

**Spiritual Unity  
of  
East & West**



**Spiritual Unity  
of  
East & West**

**in the writings of the Seer  
Emanuel Swedenborg**

**Ursula Groll**



**SWEDENBORG ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA  
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I particularly thank my husband for his patience and tolerance which enabled me to work with Swedenborg.

*Ursula Groll*

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### **Back cover**

***Mandala* © by Rosemarie Lorenz  
Sydney, Australia**

The three large cradles represent the Divine receptacles bearing within themselves and nurturing spheres of three great world religions - Hinduism, Judaism and Islam.

These spheres, enclosed in seven concentric levels, contain their holy inscriptions: OM, Shalom and Bismala.

In the centre of the Mandala, the Cross radiantly emanates the Divine Blessing: "Peace be with you", by which Jesus made himself known to his disciples after his resurrection (John 20:20-22).

The infinity of the universe, the ineffableness of which cannot be comprehended, is expressed by the protrusions reaching out into space and through which Divine inflowing is being received.

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*Spiritual Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg*  
Quotations are shown in inverted commas with the title of the specific work being given in italics immediately afterwards. The numbers refer to paragraphs or sections, which are uniform in all editions of Swedenborg's works, rather than to page numbers. For notes and acknowledgments on translations used, refer to the Bibliography of Swedenborg's Spiritual Works (see Contents).  
The complete set of Swedenborg's spiritual writings can be accessed by visiting the following website:  
[www.swedenborg.com.au/links.htm](http://www.swedenborg.com.au/links.htm)

*God, He is the East!*  
*God, He is the West!*  
*North - and Southern lands,*  
*Rest in the peace of His hands.*

J. W. Goethe  
*West-östlicher Divan*



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## Foreword

This is my second book reflecting on the spiritual teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg. It focuses on Swedenborg's descriptions of the universal spiritual kingdom presented throughout his comprehensive religious writings. Swedenborg offers the view that in the centre of the whole universe, and consequently of the universal spiritual kingdom or the spiritual 'East', stands Jesus Christ who has revealed the Divine light, the light of salvation, in all its magnificence.

In contrast to the teachings that regard Jesus as just a master among masters, for Swedenborg he is the Master of all masters, the Redeemer of humankind, whose incarnation led to the spiritual renewal of all religions and salvation for all peoples and nations. Jesus is also shown to be the founder of the Christian church, representing not just a religion but rather a spiritual epoch in the course of world eras. Swedenborg calls this epoch the fourth, or the Iron Age, and made the further claim that it came to an end at the time of the 'European Enlightenment'.

We are now living at the beginning of the fifth and last spiritual epoch which Swedenborg calls the 'New Age', the 'New Jerusalem' or the 'New Church'. This is no ecclesiastical or organisational body but one based on an inner, cosmic transformation process, effected by the advent of Jesus Christ. Yet, Swedenborg shows its impulses arose principally from the non-Christian world in which the Divine light, brought into the world by Christ in the most perfect way, could be received along an inner pathway, unadulterated, and free from all dogmas, and thus leading to spiritual renewal of all humanity.

The third millennium will impress the significance of Christ upon the consciousness of humanity in general, but also install him as the central figure of history. For the birth of Christ presented us with a new time measure together with a meaning of past events that historians, searching at the secular level, have failed to find. It is hoped that this book, in showing how the teachings in the spiritual writings of Swedenborg reveal an inner meaning to history, will help to raise general awareness of the need for investigation at a deeper level. The time has finally come to raise Swedenborg's genius and uniqueness out of the fog of obscurity that up until now has generally prevailed, to let it shine forth, a brilliant light, bringing spiritual enlightenment.

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## The 1993 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago

**A** Parliament of World Religions was convened in Chicago between 28<sup>th</sup> August and 4<sup>th</sup> September 1993. This was attended by approximately 6,500 participants from many religions of varying faiths, only the second time for such an event, the previous one being 100 years earlier. Under the auspices of theologian Hans Kueng from Tübingen, Germany, valuable statements towards world ethics were compiled, which, in spite of passionate debates during the sessions of the parliament, were finally brought together into one document, endorsed and signed by the majority of those present. It was hoped that this jointly collaborated declaration regarding world ethos would initiate comprehensive discussions in all religions leading to processes for the acceptance of more respect, communication and tolerance between the individual nations and religions resulting in a better world order<sup>11</sup>. This was based on the premise that considering the catastrophic state of the world, there would be no peace unless religious tolerance was attained.

However, how can peace be established amongst the religions if in the course of history to the present time, so many bloody and increasingly terrible wars have been, and are still being, fought all over the world?

The ancient saying: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7: 12) contains in a nutshell the ideal essence of the world ethos. This Golden Rule is expressed in all religions in various ways, pin-pointing the fundamental attitude that would make it possible for humankind to live together in peace and harmony. This encompasses tolerance and love of the neighbour, both of

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which are taught in all religions, and which Jesus, according to ancient Jewish tradition, extols as being the greatest and noblest command: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Likewise is the other command: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). This double law of love is valid for all humankind, as Jesus proclaimed: “On these two commandments depend all the Laws and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Everyone should manifest these within their closest private sphere of influence, and from there radiate them out further. In this way it is possible to bring about harmonious co-existence and peace between all nations and the various religions.

The cruelty and inhumanity of wars will always be an expression of isolation and alienation of people from true humanity and thereby from the true meaning of religions, all of which, deep within their essence, point the way towards true peace and always aiming to be ambassadors of peace. According to Isaiah 48:22 in the Old Testament: “There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked”. Discord about, and ignorance of, the inner unity of all religions widens forever the gap and makes it increasingly difficult to lift the veil which hides those truths fundamental to all religions.

If the internal reality and true significance of each and every religion had not become lost to the majority of humanity, and especially to the personalities responsible for leadership, the world might indeed be better and more peaceful. There would be no need for an alleged new world ethos, for all religions contain Divine commandments, established since antiquity, together with ethics, binding for all humankind, which guarantee a peaceful co-existence, provided men and women adhere to them.

The assembly at the first Parliament of World Religions held from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> September 1893, incidentally also in Chicago as part of the great Industrial World Exhibition, was fully aware of the implications previously mentioned. This Parliament with its spiritual discernment was to be the crowning jewel of the prestigious show display-

ing all the technical advancements of industrialisation. Even at that time the aspects common to all religions had been established and clarified. Rather than amalgamation, a tolerant discussion between the representatives of the various religions was being attempted, “in order to present to view a religious concord confirming to the world the reasons for unity of humankind, and also to point out the ethical, spiritual and religious forces representing the roots of human progress”<sup>20</sup>.

It is remarkable that the first World Parliament of Religions was not inaugurated for the purpose of an inter-religious collaboration, nor was it organised by representatives of established religions but by a prominent Chicago lawyer Charles Carrol Bonney. Bonney’s religious conviction was based on the influence of the Swedish natural scientist and seer Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). One of the focal points of Swedenborg’s spiritual work is the description of the unity of the world religions in terms of their innermost meaning.

When presenting his first plan to form a World Parliament of Religions, Charles Bonney wrote in an 1889 article: “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 might be. The spirit of enlightenment and progress of our times requires something more illustrious, more noble”<sup>27</sup>.

Charles 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. The whole plan of the 1893 Chicago religious congress was based on the principles expounded by Swedenborg that God foresees the means of salvation in every religion and that all peoples living in accordance with their religion will receive something spiritual.

Swedenborg was indeed one of the greatest ecumenics constantly stressing the universality of God’s spiritual king-

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dom. The one uniting element, though, which has to be found in all religions for this 'Universal' to exist, and essential for humanity to become one community, is the acknowledgment of God and a life of goodness. As Swedenborg puts it: "Belief in God brings about God's union with us and our union with God; and denial of God brings about severance. Our belief in God and union with him depend on our living a good life. A good life, or living rightly, is abstaining from evils because they are against our religion and therefore against God. These are the general principles of all religion, through which everyone 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 in 1863 in Calcutta and a devotee of the famous Indian Vedanta master Sri Ramakrishna, formed the highlight of the congress. This was 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"<sup>21</sup>.

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 September in Grant Park, outdoors 'under clear sky'. The Dalai Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism and winner of the Nobel Peace

Prize, deeply stirred the hearts of his audience, just as Vivekananda had done one hundred years earlier. But what is so fascinating about this Eastern spirituality, deeply penetrating into the hearts of people, and which nowadays seems to suit many searchers in the Western world much more than the dogma and interpretations of the three religions based on the *Bible* - Judaism, Christianity and Islam?

Why do so many people, particularly of our culture, leave the institutional Christian church, turning towards Eastern philosophy, meditation and spirituality? Is there a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western religiosity? And if that is so, what could possibly be the reason?

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## The Secret of the East

The upsurge of interest in Eastern spirituality shows that many are looking for a new orientation, one that actually offers practical help with regard to their existential needs in the search for the meaning of life. We often try to find the road to happiness through amassing worldly goods and material prosperity, which allegedly offers security and refuge, whereas the welfare of the soul - the ultimate goal of human endeavour - is being neglected more and more. Obviously, neither the custodians of cultural heritage nor the politicians are capable of showing the true searcher the right way. Also, the Christian Church rarely penetrates beyond the literal sense of the *Bible*, leaving followers stranded with their unsolved questions just like other institutions do, even though valuable guidance could be expected from them. These surely are the reasons for the many attempts being made in enthusiastic anticipation of finding a new direction, leaving many to turn to Eastern religions which, through ignorance still prevailing in the Western countries, are often only recognised and understood in a very limited way in their vast significance and spiritual depth.

This brings to mind the famous words by Goethe who, even in his young years, was searching for a synthesis of Western and Eastern wisdom:

As the east so the west  
offer purity to taste.  
Leave all fancies, leave the shell!  
Settle down and feast just well.

Whilst individuals in Western countries try to orientate themselves towards the external world, the Eastern approach

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towards the quest for the meaning of life is sought by turning inwardly, that is, searching for the light within one's soul. This is the essence of not only the main Eastern religions, as will be shown later, but also of the biblical religions. These point the way back to the true 'religio', that is the re-alliance with the real origin of humankind.

This prime sacred light kindles in everyone throughout the world an ardent desire to embark on a search for the 'East', that is "the point of origin and of return"<sup>2</sup>, a place not to be found on any geographical map, yet solely in the heart of the searcher. The principal Asian religions direct us towards our actual centre, our symbolic 'East' of origin, pervaded by radiant Divine light, which, in streaming forth, can illuminate and dissolve the darkness of our materialistic world. The mystical 'East' is both country of origin as well as destination. We would all do well to concentrate on our mystical 'East', the innermost chamber of our heart. The inner light shines there, leading to true salvation.

This mystical, supernatural world - this transcendental realm - is the true spiritual essence of the 'East', whereas the geographic region of the East can be described as being the "exoteric consciousness"<sup>3</sup>. This expresses the double nature, the interior and exterior, or the esoteric and exoteric meaning and significance of the true mystical 'East'.

Many people seem to sense, or even to know intuitively that they could find their lost spiritual welfare in the 'East', being, as it is, our true place of origin. It seems to form a unit and homeland for the human brotherhood, from which our common spiritual and historical roots emerge. In the later period of the Stone Ages the ancestors of the Indo-Germanic peoples actually formed, as to their language, culture and family blood relationships, a uniform nation. This Indo-European nation spread out into different directions and, in doing so, developed into the different races with separate languages. The *Rigveda*, for example, is a collection of more than a thousand spiritual poems of Indian religion dating back some three thousand years and is the oldest record. It is the root of our Indo-Germanic language. The evolution

of the Indo-Germanic nations also reflects the similarities of the various languages that developed. The closer the tribes come to the centre of origin of the language, the more their languages are alike. So the Aryans are that race of the original ancient Indo-Germanic population that migrated furthest to the East, as far as India. Consequently, they are referred to as Indo-Aryans. They were custodians of the highest spiritual cultural heritage, this being the foundation of their religion, which they practised in a rich, highly developed cult<sup>14</sup>.

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"<sup>16</sup>. 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 Greek tradition that serpent can be seen curled around the staff of Aesculapius, symbolising true salvation. Every healer and physician would be familiar with this symbol.

Whoever penetrates the veil of the material world and illusion of the senses and climbs the highest mountain peak of the one and only true revelation, will be kindled by the inner light and will reach the true goal of humanity, as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the holy Hindu text, teaches in VIII 8 - 10:

“He who meditates on Me  
as the Supreme Personality of Godhead,  
his mind constantly engaged in remembering Me,  
undeviated from the path,  
he, O Partha, is sure to reach Me.

One should meditate upon the Supreme Person  
as the one who knows everything,  
as He who is the oldest, who is the controller,  
who is smaller than the smallest,  
who is the maintainer of everything,  
who is beyond all material conception,  
who is unconceivable, and who is always a person.  
He is luminous like the sun,  
and he is transcendental, beyond this material nature.

One who at the time of death,  
fixes his life air between the eyebrows and,  
by the strength of Yoga, with an undeviating mind,  
engages himself in remembering the Supreme Lord in full  
devotion,  
will certainly attain to the Supreme Personality of  
Godhead.”

## Steps to Spiritual Enlightenment

**T**he seven categories of being or seven levels of consciousness mentioned in the previous chapter can be linked, through understanding natural phenomena in terms of spiritual causes, to the mysterious story of creation when God created the world in seven days, as told in the sacred scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The *Bible* is, as are the *Vedas*, a Holy Scripture of the East. However, its literal sense is so obscure that its interior meaning very rarely shines forth simply from the wording. Neither scientific reasoning nor evolutionary theories have yet been able to reveal its true spiritual content. Yet the *Bible* is the foundation of the entire Jewish, Christian and even the Islamic traditions and, as the revelation of the Word of God, is rightly considered to be the absolute truth.

At the beginning of the Book of Genesis we are told “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (Genesis 1:3–5). Then God created the heaven and the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars and the beasts of the earth. Only on the sixth day did he create ‘man’: “in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27) . . . And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God

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rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:1-3).

The enlightened western-inclined seer, Emanuel Swedenborg, claimed that God commissioned him to explain the inner sense or spiritual-causal meaning of the *Bible*. Swedenborg reveals that every item and entity surrounding and accompanying people in the spiritual world such as tools, instruments, accessories, the landscape scenery, buildings, weather, animals and plants are all spontaneously formed as portrayals of their inner states. This enabled him to show in detail the seven days of creation as steps during evolution towards true humanness corresponding to the unfolding of the interior centres of consciousness, as taught in Eastern religions<sup>6</sup>. This process involves each person overcoming the external way of thinking and in its stead developing the ability of inner perception. So we can enter into a supernatural state in touch with Divine light, thereby being released from bondage to the natural, worldly aspects of human nature which resist our being led into true God-realisation. This is also the very theme of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads* and part of the Indian *Vedic* writings, the oldest Holy Scriptures of humankind.

This is a matter of regaining the paradise-like state of consciousness that humankind lost when it disobeyed God’s symbolic command: “You may eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in that day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16).

Prior to having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, men and women lived in a wonderful, mystical union with the Divine source and received all revelations by internal perception, unadulterated by delusions of the senses and illusions of the mind. The soul was still abiding in that paradise-like original state, in which the inner centres of consciousness were indeed still open to the inflowing of Divine Light. These men and women called ‘Adam’ (the Hebrew word being neuter-gender meaning humanity), could still distinguish between reality and illusion. They could perceive the

things as to their true identity, that is, the essence as to its true Divine origin. They lived from their innermost core, that is, the true 'East', which was their true centre. Hence, the *Bible* says: "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:8).

Swedenborg tells us that the regaining of this original, miraculous and paradise-like state of consciousness, a state of the most intimate union with God together with all-encompassing perception, is spiritual rebirth, meaning our transformation from within. Each of the seven days of creation symbolises an inner level of consciousness that has to be unfolded along the path of our spiritual evolution in order to regain the original inner union with the Divine source and to re-establish our lost original status as being the image of God.

Mysticism is, indeed, a core theme of every religion whereby its immutable Divine truth is being expressed and handed down in the various sacred texts. All traditional doctrines teach that the Divine light is hidden and must be sought along the narrow path of spiritual development. The way back to the spiritual homeland should be the true goal of every person. It is a lifelong process of spiritual development arising through an act of freewill, this being an existential decision to turn back to God so as to try to regain this inner union, so sadly lost in ancient times. This is a road we have to follow on our search for our original religion, leading us from the plains of illusions and disillusion to the heights of exultation and realisation, as attested by the Holy Scriptures of the East:

"Fools deride ME  
when I descend in human form.  
They do not know My transcendental nature  
as the Supreme Lord of all that be."  
*Bhagavad Gita IX, 11*

All attempts to truly understand the infinite diversity of the world are in vain as long as they are based on the delusions of self and illusion of the senses, thus making it impossible to perceive the true source of absolute reality. Attachments of

that kind will never allow escape from the illusionary world of matter. The seeker cannot approach true reality along that path. Hence Swedenborg states:

“People who only think about worldly and physical things say from the heart: I am not going to believe unless I am taught about faith and what belongs to it by means of sensory evidence so that I see for myself, that is, by facts so that I understand for myself. And they confirm themselves in this attitude from the consideration that natural phenomena cannot be at variance with spiritual. Consequently it is from sensory evidence that they wish to learn about heavenly and Divine matters. But this is no more possible than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The more they want to become wise by this method, the more they blind themselves, until in the end they believe nothing, not even in the existence of anything spiritual or in eternal life. It arises out of the basic assumption made. This is eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the more they eat of it, the more dead they become.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 128

For Swedenborg, humankind was created as a vessel to receive the Divine, that spiritual light which pervades the whole universe. This spiritual light is from God, the Being or the Self. Everything emerging from that Being, entering into creation partakes in that Divine Being, yet, it is always finite.

“. . . anything that has intrinsic existence is the reality itself that is the source of everything else. That intrinsic reality is ‘life itself’ that is the Divine love that belongs to Divine wisdom and the Divine wisdom that belongs to Divine love. ~ *Divine Love and Wisdom* 76

Being, or Self, pervades everything, immanently as well as transcendently penetrating the whole universe. The Self is omnipresent in totality, within everything and everyone, and endows even the smallest iota with a latent image of the infinite wholeness within.

“The Absolute (meaning the underlying Divine reality) has no specific location. It is with those and in those who are in specific locations, depending on their locations. Love and wisdom, goodness and truth, and the life these qualities give are absolute in God; in fact, they are God himself. A specific location cannot be attributed to them, and neither can a progression from place to place as the source of their omnipresence. For this reason the Lord says he is in the midst of people (Matthew 18:20); and he is in them and they are in him (John 6:56; 14:20; 15:4-5). Nevertheless, no one can comprehend God as he is in himself. Therefore he is visible above the angelic heavens as a sun, which is the form his essence takes. He himself as wisdom emanates from that sun in the form of light, and he himself as love emanates from that sun in the form of heat. That sun is not God himself. The divine love and wisdom surrounding him as they first go forth from him come to angels’ view as a sun. The Absolute in that sun is the Human Being . . . including both the Divine Source and the Divine Human Manifestation. Since the Absolute, which is absolute love and absolute wisdom, was in him as his soul from the Father, therefore divine life or life in itself was in him.” ~ *True Christianity* 25

The more we unfold the inner self, that is, the more we take the Divine within, the closer we will move towards the real source and our true goal in life. In Hinduism, this Being, that is the Divine, the Self, is also called Brahman. This means pure consciousness, the Absolute Reality, as also in that transcendental reality, hidden in all creatures as in everything of the visible world, inherent even within the minutest part of it.

All days start with the sun rising in the east. In Hinduism, Brahman has reference to Divine Being, the Self. The Absolute Reality remains transcendent as the same One hidden in all creatures. However clouded, covered, distorted and inverted is the reception from the Divine Being, the transcen-

dental reality of Brahman remains the same in everything of the visible world, inherent even within the most minute part of it. For the self-centred person in the Western world, the term 'self-realisation' revolves around the limited and masked sense of well being of the separated self, rather than God-realisation, the same undivided One called the Self or Brahman in the East. But only to the extent that we allow God to move the separating self from centre stage can the Divine purpose for us to love God within our fellow humans give an individual image of discernable oneness. To the extent self-centredness dominates, we remain under the dictates of a self-deluded egocentricity derived from the inversions of sensual perceptions and the rationalisations of a dominant selfishness. Swedenborg refers to this false ego as the 'proprium', what is made our own by identification - our own self-centred purposes, feelings, thoughts and actions identified as coming from our own self - in service to egocentric pleasures of a dominant self-love.

“The human proprium consists of everything evil and false that gushes out of self-love and love of the world. It involves believing in ourselves rather than in the Lord or in the Word, and in imagining that what we do not grasp through sensory evidence or through facts does not exist at all.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 210

The ego, or the 'proprium', which we erroneously take to be our true self, is “an impure and most unclean fountain” and for the selfish person “is always thinking of their own merit and righteousness” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 874.

Consequently, the highest goal for an individual is to manifest Divine Self, which is in no way identical with the personal self as we are inclined to think it to be. It is a matter of overcoming the human ego, its desires, falsities and passions, arising from the world of senses, and which contains the seeds of all misery and suffering, as the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches in V 20-21:

“A person who neither rejoices

upon achieving something pleasant  
nor laments upon obtaining something unpleasant,  
who is self-intelligent, who is unbewildered,  
and who knows the science of God,  
is already situated in transcendence.”

This exquisite transpersonal state of consciousness, of true illumination and realisation can only be attained by surrendering totally to the One. According to the Eastern way of thinking this is achievable by the noble art of meditation, which can be revealed to the seeker through spiritual teachings by a master or guru. The guru guides the devotee along the inner path leading towards union with the Divine source, an exercise that has to be practised until mastery has been achieved. The well-known saying ‘practice makes perfect’ serves as a constant reminder.

It is a matter of gaining awareness over feelings and thoughts and ultimately in control of the breath and of the internal forces, in order, as stated in the *Upanishads*, that the supreme reality may actually unfold and truly develop within the person.

Yet the true Self is hidden deep inside, remaining veiled and totally inaccessible to the average person, bound to everyday awareness and attachment to the worldly materialistic way of thinking. Only very few people, the ‘true masters’, are able to see Self and bring its tidings to the world. So in the *Katha Upanishad* we read “It reveals itself to the seers, those who are pure at heart, and have focussed their concentration solely upon Brahman”. Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Swedenborg, the ‘Buddha of the North’ as D. T. Suzuki from Balzac once called him, was himself a master of meditation, although he appeared to be unaware of the Indian form of its practice. He mastered the so-called ‘internal respiration’ technique, whereby he could develop his inner sight, giving him the gift of clairvoyance. He wrote that the most ancient peoples operated with this type of respiration which was far more perfect than the breathing used by people of our time since it

set into vibration the inner levels of consciousness enabling transcendental perception to take place (refer *Secrets of Heaven* 1118).

Swedenborg began using this type of respiration, even in childhood, and over the years was able to attain the highest degrees of consciousness, the type described as ‘Samadhi’ in Eastern meditation practices, which means overcoming the senses. He describes his experience, in words of rapture similar to the ones used in the *Upanishads*, as the highest form of bliss:

“My mind seemed, so to speak, to fly upwards and to empty itself out into an infinite centre. In the centre was love itself (*amor ipse*). From here it radiated out in circles and descended in an awesome circular movement, from the centre, which was love.” ~ *Journal of Dreams* 88

Thanks to the practice of meditation and the grace of God, Swedenborg received his visions in ways that very few seers of humankind have been gifted with, allowing insight into Reality, the foundation of all things.

By abandoning his personal will and surrendering to God’s will, expressed so wonderfully in the familiar words of the Lord’s Prayer “Lord, Your will be done”, Swedenborg gained victory over the senses and attained the highest level of Self-realisation. This was his spiritual rebirth, the birth of a spiritual nature. In his serene state of consciousness, he describes this process for the benefit and instruction of Christians, showing that the inner meaning of the *Bible* reveals it too. This follows up the ancient tradition of the Indian *Vedas*, which teach that only a master, a seer by God’s grace and a true illuminated being, is able to understand and interpret the Holy Scriptures.

The *Bhagavad Gita* IV 34 - 35 says:

“The self-realised soul can impart knowledge unto you  
because they have seen the truth.  
Having obtained real knowledge from a self-realised soul,

you will never fall again into such illusion.”

This is probably also the reason why Swedenborg’s language to a great extent resembles the language of Eastern scripts, a fact of which Swedenborg himself was not even aware.

Indeed, Swedenborg uses the term ‘regeneration’ - being spiritual rebirth or transformation - to describe the new creation of a person, which is the gradual development of the inner levels of consciousness enabling the person to conquer the purely sensuous, material way of thinking and become raised into heavenly light. Along with this, constant battles and conflicts are taking place within the person, with God acting as an inner guide, fighting for the person and gradually transforming the will, making it receptive for the inner light, which will lead towards salvation and blessedness.

“. . . the Lord is constantly fighting on our behalf against evil and falsity and through these battles strengthens us in truth and goodness. The time of conflict is when the Lord is at work, for which reason the Prophets call a regenerate person the work of God’s fingers. He does not rest until love takes the lead and then the conflict ends. When the work progresses so far that faith is united with love, it is called *very good*, since the Lord now makes us likenesses of himself. At the end of the sixth day evil spirits retreat and good ones take their place. We are led into heaven, or the Paradise of Heaven.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 63

For Swedenborg, we only become an image of God when, by our spiritual development, we reach the highest level of consciousness, which corresponds to the seventh day of creation, and then become a celestial individual. Then God’s work is complete, the spiritual combat against evils and falsities that we fight within ourself has ceased, and eternal peace now reigns, which is to be achieved after the purely natural human nature has been rendered powerless. The ego, that is the human proprium with all its wishes and desires, has been

overcome and the truly Divine Will completely fills the consciousness of the celestial individual with eternal restful peace and indescribable bliss, this being the consummation of the highest form of humanness, as promised in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, the 'seventh day' of creation is called the Sabbath, or rest (refer Swedenborg *Secrets of Heaven* 87). This brings to each person true salvation from bondage to the material world and finally to at-one-ment with the Creator.

The esoteric goal of all religions is this reunification of the human soul to the Divine source, granting true heavenly peace and thus genuine religious peace. It is this supernatural peace that brings about transcendental union between all world religions and all humankind. This finds expression in pronouncing the syllable of 'OM', the symbol for Brahman the Divine, meaning Peace - Peace - Peace.

Indian yogis, as well as enlightened Buddhists, experience this transcendental peace after they have attained the highest degree of soul-peace. Likewise, the Jewish greeting 'Shalom' (Peace be with you!) brings to mind the ancient wisdom of that one and only true peace, in remembrance of which the Sabbath was sanctified and received its name, meaning 'peace'. With this truly Divine greeting 'peace be with you!', Jesus made himself known to his disciples after his resurrection (refer John 20: 20-22).

Likewise, it corresponds to the inner meaning of the *Koran*, the Holy Scripture of Islam. The term 'Islam', derived from the Arabic root 'Salema', means peace and subjection to the Will of God. So the words 'to greet' mean in Arabic 'to bestow peace'. It is said 'es-salamu alaicum', meaning that one wishes for the cessation of the 'holy war', being, in the deepest, innermost sense of the *Koran*, that spiritual war within and against one's own self. The ensuing peace is the highest state of consciousness that we can ever attain, surpassing the limitations of the senses and of the mind. The *Mandukya Upanishad* says "It is the pure consciousness of complete atonement, wherein perception of the world and its diversity has completely subsided. It is infinite peace. It is the highest

good. It is the One, besides whom there is none other. It is the Self. Apprehend it, the only thing worth knowing”.

Even for the seer and the enlightened person, the experience of this bliss is beyond words. Swedenborg himself states:

“Since I have perceived heaven’s peace in this way, I can describe it, but not in words as it really is, because human words are not adequate. Using words, I can only describe what it is like compared to that peace of mind that people have who are content in God.” ~ *Heaven and Hell* 284

Yet, this overcoming of the human self is not to be equated with the Divine Self. Truly enlightened people, by cleansing their minds, attain victory over their human nature and thus true release from attachment to the world of matter. They become a mirror wherein the Divine Self and the unity of creation is perceived. Swedenborg explains this process of realisation in wonderfully simple words:

“While the created universe is not God, it is from God; and since it is from God, his image is in it like the image of a person in a mirror. We do indeed see a person there, but there is still nothing of the person in the image.” ~ *Divine Love and Wisdom* 59

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”!

By his interpretation of the arcana, or secrets, of creation as portrayed in the Old Testament, the foundation to the three biblical religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Swedenborg reveals how intimately all religions are interconnected. He even explains how similarities of the teachings and eras have arisen in the various religions throughout the ages.

“We can see from this that the historical narratives regarding creation, the first human being and paradise are descriptions of supposed events containing within

them heavenly and Divine realities. Devising such stories was in keeping with the accepted custom of these ancient peoples. As evident from writers belonging to the earliest times, it spread to many others who in a similar way produced descriptions of imaginary events, incorporating secrets within them. For these people were well acquainted with the heavenly meaning of worldly things and the only great exploits of sufficient importance for them to write about related to heaven. They thought on a more internal level than we do today because heaven occupied their minds and they were in contact with angels; and for this reason they gained a delight out of putting together such stories. But they were led by the Lord to images which would be held sacred. From these they composed stories in which everything had a correspondence.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven*  
8891

## Lost Paradise

Attaining heavenly peace leads to a return to the formerly lost paradise, that state in which men and women still lived in internal union with God, being the true heavenly marriage, where their senses had not been adulterated with falsities, desires, and selfish wishes. This was the original state of purity of heart and innocence of Adamic man (Adam in Hebrew meaning humanity).

Since Swedenborg calls each person a ‘church’, that is a vessel to receive the Divine, so he names this paradise-like epoch of humankind the ‘most ancient church’. At that time people were still truly human, and so were called Adam because they lived in a state of continuous God-realisation and blessedness, unperturbed by the world of the senses.

“Not only were the most ancient people of a celestial genius forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge, that is to learn about faith from sensory evidence and from facts, they were not even allowed ‘to touch that tree’, that is, to even think about anything related to faith from sensory evidence and from facts. This was to prevent them declining from celestial to spiritual life and then going down further still.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven*  
202

These men and women of paradise lived in a supreme light that cannot be compared to the light of the world in any way. They lived in the light, as taught in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, “that shines above all heaven and above this world, the light, that shines in the highest of all worlds, beyond which there is no other world, it is that light, shining in the hearts of man.”

In this original state of supreme blessedness the people communicated with one another, according to Swedenborg, by a ‘tacit’, inarticulate speech, not like our speech which is based on words, but produced by so called internal respiration as has been described earlier. This raises each person to a transpersonal level of consciousness in which they can, in perfect manner, perceive Divine wisdom, and attain by intuition the supreme revelations. Swedenborg describes in detail how this revelation can be conveyed by an inner perception, an inner link with the Divine:

“Those who have perception do not need to learn by means of doctrinal theories what they know already. Take, for example, someone who has the ability to think clearly. They have no need to learn rules on how to think. If they did so, their ability to think clearly would die, as happens to people buried in sheer intellectualism. Where knowledge comes from perception, the Lord provides an internal channel through which can be known what goodness and truth are. Those who learn from doctrine are granted such knowledge by an external channel, that is, by way of the physical senses. The difference between the two is like that between light and darkness. Furthermore, the perceptions of celestial people lie beyond all description, for they enter into the smallest details and are forever varied according to states and circumstances applying.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 521

In the course of the ages (in this context after the so-called fall of man) people, by developing a self-will or acquiring the proprium as Swedenborg puts it, lost the ability of interior respiration. In its place, an external way of breathing gradually developed and along with it the ability to articulate sounds, enabling verbal speech to evolve. The intuitive soul quality of internal perception and understanding reduced more and more, finally reaching the state we have today. Now, truths can only be acquired via the senses and material thinking (refer Swedenborg *Secrets of Heaven* 608, 1118-1120).

This withdrawal of humankind from the Divine source led over time to a situation whereby the continual inflowing of revelations, which those of the most ancient church experienced, was replaced by teachings, that is, Laws written down in the Sacred Scriptures of the peoples. Literal interpretation of those Laws gave to the different cultures and religions their outer mantle and fascinating cultural diversity. All religious rites, ceremonies and customs, indeed the whole cultural life as such, have been influenced right from the beginning by the various religions. They are a reminder and imitation of the sacred ideas and names that were still known to humankind in ancient times.

Thus, the Old and the New Testament gave to Christians and Jews their specific religious culture, as the *Koran* did for the Muslims, influencing both the exterior as well as the interior life of the people even to the present day. However, many people are not aware of this fact.

In the West, being mainly influenced by the Christian tradition, people have fallen away furthest from their original source more than in any other culture. Many are even firmly convinced that there is no more need for God and religion since almost anything could be manufactured by the achievements of technology, and also because the majority of people can be easily manipulated at will by the media. The material way of thinking seems to have reached its highest peak, as have spiritual darkness and superficiality.

Parallel to material progress there is a decline in moral values and an increase in spiritual disorientation. In this respect, the so-called 'custodians of culture' together with politicians, are confronted with the greatest challenge to intervene and give a helping hand. Regrettably, not even the church institution can offer to people in their state of general disorientation adequate inner fortitude and guidance, since, due to their dogmatic approach and belief in the literal sense of the *Bible*, they themselves have often departed far away from the spiritual ethos of their own teachings. This may also be the reason for so many people turning towards Eastern religions, thus, not only following the pseudo-esoteric fashion trends, as is often

assumed, but because they actually sense therein the source of true knowledge which in their own religion seems to be blocked off and no longer flowing through freely.

As mentioned earlier, the essence of Eastern religion is the search for the Supreme Self, for God, and this can only be experienced and conceived along an internal path. Only by taking this route will we become blissfully contented and fulfilled. We can acquire true wisdom for ourselves by mastering self-realisation, a concept mostly misunderstood in our western culture, and also by self-knowledge, which is always God-realisation, processes only attainable through elevated levels of consciousness. Here, despite their restless inclination orientated towards exterior life, individuals in the West can find a pathway in their search for God, an option Western churches very seldom offer. As it is written in the *Swetasvatara Upanishad*: “Immersed in the Spirit, detached from the body, you will find union with the Lord of the Universe, surrendering completely to him, the One, for there is no other. All your wishes will be fulfilled in him”.

Indeed, this ancient teaching can be found with Emanuel Swedenborg, the “revered seer of our times” as his famous admirer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, wrote about him in an issue of the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeiger* in 1772. By God’s grace, as Swedenborg himself stated, he was granted an exceptional visionary gift, enabling him to see the purest vision and revelation that he so ardently was seeking. Indeed, only through this oriental tradition was he able to reveal to the West the inner meaning of the *Bible*, which even today continues to be mainly explained in straightforward exoteric terms. This is also the reason why so many erroneous concepts and misguided pathways are to be found in the dogmas and interpretations of the scriptures by the churches, making it practically impossible for the true seeker to gain orientation. Daisetz T. Suzuki, the famous mediator of Zen Buddhism, who translated four of Swedenborg’s major works into Japanese, recommends to all seekers of the West: “This is the Buddha for you western people - him you should read and follow”. It seems the time has finally come to do so.

Life in this world is not just a matter of material progress, rather, it is meant to be lived first and foremost for the sake of spiritual development of humankind. This was the greatest concern of Dr. Robert Muller, Chancellor of the University for Peace in Costa Rica established by the United Nations Organisation, and former vice-secretary of the United Nations at the 1993 Chicago World Parliament of Religions: “The goal aspired for by the sciences, politics, economics and sociology was already long before known by the various religions, thanks to the power of transcendence, raised consciousness and union with time and space. This dimension is often still missing, yet is urgently needed in world affairs”<sup>12</sup>.

The lawyer Charles C. Bonney of Chicago recognised well over 100 years ago, when industrialisation in the Western world was just beginning to flourish, that no genuine human progress was possible unless there was transcendental transparency. Without this realisation drawn from Swedenborg’s spiritual writings, he would never have been inspired to call together a World Parliament of Religions in 1893. This was to be a congress, that, on the one hand, was a reminder of the unity of all humankind and religions. On the other, it would direct all peoples to concentrate primarily on the Divine and thereby on interior development, so that their actions in the world would indeed yield the desired blessing.

Swedenborg offers sufficient suggestions in this respect:

“The only way these inner levels can be formed is by our focussing on the Divine and on heaven . . . the deeper levels are formed in heaven. We focus on the Divine when we believe the Divine and believe that it is the source of everything true and good and therefore of all intelligence and wisdom. We believe the Divine when we want to be led by the Divine. This is the only way our deeper levels are opened. When we are devoted to this faith and are in a life in keeping with it, we enjoy the ability to understand and be wise. However, in order to be intelligent and wise, it is fitting that we learn a great deal not only about heavenly matters but

also about earthly ones. We learn about heavenly matters from the Word and the church and about earthly ones from the arts and sciences.” ~ *Heaven and Hell* 351

It is a fatal fallacy in our age of galloping technological progress to believe that the knowledge of humankind is at its highest peak of all time. On the contrary we are digressing more and more into spiritual darkness whilst the ancient sages of antiquity actually did possess the true wisdom. Consider the construction of the pyramids with their architecture expressing pure sacred elements, being an actual image of the sky, that is, of the main positions of the sun and the constellations of the stars. The ‘ancient church’ “was provided with wisdom, intelligence, knowledge, and concepts of truth and kindness.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1224. This statement by Swedenborg is in agreement with humanity’s great teachers of wisdom.

Even as a scientist and technologist - an engineer and a miner by profession - Swedenborg primarily tried to fathom the secret of life by studying many fields of knowledge and by numerous travels and expeditions throughout Europe. He wanted to find out ‘what held the universe together in its innermost core’. When, after proceeding along this path, supreme revelation regarding God and the human soul was denied to him, he underwent an awesome process of internal metamorphosis which made him receptive to higher forms of revelation than those attainable by the methods of material-based sciences. Swedenborg himself tells that his internal senses were opened by Divine grace, enabling him to perceive in all things their true essence of being. On account of this visionary gift he felt himself being called upon and chosen for the task of interpreting the inner meaning of the *Bible*, the true sense of which cannot be explained directly from the literal words.

From his interpretation of the *Bible*, especially of Genesis, Exodus and the Apocalypse, Swedenborg presented a holistic picture of the world, describing the workings of the Divine within the entire universe and contrasting this with the

mechanical, materialistic way of thinking characteristic of his own century, that is, the European Age of Enlightenment. He presented his findings as being a synthesis of both religion and science.

Swedenborg explains that the *Bible* deals with the development of the internal spiritual potential as a way of attaining that ancient knowledge and enlightenment, as do the Holy Scriptures of the East. This is the path to regain the lost 'religio', that is, re-bonding of people with their true origin. He finally found his true calling at the age of fifty-six; that is, conception and revelation of Divine truths, a task which he pursued for twenty seven years until his death in 1772.

Swedenborg's transformation and inversion from external to internal perception is remarkable, keeping in mind that as a scientist of high esteem in the Age of Enlightenment he brought to the Christian West true enlightenment, something only attainable by interior illumination which was granted to him specifically. In this way he was able to interpret the inner meaning or esoteric sense of the *Bible*, being the Word of God, which had first to be revealed to humankind through him. This meaning contains the sum of all understanding so ardently desired. It was even more urgently required because, in Swedenborg's lifetime, progress in the sciences and technology was leading to people being hybridised into even denying the existence of God. In doing so, people themselves had barred their own entry into paradise in the same way that those in ancient times had removed themselves from Paradise by their own volition.



## “In the Beginning was the Word”

“Before creation there was just Self, Self alone, there was nothing else.” *Aitareya Upanishad*

“It is pure, it is Light of Light. It is that one Light that gives Light to everything.” *Mundaka Upanishad*

“The Word is realization... By the Word realization is attained of this and the next world. By the Word all created beings can be known. The Word, O Majesty, is that Spirit I adore as Brahman.” *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

**B**ehind these words are hidden the deepest secrets of all creation, which during the ages following the fall were increasingly clouded over for humanity. This was because the intuitive way of soul-perception continued to diminish, so much so that in the end men and women were relying almost entirely on their external senses.

“. . . the Lord foresaw that perception would perish.” ~  
*Secrets of Heaven* 609

This, however, does not imply that the fall prevented the unfolding of the Divine plan of creation which, according to the Will of God, manifested itself in the material world.

Swedenborg describes the intrinsic nature of the Word in the following way:

“The Word is Divine truth which in its intrinsic nature is the Infinite Manifestation of the Infinite Being, and is the human of the Lord himself. This human is the source from which Divine truth now proceeds and flows into heaven, and through heaven into our minds. Consequently, it rules and governs everything, which it has done from eternity. For it is one and the same with the Infinite Being by virtue of his joining the human to the Divine, effected by making even the human within him Divine. From this we can now see that the highest aspect of Divine truth is the Lord’s Divine human, and from this that the Church’s most important teaching is that his human is Divine.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4687

He divides the history of humankind into distinctive religious epochs, which he calls churches, not in terms of ecclesiastical bodies but in the degree or level of spiritual awareness and life universally among humankind at a particular point in time. These, however, cannot be pinpointed with historic accuracy because, after all, they represent the interior history of humankind and as such are a reflection of spiritual development, that is, its gradual decline and re-emergence. Through the history of creation in the secrets of the Word, the inner light has always illuminated humankind without there being any awareness of it happening, even when in the deepest spiritual darkness. Swedenborg called these epochs the ‘Four Ages of World History’, which correspond to the so-called Golden, Silver, Copper and Iron Ages, when in terms of the inner connection with the Divine:

“. . . this love gradually declined from its holiness and purity . . . There is, however, some hope that it may be brought back to its pristine or ancient holiness.” ~ *Marriage Love* 74

Swedenborg is emphatic that there has always been the Word, from which men and women could gain supreme enlightenment. However, throughout the ages there have been variations bringing distinctively different access to the Word. As the essence of ancient revelation was gradually lost, the true religion, that is, the union with the original truth being the Word of God, began to deteriorate correspondingly.

In the most ancient church (prior to the flood), or the Golden Age, people still lived “in a most intense light” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1117, in unmediated revelation of it, and as yet there was not a written Word, but:

“. . . it was revealed to each person for they were celestial and so, like the angels in whose company they lived, knew through perception what was good and true . . . So the Word was written on their hearts.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2896

Swedenborg’s description of the earliest spiritual epochs or churches gives us a magnificent insight into the character and operation of religion in the entire history of humankind.

“The earliest church, which was more celestial than all others and was called Man (homo), worshipped the Infinite Being (Esse) and the Infinite Manifestation (Existens) of that Being. While they could not have any perception of an Infinite Being, they had some perception of its Infinite Manifestation from what they perceived in their inner nature, experienced with their senses in their outer nature and saw around them in the world. They therefore worshipped the Infinite Manifestation holding the Infinite Being within, which they perceived as a Divine human because they knew that the Infinite Manifestation came through heaven from the Infinite Being. And because heaven is the Universal Human corresponding to every single part of the human being . . . through perception, they were unable to conceive of the Infinite Manifestation of an Infinite Being other than that of a Divine human. For

whatever passes from the Infinite Being by way of heaven as the Universal Human presents an image of that Being in every single thing. When it began to decline, those of the celestial church foresaw that the Infinite Manifestation could no longer continue to come into people's minds and that this being so, the human race would perish. For this reason they received by revelation the knowledge that One was to be born who would make the human within himself Divine and in this way an Infinite Manifestation similar to what had existed in the beginning would come about and at length would again be one with the Infinite Being." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4687

With the ancient church or the Silver Age, being the time after the great flood, direct perception came to an end.

"Those of this church, being spiritual and not celestial, knew what was expressed in representative things and meaningful signs but did not see it with perception ." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2897

Information concerning heavenly things was effected by correspondences and representations, terms adopted by Swedenborg which are more precisely defined than the modern expression 'symbol', the knowledge of which was derived from the most ancient people by those of the Silver Age.

"Information about heavenly matters and those belonging to eternal life was provided through the kinds of things that are termed correspondences and representations, knowledge of which they derived from the earliest people who had direct contact with the angels of heaven. Those were the things into which heaven flowed bringing enlightenment to the people of that time because correspondences and representations are the outward forms taken by heavenly realities." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10355

“Every single internal aspect of its worship had to do with mutual love. This church was widespread in much of the Asiatic world and in many kingdoms there. And although differences existed among them so far as teachings about faith were concerned, they were still one because all people everywhere made neighbourly kindness the essential element of their life.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4680

However, the people of the ancient church did already have a written Word which had evolved during the earlier period. It consisted of historical and prophetic writings, like the Old Testament Word. But in course of time that Word came to be lost. The historical sections were called ‘The Wars of Jehovah’, and the prophetic parts ‘The Utterances’, as is clear in the book of Numbers 21:14, 27 where they are cited. The historical sections of their Word were written in the prophetic style and were for the most part made-up historical narratives, like those in the first eleven Chapters of Genesis (refer Swedenborg *Secrets of Heaven* 2897).

Swedenborg then takes us on to the next phase, the ‘Third Church’ or the Bronze or Copper Age, in which:

“. . . it is true that all worship did involve the practice of things that were almost the same as earlier times but their inner meanings were unknown. This church was established among the Israelite (Jewish) nation. But because information about heavenly matters and eternal life could not be provided by enlightenment through their interiors, angels from heaven spoke to certain of them by word of mouth giving them instruction about outward things but little about inner realities because they were incapable of comprehending them. Those who were governed by natural goodness received the outward things in a holy manner. The term bronze is therefore used to describe those times, for bronze is the sign of such goodness.

But when no natural goodness was left, the Lord came into the world and restored all things in the heavens and the hells to order. He did this so that people could receive an inflowing from himself out of heaven and have enlightenment, and the hells could not intercept it and introduce thick darkness. At this point a fourth church, called Christian, came into being. All information about heavenly things and eternal life is provided to it solely through the Word. The Word is the means by which we can receive an inflowing and enlightenment; for in the writing of the Word pure correspondences and representative things were used, being signs of heavenly things, and into these the angels of heaven come when we read the Word. Consequently, heaven is linked to the church, or the angels of heaven to people on earth, through the Word although only to those with whom the good of love and neighbourliness is present. But since members of this church have also destroyed this goodness, no information can be provided by means of an inflowing and enlightenment from that source except in relation to some truths which are not united with goodness. The term iron is used to describe these times for it means truth on the last and lowest level of order." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10355

Since the loss of the paradise-like union, the Holy Scriptures for many religions of humankind have become authoritative to represent the Word of God, containing an interior as well as an exterior meaning.

Every Holy Scripture is, at first sight, a 'sealed book', and the wording revealed is a continuous sequence of symbols or correspondences that need to be decoded. The critical analysis with which many a religious scholar wants to interpret the holy texts only destroys them, and nothing much is left to be said if only the literal meaning has been taken into consideration.

The internal sense, the Divine or the mystical character of the Word, is a secret which in no way can be explained by a person’s rational mind, because the internal sense refers to the heavenly kingdom and not to worldly things. The internal sense of the Word contains the true teaching for the church, which in this case should not be understood as an institution but as a community of all those who receive the Divine. Swedenborg explains again and again in the extensive volumes of his *Secrets of Heaven*, in ever new approaches, the importance of the inner sense of the Word, thus making sure that the contents may be firmly anchored in the memory.

“Divine truth exists in the Word to raise us from an outer to an inner level and to make us a form of the church other than what presents itself in the sense of the letter.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10400

Every person is connected with the Divine by their interior and is constantly being led and influenced by the Divine, even if they are not aware of it.

“For the angelic heaven and the church on earth act as one, just like the internal and the external, or the spiritual and the natural in the case of each one of us. God created us in such a way that our inner self is in the spiritual world and our outer self is in the physical world. . . God made us citizens of both worlds.” ~ *True Christianity* 14

People in the most ancient church were still true citizens of both worlds because they did not need a written Word, as truth was given to them by inner perception and they were in communion with the angels (refer Swedenborg *Secrets of Heaven* 2896).

However, the inner meaning of Holy Scripture can only be understood by those who, according to their inner disposition, can be lifted into the light of heaven, that is, be enlightened. Swedenborg saw his mission to reveal the spiritual meaning that lies hidden within the literal text of the Word at

the point when a new spiritual era for humankind was about to arise.

In order to reveal the meaning of the Word in both its literal and spiritual sense, Swedenborg compiled all his insights into works covering more than twenty thousand pages. He wished them to serve as true enlightenment, for “human rationality cannot conceive Divine or spiritual things unless enlightened by the Lord” ~ *New Jerusalem* 256

Only those who are enlightened by the Lord comprehend the Word. This consists of an actual opening of their inner centres of consciousness which are elevated into the light of heaven. Then, the sacred flows from within and from God into them because enlightenment is a true unlocking of the interior, indeed allowing Divine truths to be perceived to a high degree (refer Swedenborg *New Jerusalem* 256).

However, since the literal understanding of the Word is in no way identical with the interior meaning, contradictions might occasionally appear, which, according to Swedenborg, leave the interpretation by the unenlightened to their personal judgment, even distorting the true meaning, in order to validate any kind of personal or erroneous ideas which favour materialistic worldly beliefs. As a result, many a believer might be troubled by biblical nightmares since they indeed do not conform with the concept of the God of Love and due to ignorance, shock people rather than guide them to their true meaning.

Swedenborg considers that the Church - and here he is referring to the institutionalised Christian Church - weakens the truths hidden in the *Bible*, because it interprets the text by thinking only at the sense level (he uses the term ‘factual truths’ as opposed to spiritual truths) which cannot give any deeply satisfying answers.

To gain insight into Swedenborg’s approach on biblical interpretation, the following lengthy quotation is included for it contains the crucial points of his art of reasoning.

“The expression *factual truths* is used to mean truths derived from the literal sense of the Word, being those generally accepted by people and occurring in everyday

conversation. There are very many which remain in widespread use. The literal sense is for simple people, for those who are being introduced into the more inner truths of faith and for those who do not understand internal ones. It confirms what their senses tell them, being in accordance with that level of understanding. This explains why statements that are dissimilar and seemingly contradicting occur many times. For example, in one place it says that the Lord leads into temptation, in another that he does not; in one that the Lord repents, in another that he does not; in one that in his actions the Lord is moved by anger and wrath, in another by pure patience and mercy; in one that souls are presented for judgement immediately after death, in another at the time of the last judgement; and so on. Because such statements are extracted from the Word's literal sense, they are called factual truths; and they are different from the truths of faith that form the teachings of the Church. For the truths of faith arise out of the literal statements through explanation of them. When they are explained a member of the Church is taught that such statements occur in the Word due to the level of people's understanding and according to outward appearance. So, in very many instances, the teachings of the Church depart from the literal sense of the Word. It should be realised that the expression inner meaning describes genuine teachings of the Church for the inner meaning contains truths which the angels in heaven possess.

Some priests and the members of the Church teach and learn the Church's truths from the literal sense of the Word; others teach and learn them from teachings drawn from the Word, called the Church's doctrine of faith. The perception of the latter group is very different from that of the first; yet ordinary people cannot tell them apart because both groups speak from the Word in almost the same way. However, those who teach and learn solely the literal sense of the

Word without guidance from the teachings of the Church grasp no more than matters that concern the natural or outer person, whereas those guided by genuine teachings drawn from the Word understand also the matters concerning the spiritual or inner person. The reason for this is that the Word in the outer or literal sense is natural, but in its inner meaning is spiritual.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 9025

From this we see that the understanding of a biblical text is indeed a complex process which can never be fathomed out completely by intellectual methods. The inner process of perception that is triggered off whilst reading the Holy Scripture cannot be reached by rational explanations. This happens for each individual seeker in a quite specific manner, depending on their spiritual quality and personal inclination as to whether they really want or are able to understand the inner meanings of the Divine truths. In this respect also, Swedenborg in his writings gives detailed information:

“ . . . it should be seen that the extent to which an inflowing and enlightenment are brought about depends on our ability to receive what is given; and this ability depends on a love of truth and kindness. We are elevated if we love truth and kindness because they are our end in view. On the other hand, if we love truth and kindness because we see self and the world as our end in view, we are constantly looking and gravitating towards a lower state. As a consequence, we cannot be elevated and become enlightened through a Divine flowing in from heaven for our intelligence, or understanding, which seems to be an understanding of truth, is the result of a light in which a fool sees things - a light shining before our mind's eye radiating from notions we have proved to ourselves and then become convinced of. Whether true or false, it still provides a brightness but this turns into total darkness when light from heaven is allowed to flow in.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10330

Further,

“If we are enlightened when reading the Word, we see it from within; for our inner self has been opened and is in the light of heaven. This light flows in and brings enlightenment, though we are not conscious of this because it flows into the concepts or knowledge present in our human memory, which is only open to natural light. When thinking with these concepts, we feel that we are doing so all by ourselves and are unaware of the inflowing; yet there are various indications enabling us to know that we have been given enlightenment.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10551

“The Word is readily understandable and evident to us (when we love truth because it is true and good) due to there being a spiritual and a celestial meaning in every part of it which are in the light of heaven. By means of these inner meanings and their light, the Lord flows into the natural sense and into the light of it with us. Consequently, we acknowledge the truth from an interior perception, and afterwards see it in our own thought. This happens as often as we are in the affection of truth for its own sake; for from affection comes perception and from perception, thought which gives rise to that acknowledgment called faith.” ~ *Sacred Scripture* 58

In order to really understand the Holy Scripture in its most inner meaning, there is no need for lengthy studies, scholastic learnedness or scientific accomplishments, nor for sophisticated arguments. All that is required is a genuine purity of intention and inner inclination, and true devotion to God; in Swedenborg’s terminology, that is towards what is true and good. Understanding of the scripture will then come to the seeker quite instinctively.

“Unless outer truth springs from inner truth it cannot be joined to goodness. The Word serves to illustrate this. We receive the influence of the inner spirit of the

Word when we read it but if we only accept the literal sense, truth from the Word does not become joined to goodness. The inner spirit of the Word only influences us and becomes joined to goodness when we believe the Word to be holy; and we consider it to be holy when we are governed by goodness.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 6789

Swedenborg regularly emphasises that those people who have a simple faith, that is, those that are not duplicitous and “whose external thinks, speaks, wills and acts in accordance with the interior” ~ *True Christianity* 147, and do not need intellectual confirmation to understand the Holy Scripture, are much more intimately connected with its sacred and inner meaning than those who operate from previously adopted, even wrong, principles. We all understand the Word in our own individual way depending on our spiritual disposition and internal perception. Belief in God, Swedenborg tells us, will be instilled into a person along an inner pathway from the soul - a priori, that is, prior to all experience, whilst knowledge of God is obtained by external experience - a posteriori - by means of the bodily senses of sight and hearing (refer *True Christianity* 7).

However, knowledges obtained in this way do not illuminate the real meaning leaving the would-be seeker still groping in the dark unless interior enlightenment goes hand in hand with exterior knowledges acquired by the senses. Then the seeker of truth will be illuminated by the inner internal word which in turn is an “image of the universal cosmic Word of Creation”<sup>8</sup>.

Many so-called educated people, that is philologists, philosophers or theologians, may well read Swedenborg’s reasoning with utter disdain concluding that he is crediting those having a simple approach to life with a greater ability for perception than scholars and their so-called intellectual proposals, who usually assume they are on the true path towards enlightenment.

“Simple-hearted people have no preconceived assumptions. Instead they think that because the Lord has said

it, it is the truth. And if shown by other statements in the Word how the matter is to be understood, they immediately agree to it and rejoice at heart. Therefore, those who simply believe that the Lord is angry, punishes, repents, and grieves come to no harm by fearing evil and doing what is good. For by believing all this of the Lord they also believe that the Lord sees every single thing, which is their faith. They are then enlightened in all other matters of faith, in the next life if not already in this. It is quite different with people prompted by impure self-love or by love of the world, who persuade themselves of what the outcome will be from preconceived assumptions.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 589

For that reason the *Bible* is written in simple and easy to understand language, adapted to the mental capacity of non-intellectuals. The sense of the letter is, in itself, “natural or worldly, since the natural is the most external into which spiritual and celestial things flow, and in which they rest, like a house on its foundations” ~ *New Jerusalem* 262.

Although the Divine is covered up in the recesses of the Holy Scripture, every iota and every letter contains some secret of the Divine and the Sacred. Otherwise the Word would not be the Word of God “but mere history and of no more use to the human race than similar descriptions found in the writings of secular authors” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 639.

Real understanding of truth can only be gained through revelation from the Word, which is the fundamental difference between it and literature. This is the only way that union with the Divine can be established. The inner sense of the Word is its ‘soul’; the letter with its literal sense is its ‘body’, Swedenborg tells us. The understanding that the individual gains in reading the Word is in its turn a revelation, a most personal inner mystical experience, free from any kind of intellectual rationalisation and arguments, simply an intuitive interior knowing. Reading any Holy Scripture “awakens on some level the hidden dormant understanding - or revelations, resting within us”<sup>28</sup>. From this arises the true religion,

which reveals itself in every individual in a very personal way, depending on the degree of the soul's inner development. Swedenborg records this as follows: "the Word is a means of heaven's union with us and its literal meaning serves as its basis and foundation" ~ *Heaven and Hell* 307.

Swedenborg interprets the *Bible* specifically for people of the Christian West because "religion . . . among Christians is solely derived from Holy Scripture" ~ *Marriage Love* 115. Since, however, Christians did not understand the *Bible*, yet maintained they were the only ones to be saved and the rest of the world, which they considered to be Gentiles, would be excluded from salvation, Swedenborg received the Divine commission to lead all Christendom out of darkness and to teach them that all humankind could be saved in accordance with the dictates of their own religion, provided they believed in the One God.

"Under the Lord's divine providence, every nation has a religion, and the first principle of every religion is a recognition of the existence of God. Otherwise we cannot call it a religion. Every nation that lives by its religion - that is, that does not do evil because it is against God - is given a spiritual element within its worldly life." ~ *Divine Providence* 322

"God provides that everyone shall have some religion, an acknowledgment of the Divine Being through that religion, and an inner life. That is, living according to one's religious principles is an inner life, for then we focus on the Divine; and to the extent that we focus on the Divine, we do not focus on the world but move away from the world and therefore from a worldly life, which is an outward life." ~ *Heaven and Hell* 318

It can be concluded from Swedenborg's writings that by means of the divine revelation which they have been given, "people are able to meet God, receive an inflow, and thus be made spiritual instead of earthly" ~ *True Christianity* 11 because everyone is capable of spiritual vision. In ancient

times there was an original revelation which spread out all over the world. All people of that time of original revelation thought in terms of spiritual correspondences, that is, they knew that the material world was an image of heaven. The cult of the ancient church was based on correspondences, that is, on representations of the Divine. However, due to the gradual loss of their supernatural abilities their understanding of the Oneness of God was altered in many ways. So Swedenborg further declares: “This is the origin of the divisions, dissensions, heresies and schisms which have affected religion” ~ *True Christianity* 11.

Fundamentally there is only one original religion, whereby the many forms of expression are only diverse aspects of one and the same truth, being the foundation of all religions. It is the same spiritual light illuminating the world and, depending on its reception, illuminating all humankind from within and filling them with Divine truth - “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (John 1:9).

The teachings of the various world religions give information as to how they can encourage humankind to let the Word, that is the Divine truth, unfold within everyone. As stated earlier, the aim of spiritual practices in the main Asian religions is to reach atonement (at-one-ment) with the Divine Self and to overcome sensual mentation. It is this ancient tradition and doctrine of salvation to which many people now feel drawn, since the other religions, dogmas, rites and interpretations veil this deep intimacy and sacredness that is the essence of true religion.

As mentioned before, the Word was known in Asia prior to being recorded by Moses and the prophets among the people of Israel. So, the most ancient church existed also in Asia. Swedenborg therefore says that the people received immediate original revelations. They lived “from the Word in the light of truth” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 11. Therefore they did not need any written Word, as did the subsequent ancient church, the written records of which, however, have now been lost. Swedenborg claims the reason why the ancient Word became lost was so that, under divine providence, a new written Word

- the *Bible* - could come into existence which, as to form and contents, could bear total reference to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14).

After the ancient Word, the Word of the Jewish faith - the Old Testament - was likewise written in a form which the things it contained represented and carried a spiritual meaning "in order that it might have an inner meaning understood by those in heaven and be a communication uniting the Lord's kingdom in heaven to the Lord's kingdom on earth" ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2899.

The Word of the New Testament - the Gospels and the Apocalypse - was also written in this same form which "the Lord spoke . . . from the Divine itself, all the particular things that he said were representatives and meaningful signs of Divine things, and so of the heavenly things of his kingdom and the church" ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2900.

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, as will be shown later.

In Swedenborg's visionary works, there is no reference to the conventional external history of the different world religions, nor any systematic treatise of their different traditions. The individual religions are portrayed in their transparency by revealing their interior, that is their purely spiritual history totally free from any material manifestations. He portrays the history of the inner evolution of humankind, which, as a whole, represents one single church, as being an image of heaven or of the cosmos. Individuals, in themselves, are a church, that is, vessels of reception of the Divine. In any case it is always a matter of unfolding transcendental con-

sciousness which should be connected with external ways of thinking in total harmony so that it can really become a true church, meaning a genuine vessel of reception for Divine consciousness.

Swedenborg’s exposition of religion is the history of the Word in its inner meaning and as such, its unfolding. However, in his interpretations of the inner meaning of the *Bible*, Jesus Christ stands in the centre because the *Bible*, as a whole, refers to the person of Christ and his being born into humanity.



## Judaism: The Universal Covenant

**J**ews and Christians alike have as their prime and highest command: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5), and “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus sums up this biblical doctrine in its totality in Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31 and Luke 10:27.

In Christian teaching, Jesus is the Easter symbol of the Hebraic Paschal Lamb and ‘ostara’ meaning the creating light in Spring bringing the emergence of life. For, interpreted naturally or spiritually, ‘ostara’ means ‘Light from the East’, also ‘Sunrise’.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew word ‘Messiah’, meaning ‘the Anointed One’, is Christ. However, the Jews do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah, so ardently awaited by them. The Jews expected their Messiah would also be a political leader and a mighty king who would lead the Jewish nation into freedom and, in every respect, bring peace. The Jewish kings were given the title of Messiah because, after their appointment, they were anointed and regarded as being the mediator between God and the people. However, for the Jews, the Messiah was never God born into flesh, as is the Christian belief<sup>19</sup>.

The reason Jews believe that the Israelites are the ‘Chosen People’ stems from a literal interpretation of the Old Testament. This belief, however, has a hidden spiritual meaning as the apostle Paul points out: “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

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." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 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 humankind 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', con-

nected 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.

The Jewish German scholar Ernst Mueller (born 1880 in Misslitz, Moravia, died 1954 in exile in London), the first to translate the *Zohar: the Holy Book of the Kabbala* from Aramaic to German, comments: “No matter how objectionable this narrow-minded focussing upon one’s own people may appear, nevertheless the following fact cannot be denied: Israel did indeed, in a special way, preserve within itself this special link to primeval humankind, as documented in the historical part of the Bible, and on account of that ‘covenant’ could foreshadow the idea and reality of a regenerated form of humankind (not just exclusively of the Jewish people). This was actually restituted to humanity by Christianity”<sup>29</sup>.

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.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 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.

The exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt should also be understood from its spiritual meaning rather than its literal:

“‘The land of Egypt’ symbolises the natural or outer level of the church; ‘Causing to come up’, the raising from an outer to an inner level, and so from the natural person to the spiritual one; and ‘the children of Israel’, the church.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10400

The journey from Egypt tells us of the conquest over the feelings of selfhood (ego, or proprium as Swedenborg calls it) which we all have. This is a process that every warrior of God has to accomplish within him or herself. Exodus is “deliverance from spiritual captivity” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 7982. This can be attained by gaining victory over attachment to the senses leading to peace of the soul, and along with it, to the Sabbath being the regeneration of the person into true ‘Man’.

Interpretation of the term ‘Sabbath’ can also be traced back to the mystical teachings in the *Book of Zohar*, or the *Book of Splendor*, which really is a commentary on the Old Testament: “A name of the Most Holy, a name, most perfect all around”<sup>30</sup>. “The Sabbath, the harmony of what is above and below”<sup>31</sup>.

What is note-worthy too is that in the *Zohar*, the Word is named the Sabbath since it has the same significance. It is the hidden primeval light: “the Light that the Most Holy created in His work of creation, its radiance illuminating the world from one end to the other, and then it remained hidden”<sup>36</sup>.

Again it becomes obvious that the Old Testament is the Holy Scripture of not just the Jews and the Christians but is valid for all humankind, since in the spiritual meaning, the people of Israel represent the universal church.

For the Jews, the *Torah*, being the five Books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy), is the essence of the Word of God. It is the foundation for Jewish education containing guidance and teachings along with commandments, prohibitions and statutes ruling all aspects of Jewish daily life. Likewise, it contains the foundation of the religious life for not only Jews and Christians but also for the true religious life of all humankind - the Ten Commandments which the hidden God gave to the children of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai after their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 20:2-18)! So it is said in Deuteronomy 29:14-15: “It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant but with whomever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whomever is not here today”.

The Ten Commandments teach love to God and love to the neighbour. Whilst recognising that at their literal or natural level they are codified in the civil, ethical and moral structure of all cultures and races in some form, for Swedenborg it is the spiritual principles within each one that have a greater relevance for us. In *True Christianity* 282 - 331 he explains in considerable detail the depths of meaning of each commandment as related to individual spiritual living and the nature of Divine life. By way of example, the command to keep the sabbath day holy spiritually means that we should find time within our otherwise busy life to search for, and think about, higher truths for daily use. It also has reference to our spiritual journey which involves successive states of temptation and fighting the dictates of our lower natures. Perseverance will ultimately achieve victory - the Day of Rest or regeneration. Then we have the celestial sabbath, a heavenly union with the Lord which comes through our love in serving others for their sakes, not our own. Perfect confidence in the Lord's unfailing goodness will bring complete protection from all evil and a life filled with blessedness and harmony. Seeking the deeper truths underpinning each of the Ten Commandments will give them a meaning far beyond their literal interpretation and show they are a compilation of the Word in its totality. They are the Law, the power and holiness which are of unfathomable depth and to the last iota endowed with a degree of infinity. 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 and God.” ~ *True Christianity* 283

The universal validity of the *Torah* shows up especially in the fact that the decree of the Sabbath, declaring it the one day of the week to be kept free from work, has traditionally been accepted and observed as such throughout the whole world, even though humankind is ignorant as to why that is

so. Even when the *Torah* is taken literally, it is of fundamental importance for the ethical life of humankind. Furthermore, its commandments are established irrevocably in the Jewish religion and must be observed implicitly. If that were not the case, surely the following statement would not be found in the *Kabbala*: “If Israel had beautified herself with the Torah it would have been saved from everything and would not be in exile”<sup>32</sup>. This is valid for all people who have had to live in spiritual bondage from the time when they were cast out of paradise because they did not keep the covenant with God and his commandment.

Furthermore, the *Torah* is one separate aspect of the all-encompassing religion, as it is reflected in the various denominations which, when joined in totality, correspond to the perfect image of Heaven. For correspondences are the “outer forms of heavenly things” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10355, even though the truth contained in the symbols and forms are hidden from humankind.

However, the Old Testament reaches fulfilment and completion only from the New Testament. This is why the risen Christ tells his disciples “that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45). Without Jesus intervening, not even his disciples were able to understand the true meaning of the scripture; it would have remained hidden from them.

In the iconography of the Middle Ages, the difference between the Old and the New Testaments - between the old and the new covenants - is symbolically personified by two female figures, ‘Synagogue’ and ‘Ecclesia’. These well-known figures adorn the southern portal of Strasbourg cathedral and were created in the first half of the thirteenth century. Standing on each side of the crucified Christ, the blindfolded eyes of Synagogue symbolise the ‘ecclesia invisibilis’, the non-seeing Jewish Church, whereas the figure of Ecclesia symbolises the ‘ecclesia visibilis’, the internal, seeing Christian Church. Long before Swedenborg’s time, creative art had

already expounded aspects of the internal meaning of the *Bible*, which, however, remained hidden for most people.



## Jesus Christ: the Centre of World Religion

Conscientious seekers are confused by the numerous and diverse interpretations of the *Bible* and expositions of the life and person of Jesus. In Christology which concerns the meaning of Christ, there are still great areas of uncertainties. As long as attempts are made to expose the figure of Jesus Christ in exoteric or historical terms, as is still predominately done by the clergy today, the great variations of interpretations and general confusion will surely increase. Both Buddhist and Hindu interpretations of the biblical gospels discern a meaningful similarity to their sacred texts, especially in the gospel of John, and the visionary symbolism in the Book of Revelation to John<sup>38</sup>. In this way the Eastern religions are a wonderful preparatory training for Christianity. Contact with Buddhist and Hindu spirituality may, for present-day Christians, result in a broadening and intensifying of their mystical religious life. This contact is even a great help and preliminary step towards understanding the gospels and the apocalypse, as indeed many people see and interpret this issue - “all pre-Christian history of humankind manifests the descent of the logos right down to its human incarnation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth”<sup>25</sup>.

Inge von Wedemeyer expounded the impressive similarity between Sri Krishna, the Divine master believed to have lived 3100 BC, and the ‘oriental’ Jesus Christ<sup>38</sup>. Sri Krishna revealed the *Bhagavad Gita* to the Hindu people. Even the name points out the interior as well as exterior similarities. ‘Krishna’ means ‘the Holy, the Pure’. It was even believed that Krishna was called ‘Jeseus’ by his disciples meaning ‘pure wisdom’. Whether accepted as historical events of profound

spiritual significance or merely echoed symbolic myths preserved in texts considered sacred, the life stories of Krishna and Jesus exhibit a remarkable parallelism. However, not only was their teaching identical in essence, their way of life on earth shows remarkable parallelism. Krishna too, so it is believed, was conceived by the Spirit and born of a virgin. Further, the story goes that one of Krishna's uncles was threatening the Divine Child's life - as Herod did - and similar to Jesus, Krishna began his public appearances at the age of twelve. According to legend, Krishna was supposed to have died a violent death, forgiving his murderer, and ascended to heaven afterwards<sup>39</sup>.

However, the name 'Krishna' also signifies 'the black' or 'the dark one'. He is always portrayed as having a dark blue face whilst Christ is seen in absolutely white light. Blue is the shadow of white light, and therefore Krishna is also interpreted to signify the 'dark sun'<sup>24</sup>.

It is natural for Hindu people to revere Jesus and to include him as one of the most radiant and highest 'avatars' (embodiments of the Divine), which, according to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*, comes into the world whenever the inflowing of Divine light threatens to dwindle amongst people. The process is embodied by the words in IV 7 - 8:

“When righteousness is weak and faints  
and unrighteousness exults in pride,  
then my Spirit arises on earth.

For the salvation of those who are good,  
for the destruction of evil in men,  
for the fulfillment of the kingdom of righteousness,  
I come to this world in the ages that pass.”

The teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, have even been taken up in the largest and most serene religious epic of the Hindus, the *Ramayana*. “And when the yogis and teachers speak of the Spirit of Christ they mean thereby the highest and most sublime level of human spiritualisation”, writes Wladimir Lindenberg<sup>13</sup>. In doing so,

the Hindus place Jesus, albeit erroneously, 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 as will be shown later. The Hindus make no difference between their avatars and the prophets and missionaries of other religions<sup>15</sup>. 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 is Yahweh, or the Divine essence, in human form. 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 Christianity* 538

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

other than in human form. Good itself and truth itself can only be conceived abstractly in relation to a person.

“No one, it is true, can have any conception of an abstract quality separate from an actual person because what is natural enters into every individual idea present in their thought. But even so, if we hold in mind the idea that everything within the Lord is Divine and that the Divine transcends our entire thought, altogether transcending even what angels can comprehend; and if as a consequence we remove from our mind everything comprehensible, we are left with the idea of pure Being (Esse) and the Manifestation (Existere) of that Being. That is to say, we then have an idea of the Celestial itself and the Spiritual itself, which are good itself and truth itself.

However, we cannot form in our mind any idea of abstract realities unless we associate with them some natural imagery that has come to us from the world through our senses; for without any such imagery our thought becomes lost so to speak in an abyss and is dissipated. Therefore . . . Jehovah has been pleased to make himself known as he exists essentially and as he manifests himself in heaven, namely as a Divine Man. For the whole of heaven combines together and presents itself in the human form . . . within the Lord, the Divine itself is the Father, the Divine that manifests itself in heaven is the Son, and the Divine proceeding from these is the Holy Spirit - from which it is clear that these three are one, as he himself teaches.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 5110

This conjunction or co-joining with the Divine human as an image of distinguishable oneness requires subtle understanding. God is Love and love is uncreated, but forms have been created to embody an image of uncreated love. The human spirit can be remade into a created image reflecting receptions of uncreated love (refer *True Christianity* 40).

Nonetheless, we cannot form for ourselves any idea of the Supreme Divine of the Lord.

“It is impossible to form in our mind any idea of the Divine (Being) itself, called the Father, because he is incomprehensible and without a mental picture, cannot form part of our belief.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10067

The finite cannot possibly grasp the infinite. Swedenborg suggests that such a tenacious attempt could lead to madness. Moses was already warned: “for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). All we can do is:

“. . . have an idea of his Divine human. For everyone is joined by thought and affection to one of whom we can have some idea but not to one we cannot. If holiness is present in our ideas when we think about the Lord’s human, we also think of the holiness which comes from the Lord and fills heaven, and at the same time we think of heaven, since heaven in its entirety corresponds to a complete human being . . . This explains why it is not possible to be joined to the Lord’s Supreme Divine, only to his Divine human, and through that Divine human to his Supreme Divine. 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.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4211

The complete fullness of the Divine is in Christ but he never called himself God, rather the ambassador of God - “And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’” (Mark 10:18) and “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.’” (John 17:2-3). Jesus did how-

ever say: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), and in a further reference: “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Yet, in Christ, Divine essence permeates his whole human form on earth. He united the abilities involving reasoning and those of the bodily senses with the Divine.

“Therefore the whole body was made Divine, and Jehovah”. ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2083

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 the 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 of 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

“The simultaneous conquering of the hells and the glorification of his human was accomplished by means of

temptations which his human was allowed to undergo and by repeated victories in them, his passion on the Cross being the final temptation and the complete victory.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10828

Therefore, the redemption that Christ brought to the world was a spiritual deed which, in turn, made at-one-ment of humanity with the Divine possible again. However, we all have to consummate our own individual salvation through gaining victory over the evil within so that our soul attains complete rest - complete soul peace.

In the same way, Swedenborg explains the importance of at-one-ment with the Father, the greatest and central secret for Christians:

“... the Lord made his human Divine from the Divine within, so becoming one with the Father; and as the human is to be approached - the Son of God - we must put our faith in the Lord, who is both the Father and the Son.” ~ *The Lord* 32

Swedenborg repeats this fundamentally important phrase for Christians and non-Christians alike in a further reference in order to emphatically impress on the human mind that the ‘Son of God’ is more, in fact far more exceeding human understanding, than his appearance in the human form as Jesus. He says:

“The human itself from this Divine is the Son of God.” ~ *The Lord* 32

We are all potentially capable of taking into ourselves the Divinity of the Lord, and in this sense to become a ‘son of God’, because the Divine is active in us as a universal guiding Spirit. This is also the reason why Gustav Mensching, in the introduction to his book *The Sons of God*, refers to the following quotation of the apostle Paul (Romans 8:14): “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”<sup>17</sup>.

To validate this kind of God/Son relationship referring to all humankind, Swedenborg quotes Jesus:

“Jesus said: ‘As many as have received him, the Father, to them he gave the power to be one of the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name’, John 1:12.” ~ *The Lord* 32

Swedenborg never tires in explaining why the Word, the Divine light, came into the world and why the universal church, comprising all humankind, was re-formed. In contrast to those enlightened beings who could perceive themselves as images of God seen in a mirror, Jesus is the incarnation of the Word in perfect form: “He is the Divine truth itself in it” ~ *Marriage Love* 81.

In this way he brought to humankind the salvation for which it was yearning; and this indeed is expressed in the Jewish name for Jesus which means saviour: ‘Joshua’ - ‘Jehovah’ or ‘Jahwe’ is saviour.

Following Christ’s birth, a new time measure/calendar began which is today acknowledged all over the world. In Eastern religion there is no definite beginning and ending of history. According to Hinduism and Buddhism, history is an endless ‘becoming’ and ‘subsiding’. Meta-historically, it is a cyclic process while history in the three monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - proceeds in a linear fashion. The transcendental God, who up until then was inherent in the whole cosmos as a hidden God, through the advent of Christ intervenes actively in worldly affairs in such a way that he can carry through his Divine Will in the world without interfering with humankind’s freedom. In this way, he brought about the new epoch of human history.

Jesus brought into the world the perfect embodiment of the interior within the exterior, of the love within wisdom, of the male and female principle. To quote Swedenborg:

“. . . truth from goodness is male; . . . goodness from that truth is female.” ~ *Marriage Love* 88

The true spiritual state is androgyne; it is a union of the feminine and the masculine, symbolised by the union of man and woman.

“There is a correspondence between the spiritual marriage of truth with goodness, and the natural marriage of a husband with one wife.” ~ *Marriage Love* 76

Thus, monogamous marriages also correspond to “the celestial, spiritual and holy marriage of the Lord and the church” ~ *Marriage Love* 62, or the conjoining of the Divine with the human. They grow through spiritual development, becoming more and more intimate and perfect. This love is, as to its origin, “more celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean than any other love” ~ *Marriage Love* 71.

The whole of creation has its beginning in this spiritual marriage - the marriage of good and truth - which is the undivided Divinity inherent in all of the created universe. Creation is an image of this holy marriage. To make it possible for all of us to enter this sacred marriage and be united with the Divine, Jesus came into the world as the restorer and mediator of the Divine. For Swedenborg, God had to be born into earthly conditions so that he could approach people in the same form - the human form - and so to be accepted by them.

“Therefore, to make his human Divine, the Lord came into the world in the ordinary way. He was willing to be born, receive instruction and be born again as any other person is but with one difference. We are born again from the Lord whereas the Lord not only regenerated himself from himself, but also glorified himself and became Divine. Also, we are made new through the inflowing of love and truth whereas the Lord was made so through the inflowing of Divine love from within him which was his own. From this it may be seen that our regeneration is an image of the Lord’s glorification, or what amounts to the same, so that in the process of our regeneration we can remotely envisage the process of the Lord’s glorification.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 3138

Jesus brought the truly perfect consciousness, the pure and holy Christ consciousness, into the world. In reference to human regeneration, transformation and renewal by the Lord, Swedenborg quotes Jesus' own words of annunciation from the Gospel of John for validation in *True Christianity* 107: "I have come into the world as a light so that all who *believe in me* will not remain in darkness" (John 12:46; 8:12). "As long as you have the light, *believe in the light*, so that you may be children of light" (John 12:36 - emphasis added).

But Jesus was "in his human, a child like any other child, a boy like any other boy, and so on, the only difference being that he achieved progress more quickly, fully and perfectly than others" ~ *True Christianity* 89. Swedenborg goes further by adding it was to an extent that has never happened before or after him. His spiritual development reached highest perfection.

"The Lord's perception came directly from Jehovah, and so from Divine good, whereas his thought came from intellectual truth and the affection for it. Not even an angelic idea is adequate to understand the Lord's Divine perception, which lies beyond description." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1919

"In him alone there was a correspondence of all things of the body with the Divine. This was an infinitely perfect correspondence and from it there resulted a union of bodily with Divine celestial things and of sensory with Divine spiritual things. Therefore he became the Perfect Man, and the Only Man." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1414

Only Jesus has been born a "spiritual-celestial Man. Everyone else has been born a natural person with the ability or capacity to become, through regeneration by the Lord, either celestial or spiritual" ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4594. The endeavour to attain this most supreme perception and union with the Absolute is indeed the inner goal of all main religions and is expressed in various ways in all Holy Scriptures.

For Swedenborg, this finds its highest fulfilment in the Christian religion by the glorification of the human nature of Jesus Christ.

When partaking in the Holy Supper, devout Christians receive conscious perception of at-one-ment with the Father. The Holy Supper is “the holiest act of worship” ~ *True Christianity* 709. There are three things involved in the Holy Supper: “the Lord, his Divine good and his Divine truth” ~ *True Christianity* 711. “The Lord is wholly present in the Holy Supper, both as regards his glorified human and the Divine from which the human came” ~ *True Christianity* 716.

“In the church, the Holy Supper is an external practice that has an inner reality which joins to heaven a person who is governed by love and kindness, and by means of heaven to the Lord.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4211

Glorification of the Lord finds special expression in the rite of the Catholic Church when, through the blessing by the priest, bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. The celebration of the Eucharist, in remembrance of the overcoming of the cross and the absolute glorification of the human self, as accomplished by Jesus, forms the central event of the mass demonstrating the unique place Jesus occupies in the dogma and rites of the Catholic Church. Helmuth von Glasenapp writes in his exposition of the world religions: “Other major world religions also celebrate festivals in honour of their founders, they also revere their relics, and the custom of a holy meal is not uncommon to them. However, nowhere in any other worship does anything appear evident that might reach up to that quality of the Christian faith of trans-substantiation and awareness of the Saviour being actually present in the Holy Meal - and rightly so, as no other belief system acknowledges that its founder is the nucleus and the star of His message of salvation, towards whom everything else is orientated”<sup>5</sup>.

According to Swedenborg, every person, individually being in fellowship with Christ, must by their own effort and with God’s help, proceed on the path of inner transformation

in order to reach their goal. Just as with Jesus - “everything human in him was made Divine by his own power” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1893, so we must all make the effort to overcome our human nature by the power of God, for the Lord continuously saves all those that believe in him and live according to his commandments (refer Swedenborg ~ *True Christianity* 579). Regarding the most stringent argument as to the work of salvation that everyone has to accomplish individually, Swedenborg quotes Jesus’ own words: “Do not think that I am come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them . . . Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17,19).

The goal is our regeneration from within. Ultimately, it is the re-establishment of the state of being an image of God. In order to become an image of God and true follower of Christ, we have to unfold our inner light by his power so that we all are reborn from the Divine and become radiant with light, as he is. 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 and Wisdom* 221

Jesus accomplished everything that was written concerning himself in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms - “Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44). By the complete transformation of his human being into his original Divinity, he became one with the Father, the image and likeness of the invisible God, and thus fulfilled the highest command of the true Sabbath - attainment of heavenly peace and sanctification of the seventh day of creation. This is the reason for people to keep the Sabbath holy, because it is a reminder of

the at-one-ment of the Divine Self with the humanity of the Lord.

“The Lord himself is the Sabbath” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 85. As Jesus says to the Pharisees: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28).

True fellowship with Jesus Christ involves everyone individually manifesting the Sabbath so that they may become a new creation - a re-born person - and therefore a ‘new church’.

“Every subsequent inmost church has been a Sabbath of the Lord, and so is every regenerate person when they become celestial, since they are a likeness of the Lord. Six days of conflict or labour precede this. In the Jewish church these things were represented by the work days, and by the seventh which was the Sabbath; for in that church, everything that had been ordained was representative of the Lord and his kingdom.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 85

The Sabbath was also called the covenant which God made with the children of Israel - “Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.” (Exodus 31:16) - because the covenant denotes everything:

“. . . that joins a person to the Lord, namely, love and faith and the things that belong to them. In fact these are the Lord’s and the Lord is within them, and so the Covenant itself exists within these where they are received. These things do not exist except with someone who has been regenerated, with whom anything at all of the Regenerator’s, or the Lord’s, constitutes the covenant, or is the covenant.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 666

For Swedenborg, the whole *Bible* has only been written with respect to Jesus Christ, who, by fulfilling what has been prearranged and prophesied about him in the Old Testament, is the spiritual centre of the whole universe. At the same

time, he is 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 enim est oriens)” ~ *Marriage Love* 261.

Figuratively speaking Jesus is portrayed as the spiritual sun, as also is Krishna. The light of the sun moves from east to west. Eastern ‘man’ never lost the inherent knowledge of the divinity and always taught the search for the Self, hidden in the soul of each and everyone<sup>26</sup>.

A wonderful presentation of the light that comes from the east is to be seen in the famous basilica of Torcello, that small island near Venice. At the High Altar in the middle of the twelve apostles, towards the east, a window has been placed as a symbol of Christ ‘*oriens ex alto*’. The prophet Ezekiel is not the only one who refers to Christ as “standing at the door of the east gate of the Lord’s house”, where “the glory of the God of Israel was . . .” (Ezekiel 10:19). This prophecy is repeated in the New Testament in the words of praise uttered by Zacharias: “because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high.” (Luke 1:78). This window in the basilica of Torcello is also a symbol for the spiritual sun illuminating all humankind from the ‘East’, enlightening the mystery of the East embodied by the only true oriental Jesus and as such, not just by him as a person. He is simultaneously the spiritual centre at every point of the universe. This cosmic Christ can also be experienced in a very powerful presentation in the dome of St. Mark’s, Venice, a place that due to strong Byzantine influence has become a point of intersection between East and West. From wherever you stand in this magnificent dome so richly adorned with magnificent gold mosaics, the Christ image can be seen above and all around, surrounding and enveloping the observer, enraptured and in awe.

Christ, the logos and primeval light, is for Swedenborg the cosmos itself and, in regard to the whole creation, is immanent as well as 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.

The following detailed description makes this presentation of the Grand Man as being the universal church perfectly clear:

“Heaven consists of countless communities. They all vary, and yet all are one, for all are led as one by the Lord. A parallel exists for us in that although internally our body has so many parts, which, like our other organs and limbs, have so many inner parts, each functioning differently from any other, yet all of them are nevertheless controlled as one by one soul. A parallel also exists with the human body which has different ways of exerting its strength and of moving. Nevertheless all are controlled by one motion of the heart and one of the lungs which together make one. The reason they are able to function as one in this way is that in heaven there is one single inflowing which is received by us according to our own disposition. This inflowing is an inflowing of affections from the Lord, from his mercy and life. And although there is one inflowing only, everything nevertheless conforms and follows as one. And this comes about through the mutual love shared by those in heaven.

Such was the situation with the first ancient church. Although there were so many forms of inner and external worship . . . they all nevertheless had ‘one lip’ and ‘their words were one’; that is, they all shared one doctrine in general and in particular. Doctrine is one when all possess mutual love, or charity. Mutual love or charity causes things, though varied, to be one, for it makes one out of them. If all people, no matter how many - even ten thousand times ten thousand - are governed by charity or mutual love, they only have one end in view, namely the common good, the Lord’s kingdom, and the Lord himself. 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 our body, which, as stated, 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'." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1285

The human being, as a Grand Man, is an image or a vessel of God. God is not identical with the Grand Man but he is in it as the soul is within its body. Consequently the Divine of the cosmic Christ is present and active in every single person. Swedenborg also explains why that is so.

"The reason why the Lord's Internal, which is Jehovah, is called Man is that nobody is Man except Jehovah alone, for in its genuine sense Man means that Being (Esse) . . . Being (Esse) itself - from which we derive our being - is Divine, and is consequently celestial and spiritual. Without that Divine celestial and spiritual there is nothing truly human in us." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1894

Indeed, the cosmos in the form of a Divine primeval human appears in numerous myths of creation of different peoples. The Germanic tribes had a giant called Ymir. Earth was created from his flesh. According to a Chinese myth, the primeval man P'an Ku created the universe, and in the *Upanishads* Purusha is the man, or person, representing the Self inherent to the whole cosmos. The figure of Purusha appears in Iranian mythology as the cosmic giant Gayomart, and correspondingly, in Jewish tradition as the Grand Man, the Adam Kadmon of the Kabbala, the body of which is formed from the statutes of the Torah<sup>4</sup>.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, this eternal wisdom is portrayed in a wonderfully simple and most descriptive manner: "The East is a part of the Lord and so is the West. The South is a part of the Lord and so is the North".

"God owns the East and the West. Wherever you may turn, there is God's countenance", is correspondingly said in the *Koran* (Sura 2, 115).

Therefore, we can all partake of the light, and are able to receive the Divine truth, even though not everyone is aware of it. Yet receptivity for that light is different for the various nations as for each individual, reflecting their degree of inner union with heaven and the universal church. The deeper we develop our internal vision, meaning the ability to receive the Divine within, the more we become truly human because we become more God-like.

To illustrate the inflowing of the Divine light into the whole cosmos, Swedenborg often refers to the universal church before the advent of the Lord as a human, because it is the heaven or the kingdom of heaven on earth. Christ is the heart and the lungs of the universal church and supplies all parts of it with his light, as the lungs support the body with oxygen. From its central position the light illuminates the whole surroundings, so that each single individual - a microcosm within the macrocosm - can be flooded with light when they turn towards this inner light. Every human is an image of God, a mirror of the universe, and at the same time is always:

“ . . . the focal point of inflowing coming through the heavenly form from all. Consequently the image of heaven is reproduced in everyone, making us a likeness of heaven and so a human being.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 3633

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 Christianity* 729

To highlight the true meaning of the term ‘church’, another of Swedenborg’s detailed explanations is now quoted, together with showing how important an understanding of the universal church, and therefore of the Cosmic Christ, really is for all religions:

“What makes it the church is spiritual good and the truths that spring from that good. A person without spiritual good, which is neighbourliness, and without spiritual truths, which is true faith, does not belong to the church in spite of having been born within it. The whole of the Lord’s heavenly kingdom possesses kindness and faith, and unless the church possesses good like that it cannot be the church since it is not joined to heaven; for the Church is the Lord’s kingdom on earth.

The term ‘church’ is not used because it is the place where the Word is and teachings drawn from it, or because it is where the Lord is known and the sacraments are celebrated. Rather it is the church because it lives in accordance with the Word or with teachings drawn from the Word, and seeks to make those teachings its rule of life. People who do not live like this are not part of it but outside; and those who lead evil lives contrary to that teaching, are further away outside the church than gentiles who know nothing whatever about the Word, the Lord, or the sacraments. For since those people are acquainted with the forms of good that the church fosters and with the truths it teaches, they destroy their inner church, something gentiles cannot do because they are unacquainted with those things. It should also be realised that everyone who leads a good life, in charity and faith, is a church, and is a kingdom of the Lord. For that reason they are also called a temple, and a house of God. Those who are churches individually, no matter how remote from one another they may be, constitute one church collectively.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 6637

In the same vein, albeit expressed in different words, the following statement referring to those people that do not belong to the Christian religion are worth considering:

“Those outside the Church who acknowledge one God and who in accordance with their religion live in some sort of charity towards their neighbour, are in communion with those who belong to the Church. For no one is damned who believes in God and lives a good life. From this it is plain that the Lord’s church exists throughout the whole world, although it is especially located where the Lord is acknowledged and the Word is known.” ~ *New Jerusalem* 244

So the church is realised in each person to the extent that they are, through their interior, united with the Divine.

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.

It is significant that the magi from the East, the so-called holy three kings, saw the star and recognised the Divine light in Jesus, that they worshipped the child in the manger and

gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh - “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11). The deep symbolic meaning of this is hardly known to us any more. For Swedenborg, the sages of antiquity used frankincense and incense in sacred acts of worship because “odour corresponds to perception, and ‘a fragrant odour’ - like that of the aromas which various kinds of spices have - to a pleasing and acceptable perception, being of truth derived from good” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4748.

Further, “‘Gold’ here means good, ‘frankincense’ inner truth, and ‘myrrh’ external truth” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 10252.

Yet gold is also the symbol of purity and constancy. Frankincense is used in the Eastern Church during prayers, as it purifies the atmosphere and favours true contemplation, and Myrrh, since antiquity, has been regarded as the symbol of loving and reverent devotion<sup>22</sup>.

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).

Swedenborg’s interpretations of the inner meaning of the *Bible* are meant primarily for Christians because the Christian Church is so deranged that “hardly any remains survive” ~ *True Christianity* 4, ‘remains’ being those deeply acquired loves and thoughts during earliest life. “Both the Roman Catholics and the Protestants have not woken up to what is said in the Word” ~ *True Christianity* 82. He says that even in Christianity, true ‘conjugal love’ as he terms it - the true union or marriage of the internal with the external, of love and wisdom, the male and the female aspect - that Jesus personified to perfection, occurs only rarely (refer *Marriage Love* 71).

Swedenborg considers that the Christian Church has come to an end because there is little left of either real faith or true charity. This means Christians are missing the link that binds them to heaven, that is the ‘true Word’ which makes them able to become members of the true church based on inner worship rather than external rites.

The fact that the pure light came into the world through Jesus Christ, who thereby became the founder of the Christian religion, does not imply in any way that Christians actually have that light. On the contrary, Swedenborg considered it to be his mission, by revealing the inner meaning of the *Bible*, to show those members of the universal church, who call themselves Christians, the way back to the light. This was because worldly thinking, directed towards material things, especially in the delusive light of the European Age of Enlightenment, threatened to prevent true enlightenment. Humankind, as already portrayed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, again

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and again needs new teachers of wisdom to lead us from the darkness of ignorance back into the true light.

## Islam: The Hidden Secret

**T**he patriarch to the three monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - is Abraham, or Abram as he was named before he was called to go to the land of Canaan.

Swedenborg, in explaining the inner meaning of the Old Testament, points out that 'Abram' means 'the Lord', and he represents the Lord. In also saying that the biblical text is a receptacle or vessel for the interior meaning, it follows that the land of Canaan has its particular spiritual meaning. The land of Canaan did not just refer to a certain part of the country in the worldly sense but rather "represented and meant the celestial and spiritual things that belong to the Lord's kingdom, and those that belong to the Lord himself." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1413. It is on this account the land of Canaan is called the holy land, or the heavenly Canaan.

When it is said in the Old Testament: "Now the Lord had said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1), this is God's first instruction about the path leading from spiritual darkness towards true light by means of conquering the physical senses. In other words, when a person recedes from bodily and worldly things, the holy land and the spiritual and celestial things can be presented to the view (refer Swedenborg *Secrets of Heaven* 1407).

The covenant that God made with Abram, as well as all the other covenants made with Abram's descendants was "nothing else than a representative of the Divine and of the heavenly things of the kingdom of God" ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1864.

The Old Testament records that Abram dwelt in Egypt for a time which, according to Swedenborg, refers to when we acquire knowledges through the senses. Egypt is also a representation of the development of Jesus as a boy when he was still bound to factual information from the senses and worldly knowledge. Because the Lord was born as any other is born and needed to be taught as any other has to be, he had also to learn facts. His development in the early stages corresponded to the development of every person. But once he had dispersed all unimportant and worthless facts which he had acquired by external means, then he was able to be admitted into the light of heavenly things and at length to glorify his inherited natural human nature, so bringing to completion his mission of redemption (refer Swedenborg ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 1542).

When Abram received a new name from Jehovah, that of Abraham, he acquired a new quality from that time. Swedenborg records that the words from Genesis 17:5 “Your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” mean he would put on what was Divine, that is the Lord Jesus Christ as represented by Abraham, so that all truth and all resulting good would come forth (refer *Secrets of Heaven* 2008, 2009).

We are also told by Swedenborg that the letter ‘H’, which was inserted into the name ‘Abram’ to render it ‘Abraham’, was taken from the name of Jehovah, it being the only letter that implies Divinity and signifies ‘I am’ or ‘to Be’ (refer *Secrets of Heaven* 2010).

As a matter of fact, the Kabbalists attach to the letter ‘H’ the mystical meaning of ‘Breath of God’, that is, God being the spiritual breath of the human soul, kindling a notion of indestructibility of Being and also of remembrance of its homeland as to its Divine origin. The letter ‘H’ is “the symbol for religion, the union of man with God”<sup>10</sup>.

Likewise, the letter ‘H’ was inserted into the name of Abraham’s wife, Sarai. Sarah, like Abraham, represented what is Divine of the Lord. Together, Sarah and Abraham represent “the Divine marriage of good and truth in the Lord -

Abraham being Divine good and Sarah Divine truth” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2063.

As he had promised, God gave Sarah and Abraham a son - Isaac. With him and his descendants, God established his eternal covenant - “God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.’” (Genesis 17:19).

With Sarah’s Egyptian handmaid Hagar, Abraham fathered his other son Ishmael, the ancestor of Arab people. Mohammed was a descendant of Ishmael, through his son Kedar. So strictly speaking these three religions should not be dealt with in isolation because they all represent different aspects of Abraham’s monotheism.

The main Asian religions, being among the oldest religions of humankind, 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 Christianity* 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 even though they can come very close to the Eternal truth and the Absolute<sup>18</sup>. 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". Although God reveals himself in the manifold manifestations of creation, yet he himself is beyond all qualities and is the undivided One.

The secrecy of the Divine is symbolised in the Islamic world by the attire of the women, who hide their femininity from the eyes of men and the world by their clothing. Women are the symbol of Love, the interior, whilst men embody Wisdom, the exterior. The exterior is an expression of the inner meaning of the religion. Even though the facial veil had already been worn in the pre-Islamic East (it was Salome who performed the dance of the seven veils), it was of fundamental importance that, before the establishment of Islam and its teachings, women were not required to wear the veil<sup>33</sup>.

Swedenborg offers the most profound explanation for the secret of the 'East', which lies hidden like the Islamic woman behind her veil, and unravels its spiritual, and so its religious significance.

"The Mohammedans . . . acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God and a very great prophet. They accept that he was sent into the world by God the Father to teach people, but not that God the Father and he are one, and his Divinity and humanity are one person, united like soul and body, as all Christians believe by the authority of the Athanasian Creed. Mohammed's followers therefore have been unable to acknowledge the Lord as God from eternity, but only as a perfect man in the world. Since Mohammed, and therefore his dis-

ciples also who followed him, thought this way, knowing that God is one and the Creator of the universe, they had to exclude the Lord in their worship; the more so because they also proclaim Mohammed as the greatest prophet.” ~ *Marriage Love* 341

As the Jews and the Mohammedans do not acknowledge the unity of Christ’s humanity with his Divinity, their followers do not live in monogamous marriages as Christians do. As with Mohammedans, the Israelites “were allowed to marry more than one wife, because there was no Christian church with them” ~ *Marriage Love* 340.

“Moreover, to prevent it being a sin for them, they remain natural people and do not become spiritual. The natural person is unable to see that there is anything sinful in matters which have the approval of the accepted religion; only a spiritual person can see this.” ~ *Marriage Love* 348

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, according to Swedenborg, Islam has the same global function as the other world religions.

As the Jewish people receive their religious instructions from the *Torah*, so Christianity has in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-11) very precise and universal precepts for a truly religious life. These are spiritual laws that point the way to the kingdom of heaven. Their validity is expressed in the words of the founder of the religion himself, with Jesus saying clearly and unmistakably: "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Since Christians did not have any civil legislation of their own, they later had to fall back on Roman law. Although the Christians did indeed attune their church law to the ethics of the *Bible*, they were still strongly under the imposing influence of Roman civil legislation and Germanic law<sup>34</sup>. That is also one of the reasons for secularisation of the West and the separation of Church and state. Worldly law nowadays has practically lost all its inter-relationship with transcendental aspects and the consciousness of the supreme law, that of neighbourly love and a person's vindication before God; it is dwindling away at an ever more alarming rate. That is also the reason for all the selfishness of our times and increasing violence and ruthlessness in pursuing personal goals.

Further, Mohammedans did not have any explicit laws covering both secular and heavenly life - the commandments in the Old Testament (Exodus 21) for everyday life were no longer considered binding - a prophet was needed who would bring to humankind the all-encompassing law for all conditions essential to life. This Prophet, Mohammed, is also called 'the legislator' to whom the law - the 'Sharia' - of the *Koran* was revealed by God. However, the Sharia is an adaptation of the Divine Will to humankind's limited capacity of understanding, as likewise are the commandments of the Old Testament. Human-will, filled with selfish desires, evils and falsities is being held in check by the God-given law of the *Koran*. Those who subject themselves to the Divine law live according to truly Islamic precepts, because they are fulfilling God's Will as revealed through Mohammed.

Since Islam acknowledges both the Old and the New Testaments as a Divine revelation (Sura 2: 130), the law handed down from the Prophet Mohammed and the Ten Commandments transmitted by the prophet Moses in the *Torah* are, in the true and religious sense, addressing all people. For this reason, Mohammed is considered the last of the prophets as he demands submission to God's Word, that is 'al-islam' literally meaning 'obedience', or more precisely, obedience to God. To observe the God-given law, also directing mundane life, is the basis for humankind to manifest its status of being in the image God provided, that is, that people really live according to the regulations.

Devout Muslims who act according to the precepts of their Holy Scripture literally fulfil the Will of God much more readily than Christians who daily recite the Lord's Prayer, repeating again and again: "Lord, Your will be done", whilst following their own will and ego. As Muslims do the Will of God exactly in accordance with the laws of their religion, Islam is the last in the sequence of the major revelations. For the Muslim, Islam is the law because it is God's Word and God's Will.

The *Koran* has, of course, an internal meaning within its external text which remains closed off to most Muslims as they lack internal vision, as do Christians also. So, it is also said in the *Koran* that the unbelievers who follow their own desires are those whom Allah has "put locks upon their hearts" because they do not know the inner meaning (Sura 47:26).

Mystic teachings of all the three monotheistic religions point out conjunction and union between lower and higher states (literal and inner meanings) even in spite of the fact that in Jewish and Islamic mysticism Jesus does not take the centre position as obviously he does in Christian mysticism. While in the Christian religion Christ has been traditionally seen as the intermediary between the human state and the higher or inner state, there is no equivalent in the Jewish and Islamic religions.

Nevertheless, the three 'Abrahamic' religions should not be treated independently from one another. While apparently incompatible externally, internally they are in unison. They are often mentioned together 'jointly in one breath' so to speak. Frithjof Schuon coined the term 'triad of monotheistic revelation'. They are like the pearls of a pearl necklace "where no pearl is like another, yet each one is a pearl"<sup>27</sup>. Otherwise they could never have Jerusalem as a joint spiritual centre. Yet each is convinced that its God is the true and only one and each of them is correct for they all pray to the one and the same God.

Jews and Christians pray: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29). The Muslims pray: "Allah is One, the only Eternal God." (Sura 112).

We are all being illuminated by the same light, regardless of whether or not we know it. All Holy Scriptures tell this.

Psalm 36:9 reads: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light".

And the Sura of Light (Sura 24:34) proclaims: "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth".

Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of light, says: "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become 'sons of light'" (John 12:36).

The Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, regards his mission to lead "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24), meaning all people, onto the right path. So we read in John 10:16: "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." In his fellowship they will allegorically find their way home again to their lost Jerusalem, the place for which all humankind is yearning, hoping that the destroyed temple of their inner life, the House of God, may be erected again.

## The New Jerusalem

Swedenborg's mighty work of revealing 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'.

Religious eras reflect the path of human spiritual life as the progression and regression of individual and societal relationships with God. As such, they represent the historical growth and decline in the active, outward alignment of an individual's inward development and the coinciding development of the positive and negative spirituality guiding communities collectively.

In the Book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem is depicted as a city descending as a bride prepared for the Lord God. In bridal preparation for the groom, we must allow our inner being to be made clean of all impurity in order to be ready to directly approach the presence of God. Approaching as the bridegroom, the Lord enters our inner being, our prepared bride. After the internal wedding supper, mutual love of God and the neighbour can descend into outward manifestation on the material plane of our natural life.

The New Jerusalem, as the internally linked universal church body proclaimed by Swedenborg, has had a steady influence on spiritual life, not only within Christianity but also from indirect mediation throughout the whole world. In proclaiming this new internal church body, he made no assertions concerning an external counterpart nor did he advocate establishing a new denominational organisation. It was some readers of his spiritual works who in London in 1787, some fifteen years after his death, commenced a sectarian organisa-

tion calling itself 'The Church of the New Jerusalem' ('The New Church' and 'Swedenborgian Church' being alternative names in more recent times) which initially preserved, cared for, translated and disseminated those works. Within another twenty-five years, independent publishing houses were established to continue the preservation of his vast spiritual writings. Today, his works have been translated into many languages and are available via library collections and online search engines.

Swedenborg's universal pluralism asserts God to be Love Itself, and heaven as consisting of numberless men and women, co-operating individually, in groups and as a whole, to image God's love outwardly among kindred spirits in active relationships of loving-kindness. The simple synopsis of this brief overview states that spiritual societies form on the basis of shared pleasure and the Golden Rule, and likewise the higher or more inward heavenly societies form from the central reality of approaching the Divine Human-One alone as God.

Even so, it is difficult to impart, in a brief and precise manner, the universality of Swedenborg's message, particularly in reference to his explanations and descriptive Christian witness, being the essence of his entire religious work of about 20,000 pages, illustrated by many examples, specifically of the figure of the Divine human.

Following the four eras of humankind, that is, the gold, silver, copper and iron, there proceeds the dawn of a new and final, fifth epoch. The Christian era comes to an internal conclusion at the end of the Iron Age, which Swedenborg calls the 'Fourth Church.' Church eras decline when selfcentredness replaces compassion as the guiding principle and falsities become widely promoted as truths of faith. In the fullness of time, when there is no longer any sustainable marriage of goodness and truth within people, the inward stifling or quenching of the Holy Spirit, combined with truth from the Word being twisted and misinterpreted for selfish ends, lead to states of finality, desolation, and decision.

For Swedenborg, Jesus Christ is God himself, the most supreme, the most sacred, the Word and the salvation of all humankind. He condemns in the most definite terms the form Christianity has developed into in the course of time. He demonstrates that by the eighteenth century there was hardly anything left of the true teachings which Jesus had proclaimed, requiring the movement away from selfcentredness to make room for the compassionate kind of love that makes humanity anew. The organised Christian Church had done what, in moral terms, is absolutely abominable. Not only had it waged bloody wars in the name of Christ and in so doing brought much misery upon humankind, it had even used religion, and the Divine contained in religion, as the means of ruling over the souls of the people and their spiritual life in order thereby to gain worldly power. Thus the Christian era comes to a conclusion and the fifth and final era begins - the New Jerusalem.

For that reason, Swedenborg refers to the state of the Christian Church at his time as 'Babylon', a state described in the Book of Revelation 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. How dangerous and inwardly wicked it is can be summarily established from what now follows.

Roman Catholics acknowledge and worship the Lord without his having any power to save. They totally divide his Divine from his human, and transfer to themselves his Divine power, which belongs to his human. For they forgive sins, grant entry to heaven, cast into hell, and save whoever they wish, putting a price on salvation and so claiming for themselves the prerogatives which belong to God's power alone. By exercising that power, it follows that they make themselves into gods, each in their own rank down to the

lowest, by deriving it from their chief, who they call the Vicar of Christ. Therefore they look on themselves as the Lord and worship him not for his sake, but for their own.

Not only do they adulterate and falsify the Word, they even deprive the people of it so that not a glimmer of the truth reaches them. Nor is this enough for them. They actually reduce it to nothing by accepting the decrees of Rome as containing a Divine element superior to that in the Word. By so doing they bar the way to heaven for all; for the way to heaven is the acknowledgment of the Lord and faith in him and love to him, and it is the Word which teaches the way. As a result, without the Lord acting by means of the Word, salvation is impossible.” ~ *Last Judgment* 55

A more severe criticism of the Christian Church has probably not been voiced since the time of the Reformation, the accusation being that it had not only placed itself above Christ, but also that its dogma had interfered with essential access to true enlightenment, blocking the path leading to the inner light. For Swedenborg, the only official channel and authority leading to true faith, and therefore to the genuine precepts of life, are the Sacred Scriptures. So far as the *Bible* is concerned, it has certainly undergone many a change in the course of the centuries from translations to modernisation of language. Since, however, the *Bible* is the Word of God, its inner meaning cannot be disregarded and by divine providence, no institution is permitted to make unsanctioned changes to the text. The Christian religion arises solely from the *Bible*, hence it is from the *Bible* that Swedenborg devolves the inner meaning for the West.

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.

“Any person that regards these laws as Divine, and lives by them because of their religion, is saved. Most of the peoples remote from Christianity regard these not as civil laws but as divine laws and keep them sacred . . . So there is happiness for people outside Christendom, if they simply abstain from evils as sins against God because evils are against their religion.” ~ *Divine Providence* 254

“It makes no difference whether their joy is like that of angels in the highest heaven or like that of angels in the lowest heaven, since all people who get to heaven attain the highest joy of their hearts . . . They could not bear anything higher or they would suffocate.” ~ *Divine Providence* 254

“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 of some truths 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 truths of faith.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 3263

“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. Therefore, it is of great importance that, for the first time in the history of the Catholic Church, the Second Council of the Vatican recognised the other religions as containing a certain degree of truth. An important step towards dialogue of religions amongst the nations was

undertaken, and unless advances are made, there can be no peace between the nations, a peace so dearly longed for. In its report, the Council states: "Since antiquity up to the present day the different nations have had an inkling of that hidden power manifesting itself in the dealings of the world and human way of life, and not seldom there is even found that feeling of acknowledgement of a supreme Deity, or even that of a Father . . . The Catholic Church does not reject anything that is true and holy in those religions. With sincere earnestness it observes those actions and habits, those statutes and doctrines which, even though they might differ in some way from what it regards as true and thus teaches, yet they do indeed occasionally reveal a ray of that truth, that illuminates all humankind."

Everyone needs a set of beliefs which can lead to a life based on spiritual values and the most important guidelines in this respect are the Holy Scriptures. They contain all the precepts for a righteous, God-fearing life. Even so, the mystics, visionaries and sages of all times enunciate this spiritual light which each and everyone can find on their inner journey. However, everyone is also being led from within themselves by their Master, that is the universal Spirit of Christ immanently present within and involved in the workings of the whole creation as in each individual human being on their individual paths to their very personal salvation even though that is very hard to detect:

" . . . the Divine end, which has good in view, governs everything. Nothing is therefore allowed to happen except to the end that something good may come out of it. But because we possess freedom enabling our reformation, we are turned from evil towards goodness so far as we freely allow ourselves to be turned. We are constantly being turned from an utterly dreadful hell into which we make every effort to throw ourselves, to one that is not so bad, if we cannot be led to heaven."

~ *Secrets of Heaven* 6489

According to Swedenborg, prior to the establishment of every new church, that means, every new era or spiritual epoch, a last judgment has to take place in the spiritual world. This last judgment is neither an end of the world nor a completely new creation of all things but a rearrangement of the spiritual domains which cannot be perceived by the natural sense of people. He records that the last judgment preceding the arising of the spiritual church of the New Jerusalem occurred in 1757. It involved those souls in the spiritual world who had lived in the world after Christ's advent. A new angelic heaven was created.

“The reason the nations were arranged by districts was that their position depended on the shared ability of each group to receive Divine truths.” ~ *Last Judgment* 48

“. . . those who were inwardly good being taken into heaven and those who were inwardly wicked to that state called hell.” ~ *Last Judgment* 64

“. . . at the end of a church, the inner levels are disclosed, and then a judgment is passed on the people.” ~ *Last Judgment* 67

Chapter 21 of the biblical Book of Revelation starts with those words: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth”, which Swedenborg interprets in the following way: “A new heaven had been formed of Christians by the Lord, which is now called the Christian heaven” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 876. It is made up of those souls who have taken up Divine light through the Word, that is, through the *Bible*. For everyone after death comes to that place which corresponds to the state of their inner development and the religion that they practised while in the world. After death everyone keeps their religion, “for our religion remains with us” ~ *Last Judgment* 50.

The whole Chapter 21 of the Apocalypse of the New Testament deals with the coming of the Lord and the new church established by him, which is called the New Age or the New Jerusalem. This New Jerusalem is not to be regarded as

being identical with the city of Jerusalem in Israel; rather it is the kingdom of the Lord amongst all people on the whole earth (Luke 17:21). Swedenborg says:

“This new church is meant by Jerusalem, which will be given a new name by Jehovah, and it will be a crown of glory in the hand of Jehovah, and a royal diadem in the hand of God, in which Jehovah delights, and will be called, ‘Sought out, A city not forsaken.’” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 880

So the new religious age, the New Jerusalem, as enunciated in the New Testament in the revelations to John, will be a new Church, encompassing the whole world, because a place of inner peace will be created in the souls of faithful humankind forming it, which is the goal of true human evolution. The name ‘Jerusalem’ is not a Hebrew Word, so its linguistic root and meaning is hard to determine. Generally, though, it is interpreted as meaning ‘City of Peace’.

Also, Philon of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher of Hellenistic cultural background and a contemporary of Jesus, did not consider Jerusalem to be a mundane city but rather as being an allegorical state which, on purely spiritual motifs, he called ‘the Face of Peace’. It symbolises the end of internal spiritual combats finally leading the innermost core of the person involved to that state of being which is a blessed haven of peace. “Thus don’t search for the City of the Absolute Being in any geographical region of the earth - for it has not been constructed from wood or stone - but in the lucid soul, free from battles, having chosen a contemplative and peaceful life as its goal”<sup>1</sup>.

For Yunus Emre, the Islamic Sufi-mystic, the spiritual path also finds its consummation only within his innermost being, which *Pilgrimage* 26: P.159 tells us is the source of the Divine light:

“If you are seeking God, search for  
Him in your heart –  
He’s not in Jerusalem, nor  
in Mecca, nor the hajj.”

If a religious battle is mentioned, it must not be understood in the literal sense of the word for this leads to misconceptions; it is meant to be a parable for the interior battles and turmoil within the soul. The Dshihad - the holy battle of Muslims - is not a battle against the infidels but at the inner level means 'self-sacrifice' or surrender of the human ego. In answer to the question whether or not any Sura that commands religious warfare is being revealed, Mohammed also taught: "Will they not ponder the Koran? Are there locks upon their hearts?" (Sura 47: 26)

Also the battles and the wars in the *Bible* indicate the spiritual battles against desires and falsities, battles against the evil within the human soul, but they are also a reflection of the historical reality. In a like-manner with all Holy Scriptures, Swedenborg reveals that the *Bible* deals with spiritual and celestial things (refer *Secrets of Heaven* 1664). Therefore, in calling upon the children of Israel to wage the holy war against the gentiles: "Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears" (Joel 3: 9-10), the prophets of the Old Testament must not be taken literally. Rather it is a call to wage war within one's inner self, for then "Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it" (Joel 3:17). At the final end of this war, blessedness and peace will enter all humankind in its place, as predicted in the annunciation of the Kingdom of the Messiah in Isaiah 2:4-5: "nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord".

It is a matter of conquering the demons in one's interior being in order to receive salvation of the soul and attain true religion. In the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, this situation is described when the heavily armed warriors are lined up to fight the enemy, the latter symbolising the power of sensual desires and delusions.

Both in a material way and ideologically, the holy city of Jerusalem - the Heavenly City - is the spiritual centre for Jews,

Christians and Muslims, the focus towards which all their religious yearnings are orientated. Jerusalem is the gateway between the East and the West. Since antiquity it has been the spiritual 'East' for all humankind, the site of Divine revelation, as can be read in the Old Testament: "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory" (Ezekiel 43:2).

Jerusalem, the City of God, is situated in the land of Canaan. Here was the temple with the altar on which the sacrifices were made and where true worship took place. In this temple Jesus had been standing, teaching; in Jerusalem he was condemned to death and crucified, thus glorifying his human nature by making it Divine. In this way, the interior church was restored and rebuilt after the people of Israel had rebelled and Jerusalem had become 'a whore' (refer Isaiah chapter 1) breaking the covenant which God had entered into with them when he led them out of Egypt. By this violation of the covenant, the children of Israel became god-less (refer Jeremiah 11:12) and "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22).

By overcoming his human nature, Jesus restored the only real peace, manifesting the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath, and thereby actually sanctifying it. For that reason "the cosmos is here in its absolute centre . . . It is the cosmos, again transformed into light, the redeemed cosmos - and as such the eternal Now and Here of God's Presence"<sup>37</sup>.

The last book of the *Bible*, in which Jesus made known to John many things through an angel when staying for a time on the isle of Patmos, deals with the return of Jesus Christ as its central theme. John probably recorded his revelation at the beginning of the second century and ever since it has been a book which has not given up its secrets to human scrutiny, its fifth chapter containing the vision of the lamb holding the scroll with the seven seals indicating this would be the case. In the eighteenth century, this secret was interpreted in a new approach by Swedenborg's revelation regarding this subject, at a time when he says the Christian Church was

coming to an end spiritually. This revelation was necessary in order “that some people might be saved” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 947, for the spiritual state of the Christian world was such that it was in great danger of altogether losing the understanding of the interior meaning of the Word. The Christian Church shared the fate of all the previous religious epochs. According to Swedenborg, it had reached its end by distorting the image of God in the minds of people. His description of this state is in no way abstract and is nowadays just as valid as it was when he wrote it:

“There are various ways a church comes to an end. It happens principally through circumstances which cause falsity to look like truth; and when this happens, the inherently spiritual good can no longer exist. What is then believed to be good is only natural goodness, the product of a moral life. The main reason for truth and goodness coming to an end is principally because of the predominance of the two natural loves (self-love and love of the world) over the diametrically opposite two spiritual loves. When self-love is dominant, it is the opposite of love to God; and when the love of the world is dominant, it is the opposite to love towards the neighbour. Self-love is wishing well to no one but oneself, except for selfish reasons; and likewise the love of the world. Once those loves have got a grip, they spread like mortification through the body, and stage by stage destroy every part of it.” ~ *True Christianity* 754

Swedenborg provides an understanding of the revelation to John word by word, phrase by phrase, in many volumes to portray all the details. Here, we can only deal with the small section in chapter 21 of the revelation concerning the New Jerusalem, which contains the essence of the teachings in Swedenborg’s writings.

In all of Swedenborg’s extensive religious works, including his interpretation of the inner meaning within the text of the Revelation to John, Swedenborg’s leading concern is to show humankind the way back to paradise, lost long ago. It is about

re-uniting each person with their origin, leading them back to their true religion by once more re-awakening within them the 'lost' Word and re-kindling the inner light.

The New Jerusalem means symbolically the new religious epoch, which, according to Swedenborg, started when the Christian Church spiritually came to its end. The people of the new church - the New Jerusalem - are, in the broadest sense of the word, members of all religions because, as explained earlier, spiritual regeneration for humankind became universal with the advent of Christ even though people everywhere are not aware of this. Swedenborg concludes that everyone can be in communion with the new heaven by regarding Divine truths and living according to them.

The way and means of establishing this new church on earth is for followers of the Christian religion to primarily study the *Bible*, being the Word of God. It contains both in the literal text and the spiritual meaning the all-encompassing and most desired knowledge and truth as it refers to the transcendental realm - the Kingdom of the Lord. Through genuine worship and devout reading, particularly by sincere pondering on the biblical texts, truth is revealed by an internal, intuitive way to the seeker, being intimately connected with the Divine through the Holy Scripture. This awakens an echo and a memory of the ancient religion, setting their inner centres of consciousness into vibration. Swedenborg's description of this state of consciousness makes us aware of the complexity of this process being triggered within the soul:

"The inner meaning of the Word consists of two distinct elements - the spiritual and the celestial. The spiritual involves a discernment - abstractedly apart from the letter - of subject matter or real things, the literal sense serving these as an object in the same way as things seen with the eye may serve as objects of thought regarding more noble matters. The celestial involves pure perception of the affection present within the real things which belong to the inner meaning. The discernment of real things exists with spiritual angels, whereas the pure perception of that affection

exists with celestial angels. The latter immediately become aware, purely from the affection there, what the letter embodies within itself when this is being read by people in the world. And from this they form celestial ideas for themselves, doing so with unending variety and in an indescribable fashion in accordance with the sequence and harmony of the celestial things of love comprising the affection.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2275

The same path towards understanding can be found in the Holy Scriptures of other religions and is also practised in the schools teaching the *Torah* and the *Koran*. Swedenborg expresses this in the following words:

“In every Divine work there is a union of goodness with truth, and of truth with goodness.” ~ *Sacred Scripture* 81

Jerusalem means the church in contemplation of the Word and its teaching (refer Swedenborg *The Lord* 63, 64). 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” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 897. Also, “the teachings of the new church will be written in their hearts” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 194, as it once was with the people of the most ancient epoch.

Christians should receive the teaching of the New Jerusalem in worship of the Lord from the *Bible* since as the Word of God, it is the link to what is Most Holy. This link is being saved from desecration by the form of the literal text:

“When the holy city Jerusalem means the Lord’s new church as to doctrine, its wall symbolises the Word in its literal sense, from which doctrine is derived; for that sense protects the spiritual meaning lying concealed within it, as a wall protects a city and its inhabitants. That the literal sense is the basis, container and the support of its spiritual meaning, may be seen in the *Sacred Scripture* (n. 27-36); and that sense is a protector, to pre-

vent the interior Divine truth of its spiritual meaning from being injured.” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 898

The precious stones adorning the foundations of the wall refer to the light received from heaven by all who live in accordance with it, depending on their inner state and individual receptivity as they perceive the truths from interior thought:

“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. But those who have confirmed themselves in the belief that in theological matters the understanding is to see nothing, blindly accepting that what the church teaches must be believed, cannot see any truth in the light, for they have obstructed the channel of light into themselves.” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 914

“‘Precious stones’ in general mean all the truths of doctrine from the Word which shine through from the spiritual meaning.” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 915

To the people of the New Jerusalem, Divine truths are being revealed through the *Bible*, being the only true teaching of the Word, and for them “from interior enlightenment, to live in a manner conforming with them” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 920.

In the Book of Revelation (21:22) it is said: “for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” which at first seems strange. Swedenborg clarifies this by explaining the verse means there will be no separation of the external from the internal in it which is because the temple “symbolises the church as to worship, and in the highest sense, the Lord himself” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 918.

By developing the human virtues of love of the neighbour, 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 that Swedenborg frequently emphasises. It is an activity that should be manifested in creation, since good must not just remain an idea but be realised through active deeds. This is the meaning of creation, and the reason for fellowship with Christ, which each and everyone can realise 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.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 164

This statement is valid for all people and is being taught in all religions. For every true religion is not just a matter of pure faith but its principles must also be lived and manifested, so that under no circumstances must it become a lifeless theory or empty dogma, detached from daily life. Swedenborg states briefly and unmistakably:

“For everyone knows that religion is to do what is good, and that everyone will be judged according to their deeds.” ~ *Life* 31

There are two decisive points in reference to the teachings of the New Jerusalem and the practice of religion in general: ‘Love for the Lord’ and ‘Love for the Neighbour’. ‘Love for the Lord’ means to have faith in the Lord and to keep his commandments. Observing the commandments is expressing ‘Love for the Neighbour’, meaning to desire well-being to others and to be of use to them. Swedenborg states that these two things are its:

“ . . . general principles on which all particulars depend, and the fundamental elements from which all actions proceed. They are therefore the soul and life of all its teaching.” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 903

He says that “the time will come when people will be enlightened” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 4402, and adds that real Christianity will not arise until that time (refer *True Christianity* 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. There is a prerequisite however. We must surrender our self-love and love of the world in order to perform our service in truly active selflessness, free from serving selfinterest, at that ‘place in creation’ to which we have been assigned.

“A life of thoughtfulness toward our neighbour - behaving fairly and uprightly in all our deeds and in all our responsibilities - leads to heaven, but not a life of piety apart from active life.” ~ *Heaven and Hell* 360

At first glance, nothing seems more plausible and simpler. Yet, in our material and self-centred world, it is often very difficult to live these virtues laid down in the Ten Commandments, which Swedenborg tells us contain the teachings for the new age. However, things now are no different than they were in his day. Swedenborg, the son of a bishop, an active scientist, a member of the Swedish parliament and a participant in the social and political life of his time, had ample experiences to come into contact with human behaviour and weaknesses. He always refers to these to demonstrate, from practical examples, the difference between worldly and spiritual life, between the merely exterior and the interior person. For instance, he says of those who have a knowledge of the truth but lead evil lives:

“. . . these are chiefly people who teach, but the truth which they teach sends its roots down no more deeply than only memory-knowledge is accustomed to do; for it is learned and displayed by them solely for the sake of position and gain. And because the ground in which they sow truth is accordingly self-love and love of the world, their belief in truth is no more than a certain

persuasion resulting from those loves.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 2400

Swedenborg’s pertinent description of the egotism and materialism of his time matches perfectly the conditions of our time:

“Self-love is wishing well to ourself alone and not to others, except on our own account, not even to the church, our country, any human community or fellow citizen. It also includes doing good to them solely for the sake of our own reputation, honour and glory. If we do not see these ends in the good done for others, we say in our heart ‘What does it matter? Why am I doing this? What’s in it for me?’ And so we stop doing it. This shows plainly that in a state of self-love, we do not love the church, our country, our community or our fellow citizens, nor any good, but ourselves alone.” ~ *New Jerusalem* 65

Further,

“Good that is truly good must be done from a love of goodness for its own sake. People governed by that love detest merit, for they love to do it and derive feelings of delight out of doing it. On the other hand they are saddened if there is any thought that it is done for some selfish reason.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 9983

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 and 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.

“The actual delight that resides in the love of doing good without thought of personal benefit is a reward that lasts forever; for all love and affection inscribed on our life remains permanently. Heaven and eternal happiness from the Lord are introduced into that kindness.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 9984

On the surface it seems as though it would be quite easy to walk the path towards our salvation and the well-being of others. Yet it is very difficult to make the inner resolution to change for the better, and then to actually live by that. This is principally a matter of strict spiritual and external discipline, striving in the various situations that life presents us with towards fully observing the Ten Commandments, for they are truly the foundation of the new church, or the new age. These are valid for every human being. Swedenborg explicitly exclaims:

“All nations throughout the world who have religion possess laws similar to those in the Decalogue. All who live them from a religious outlook are saved; all who do not are damned.” ~ *Life* 65

However, no one is lost who, with all their heart, strives to stay on the right path. The same applies to all people who, once they have commenced treading the path of regeneration and spiritual rebirth, fight their inner self-will, from which evils and falsities arise and selfish actions and thinking result. This, too, is also not easy, as anyone would know who is striving to do so. The inner combat needs much more energy than one might think, and it requires commitment on the part of the whole personality. However, Swedenborg gives to everyone who really strives to walk the right path, guidelines

on how to proceed along that road, starting at first only in very small steps:

“Our fight against evils must be done as of ourselves, for if we do not fight as of ourselves, we do not do so at all. We would stand like automatons that see nothing and do nothing, and from evil we are continually thinking in its favour and not against it. It should be known that it is the Lord alone who fights in us against our evils, and that it only appears to us that we fight of ourselves. The Lord desires that it should appear to us like this because without it no combat takes place and therefore no reformation.” ~ *Life* 96

“This combat is not severe except in the case of those who have given free rein to their ardent evil desires and have indulged them with a set purpose. The same applies with those who have stubbornly moved away from the holy things of the Word and of the church. With others it is not severe; let them even once in a week, or twice in a month, resist the evils they are inclined to and they will perceive a change.” ~ *Life* 97

Therefore, it does appear that it would be fairly easy to turn earth into a paradise if this incredibly simple advice were followed by all people. It is also hard to believe that the conclusion to 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).

The victors, clad in white robes, who are referred in the Revelation of John as “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and people and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the lamb” (Revelation 7:9), are those

people who “have cleansed their religious principles from the evils of falsity” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 378.

The white robes, reminding us of Christ’s clothes which became white as the light at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:2), mean the central religious beliefs (refer Swedenborg ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 379). The victors, regardless of whatever way they have reached the sublime state of Divine virtues and of which religion they belong to, are those who are in “goodness and truth, therefore in celestial joys from the Lord” ~ *Revelation Unveiled* 385.

Swedenborg described the spiritual state of a human being who has reached the highest level of self-development as follows:

“Those who are celestial are not involved in conflict. If evils and falsities attack them, they treat them with contempt, and are therefore called conquerors. No visible bonds restrict them, for they are free. Their bonds, which are not visible, are perceptions of kindness and truth.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 81

Corresponding to Swedenborg’s description of the spiritual person, the *Bhagavad Gita* XIV 22 - 25, presents one who has attained such an exalted state of consciousness:

“He who hates not light, nor busy activity,  
nor even darkness, when they are near,  
neither long for them when they are far;  
Who unperturbed by changing conditions  
sits apart and watches and says  
‘the powers of nature go round’,  
and remains firm and shaken not;  
Who dwells in his inner self,  
and is the same in pleasure and pain;  
to whom gold or stones or earth are one,  
and what is pleasing or displeasing leave him in peace;  
who is beyond both praise and blame,  
and whose mind is steady and quiet;  
Who is the same in honour or disgrace,  
and has the same love for enemies or friends,

who surrenders all selfish undertakings –  
 this man has gone beyond the three.”

(Meaning: ‘This man is called a conqueror of Nature’)

Within the Christian Church there are still many who are convinced that their religion is the only true one, solely offering salvation, presiding over all other religions because Christ, the son of God, is the founder and the saviour of the world. As has already been mentioned, Swedenborg did indeed call Christ the Grand Man who, by his human form, represents the cosmos. This means Christ is not only the Son of God and the universal spirit of leadership, but that he also embodies the all-encompassing universe which he illuminates from inside with his spiritual light. All people partake of this heavenly light, being part of the cosmos themselves, with everyone being created in its image, as a microcosm.

St. Augustine spoke about the cosmic Christ when he said: “What we call religion has already existed since the very beginning of humankind up until the incarnation of Christ, but only from that point of time onward was the eternal religion named Christianity”. Furthermore, consider Jesus’ apocryphal words: “It is given to all humankind to believe in this light”<sup>35</sup>.

Swedenborg could not be considered a true seer if that universal truth did not also appear in his visionary works. Although Jesus Christ does indeed stand in the centre, and although he portrays him in many and various ways as the light of the world, yet Swedenborg announces the end of the Christian era in his explanation of the revelation to John simply because the majority of Christians do not take up the hidden light of Christ. However, he goes on to demonstrate that the New Jerusalem, or the new church will not arise just from the established Church. The new church will be formed predominantly from people not born within the reach of the Christian religion. It will be called the Holy City, New Jerusalem “coming down from heaven, by which is meant a new church among gentile nations, after the present-day

Church in our European world has been laid waste” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 9407.

In this way the New Jerusalem will arise among the gentiles, those people who were particularly despised by the Christians.

“They are certainly open to doctrinal falsities due, though, to lack of knowledge because they do not possess the Word. Nevertheless when they have received instruction they have a clearer perception and consequently a more inner perception of what heavenly life means for a person than Christians have. The reason for this is that they have not set themselves firmly against the truths of faith as very many Christians have done. Consequently their inner nature is not closed but is like that of young children, open to and receptive of truth.” ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 9256

Swedenborg untiringly repeats in great detail why the new church will indeed not emerge from the Christian Church. Of course, to label non-Christians as ‘Gentiles’ or ‘Heathens’ is nowadays absolutely inappropriate, for most intimate piety and love of God is indeed particularly displayed in the non-Christian world:

“But those who have not set themselves firmly against the forms of kindness and the truths of faith - for instance, those who are outside the Christian Church and yet have lived in some kind of faith and charity according to their religion - have not been able to close their inner nature through negative rejections of truth and positive acceptances of falsity contrary to the truth of faith found in the Word. Their internal can be opened in the direction of heaven and of the Lord either in this world or in the next. In the next life, all the earthly and worldly ideas they have brought with them from this life are raised up in order that they may all look upwards together. This brings them into a condition to receive the truths of faith and forms of the good of charity from the Lord, to have intelligence and

wisdom conferred on them, and so be endowed with eternal happiness. Such is the condition of all who lead a good life in accord with their religion. For this reason the Lord's Church is spread throughout the entire world." ~ *Secrets of Heaven* 9256

In this way Swedenborg's work points out, with absolute clarity, to all humankind - in the East as well as in the West - the way back to our true origin, detached from all insane manifestations of materialism of our times. It leads us back to that main issue which, in 1993, attracted the members of the World Parliament of Religions to come together for the conference in Chicago to discuss the 'East' being within each person, bringing about fulfilment of religious life. Already a hundred years previously, people had clearly been aware of that issue when the representative of the spiritual 'East' - Swami Vivekananda - had, in a flash, captivated the hearts of the audience from the West. And a hundred years later, the Dalai Lama enthralled his audience more than any other participant at that meeting of the World Parliament of Religions. However, not only at that venue, but also in many other countries all over the world, people are drawn to representatives of Eastern religions. Still, everyone has to decide for him or herself which master they wish to follow.

Swedenborg's disclosures about the future state of the new age, which he tells us has already begun after the tremendous upheavals in the spiritual world, are very general and open in every direction. Since it is a matter of spiritual renewal, any resulting changes would not yet be perceived in the natural world.

"So just as before there will be politics, peace-treaties, alliances and wars, and all the other general and particular features of society . . . The future state of the church, however, will not be the same. It may seem much the same in outward appearance, but inwardly it will be different. In outward appearance the churches will be divided from one another as before, their teachings will differ as before, and so will the religious sys-

tems of the gentiles. But people in the church will henceforward have more freedom in thinking about matters of faith, and so about matters which have to do with heaven, because of the restoration of spiritual freedom. For now everything in the heavens and the hells has been restored to order, and it is from there that all thought is influenced about Divine matters or against them; from the heavens when thought favours what is Divine, from the hells when it opposes it. But people will be unaware of this change of state, since they do not reflect on it, nor indeed do they know anything about spiritual freedom or influences from the spiritual world. However, in heaven this is perceived, and people after their deaths can do so too. It is because people have had their spiritual freedom restored that the spiritual meaning of the Word has now been disclosed, and by it Divine truths of a more inward kind have been revealed. For in their previous state people would not have understood them.” ~ *Last Judgment* 73

At first glance, readers might find the meaning of these expositions by Swedenborg nearly impossible to grasp because the real process of transformation is an internal cosmic event, manifesting and become clear only in the course of time. Renate von Scholtz-Wiesner expresses this complex process in wonderful simple terms in her book *Hoffen und Erkennen [Hoping and Discerning]*: “Under the cover of things, a sacred All gradually arises”<sup>23</sup>.

However, we can already observe one thing today. Men and women are indeed much freer when thinking about matters of faith. Yet, the future remains open and uncertain, it can be foretold neither by a Nordic seer nor by the angels in heaven. The reason for this was imparted by the angels to Swedenborg:

“The Lord alone knows the future. What they did know was that the servitude and captivity in which people in the church have been held up to now had been

taken away. Now, through the restoration of freedom, they could better perceive inner truths and also become interior people if they wished to do so. But they said that they still had only faint hopes of the people in the Christian Church, though much better hopes of a people far removed from the Christian world and sheltered from its attackers, with a nature able to receive spiritual light and become celestial-spiritual. They said that at the present time inner truths are being revealed among those people and they are being received with spiritual faith in the way they live and in their hearts; and they worship the Lord.” ~ *Last Judgment* 74

“This new church is the crown of all the churches which have up to now existed upon earth, because it will worship one visible God, in whom is the invisible God, as the soul is in the body.” ~ *True Christianity* 787

Every human on earth can interpret and, with God’s help, internalise and manifest Swedenborg’s expositions in a very personal way. Swedenborg’s work is so complex and multi-layered that it can hardly be fathomed in all its depth. However, it leaves room for hope that it will be instrumental in fostering spiritual tolerance and in giving each individual that peace of the soul so ardently desired. Also, the peace process between the world religions and among the nations of the world will continue to grow as the vision of the new age becomes more and more apparent.



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Schult, Arthur: *Urgeschichte der Menschheit. Die biblische Schöpfungsgeschichte im Licht der Mysterienweisheit* [*Ancient History of Mankind. Biblical History of Creation in the Light of Hidden Wisdom*]. Turm-Verlag, Bietigheim, o.J.

Schult, Arthur: *Das Johannes-Evangelium als Offenbarung des kosmischen Christus* [*The Gospel of John as a Revelation of the Cosmic Christ*]. Reichl Verlag, Remagen 1965

Schult, Arthur: *Welten Werden und Johannes Apokalypse* [*The World to Come and John's Apocalypse*]. Turm-Verlag, Bietigheim 1973

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## Bibliography of Swedenborg's Spiritual Works

The main publishers of Swedenborg's spiritual works are:

Swedenborg Foundation Inc.  
320 North Church Street  
West Chester, PA 19380, USA  
[www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com)

The Swedenborg Society  
Swedenborg House  
20 - 21 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2TH, UK  
[www.swedenborg.org.uk](http://www.swedenborg.org.uk)

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The works used in this book and the years in which they were written:

*Divine Love and Wisdom* 1763

Outlines the Divine purpose in creating the natural universe. The nature of reality is fully discussed as are major topics essential for a full understanding of spiritual laws.

It is set out in five major sections:

1. the Creator
2. the Means of Creation (Emanation)
3. the Structure of Creation (Degrees)
4. the Method of Creation (Use)
5. the Goal of Creation (Harmony)

This work has been described as literally cosmic in its scope.

*Divine Providence* 1763 - 1764

This work is a continuation of *Divine Love and Wisdom*. The former describes the purpose of creation and this shows how the Divine nature governs human life and creation. A major theme of the work is the true nature of spiritual freedom and the laws which provide for this. The question of a loving, just God alongside innocent human suffering is put into clear perspective.

*Heaven and Hell* 1757 - 1758

This is the most well-known and frequently read book by Swedenborg. It deals specifically with the nature of life after death and the two states of life called Heaven and Hell. The central theme is the formation and emergence of our ruling love, or life's delight, while living in this world which determines the basis of our situation and fulfilment after death. The material in the book relates to two distinct levels: the afterlife itself and the internal states within each of us now, both functioning according to similar spiritual laws and consequences.

It is set out in four major sections:

1. the form of heaven and its communities which is the Divine human, the distinctions between celestial and spiritual angels, and between the three main levels of heaven. All angels are people who essentially lived from kindness when in this world.
2. a full description of life in heaven as experienced by angels, including their presence with us.
3. the process of dying and awakening, and the three stages of development after death in the initial world of spirits.
4. the state of hell, its life, its inverted heavenly form, its use, and how it is controlled.

*Last Judgment* 1757 - 1758

Swedenborg states that the last judgment, predicted in the *Bible*, took place in the spiritual world in 1757 - a uniquely Swedenborgian belief. The events associated with it, together with the spiritual qualities and lives of the different nations, are also described.

*Life* 1761 - 1763

A brief study describing the qualities which comprise the life of good which leads to heaven. It emphasises the view that we can only evolve spiritually from the Lord, although we must act as if from ourselves. Swedenborg argues that we must have a correct understanding of the teaching of the Ten Commandments at their internal level so that we can recognise the need to reject the evils listed in them. By doing so, we come into the opposite goods and turn ourselves towards heaven. Many supporting biblical quotations are given.

*The Lord* 1761 - 1763

An important study presenting teaching on the nature of the Lord. It explains the workings of the Divine trinity and the fundamental Swedenborgian teaching of God as a Divinely human person, who ministers to the human race as both revealer and redeemer.

*Marriage Love* 1767 - 1768

Also published under the titles "Conjugal Love" and "Love in Marriage", this book presents the nature of male-female qualities, their origin from the Divine, their correspondence, and the dynamic union within marriage. The reasons and causes of marital breakdown - both external and internal - are discussed. Human sexuality is described in its spiritual and natural contexts, and in the second half of the work, a large number of disorderly conditions are examined.

*New Jerusalem* 1757 - 1758

This is Swedenborg's own summary of the main teachings given in his first major work *Secrets of Heaven*. Some editions include the specific references to the relevant paragraphs in that major work. Many of the teachings included are developed at greater length in later publications.

*Revelation Unveiled* 1764 - 1766

Also published under the title "Apocalypse Revealed", this two volume work is a verse by verse systematic

exposition of the spiritual meanings within the powerful imagery and apparent prophecy of things to take place as presented by the literal text of the last book the *Bible*. Swedenborg shows that it actually describes our eventual personal self-judgment in the spiritual world with reference to deeper levels of both good and evil states within us being aroused and resolved. This is also set in the context of the last judgment, or major re-ordering of the whole spiritual world, which Swedenborg claimed to have witnessed. The book also outlines the two extremes, described as ‘faith-alone’ and ‘love of dominion’, towards which religion tends to gravitate, either causing an inevitable decline.

*Sacred Scripture* 1761 - 1763

A work in which Swedenborg provides support, from the *Bible* itself, for the idea that it presents the Word of God on earth by means of an internal or spiritual sense, and that its teachings are necessary to maintain human life.

*Secrets of Heaven* 1747 - 1758

The twelve volumes comprising *Secrets of Heaven*, also published under the Latin title of “*Arcana Caelestia*”, is considered to be Swedenborg’s magnum opus. Its form is quite unique. The internal spiritual meaning of the first two books of the *Bible*, Genesis and Exodus, is set out systematically verse by verse from beginning to end. Many other verses from the *Bible*, which refer to the same imagery, are used as support material. The Genesis and Exodus material presents the sequence of spiritual growth and development as the soul begins to enter consciousness of its existence from the Divine. It outlines the many struggles and temptations of soul-growth in the journey towards eventual angelhood, dealing with the activity of angels and evil spirits in the internal states and life of each of us. The full nature of good and evil are described frequently and in great detail.

Today, its content is being increasingly studied and examined for its direct application in areas of spiritual growth, psychology and counselling.

In between many of the chapters of Genesis and Exodus, Swedenborg adds other material - usually referred to as inter-chapter sections - on specific subjects. Swedenborg gives an extensive presentation on each theme from a spiritual world perspective, and includes very many of his own experiences from what he heard and saw. Much of the topic material was later used by Swedenborg in specific volumes, such as *Heaven and Hell* and *New Jerusalem*.

The entire work is a psycho-spiritual storehouse of the soul, its spiritual form and life, its Divine origin, and its potential development. It is an inexhaustible reservoir of spiritual insights. Swedenborg was never again to touch so deeply and expressively on the spirit within.

*True Christianity* 1769 - 1771

As *Secrets of Heaven* was the initial and quite unique outpouring of Swedenborg's insights of a psycho-spiritual nature, so *True Christianity*, his final major output, also has a distinct quality to it. It is also published under the title "True Christian Religion".

This two volume work is a highly systematised explanation of traditional Christian theology and doctrine containing many new and radically different spiritual insights. Using religious terminology, subjects such as God, the Trinity, Salvation, the Scriptures, Faith, Charity, Free Will, Regeneration, and the Last Judgment are extensively discussed.

Quotations from *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Divine Providence*, *Heaven and Hell* and *True Christianity* (paragraphs 1 - 462) used in this book have been extracted, with permission, from the New Century Edition series published by the Swedenborg Foundation, being the only works currently available in it. As far as possible, quotations from other works reflect the style which is being adopted in the New Century Edition translations.

Other main works by Swedenborg include:

*Faith* 1761 - 1763

A brief work explaining the nature of faith and its role in the life of regeneration. Contrary to the common concept, 'faith' does not mean believing something not understood. Genuine faith is presented as an inner acknowledgment or perception of truth which, in the stream of providence, cannot properly be separated from neighbourliness. 'Faith alone' and 'salvation by faith' are pointedly rejected.

*Life on Other Planets* 1756-1758

In our age of space exploration, this work, also published under the title "The Worlds in Space", has aroused unusual controversy, as Swedenborg claims that he met in the spiritual world former inhabitants of several of the other planets in our solar system and our moon. There are also sections dealing with spirits from earths beyond our solar system. Controversy apart, the book's great value lies in its descriptions of the states and qualities of spirits in the whole of creation, their understanding of God, and their perceptions of spiritual life. It is in this work that Swedenborg states that in the whole of the universe the Divine is known to be One, and that the quality of human life on earth is the most exterior to be found in the universe.

*Neighbourliness* 1764

This short work, also published under the title "Charity", questions the traditional, pietistic view of good works and speaks for a life of being useful to the neighbour and to God. We exercise charity in a broad, true sense through being of use by the faithful execution of the details of our daily work and duties, coupled with thoughtful care for others. It is quite practical in content since Swedenborg describes the attitude and spiritual motives towards others of people in various occupations.

*Soul-Body Interaction* 1769

A metaphysical treatise discussing the relationship between the spiritual and the natural and the means by which they are inter-connected. Spiritual inflowing from the Lord interconnects the human soul and body. The work provides a basis for making the distinct differences between the spiritual and natural worlds understandable.

*Revelation Explained* 1757 - 1759

Written relatively early in his period of enlightenment, Swedenborg presents a verse by verse exposition of the biblical Book of Revelation, drawing extensively from other passages in the *Bible* as supporting material for the spiritual meaning given. However, he did not complete the manuscript leaving off writing quite suddenly at Revelation chapter 19 verse 10. It was published in six volumes after his death with the name "Apocalypse Explained".

In addition to presenting the spiritual meaning of the biblical text of the Book of Revelation, a number of sections are included as additional material e.g. :

- God, Providence, Creation
- Life in Animals and Plants
- Religion and Life
- The Word of God



Books by and about Emanuel Swedenborg  
and his spiritual teachings may be obtained from

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