealed may be taught and understood naturally and rationally; for spiritual truths have a correspondence with natural truths. For this reason, I was introduced by the Lord first into the natural sciences and thus prepared, and, in fact, from the year 1710 to the year 1744 when heaven was opened to me. The Lord has further granted me to love truth in a spiritual manner."²⁵

Note the years here mentioned, 1710 to 1744. In the year 1710, on the tenth day of May, Swedenborg, making his first voyage, landed in London. In 1744 he was for the second time in London, and it was then that heaven was opened to him. In 1710 he was twenty-two years of age. His previous years had all been spent in the university town of Upsala, under the guidance of professors. Here, naturally, he had not much opportunity for developing independence of thought. And now, in 1710, he had come from a small university town of less than two thousand inhabitants into a great city of half a million inhabitants. But what is most important in this his first visit to England in the year 1710 when he was first "introduced by the Lord into the natural sciences," is the fact that he came into a land where was freedom of speech and freedom of the press. On his first arrival in London, this fact was brought to Swedenborg's attention in a very lively way; for the whole city was engaged in a heated discussion, by pamphlets and coffee-house discussion, concerning the power of the crown over the subject, and the

24. *ibid.*, n. 3464.

25. Oetinger; sec 2 Doc. 256.

duties of the citizen to the crown.²⁶ The young student must certainly have been amazed at the fact that, despite the bitter and public criticisms against the government, no one was arrested. Such political controversies would never have been tolerated in Sweden, nor in any country on the Continent, except Holland. England and Holland were the only countries where there was freedom of the press and freedom of speech; but in Holland, that freedom was circumscribed by the Calvinism of the State Church.

Swedenborg remained in England for nearly three years, but those years were the most formative years of his life. He had never previously been in a great city. His life had been spent in a university town where thought and discussion were more or less dominated by the spirit of dogmatic theology. And now, a young man of impressionable age, he was in a country where was utter freedom of thought and investigation. He was intimate with the Astronomer Royal, John Flamsteed. He visited Oxford and had learned discussions with the Savillian Professor of Mathematics and eminent Astronomer, Halley, and also with Dr. Hudson, the Bodleian Librarian. He attended meetings of the Philosophical Society, and visited many of its members in their homes. He discussed mineralogy with the geologist, Dr. John Woodward; he had frequent talks with the publisher and publicist, John Chamberlayne; he discussed mathematical instruments with the scientific inventor, Francis Hawksbee, and the famous instrument maker, Marshall; he read the Philosophical Transactions and other English writings. And all this, as I have said, at the most formative period of his life. Truly we can say that, while his body was born in Sweden and his inheritance was Swedish, his mind is also a child of England, that is, of the freedom of thought and discussion, and of the boldness of investigation which characterized the English nation. It was England that fostered in him that boldness of thought, freed from the fetters of dogmatic theology, which characterizes his philosophical writings and his political activities in the Swedish Diet.

On his return to Sweden in 1715, one of the first effects of his visit to England was his publication of a quarterly which he called the *Daedalus Hyperboreus* (*the Daedalus of the North*). The remarkable thing about this paper was that, instead of being written in Latin, it was written in Swedish. His mind was inspired by the example set by the Royal Society whose Philosophical Transactions were published, not in Latin as was the universal

26. *Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, p. 12.

custom in Europe in the case of learned works, but in the native language. Swedenborg was determined that the Swedes, including the ordinary man who was ignorant of Latin, should have the same opportunity of learning the sciences as the English; that by the investigation of natural phenomena, the whole nation should be aroused to think, and to take an active interest in the conclusions drawn by the learned.

But Swedenborg had to provide for his living. In 1716, he thought of becoming a professor of physics, but one limitation to this was the fact that he stammered. Nevertheless, he might have become a professor, or a director of a physical laboratory, for he was highly thought of by the professors in Upsala University ; had he not been appointed by Charles the Twelfth to be an Assistant to the great Swedish Engineer Polhem in the building of a dry dock, in the construction of a canal, and, incidentally, in the transporting of large galleys overland to an inlet of the sea wherefrom Charles the Twelfth could attack the Norwegians. These works were all engineering works, and I suppose, had Swedenborg lived at this day, he would have been called a Civil Engineer. He describes some of these works. For instance, the dry dock. A dock was to be blasted into a rocky cliff facing the sea, and for this purpose a circular dam had to be built in order to afford a dry space for the blasting. Swedenborg was charged with measuring the floor of the sea in order to fit the bottom of the dam to its contours. He also had some part in the building of the dam itself, which was built above the water and then lowered.

These engineering works greatly interested Swedenborg, but he was still more interested in investigating the phenomena of nature and the committing of his thoughts to paper, especially with a view to publishing them in his *Daedalus Hyperboreus*.

When Charles the Twelfth died in 1719, Swedenborg took his seat as an Assessor in the College of Mines, to which office Charles had appointed him in 1716, though temporarily delegating him to assist the engineering works carried on by Polhem. In the College of Mines he devoted himself to the study of mineralogy and chemistry.

His position as an Assessor in this College was a very important one. The Assessors of the College had judicial functions in all matters concerning the mining and smelting industry in Sweden leases, the quality of the iron produced, safety devices, disputes with workmen, etc. Every summer,

Assessors were sent out to the various mining districts to hear cases and take testimony. This they reported to the full College where decisions were made by majority vote.

Swedenborg was diligent in this work, but his real interest lay in searching more deeply into the phenomena of nature. He delved deeply into the study of chemistry, and, for the purpose of learning the operation of the soul in the body, he entered upon the study of anatomy, particularly the anatomy of the brain.

In 1721 and 1722 he published, in Amsterdam and Leipzig, as the results of his studies, his *Forerunner of the Principia* (commonly called *Chemistry*) and his *Miscellaneous Observations*, in which works we see the seeds of those doctrines which were later developed in the *Principia*. He also issued a prospectus of a work in several volumes which was to treat of the various minerals.

The following years were occupied in the preparation of these volumes, and in 1734 he went to Leipzig and there published the fruits of his studies, in three folio volumes, entitled *Opera Mineralia*.

This work is specially remarkable in that, while the second and third volumes deal with Iron and Copper in a purely scientific way, the first volume, entitled the *Principia*, commences with a philosophical consideration of how the finite was created by the Infinite.

So far as I know, no man in literature has ever ventured to try to solve the problem of how the finite was created by the Infinite. St. Augustine toyed with the idea that God created the world from His own Substance, but he concluded that this would involve pantheism that matter was God; therefore he propounded the doctrine which has ever since prevailed among Christian theologians, that the world was created from nothing.²⁷

Swedenborg was not satisfied with this. Knowing that from nothing, nothing comes, he concluded that creation was not only from God but was actually the finiting of Infinite Substance. Thus early was his mind formed for seeing in clear light the teaching of Revelation, that God created the world by "finiting His Infinity by means of substances emitted from Himself."²⁸

The Writings say nothing as to how God finited His Infinity, but in the *Principia*, Swedenborg essays to take up this problem, and his solution is not

27. See *A Philosopher's Notebook*, pp. 27, 138, 252.

28. *True Christian Religion*, n. 33.

only in agreement with the teaching of Revelation, but it greatly enlightens our understanding of that teaching.

Swedenborg's reasoning is similar to that of Euclid when teaching of the origin of geometry. That origin, says Euclid, is a point without length, breadth, and thickness. The point moved in one direction makes a line which has length but no breadth or thickness. The line moved in one direction makes an area having length and breadth but no thickness. An area moved in one direction makes a body having length, breadth, and thickness, and thus comprehensible to the human mind. But the objection is made. If the point has neither length, breadth, nor thickness, it is nothing; and how can something come from nothing ?; to which Euclid might answer: If we seek the origin of geometry, we must go beyond geometry; and since human thought cannot envisage the existence of anything save in terms of three dimensions, therefore the origin of geometry must be above the comprehension of human thought. In other words, reason can see that it is but not what it is.

So Swedenborg defines the beginning of creation as pure and total motion in the Infinite, that is, a motion without any finite thing being moved; a motion which can be conceived of rationally but not geometrically.²⁹ Now, of course, such a motion is beyond our comprehension. Yet human reason can see that it is, even though it cannot see what it is. Moreover, reason can see that creation commences with the Divine Will, and that this Will goes forth or proceeds as creative motion, that is to say, as Divine Truth. So all human creation begins with will, and this will flows into the body as creative motion. In the *Principia*, Swedenborg shows that the first natural point or creative motion pervades the universe and continually sustains the universe, so that should it cease, the created universe would at once cease to be.

By the doctrine of the *Principia*, we can see more clearly the teaching of the Writings concerning the Divine Proceeding, and the teaching that existence is perpetual subsistence. The teaching of the *Principia* so fully agrees with the more general teaching of the Writings concerning creation that there can be hardly a doubt that by it Swedenborg's mind was prepared to receive the spiritual truths concerning creation in his understanding.³⁰

29. *Principia* I, ii, s. 12.

30. New Churchmen have thought that the statement in *Divine Providence* n. 6, which condemns those who hold that the first substance is likened "to a point which is of

It has also been held that the repudiation of the Principia doctrine is involved in Swedenborg's statement in *True Christian Religion* n. 76, that he had "long meditated concerning creation but in vain" until he knew that there were two worlds and two suns. This would seem to mean nothing more than that without revelation the Principia doctrine would be a mere hypothesis; for it may be noted that heaven was opened to Swedenborg in 1744, and it was later in the same year that he wrote in his work on the Senses, n. 262: "According to an admonition of the night, I ought to betake myself to my philosophical Principia . . . and it was said that then it would be given me to fly wheresoever I will." Moreover, six months after he had received his commission as revelator, in April 1745, he wrote in his *History of Creation* n. 10, that he was "amazed at the agreement" of his doctrine of creation and the Mosaic account.

The *Opera Mineralia* brought Swedenborg high renown. It received long and highly flattering reviews in the learned journals of Europe, and on the basis of it, Swedenborg was invited by the Royal Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg to enter into correspondence with that body.

The first volume, the *Principia*, was a philosophical inquiry into the mode in which the mineral kingdom was created by the Infinite. It was indeed intended as the introduction to a long series of works on the various minerals, but Swedenborg's underlying reason for writing it was his desire to search into the soul and its commerce with the body. This is indicated by the fact that, while the *Opera Mineralia* was being printed, Swedenborg wrote his *Forerunner of a Reasoning Philosophy concerning the Infinite and the final cause of Creation*, in which he treats at length of the Mechanism of the Operation of Soul and Body. He was inspired to the writing of this work by the desire to search into the ultimate and spiritual causes underlying the phenomena of nature. He wished to show that the soul was not an aerial something but was a real substance; that it was the means by which God willed to form a heaven from the human race; and that its connection with the body was a real organic connection.

no dimension, and that the forms of extension existed from an infinitude of such points"; and the statement in *True Christian Religion* n. 20, condemning the doctrine of the origin of substance "from forms, and geometrical lines which are of no dimension"; constitute a condemnation of the whole doctrine of the *Principia*; but in this they fail to see the difference between the geometrical point of Euclid and the first natural point. What is condemned are the monads of Wolff. The first natural point is the proceeding of the Infinite; it is the creative motion of the Divine Love, and contains within itself all that will subsequently be created.

It was with this in mind that Swedenborg developed his *Principia* doctrine of the atmospheres—one universal atmosphere above the sun of the natural world, and three atmospheres below that sun, two of which embodied the supreme atmosphere. New Churchmen are so accustomed to the doctrine of three atmospheres that they are apt not to reflect on the fact that this doctrine is entirely alien to the scientific world, both of Swedenborg's day and of our own. But Swedenborg saw that nothing can be transmitted through a vacuum; that, if the ear hears, there must be an atmosphere to carry the sound waves to its organ; that if the eye can see a bell swinging in a receptacle exhausted of air, while the ear cannot hear the ringing of the bell, there must be a superior atmosphere conveying light waves to the eye; that the corporeal life conveyed to the animal soul must be transmitted by the mechanism of a still superior natural atmosphere, and that the spiritual life conveyed to the human soul came through a supreme atmosphere above the sun of the natural world.

That in the *Principia*, Swedenborg had in mind his search of the soul is clearly indicated by a statement which he makes in *The Five Senses* written in 1744 when his spiritual eyes were opened. He there says: "These [the doctrines of order, forms, and influx] are given in my philosophical *Principia* where the forms of the parts of each atmosphere are set forth and delineated. This was done for the present purpose. Now comes the application." (No. 267) And a little earlier in the same volume he writes: "It is to be observed that according to an admonition of the night, I ought to go back to my philosophical *Principia* . . . and it was said that then it would be granted me to fly whithersoever I would." (No. 262)

Swedenborg soon realized that for the study of the soul it would be necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the body in which she dwells. For this purpose, he spent eighteen months (1736-1738) in an anatomical school in Paris, where he took up the work of dissection, particularly of animals living both on land and in the water, in order to study the relation of the brain to the lungs.

It was at the beginning of these studies (1736) that Swedenborg began to have significant dreams, and these continued until he received his commission in 1745.³¹ Moreover, he began to learn the signification of these dreams, and was thus initiated into the doctrine of correspondences; we

31. *The Word Explained*, n. 1894.

find his first references to that doctrine in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* which was finished in December 1739.³²

Moreover, while writing the *Economy*, Swedenborg experienced a remarkable enlightenment, which must be connected with that interior breathing to which I have previously alluded; for in that work,³³ when speaking of true philosophers, he writes: "As soon as they light upon the truth, after a long course of reasoning, straightway there is a certain cheering light and joyful flash which brings confirmation, and which bathes the sphere of their mind. There is also a certain mysterious radiation I know not whence it springs – that darts through some sacred temple of the brain. Thus a kind of rational instinct displays itself and indicates, as it were, that at that moment the soul has relapsed, as it were, into the golden age of her infancy."

Clearly these words indicate a more interior opening of Swedenborg's understanding preparatory to the opening of his spiritual eyes to see the phenomena of the spiritual world. Without such interior opening, the seeing of those phenomena would have been of little use.

While volume I of the *Economy* was being printed, Swedenborg jotted down some notes in which he applies his *Principia* theory to the souls of men, animals, and insects. At the end of these Notes he wrote: "These things are true because I have the sign." What this sign was, we do not know, but from later statements made by Swedenborg, there can be little doubt but that it consisted in the seeing of lights and flames with the eyes of his spirit. In other words, Swedenborg's thought was so interior that he not only felt himself enlightened but actually saw spiritual light with his spiritual eyes.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when writing the second volume of his *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* which he now commenced, Swedenborg is led by his deep thought to see that there is a spiritual sun. "As the [natural] sun is the fountain of life (he writes in E.A.K. II, n. 255), so the Deity is the Sun of life and of all wisdom." But he adds in *ibid.*, n. 259, "I confess, however, that while lingering on this threshold, which conducts me almost beyond the bounds of nature, I feel a holy tremor stealing over me and warning me to pause; for the mind thinks it sees what it does not see, and

32. See *Psychological Transactions* pp. 195 seq., where are given all Swedenborg's references in his philosophical works to the doctrine of correspondences. I, nos. 625–6, 648–9, 3 Doc. 924.

33. No. 19.

sees where no intuition can penetrate. And what increases this awe is a love of truth which, that it may hold in my mind the supreme place is the end of all my endeavours. This alone I perceive, that the order of nature exists for the sake of ends which flow through universal nature to return to the first end; and that worshipers of nature are insane.”

In the *Economy*, moreover, Swedenborg brought out and elaborated the doctrine of degrees, a doctrine without which (he says) there can be no entering into the inner secrets of nature. The doctrine was entirely unknown to the learned world, and the contemporary reviews of Swedenborg’s work show that the reviewers had little comprehension of it.

Swedenborg doubtless had this in mind when, many years later, he wrote in the *Divine Love and Wisdom*: “I do not know whether anything has hitherto been known about discrete degrees, and yet without this knowledge nothing of causes can be known” (n. 188). Nothing concerning this doctrine was known in the learned world; but the doctrine was not only known to Swedenborg but it formed the key to his penetration into new regions of truth; and when his spiritual eyes were opened, enabled him to understand the relation between the spiritual world and the natural.

In the same work³⁴ he speaks in a similar way concerning knowledge of the Spiritual Sun. “That there is a sun other than the natural sun has hitherto been unknown, because man’s spiritual has so greatly passed over into his natural that he does not know what the spiritual is, nor, consequently, that there is a spiritual world in which are spirits and angels, different from the natural world.”

On his return to Stockholm in 1740, Swedenborg wrote his work on *The Fibre*. Here he demonstrated that man has three discretely different foods: the food which he eats three times a day, the food he imbibes through the nostrils, and an ethereal food that goes to the finest parts of the brain, the organic seat of the will and understanding. He saw that during his life on earth, man forms his character. He saw also that man’s character must have an actual basis in that which is of time and space. In other words, our character consists in the order and arrangement of the parts of the organic seat of the mind, just as the character of a pianist’s hands consists in the order and arrangement of the fibres of that hand.

34. *ibid.*, I, n. 632, II, n. 210., D.L.W., n. 85.

Swedenborg saw that if the character of a man is an organic form, that form must be nourished by foods which shall fix and maintain it; just as in the case of the pianist's hand. The hand must be formed by practice, but the form can be made firm only by nourishing food. Swedenborg recognized that the building up and fixation of the organic vessel of the mind required a food finer than the food of the body.

While man has the power of forming his mind in freedom after the pattern of the Word of God, or after the pattern of the Prince of the world, nature, by means of this finer or ethereal food, fixes and hardens the form. Therefore, as we become older, we find in our own experience how difficult it is to change our character, although it can always be changed so long as we live on earth.

Here we have the basis for the later teaching of the Writings, that the blood of an evil man receives different nourishment than the blood of a good man,³⁵ and of the teaching concerning the limbus, those finest things of nature which man retains after death, as the organic basis of his character.

Swedenborg then wrote that very remarkable work, the *Rational Psychology*. I have read works on psychology, and I understand that now on the radio you are receiving lectures, or have received lectures, on that subject; but my experience is that the psychology as now taught is almost purely empirical, purely experimental. Modern psychology knows nothing of the mind of man, of what the will and understanding are, or what the memory. It even raises the question as to whether man has a soul. But Swedenborg began by seeing that man has a soul, and he laboured to investigate the operation of that soul in the body. He saw, for instance, what we can readily acknowledge, that man has two minds; but, instead of regarding those minds as abstract qualities, he shows that they must each be organized forms. We all know that we can look down on our own lusts, and can condemn them and fight against them. The organ that looks down and the organ that is fought are both organic. But what does modern psychology know of this? I am now engaged in translating Swedenborg's work on *Rational Psychology*, and the more I enter into its contents, the more I am amazed at the wonderful insight of the man who wrote it, an insight which reveals truths that the mind at once acknowledges; but the mind wonders at the genius of the man who laid them bare.

35. D.L.W., nos. 420 seq.

In his *Rational Psychology*, Swedenborg has much to say concerning the life of the soul after the death of the body. He shows that heaven consists of many societies, and that the angels of heaven are all engaged in the performance of uses. He conjectures that after death the soul will not have the form of the human body. The organs of the terrestrial body are adapted to earthly uses, and when the use ceases, the necessity of the organs will also cease.³⁶ But, he says, in conclusion: “When we ourselves live as souls, we shall perhaps laugh at ourselves at having conjectured so childishly” (Rat. Psych. n. 524).

This is not an expression of doubt as to the truth of his conjecture. Swedenborg was fully convinced of its truth; nor did he laugh at it when his spiritual eyes were fully opened; on the contrary, he confirmed it. But he realized that it was a conjecture—a conjecture based on sound philosophical principles, but still a conjecture awaiting the confirmation of experience. His attitude is expressed in what he had written two years earlier in the preface to his *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*: True philosophers (he says), “the more profoundly they penetrate, the less do they confide in their imaginative faculty. In the absence of experience, they fear to extend the claim of their reason beyond the nearest link, and should they extend it somewhat further, then, so long as experience is lacking, they class their conclusions as among hypotheses” (E.A.K. n. 19).

The like can be said of his theory of creation as set forth in his *Principia*. It was a theory, and he himself confessed that it lacked the confirmation of experience. Therefore, when his spiritual eyes were opened, he said to some angels who asked for his thoughts on creation, “I have long meditated concerning creation but in vain. But after I was admitted by the Lord into your world, I perceived that it was vain to make any conclusion respecting the creation of the universe unless it first be known that there are two worlds and two suns” (T.C.R. 75). Swedenborg did know that there are two worlds and two suns, and it was on this knowledge that he based his theory in the *Principia*. That theory was an hypothesis, yet Swedenborg found that it was in agreement with the truth as given in *Divine Love and Wisdom*³⁷

36. See *New Philosophy*, Jan., 1948, pp. 138–39.

37. Confer *History of Creation*, nos. 9, 10

After the *Rational Psychology*, Swedenborg devoted himself to an extensive work on the Brain and the Nerves. How necessary this study was for his preparation is shown in a passage from *The Word Explained*:

In the brain, the idea of all things is so clearly evident that he who beholds its interior parts knows therefrom the nature of the universe itself with its sidereal systems; and also how heaven operates, besides many other things which will be in the kingdom of the Messiah. But these knowledges cannot be clearly deduced because so many parts of the brain, nay, the uses of almost all of them, are unknown. Unless, therefore, these be first evolved, the things which are brought forward will appear obscure; and yet, in themselves, they are so clear to those who understand these things that in the brain such persons almost behold heaven in an image, and thus the nature of the state of the heavenly kingdom.³⁸

Do not be surprised at this; for the brain is the scene where all our thoughts, all our loves and affections have their play, and, with a good man, those thoughts and loves and affections are an image of heaven. The brain itself is then an image of the Divine Love and Wisdom in its inner aspect, just as the body is an ultimate image of God. Swedenborg understood to a remarkable degree the uses of the brain, and this knowledge enabled him in after years to "behold in that organ, heaven in an image."

In his work on the Brain, Swedenborg has revealed so many things that are new that anatomists skilled in the science have held up their hands in amazement and wondered how it was possible for him to arrive at conclusions which modern anatomists have arrived at only within the past few years show it was possible for Swedenborg to arrive at these conclusions when the material at his hand was comparatively scanty. Swedenborg was the first to demonstrate that the grey matter of the brain is the seat of the mind; the first to demonstrate that the mid-brain has charge of all habitual action, and this to the end that we may perform these actions, may walk and talk and use our muscles, and yet leave the rational brain free to think.

These discoveries are comparatively superficial, and they are now universally recognized. But his doctrine of discrete degrees as shown in *The Brain*, his doctrine of the relation between the soul and the body these are not recognized in the world. There is indeed recognition of some of his remarkable discoveries, but the process of thought by which he made

38. n. 1071.

those discoveries, the principles on which they are based these are not acknowledged. They are not even considered, because they cannot be demonstrated experimentally.

Following *The Brain*, Swedenborg took up the *Animal Kingdom*, a work in which he investigates the ultimate organs of the human body. Commencing with the mouth, he takes up the organs of the alimentary system, and then, commencing with the nostrils, the organs of the respiratory system. We have Swedenborg's own statement that, during the writing of this work, lights appeared to him almost every day, and that this was to him a confirmation of the truth of what he was writing. Now do not be amazed at this statement. We ourselves sometimes say "A light dawned upon me," or "I saw the thing in a new or clearer light." Actually the spirit does see the thing in clear light. Swedenborg's thought was so abstract, so deep, that when a light appeared to him that gave him illumination, he sometimes actually saw it as a light, and it was in fact a light. When you and I say "A light dawns upon us," if our eyes were opened to see in the spiritual world, we would find a light had actually dawned upon us.

Swedenborg saw light, both in the sense that the eyes of his spirit were opened to see spiritual truths, and in the sense that there was also a beginning of the opening of his sight to see the phenomena of the spiritual world; and this seeing confirmed him in the truth of what he was writing.

Listen to his own words, written in 1747, three or four years after writing the *Animal Kingdom*. "What is well pleasing is confirmed by a flame which is a sign of confirmation from love. By the divine mercy of God Messiah, such a flame appeared to me so often and indeed in different sizes with a diversity of colour and splendour that, during some months when I was writing a certain work [*the Animal Kingdom*], hardly a day passed in which a flame did not appear as vividly as the flame of a household hearth. It was then a sign of approval, and this was prior to the time when spirits began to speak with me viva voce."³⁹

These experiences did indeed give Swedenborg confirmation and assurance, but at the time he did not fully perceive their significance. Listen further to his words on this subject, written in August 1748: "For many years previous to the time when my mind was opened so that I could speak with spirits, such proof existed with me that I now wonder that I had not then

39. In W.E. nos. 6904–5.

come into persuasion concerning the Lord's government by means of spirits. Not only were there dreams for some years, informing me concerning the things that were being written, but there were also changes of state while I was writing; an extraordinary light on the things that were being written. Later there were also many visions when my eyes were closed and a light miraculously given; fiery lights were seen, speeches in the time of morning, etc., until a spirit addressed me in a few words."⁴⁰

But Swedenborg also had times when doubts came to his mind. In fact, there can be no rational mind that has not experienced doubts. But to doubt is to investigate, and to investigate with a sincere mind, with the acknowledgment of God and the acknowledgment of the soul, is the means by which man can arrive at truth. Swedenborg had doubts about things stated in the Word; he wondered about the miracles wrought by Pharaoh's magicians; and also about other matters. But when he thought interiorly from principles, the doubts were removed, even if the questions were not settled. So with us; we may have doubts, but if we think, not from the doubts, but from principles that are clear to us, then, even if the doubts are not settled, they are removed from troubling the mind.

Here are Swedenborg's own words on this subject: "Whenever I have desired to consult the understanding in those things which are heavenly, I seemed to myself to fall backward . . . and unless, by the divine mercy of God Messiah, I had been at once returned to the way, I would quickly have fallen backward."⁴¹

Then a little later he wrote: "When the sciences and things of the memory which are exceedingly limited wished to carry themselves into things spiritual, and to build these up, as it were, I at once fell into doubts, and unless by His infinite mercy these doubts had been taken away by God Messiah, I would have fallen headlong into the most dense darkness and into doubts and denials."⁴²

The secret of Swedenborg's success was that he thought from the truth. He approached nature from the acknowledgment of God. He did not do, what so many now are inclined to do, investigate as to whether there is a God, or whether there is a soul. He saw clearly in rational light that God does exist, and that the whole of nature is a witness to the Divine Love

40. In S.D. n. 2951.

41. See *Journal of Dreams* 50., W.E. n. 2973.

42. *ibid.*, n. 8212.

and Wisdom. He saw at once, without doubt, without argument, that man has a rational soul, and that this soul is the dwelling-place of God. It was from the acknowledgment of God that he investigated nature; from the acknowledgment of the soul that he investigated the body; and it was this acknowledgment that led him to see those marvelous things at which some present-day scientists wonder, and those still more marvelous doctrines of which modern learning knows nothing.

Listen to Swedenborg's own testimony in 1747: "Take whatever you will in the kingdoms of the earth, the terrestrial, vegetable, and animal; take whatsoever you will in man; and, considering them rightly, you will be contemplating the kingdom of God. I confess that I have considered them in great number, and have not as yet been able to meet with a single one that does not look to the kingdom of God Messiah and to that conjugal love which exists between the Messiah and the Church."

The last of Swedenborg's purely philosophical writings was the uncompleted work on the *Worship and Love of God*, Parts 1 and 2 of which were published a few weeks prior to April 1745 when Swedenborg received his commission as Revelator. In this work he concentrates all the principles set forth in his former writings, to present in a universal way the whole of nature as the Kingdom of God. It is to this work that he undoubtedly refers when he writes four years later: "When contemplating all things in the universe which it was granted me to run through, in order that I might reduce them to one supreme universal into which they should one and all concentrate, and so to which they should refer themselves, there was found nothing whatever that did not look to the kingdom of God Messiah, and refer itself thereto."⁴³

Swedenborg worked by the analytical method. He began by adducing the facts, and followed this by his inductions. But no analytical thought is possible without synthetic thought. You hear men say they examine facts impartially, but such a thing is impossible. No man can examine impartially. Every man will examine in the light of the principles that are in his mind. Thus all analytical thought is accompanied by something of the synthetic. Swedenborg thought analytically. He would not come to a conclusion apart from the testimony of facts, but his conclusions were all guided by the acknowledgment of God, the spiritual world, the soul.

43. In W.E., n. 5266., In *ibid.*, n. 5783.

And this leads me to consider the nature of Swedenborg's inspiration. The soul flows into the body. With a little infant there are no planes which pervert this influx, and we see the presence of the soul in the body as something delightful, something beautiful, something heavenly. But soon the child begins to form a plane in the mind, and the life of the soul flowing into this plane is manifested as the love of self, and the child begins to lose its first innocence. Further planes may be formed in the mind by confirmation in the denial of God, and by a life of evil. Then the soul flows through these planes as through chinks and crannies, and reveals itself in the faculties of liberty and rationality; but otherwise the man is nothing but a beast, with his bestiality covered over by a fair external.

With Swedenborg, planes of truth were formed in his mind, and we have the evidence of his life, that he shunned evils as sins against God.

Swedenborg was an ambitious man; he wished for the glory of the world. He could not but know that he had a genius superior to that of most men. He wished to be one of the leading lights of Europe, and he recognized the evil within the wish. He recognized that, while his work might be of service to mankind, he himself was in danger of being consumed by the love of self. He was tempted to exalt himself above others.

On one occasion, in 1744, he saw a book in a bookseller's window which was not a book that he had just published; and the first thought that came to his mind was that his book was more worthy of being displayed. But that thought was immediately followed by a sense of humiliation and the reflection that the Lord had many means of teaching men.

This incident gives us a clue to the better understanding of what Swedenborg so often says in his scientific works, namely, that no man can be a true philosopher unless he shuns the fires of the love of self. We can understand the temptations that Swedenborg went through; how he conquered the love of self, and how it was this conquering that enabled him to be a great philosopher.

Here we have revealed to us the nature of Swedenborg's inspiration. It was not dictation. In the course of his life he had shunned the fires of the love of self. By his philosophy based on the worship and love of God, he had formed more and more interior planes in his mind for the perceptive reception of the soul planes to which the inflowing soul could give perception and inspiration. Swedenborg experienced more and more of this inspiration,

even during the years of his preparation. He is clearly speaking from his own experience when, as I have already mentioned, he speaks of “a certain cheering light and joyful flash which brings confirmation and bathes the sphere of their mind,” and of “a mysterious radiation, I know not whence it springs, that darts through some sacred temple of the brain,” and which brings a rational instinct, indicating that the soul has relapsed into the golden age of her infancy.

When Swedenborg’s preparation was completed; when he had formed his mind, not only by a true philosophy but by the study of the phenomena of the spiritual world; the planes of that mind were formed for the full reception of the soul, and he was inspired from within. Listen to what is said on this subject in the *Arcana Caelestia*: “Divine Revelation is made either by angels through whom the Lord speaks, or by perception. The former is external revelation such as was given through the Prophets; the latter is an internal revelation which affects the intellectual principle spiritually, and perceptibly leads it to think of a subject as it really is, with an internal assent, one knows not whence. One thinks that it is within him and flows from the connection of things, but it is a dictate from the Lord flowing through heaven into the interiors of the thought.”⁴⁴

The Writings were not dictated to Swedenborg. The Lord did not dictate to him as He dictated to the Prophets of the Old Testament. The revealed truths did not come to him in the form of words and sentences. They came to him in the form of inspiration from within. The nature of Swedenborg’s inspiration was perception—perception such as it was in the Golden Age when men, undefiled by the evils of the proprium, perceived the presence of God in the kingdom of nature. Swedenborg wrote the words of our Revelation as of himself, but he wrote from Divine inspiration. That inspiration, however, differed from the inspiration of the men of the Golden Age, in that the perception of spiritual and celestial truths which he had from inspiration could clothe itself with corresponding philosophical, rational, and scientific truths.

The theology of the Christian world today is constantly retreating before the assaults of science; and when it has retreated to a safe distance, it finds it must still further retreat because it cannot meet the assaults of ever advancing science. But in the Revelation now given, we have a theology clothed with

44. No. 5121.

rational truth, a theology to which science must bow; a theology of which it can justly be said, that by it "it is now permitted intellectually to enter into the mysteries of faith." □