

Extract:

The Esotericism of Emanuel Swedenborg

When we study the spiritual writings of Swedenborg we encounter a process which is unique in the history of human experience. Here we have the communications of an unusual man who describes his direct experiences of spiritual reality obtained by years of daily entry into spiritual and celestial worlds, and who was directed by the Lord God to unfold cosmic truths that had been lost to humanity for thousands of years. In addition, a great deal of new material was disclosed that had not previously been known. For almost 30 years Swedenborg participated directly in the life of other worlds, and recorded all that he was shown and taught in his copious writings. These records are remarkable for their clarity, honesty, consistency and internal continuity.

All this was made possible by the long training that Swedenborg undertook as a scholar, mathematician, linguist, geologist, engineer, anatomist, psychologist, physiologist and traveler, and in his time he was probably the last man on earth to truly master all the knowledge of the world. His thirst for knowledge and understanding was unquenchable - as we have seen previously - and he approached every topic with the same vigor, intensity and enthusiasm. The search for the meaning of life led him into anatomy and physiology, and he performed a number of dissections, becoming a leading anatomist. His microscopic studies of brain tissues enabled him to reason out the functions of the neurons, and his views are scientifically correct.

Swedenborg was strongly religious, but not narrow minded. During his travels he eagerly visited churches of all denominations, including the Vatican, and had long religious discussions with hundreds of pastors, ministers, priests and bishops. His great ambition was to discover and determine the exact nature of the soul, and to this end he employed every avenue. He spent years examining plant, animal and human organs and tissues in search of clues to the nature of the soul, but at the same time he made a profound study of society, politics and government because these concerned the human condition. In the year 1743, at the age of 55, Swedenborg's inner vision began to open, and for the following two years a vast series of altered psychic states, changes in breathing rhythm and extraordinary dreams took place. He recorded and analyzed some of these dreams, and from this produced the world's first dream-diary.

During April, 1745, he went through several tremendous experiences in full consciousness which totally rearranged his life. He came face to face with the Lord who declared that he had been chosen to communicate to humanity the hidden spiritual sense of the Word of God. That same night his spiritual senses were fully opened and he was able to freely move into all the spiritual realms and, at first hand, see the conditions of life in other worlds. Three years later he published the first volume of *Arcana Coelestia*, in which the deeply

concealed Divine, celestial and spiritual truths of the Word were expounded for the first time. During the succeeding 23 years Swedenborg published more than 30 books dealing with spiritual life, the regeneration of the human soul, and spiritual doctrine. These include such works as the 12 volume Arcana Coelestia, the 6 volume Apocalypse Explained, Heaven and Hell, The True Christian Religion, and Conjugal Love, and much more.

One of the crucial principles brought forth by Swedenborg concerned correspondences. He announced that *“Divine things manifest themselves in the world by correspondences”* and that *“the science of correspondences is the key to the spiritual sense of the world”*. We can understand the nature of correspondences by taking into account the layered structure of the universe where there are several worlds which proceed from one another in strict conformity with Divine law and order. These worlds are discreet and separate from each other, there is no direct communication between them, they do not merge into one another, and in each world there are unique laws, energies and substances not found in the other worlds. Creation is built this way to keep the different laws, principles, forces and grades of substance in cosmic order. Things, affirmations, energies, truths, goods and revelations which proceed from the Lord God successively pass through these worlds, and in each one a different kind of manifestation is generated. Souls which dwell in each world are quite dissimilar in their degrees of awakening, development and receptivity, and what can be received in one world cannot be received in another unless it is modified in some way.....

..... As we have discussed previously, by means of this representation it is shown that the Divine communication which is called the Word, De Verbo, Logos or Theomertmalogos has an exceedingly rich inner, spiritual content, which is contained within the literal sense and is freely available to those who seek it. However, care must be taken to avoid the perversion and destruction of spiritual truth by the machinations of literalists, fundamentalists and cynics. Throughout history human beings have repeatedly fallen away from states of spiritual perception and conjunction with the highest Reality. The scene of the harlot and the dead horse epitomizes a person’s self-willed impulse to try and shape reality into the mold of their imagination, and to substitute their personal ‘explanations’ of reality for the eternal meanings which form its essence.

In Heaven and Hell: para 306, and elsewhere, Swedenborg reported that a great and very serious decline occurred to the human race. Originally, the enlightened Ancients had their interiors turned heavenwards, and were in a state of functional conjunction with the Lord God, and since their spiritual interiors were fully open they received immediate influx and revelation from God. Due to an abuse of their freedom many people partly turned themselves away from God and began to involve themselves with the interesting things and phenomena of the external world, and although they lost the capacity to receive direct revelation on a daily basis, they were able to retain some degree of functional interaction

with the spiritual world by means of correspondences. It was given to them to know that all things in the outer, physical world corresponded to enduring spiritual realities, and therefore, everything was seen to be a representation of the spiritual and celestial realms, and of God.

Gradually, the knowledge of the science of correspondences was lost: all remembrance of this important link with the spiritual world was blotted out because people were adapting correspondences to perverse and magical practices. It was then that the Word was written so that people could be reminded of the reality of God and the presence of the spiritual world. Although the Word was written in the pure language of correspondences, no one could see the inner realities, because people were now completely external, and interpreted everything in a scientific, literal manner, and thought in material terms. It was to remedy this completely degenerate state of the human psyche that the Lord God entered the world as the Living Word, and endeavoured to reveal the inner contents of Divine communication.

The Word has a cosmic function in that it serves all levels of the Ray of Creation simultaneously. An external, terrestrial person can read the Word and see only the literal sense; there is nothing in that person which can detect an internal meaning. However, the same words read by that person are perceived by spiritual beings as expositions of universal truths and principles: for them the literal meanings count for nothing and only the richer spiritual truths are contemplated; and taking it further celestial beings see transcendental values, states, uses and functions in the literal or spiritual meanings. From one viewpoint these seem to be utterly different and unrelated things, however, in the final analysis they are one because all levels, qualities, states and values are in mutual correspondence, and they come forth from the one Divine communication.

Swedenborg sums up the function of the Word as follows:

“Thus after man separated himself from heaven the Lord provided a medium of conjunction of heaven with man by means of the Word”.

It is known from spiritual sources that when a man or woman reads the Word with sincerity and feeling, and knows that it has a sacred inner content, then what is read is apprehended by the outer mind with a degree of illumination. At the same time, spiritual beings associated with the person grasp the more universal meanings embodied in the words and are themselves enlightened. Simultaneously, celestial beings associated with the person perceive the meanings, ends and uses contained in the words and act accordingly. Therefore, when used consciously the Word unifies the interests and functions of earthly beings and heavenly beings, and brings them into correspondential harmony.

We humans, who live in the world of space, time and physical matter, have all of our thoughts bound up with these things and dimensions, and never see the fulness of the real

world. Those who live in the spiritual universe are beyond the limitations of space, time and matter, and moreover, their thoughts are unrestricted and they clearly see the spiritual objects and processes to which their thoughts refer. Even if terrestrial thoughts are presented to them, they never see them in earthly terms but perceive only the cosmic and spiritual riches which they contain. For example, if the name Moses is presented to spiritual beings it is impossible for them to think of the historical figure of that man. Instead they comprehend only the laws of life, the order of spiritual creation, and all the good, truth, love and wisdom which the laws contain. Celestial souls do not think like men and women, in fact, they do not cogitate, reason or meditate upon ideas at all. They have immediate perception of the inner contents of things and experience them by means of exquisite affections or states of love.