

Swedenborg : A Universal Genius

Everybody who knows the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg also knows about the important work of "Divine Providence". Standing here in Sydney at the Swedenborg Centre I can tell you that it was a perfect work of Divine Providence that brought me on the way to Australia. It was Rosemarie Lorenz who walked into my home in Darmstadt in February 2001. We both didn't know anything about each other, but Rosemarie got my address from Barbara Schmidt from Freiburg in southern Germany, whose husband was a Minister of the Swedenborgian Church in Germany. So Rosemarie phoned and she came, and soon we found out that we both had a common interest: Emanuel Swedenborg. And so the connection between Darmstadt in Germany and Sydney Australia was perfect. Before meeting Rosemarie I hadn't even thought that there could be a single Swedenborgian in Australia.

It's still a miracle for me that I am here today and that I shall speak to you about Swedenborg, whose writings fascinated me so much that I just had to write two books about him. Like a child I wanted to tell the whole world about him and the answers I found in his writings, answers I had sought since my early childhood, when I grew up in the deepest Catholic part of Germany near the oldest town Trier, founded by Emperor Constantine, before he founded Constantinople.

The glamour of the Catholic Church fascinated me, but the doctrine, that our Lord Jesus Christ would only save Christians, frightened me. I just couldn't believe it, and after trying to find the answers in history and literature, I continued my search for the truth in Science and later on in comparative religion. To make the story short: one day it just said "Swedenborg" in my head. Since I had studied Scandinavian literature, but not found the answers I was looking for, I thought I should have a look at this strange Swede, who wasn't really famous or known. Most people declared him to be crazy or insane. The only thing that I remembered was that August Strindberg was fascinated by him for a while. I just became curious and borrowed the first book I could find at the University library in Frankfurt, and that was the first volume of "True Christian Religion".

Having read numerous books about Quantum physics and so-called New Age literature, I recognized at the first moment that I had found what I always was looking for: The whole concept being in the first chapter covering the unity of God, God the creator and so on. What I read was so breathtaking for me that I started reading Swedenborg systematically and making notes and organizing chapters in my head, because I knew that I would like to write a book about him. Of course I didn't have the slightest idea what I had got into, but I started naively and full of enthusiasm, gave up my job and followed my inspiration.

SWEDENBORG – THE UNIVERSAL GENIUS

Holism was the topic of the late 1980s among natural scientists. And I realized very early that the visionary work of Emanuel Swedenborg is a self-contained whole explaining everything that scientists wanted to prove with their experiments. Swedenborg never saw Science and Religion as separated. He himself experienced the transformation from a natural scientist to a visionary, to the greatest seer the western world has ever known. He describes and explains the whole Universe, the whole Cosmos or Divine Order from the beginning to the open end.

The most important point is that Swedenborg never sees things as isolated. For him the whole “universe is a coherent work from first things to last, because it is a work, that includes ends, causes, and effects in an indissoluble connection”. (True Christian Religion 47) “This all-embracing whole composed of the smallest parts is a coherent single work, to the extent that no single point touches and can be excited, without the sensation being transferred to all other parts”. (True Christian Religion 60)

That means that everything we do, think and intend has an effect on the whole cosmos. If we were aware of this total complexity I dare say we wouldn't be able to do anything because we have no idea about the effects of our acting in the world.

Quantum physics and so called New Age wants to find out the cause, the smallest particle to reveal the secret. I wonder if they ever will find out. Swedenborg had no sort of measuring instruments at his disposal by which he could have tested his scientific speculations. However; there are astonishing passages in his scientific writings, in which he describes elementary particles in a manner scarcely distinguishable from that in a modern physics textbook: “The smaller and closer the parts are to their first simple substratum, the smaller they are in mass, their dissimilarities soften, their imperfections decrease and their forms become more perfect. They are also lighter and quicker in their motion. The more they approach the simple primal substance the purer they become and they attain highest perfection in their mechanism and geometry”. (De Infinito 143)

But ever-deeper probing of matter has still not enabled researchers to find the ultimate building blocks of matter. Although new particles are always being discovered and analyzed, the structure of matter is becoming more and more complicated. Quantum physics can confirm an explanation already given by Swedenborg: “Everything divided is more and more manifold, and not more and more simple, because it approaches nearer to the infinite, in which everything is eternal”. (Conjugal Love 329)

Those short selected quotes can give us an idea about the complexity and infinity of the universe and the world we are living in. In our times we spend incredible amounts of money to find out what Swedenborg found out by mystical insight. But Swedenborg does not claim this wisdom for himself alone but states clearly: “This concurs with the wisdom of the ancients, whereby all things are divisible without limit”. (True Christian Religion 33) And he adds, “That everything can be multiplied without end”. (Conjugal Love 185)

Holism means that every single part in the universe contains the whole knowledge about everything. We can see it in the hologram that describes the whole on the one hand, and also shows that every part contains the whole, on the other. In Quantum theory, the universe is considered as an “unbroken whole”.

And the ground of all being is God, the embodiment of all that is. “God is order, because he himself is substance and form”. (True Christian Religion 52) Everything depends on him, an ordering principle is inherent and transcendent in all apparent things, even in the so called chaos, which is not some confused random disorder, but the absolute fundamental order.

“Whoever traces effects back to their causes may know that the consistence of all things depends on order... It is this unity that effects the preservation of the whole, which would otherwise fall asunder, and relapse not only into primal chaos, but into nothing”. (True Christian Religion 679)

But the fundamental level is and remains always untouched by everything that derives from it. Why is this so?

Swedenborg answers this question with a comparison, which makes clear how the immutability of the ground of being relates to the world of appearances, and at the same time gives us an explanation about our relationship to the universe and to God:

“This created world is not God but from God; and because it is from God so it is in his image just as the image of a man in a mirror in which the man appears but nothing of the man is present”. (Divine Love & Wisdom 59)

As a “mirror” of the universe and created as an image of God, every individual is connected with the absolute consciousness or being and part of this consciousness that is present in all things by divine influence. This means that we are only ostensibly removed from the unity of absolute being, but feel ourselves separated from that which defines our actual essence. As everything in the universe, according to Swedenborg, is love and wisdom, substance and form, inner and outer, and at the same time everything is also a whole or attains to this, then this is also true for the unfolding or development of each individual consciousness. For each person, the unconscious should become conscious. It desires to be integrated into consciousness and so strives towards a wholeness in which it can experience itself consciously as a part of the all-embracing whole and enter into connection with it.

At every point within the universe, we will always be “the centre of divine influences, the image of the heavens is transferred and maps all unto itself”. (Heavenly Secrets 3633)

The nature of Swedenborg’s visionary writings lies in his exegesis of the inner sense of the Bible, especially the first and second books of Moses. He questions not only the dogma of the Christian church but indicates the unifying principle of all the great world religions: there is only one God and Creator with whom all people are connected.

Swedenborg analyses the seven days of creation as the “stages of man’s becoming”, which man has to ascend in order to be united with God and become his image. It is a lifelong process of development in soul and spirit, concerned with the unfolding of “inner” or “spiritual” vision, the intuitive soul faculty and, with it, the training of various levels of consciousness, and the discovery of the inner world. This links man with the divine or cosmic true consciousness and allows him to participate in it according to the unfolding and ripening of his inner world. “The connection with the Lord and regeneration are one and the same”. (Divine Providence 92)

The goal of this soul work and spiritual growth is the complete surrender of the personal or outer will. One’s own will and thought should be utterly subordinated to the will of God, who works in each person, in order that the true divine consciousness can unfold from within.

The heavenly person corresponds to the seventh day of creation. The work of God was completed, and he rested from his work, because all inner struggles in the spiritually most developed individual had ceased. The “spiritual rebirth” is completed: the outer world “follows and serves” the inner world, “the struggle ceases and rest begins”. (Heavenly Secrets 91)

“Whenever evil and falsehood assault him he does not care and thus he is called victorious. He is free and no longer determined by visible ties. The insights of good and truth which he has internalized are his invisible bands”. (Heavenly Secrets 81)

“The heavenly man does not act according to his own desires but according to the pleasure of the Lord, which has become his only desire. Therefore he enjoys inner peace and contentment”. (Heavenly Secrets 85)

Cosmic consciousness streams from within into conscious thought. Everything is ordered as in heaven and indeed because of his influence in a man who is truly reborn. (Heavenly Secrets 2556)

In Heavenly Secrets 87, we are told, that, because the moment in which the inner struggles of man cease and he becomes heavenly, this day is called “Sabbath or the day of Peace”. The

seventh day is, therefore, “the union of the Divine Self with the humanity of the Lord” (Heavenly Secrets 10), the true salvation of humanity from our ties with the material world and our becoming one with the Creator.

Spiritual rebirth is the birth of the spiritual person who is ensouled by heavenly peace, which Swedenborg describes in his biblical exegesis and is also the inner sense common to all great religions, hidden in their holy scriptures. The birth of the spiritual person is the esoteric meaning of all religions. It corresponds to the inner sense of the Koran, the holy text of Islam. Islam means “peace”, just as the inner sense of the Jewish greeting Shalom and Yoga of Eastern religion mean “Peace”.

“Divine peace is in the Lord and arises from the union of the Divine itself and the divine-human in it...For this reason one used to greet each other in the ancient world with words still used today: “peace be with you!” In remembrance of these things the Sabbath was instituted and named after rest or peace. (Heaven & Hell 286-287)

And as a witness of this peace Swedenborg confesses: “As I have experienced this peace...I can also describe it, certainly not literally as it is in itself – for human words are not adequate – but by comparison with the peace and mind of those who are content in God.” (HH 284)
The end of the “holy war, the struggle within”, and the “defeat of one`s own imperfection” brings about this peace.

Swedenborg`s exegesis of the creation story in the Old Testament can be compared with the development of consciousness and apprehension of God in the religious texts of the East.

Becoming a human being means becoming similar to God – his image – and unfolding the Divine in the human. This supreme goal is a gift of mercy, which humans can only attain through “divine grace” according to Swedenborg. Only through inner conversion can the senses, deception and materialist thinking be overcome and absolute truth behind phenomena be glimpsed.

In the East, the seeker is initiated through spiritual training into the high art of meditation. The religious writings of the East give precise guidelines. In the Upanishads, we read:

“Bring the stream of feelings and thoughts under your control in order that the supreme reality, the illuminated Lord, manifests himself to you. Strive solely for eternal bliss. Use your reason and judgement to keep your senses from adhering to the things of pleasure. They will then be purified by the light of divine purity within and this light will manifest to you. Be master of your breath and inner powers light the Self in you. Through meditation get drunk on the wine of Divine love, so you will attain perfection”. (Swetasvtara Upanishad)

And in the Bhagavad Gita (VI, 8) we read:

He is a Yogi, a Perfect One;
Wise, his heart full of happiness;
Illuminated, his soul is set on high,
He is a master of his senses.

THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS IN CHICAGO 1893

The unique spiritual teachings of the naturalist and seer, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), were first brought to the attention of the wider Religious world at the Parliament of World

Religions in Chicago during 1893. Remarkably, this first World Parliament of Religions was not inaugurated by representatives of established religions or even more so for the reason of an inter-religious collaboration but by the prominent Chicago lawyer Charles Carroll Bonney. Bonney's religious conviction was based on the teachings in Swedenborg's religious works, their focal point being the description of the spiritual unity of the world religions as to their innermost meaning.

When presenting his first plan to form a world parliament of religions Charles C. Bonney writes in an article in 1889: "The crowning of the world exhibition of 1893 ought not to be the presentation of material triumphs, industrial achievements and technical victories of mankind, no matter how grand these achievements may be. The spirit of enlightenment and progress of our times requires something more illustrious, more noble". (12/1, 1900)

Charles C. Bonney, who, since his youth had been interested in world religions, was a member of the Church of the New Jerusalem, a church based on Swedenborg's visionary theology. This had been founded in London in 1787. He was convinced of the rightness of this theology and in it discovered those fundamental truths validating the creation of a world parliament of religions whereupon the whole plan of this religious congress to be held in 1893 was based, this being: that God foresees the means of salvation for every religion and that all peoples that live in accordance to their religion would receive something spiritual.

Swedenborg was indeed one of the greatest ecumenists constantly stressing the universality of God's Church and the One uniting element, the "Universal" of the church or of mankind, which has to be found in all religions, essential for them to become a "community". This is the acknowledgement of God and the goodness of life: "Acknowledgement of God effects a conjunction of God and man, denial of God causes disjunction. Each one acknowledges God and is conjoined with Him in accord with the goodness of his life. Goodness of life, or living rightly, is shunning evils, because they are contrary to religion, thus to God. These are factors common to all religions, and by them any one can be saved". (Divine Providence 325)

At this first World Parliament of Religions many Christians of the American continent and from all over the world were confronted with the depth and beauty of the eastern way of thinking. The address by the yet little known Swami Vivekananda, born 1863 in Calcutta, a devotee of the famous Indian Vedanta master Sri Ramakrishna, formed the highlight of the congress, because from his spiritual insights he was able to speak in the name of all religions and to point out what they had in common: "May He breathe into you His Spirit Whom each of you call with a different name, yet Who is always the same so that you become conscious of the Divine in every religion. However, that does not mean that a Christian should become a Buddhist, or a Hindu a Christian, rather that everyone would make the Spirit of the others one's own, without changing one's own belief for that reason. Then the representatives of all religions and denominations will come together, freed from conflicts, finding harmony, peace collaboration and mutual support". (K.O. Schmidt.: Universal Religion according to Vivekananda, Drei Eichen Verlag, Ergolding 1970. p. 17)

It could not be just a coincidence that at the second convention of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993, again a representative of eastern religions gave the main address at the final gathering on the 4th of September in the Grant Park, outdoors, 'under clear sky': the Dalai Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. He deeply stirred the hearts of his audience, just as Vivekananda had done so one hundred years ago.

It is of great importance to see the similarity between the teachings of the holy eastern scriptures and the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Reaching perfection, gaining bliss and peace is only possible by overcoming the natural senses. I dare say that Swedenborg brought us the old teachings of the East when revealing the inner

sense of the Bible, and at the same time added a new revelation about the meaning of the Lord's coming into the world.

But there is also a great difference between the eastern belief and Swedenborg's description of the role of Jesus Christ.

The Hindus place Jesus on the same level as their Avatars. Even though the Indian Avatar is a teacher of wisdom, he is not a saviour as is Jesus Christ, who due to his actual at-one-ment with the Divine, brought Salvation to humankind. The Hindus make no difference between their avatars and the prophets and missionaries of other religions. All are given the same position as teachers of wisdom for humankind, as reflected in the Bhagavad Gita.

Christians assign to Jesus, notwithstanding other incarnations of the Divine, the exclusive position of being the only begotten Son of God. Of all the great world religions, Christianity is the only religion with members that exalt Jesus Christ as the sole incarnation of God himself. This remarkable assertion of one human Divinity cannot be found in other religions. A profound, biblically aligned explanation can be found in the systematic theology of Swedenborg. He regards the Christian Church as being but a part of the universal church, like heart and lungs are part of the whole body. The universal church forms from the central idea of God as the Divine Human-One, and encompasses some of the transcendental teachings of the East. In this context of approaching the Lord alone as God, an avatar or Buddha would be a fully realised image of distinguishable oneness. For Swedenborg, the resurrected Jesus Christ embodies the Divine Self in the form of the Divine Human-One. He and the Father are One – the Divine human totally united with the Divine essence.

“His soul was the Divine itself, which is called the Father since God is indivisible; and his human born into the world is the human of God the Father, which is called the Son of God”. (True Christian Religion 538)

“It is the reason for the statement in John 1:18 about nobody, except the only begotten Son, ever having seen God, and about there being no way to the Father except through him; as well as from the statement that he is the Mediator”. (Heavenly Secrets 4211)

Swedenborg explains in detail why humanity can obtain through the person of Jesus Christ an idea of the Divine human that forms an inner connection and mental conception of God, because God cannot be thought of in any way than in human form. (Confer Heavenly Secrets 5110)

Jehovah is the Divine, the Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ, thereby initiating a decisive turning process in the whole cosmic world history.

“Because the Lord became the Word in its literal form, the state of the church was entirely changed. All the churches before his coming were representative, not able to see Divine truth except in the shade. But after the Lord's coming into the world, a church was instituted by him which saw Divine truth in light. The difference between the two is like evening and morning. Before his coming, the Lord was indeed present with spiritual people but mediately through heaven; whereas after his coming into the world he put on the Divine Natural also, in which he is present with all people”. (Sacred Scripture 99)

Swedenborg also elucidates what is meant by the salvation of humanity, the so-called redemption which was brought about by the incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus.

“Without his advent no one could have been reformed or regenerated, and so saved. But this became possible after the Lord had deprived the devil (that is hell) of all power and had glorified his human, that is, had united it to the Divine with his Father. If these things had not been done,

no one would have been capable of permanently receiving any Divine truth, still less any Divine good". (The Lord 17)

Christ's light-garment is the emanation of his truly Divine nature and holiness. It penetrates body and soul. "He unlike anyone else, rose from death with his whole body". (Divine Love & Wisdom 221)

With the Lord's advent the whole cosmos and so the universal church could be renewed and flooded with light. Christ, the logos and primeval light, is for Swedenborg the cosmos itself and, in regard to the whole creation is immanent and transcendental. The cosmos, as a spiritual structure, has the form of a Grand Man or Universal Human according to the image in which humans have been created.

"Variations in matters of doctrine and in forms of worship are like the variations that exist with the physical senses and with the inner parts of the body which...all contribute to the perfection of the whole. Indeed the Lord flows in and works by way of charity though in different ways according to the inherent qualities of each individual. And in so doing he arranges everyone into a proper order, on earth as in heaven. In this way the Lord's will is done, as he himself teaches 'on earth as it is in heaven'. (Heavenly Secrets 1285)

This means that all people are being enlightened by the same spiritual light if they believe in the One God as being the Almighty and live a life of love towards this God according to their religion. Swedenborg emphasises again and again the universal importance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, with reference to the internal regeneration of all humankind: "No nation is incapable of being saved if it acknowledges God and adopts a good life. The good Lord has redeemed all of them. We are spiritual by birth, a fact that gives us the ability to receive the gift of redemption". (True Christian Religion 729)

If there is only one universal church or religion, why are there so many different religions? The Hindus always knew about this as they have the oldest religion or universal doctrine. That's why Vivekananda was able to speak in the name of all religions and to point out what they had in common: "May He breathe into you His Spirit whom each of you call with a different name, yet who is always the same so that you become conscious of the Divine in every religion".

All Aryan religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Lamaism and that of Zarathustra – originate in the eastern Hemisphere. There is hardly any other country that has raised more religious personages than India, and so it is occasionally referred to as the "mother country of all religions". The Semitic religions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam – also did not arise in the West but in the far, the middle and the near East. The "East" is for all religions, regardless of how diverse their presentation may seem, always the origin from which the doctrine of the inner light comes into being. Whilst this religion lived on in Asia, in the course of time it was almost entirely lost in the West along with its true spiritual orientation.

EX ORIENTE LUX! Light comes from the East! This well-known metaphor refers symbolically to the heavenly light shining within everyone. That Divine spark has to be awakened to enable a move to enlightenment. The spiritual cause of this symbol does indeed express the genesis and origin of that eternal truth. Therefore the Holy Scriptures and the masters of the geographic East teach the way to attain true God-realisation, which is as follows:

We can only attain salvation and the true religion, being reunion with God, through conquering attachment to the sensuous world which requires the overcoming of the material way of thinking and developing the art of inner perception. In essence it involves, according to the teachings of Mahayana-Buddhism, unfolding the seven levels of consciousness and organs of supersensual perception. In Hinduism this corresponds to the chakras, the seven mystical centres within the

human body, symbolically represented by the lotus flower, and by the kundalini energy of the serpent, the symbol of knowledge.

In the Semitic Religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, being those based on the Bible, the teachings regarding the Divine light are not as explicitly rendered as in the main Aryan religions. They differ quite distinctly in their external representation as also in their belief in the literal meaning of the Word. At their external levels, these three major monotheistic religions seem incompatible, although their internal unity does reveal itself in their interrelations.

For Swedenborg, the whole Bible has been written only with respect to Jesus Christ, who, by fulfilling what has been prearranged and prophesied about him in The Old Testament, is the spiritual center of the whole universe. At the same time, he is the spiritual sun, the universal spirit, the guiding spirit, providing true orientation for all humankind. Swedenborg writes in a matter of fact kind of way: "THE LORD IS THE EAST (DOMINUM EST ORIENS)". (Conjugial Love 261)

JUDAISM: THE UNIVERSAL COVENANT

I will now take a brief look at each of the three Semitic Religions, linking their teachings with Swedenborg's universal principles. First Judaism.

The literal translation of the Hebrew word `Israel` means `God's warrior`. This name was given to Jacob when, after his battle with God's angel at Jabbok, he emerged as victor though with his thigh out of joint. This battle symbolises his internal wrestling with God within his soul. After the battle, a voice spoke to Jacob: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed". (Genesis 32:28)

God's covenant with Israel and the wrestling of Jacob correspond to God's covenant with all humankind and the internal combat that God enters into with every individual who sets out on the spiritual path. For everyone is a "nation" is Israel, is a warrior of God, and so it is said in the Old Testament: "For you were the fewest of all peoples". (Deuteronomy 7:7)

We are all called upon to wrestle for God within our inmost to transform, with the help of God, our human self, to become more and more the image of God, as written in the story of creation. As Swedenborg puts it:
"In the inner meaning, `Israel` is the celestial-spiritual person and consequently the inner person. Therefore, `Israel` also means the inner spiritual church". (Heavenly Secrets 4292)

Israel is therefore a state or a quality with which we have all been endowed by God enabling us to enter into the covenant with him. It denotes the interior of the church – the soul – by which we can be united with the Divine. Therefore, all believers are referred to by the term Israel and make up Israel, or the universal church, into which the whole of mankind has been appointed. All human beings are potentially the people of the One God, and so each person is called upon to wrestle for God within him or herself, until base human nature has been overcome. Consequently each individual is potentially a chosen one and all nations are spiritually speaking chosen because they form a spiritual unit: that of Israel.

Judaic mysticism strongly emphasises the divinity inherent in the world, that is, the so-called hidden female element of God, referred to as `Shechina`. She is the `soul of Israel`, connected not only with the history of the Jewish people but also with the whole cosmos. This also explains why Israel can, so to speak, be considered as a nation representative of all humankind.

Swedenborg, in his own manner, from innumerable references in the Old Testament, determines why the Israelites were called the chosen people:

“The reason why that nation is called Jehovah`s people in the Word, the nation chosen and loved by him, is that in it Judah is used to symbolise the celestial church, Israel the spiritual church, and each son of Jacob some aspect of the Church”. (Heavenly Secrets 10396)

Therefore, the connection between Israel, all humankind and consequently the universal church is again re-established, as all the people of the world share in the Divine who is present in every one. For the people of Israel, the Ten Commandments constituted:

“... The starting-point of the Word and so of the church which was to be established among the Israelite nation, and being a brief summary of the whole of religion, making a link between God and humankind and humankind of God”. (True Christian Religion 283)

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

I now turn to traditional Christian teachings.

Many Christians live with the erroneous belief that they alone have the really true religion and will enter eternal life after having died simply because they were born into and baptized in the Christian Church. Indeed, they do worship Christ as the saviour and redeemer of humankind, but few of them realise that he only pointed out the way of salvation because he fulfilled the Word, the Divine light, in the most perfect way when on earth. However, we will only be redeemed if we become true followers of Christ by actually manifesting, with his power, the Divine light within ourselves. We should recall that since the day he was born into human form, the extent that the Divine was hidden within him was, and still is, a great mystery to the world as the evangelist John portrays most clearly with those words: “The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”. (John 1:5)

It appears almost natural that humankind did not recognise the light and consequently also was not able to acknowledge it. Swedenborg tells us that the crucifixion of Jesus means “the Word was completely destroyed and desecrated”. (The Lord 16)

The history of Christianity, now proceeding over more than 2000 years, reflects the struggle for understanding – or misunderstanding as the case may be – of the Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ. This is because he became, according to Swedenborg “the word in the outermost. It is from this that he is called ‘the first and the last’ (Revelation 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8; 21:7; 22:13”. (Sacred Scripture 98)

The Bhagavad Gita already records the doctrine of Divine Perfection as manifested in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Thus Krishna, the Divine Guru, informs his pupil Arjuna in X 32 – 34:

“I am the beginning and the middle
And the end of all that is.
Of all knowledge
I am the knowledge of the Soul.
Of the many paths of reason.
I am the one that leads to Truth.
Of sounds I am the first sound, A;
Of compounds I am coordination.
I am time, never-ending time.

I am the Creator who sees all.
I am death that carries off all things,
And I am the source of things to come”

Correspondingly, it is said in the Book of Revelation to John: “ And he said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son”. (Revelation 21:6-7)

ISLAM

Finally, Islam, which can be described as the hidden secret.

The main Aryan religions teach the way towards unification of each person with the Creator. This is the goal of every person`s development in becoming a true human being. Their teaching is perfectly clear: “The truth is you are always conjoined with the Lord. However, you must know it. There is nothing more worth knowing” is a statement in the *Setasvatara Upanishad*, which is analogous to Swedenborg`s biblical explanations.

Yet, according to Swedenborg, not even the angels in the highest heaven can ever reach up to the Absolute; they only have appearances` of the truth. Only Jesus is true God and true Man, because only he has completely glorified his human nature. Swedenborg also explains why men and women can never attain this absolute perfection:

“...because we are finite, the Lord`s actual Divine cannot be linked to us, but only joined. By way of illustration, the light of the sun cannot be linked to the eye nor the sound carried by the air be linked to the ear, but they can only be respectively joined so as to enable seeing and hearing”. (True Christian Religion 718)

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, does not acknowledge the glorification of human beings. They can become a prophet and apostle of the Word of God, but according to the teachings of Islam, can never attain the purity of the Almighty. Humans always remain merely an image, yet, by overcoming the senses, we can attain the highest degree of self-realisation. So, one of Islam`s most important mystics, Muhiyuddin Muhammad Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), agrees so closely with Swedenborg`s teaching when he says: “God is the mirror wherein you perceive yourself as you are his mirror in which he contemplates his names”.

The enlightened one can see the human self (as if in a mirror) as an image of the Divine Self, that is as likeness of God and proclaim: “TAT TVAM ASI”, meaning: “that you are”, like the Hindus say.

We should become aware of our divine nature and destiny in the world, but we may not consider ourselves to be God, a presumption Swedenborg knew all too well and prophesied in the future. His warning is, therefore, as clear as it is drastic:

“May everyone beware that he does not fall into that deplorable heresy that God has poured himself into men and is in them and no longer in himself... a heresy which is so repulsive that it stinks like a corpse in the spiritual world”. (Divine Love & Wisdom 130)

In another reference he says it succinctly: “What comes from God is not God himself, but divine”. (True Christian Religion 25)

Swedenborg reasons that, according to divine providence, it was inevitable that Islam, the last of the three great Semitic religions, would arise because the knowledge of correspondences,

the symbolic representation of spiritual things, had been lost in existing religions. Idolatries had arisen which before the advent of Islam spread throughout the whole world, that is Africa and Europe: "as well as Asia with its surrounding islands. In order to uproot idolatrous practices under the auspices of divine providence a new religion developed that was appropriate to the character of the people of the Near East. In this religion there would be material from both Testaments of the Word". (Divine Providence 255)

This is probably the (only) explanation for the highest command to Judaism and Islam concerning God that "You shall not make for yourself a carved image".(Exodus 20:4) This is the reason why in purist Islamic art there is no depiction of the human form which gives mosques their unique magic. In that respect Islam has the same global function as the other world religions.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

Swedenborg's revealing of the inner meaning of the *Bible* culminates in the proclamation of a new religious era, which, at the end of the Holy Scripture in the Book of Revelation to John is being hailed as a crowning jewel called "The New Jerusalem". It started according to Swedenborg, when the Christian Church spiritually came to an end.

Swedenborg refers to the state of the Christian Church at his time as `Babylon` in the Book of the Book of Revelation, a state arising when charity and faith cease to exist and are being substituted by self-love being the ruling love of `papisty` which started after the arrival of Christ. "It is more dangerous and dreadful than the one before the Lord's coming, because it profanes the church's interior forms of kindness and truth, which the Lord disclosed to the world when he revealed himself". (Last Judgement 55)

The Christian Church is, however, only a small part within the universal church. Swedenborg emphasises again and again that everyone can attain eternal bliss irrespective of their religion. Therefore all religions contain similar laws, such as the Ten Commandments, which, if followed, indicate the way.

"Regarding the Lord's spiritual church, it should be realised that it exists throughout the whole world, for it is not confined to those who possess the Word and from the Word have knowledge of the Lord and so of some truth of faith. It is also among those who do not possess the Word and therefore do not know the Lord at all, and as a consequence have no knowledge of any truth of faith". (Heavenly Secrets 3263)

And in more precise and simple words, he puts it as follows: "The church of the Lord is with all who live throughout the whole world in kindness according to their religion". (New Jerusalem 246)

That is the annunciation of a true "Ecclesia Catholica", of an all-encompassing church truly representing the body of Christ. Everyone is a member of this all-encompassing body, all with equal rights, and is able to find the path to salvation within their own religion.

The New Jerusalem means symbolically the new religious epoch. In this church, that is the new age to come, the Word will be understood because "it is shining and translucent from its spiritual meaning". (Apocalypse Revealed 897)

Also, the teachings of the new church will be written in the hearts of people (Apocalypse Revealed 194), as it once was with the people of the most ancient epoch.

“This light, which enlightens the mind, flows in from no other source than out of heaven from the Lord; and as those who shall be the New Jerusalem will directly approach the Lord, that light will flow in through the love of the will into the perception of the understanding, which is the orderly way”. (Apocalypse Revealed 914)

Swedenborg`s prophecy is a great cosmic outline, and every individual can take part in it. By developing the human virtues of love to the neighbour, of truth, selflessness and true humility, people in the New Jerusalem will become servants of the all-encompassing `All` by being in fellowship with Christ. By offering up their gifts and talents for the welfare of others, each individual creates uses, a function Swedenborg frequently emphasises. It is an activity that should be manifested in creation, since good must not remain an idea but be realized through active deeds. This is the meaning of creation, and the reason for fellowship with Christ, which each and every one can realize in their own individual way. So Swedenborg gave us a very definite and infinitely comforting maxim:

“Charity and innocence not only excuse selfhood, that is, a person`s evil and falsity, but also virtually do away with it”. (Heavenly Secrets 164)

Swedenborg`s pertinent description of the egotism and materialism of his time matches perfectly with the conditions of our time (refer New Jerusalem 65). We must all develop our talents and apply them towards the welfare of the whole community, so that the world may turn out to be a better place. For love of self and love of the world are according to Swedenborg, hell and evil, whereas “love for the Lord and love for our neighbour rule in the heavens and actually constitute the heavens”. (Heaven & Hell 554)

For us today, this may appear to be a type of magic fairy-tale utopia, yet it would be possible to attain without any external revolutionary upheavals. All that needs to be done is for everyone to change themselves, so that the effect could be felt in the world around us, thereby creating a healthier and saner spiritual climate in the world. We must open our interiors to allow the Divine to flow into us and turn us towards the inner light in order to develop the power of our hearts. Heavenly bliss is the vehicle that stirs our interior whenever we act purely selflessly. (Refer Heavenly Secrets 9984)

Swedenborg prophesises, that “the time will come when people will be enlightened” (Heavenly Secrets 4402), and adds that real Christianity will not arise until that time (refer True Christian Religion 700). The New Jerusalem will be the age of true and real self-realisation in which each and every person can follow their leading love and inclinations as a calling, for that is the essence of true inner life and endeavour of the human condition.

It does appear that it would be fairly easy to turn earth into paradise if this incredible simple advice were followed by all people. It is also hard to believe that the conclusion of such a rich and complex achievement as Emanuel Swedenborg`s writings, which open up for us a whole new spiritual universe, is the realisation that it is simply about developing human virtues to their highest degree of purity. Yet this seems the hardest thing that can be demanded of humankind, involving the invitation to take up one`s cross, meaning to take up battle against the baser desires within one`s deepest inner self. (Refer Swedenborg Life 66)

It is the only way to become more and more an image of God and a perfect whole of the universe.