

Swedenborg and the Second
Coming of the Lord
General Doctrinal Class

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Before speaking about Swedenborg, I will say a few words about the New Church. The Christian world is more and more losing faith in God as a Divine Man. There are those who consider God to be "the ground of being," the order of the universe, or other terms which take away the idea of God as a Divine Man.

If it is not believed that God is a Divine Man, the First and Great Commandment cannot be fulfilled; for who can love the "Ground of Being" with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength? We are told that God created man in His image and likeness; wherefore it follows that God is Infinite Man. But finite man cannot comprehend the Infinite, as we read, "No man hath seen God." John 1:18

The purpose of creation is that there might be those whom God can love and who can love God and their fellow men. If God is not a Divine Man who can love and be loved, creation has no sense, no meaning. Now we cannot love that which we do not know; wherefore to fulfill the end of creation, God had to reveal Himself to man; He had to clothe Himself in Divine appearances, suited to the comprehension of men. Jehovah therefore appeared in visions and dreams to the men of the Most Ancient Church. By influx through the Heavens He clothed Himself with a Human appearance that men could see, know, and love. Later He revealed Himself in His Word, which was accommodated to man's comprehension. When this was no longer sufficient, for our salvation, He descended and took on a natural Human by birth in this world. If we view this from a feeling of the nature of God's love and purpose in creation this is not surprising, but is the natural fulfillment of the end of creation. In fact, if one elevates one's mind above the materialistic thought of the world, one can see that it could not have been otherwise.

The whole of the Old and New Testament teach that God is a Divine Man. Where this idea is lost there is nothing of real Christianity left, even with those who still call themselves Christian.

The First and Great Commandment commences with the words, "The Lord our God is one Lord." If the idea of the oneness of God is lost, the mind becomes totally confused, and when the mind is in the dilemma as to whether God is one or three persons, there can be no love of God with all the mind; and, when there is no love of God with the mind, the love of God with the heart is also lost. It can be readily seen that if a man did not know whether his father was one or three persons he could not love his father; and that a man who was entirely indifferent as to whether his father was one or three certainly had no love. Is it not evident that the same applies to our Father in Heaven, that if there is no interest in understanding the Trinity, this indicates that there is no love of the Lord?

On account of the Church dividing God into three persons, and later coming to the general denial that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, the Lord had to come again in His Word for the sake of the salvation of the Human race. The Lord made His Second Coming to reveal Himself anew, to reveal Himself in His Divine Human.

We read in the Faith of the New Heaven and of the New Church, in the preface of the True Christian Religion, "Jehovah God...came down and took on the Human for the purpose of reducing to order all things which were in Heaven, and all things in hell, and all things in the Church; because at that time the power of hell prevailed over the power of Heaven, and on earth the power of evil over the power of good, and consequently a total damnation stood at the door and threatened. This impending damnation Jehovah God removed by means of His Human, which was the Divine Truth, and thus He redeemed angels and men, and thereupon He united, in His Human the Divine Truth with the Divine Good, or Divine Wisdom with Divine Love, and so with and in His Glorified Human, He returned into His Divine in which He was from eternity.

"From these words it is clear that without the Lord's coming into the world no one would have been saved. It is the same at this day; wherefore without the Lord's coming again into the world in the Divine True which is the Word, no one can be saved." T.C.R. 3

Here we are told that the Lord in order to save us came into the world again in the Divine True, which is the Word. This Divine True which is the Word, the Lord has given us through a man, Emanuel Swedenborg. We read, "The Second Coming of the Lord is effected by means of a man to whom the Lord has manifested Himself in Person, and whom He has filled with His spirit, that he may teach the Doctrines of the New Church from the Lord, by means of the Word." T.C.R. 779

We have met today to celebrate Swedenborg's birthday, to celebrate the birthday of a great man is in order, provided it does not become an adoration of the person.

You all know the greatness of Swedenborg's mind. He was not only a great thinker, but he was also a great person as to his loves and spirit. To honor a person is good in so far as we recognize that it is not the person, but the Lord who manifests genuine goods and truths through the person.

We are told that angels do not take any honor or thanks to themselves, but ascribe all honor to the Lord. Swedenborg above all would be grieved at any adoration of his person; for he clearly perceived that from himself he had nothing of good or truth. We read in the Arcana Coelestia, "Angels are indeed in the highest wisdom and intelligence, but have all wisdom and intelligence from the Divine of the Lord. From themselves or from their proprium, they have nothing of wisdom and intelligence. So far therefore as they are in truths and goods from the Divine of the Lord, so far they are wise and intelligent. That angels have nothing of wisdom and intelligence from themselves they openly confess, nay, they are indignant if anyone ascribes to them anything of wisdom and intelligence, for they know and perceive that this would be to take away from the Divine that which is Divine, and claim for themselves that which is not theirs, and thus to incur the crime of spiritual theft. The angels also say that all that is their own is evil and false, both from heredity and from actual life, when they were

men in the world; and that the evil and false is not separated or wiped away from them...but that it remains with them, and that it is by the Lord that they are withheld from the evil and the false and are kept in good and truth." A.C.4295

It was the above attitude which characterizes the angels which also characterized Swedenborg.

While we may be amazed at Swedenborg's wonderful understanding, we must never confuse Swedenborg's understanding with the function which the Lord called him to as an instrument through whom the Lord made His Second Coming. Swedenborg's rational mind was finite, that is, it was limited; while the Lord in His Second Coming is Infinite; and there is no ratio between the Infinite and finite.

This relation is described in a memorable relation as follows:

A spirit said to Swedenborg, "There is a palace here, which we call the Temple of Wisdom; but no one can see it who believes himself to be very wise, still less one who believes he is wise enough, and less still one who believes he is wise from himself. This is because such are not in a state to receive the light of heaven from a love of genuine wisdom. It is genuine wisdom for a man to see from the light of Heaven that what he knows, understands, and is wise in, is so little in comparison with what he does not know and understand, and in which he is not wise, as to be like a drop to the ocean, consequently as almost nothing. Everyone who is in this paradisaal garden, and who acknowledges both from perception and from seeing it in himself that his wisdom is so slight, sees the Temple of Wisdom; for it is the inner light in man's mind that enables him to see it, and not the outer light apart from the inner. So because I had often thought and had cause to acknowledge first from knowledge then from perception, and finally from inner light, that a man has so little wisdom, behold it was granted me to see the Temple. In form it was wonderful. I asked if it was allowable to enter and was told that it was." T.C.R. 387

This acknowledgement on the part of Swedenborg, was not just an expression of humility, but was, as is said, a thing of "knowledge, perception, and inner light."

But what Swedenborg wrote from the Lord, was indeed the Coming of the Lord, the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, and therefore contained the Infinite wisdom of the Lord, wherefore the Writings can be more and more opened in heaven and in the Church to eternity.

The Writings which are from the Lord through Swedenborg are the coming of the Lord, for we read "On the Books was written 'The Advent of the Lord', on all in the spiritual world. By command I wrote the same on two copies in Holland." (Ecclesiastical History).

Swedenborg wrote to Gjörrwell, "While I am in the act of writing, I enjoy a perfect inspiration, for otherwise it would be my own; but now I know what I

write is the living truth of God." Doc. II, 404. Again, "Do not believe I have taken anything from myself, nor from any angel, but from the Lord alone." A.R. Preface. "That which came from the Lord has been written, and that which came from angels has not been written." A.C. 1183

If we only see the letter of the Writings in natural light they do not appear to be purely Divine. In this relation we read that spirits from another earth said to Swedenborg that, "these things which (he) had written are so rude and gross that nothing which was interior could be understood from these words or from the sense of the words. I perceived also from a spiritual idea that it was so that they were very rude, wherefore it was granted me to respond that these things could be infused as is the case with the literal sense of the Word. That there are many such things, as it were, vessels in the sense of the letter with the Prophets." S.D. 2165

Here Swedenborg compares the letter of what he wrote to the letter of the Old Testament.

It is somewhere said in the Writings that "every Divine work is perfect in ultimates." The Word is the supreme example of a Divine work, and certainly the Writings in which the Lord has made His Second Coming is a Divine work. As you know the Word is Divine as to every jot and tittle, that is, as to every least thing. Yet if the Word is viewed as to the letter, by the natural rational mind, merely in the light of the world, it does not appear to be perfect; it appears to have inaccuracies and mistakes, and to be contrary to scientific facts. The Divine Perfection of the Word lies in the fact that it is a perfect ultimate for its spiritual and celestial contents, and we believe that same applies to the Writings of Swedenborg, which being the Coming of the Lord, must be the Word of the Lord, or the Third Testament.

We are taught that the Divine Providence is not only in generals or universals but in particulars and in every least single thing. The Lord's Providence was in its greatest fullness in the giving of His Word, and in the making of His Second Coming as well as His First Coming. There can therefore not be the least thing in the Word which is not of the Lord's Providence, and which therefore as to every word contains a Divine meaning.

The Lord speaks in the Word through men, and in so doing He used the memory and understanding of men. The one, through whom the Lord wrote the Word, might have little, even hardly any understanding, or he might have more understanding of what he wrote; but whether it was little or relatively much did not affect the fact that it was a purely Divine work. For example, concerning the Prophets through whom the Old Testament was written, we are told that at times they heard a voice and understood scarcely anything; on the other hand, the apostle John certainly had some inner understanding of what he wrote. In the case of Swedenborg he had a far greater understanding than did those who wrote the Old and New Testaments, but yet it was not Swedenborg's understanding that is the Lord in His

Second Coming; for this would make Swedenborg a god, a charge that some ignorant people have brought against the New Church.

The Divine Providence, in giving the Word, was not only in relation to the man through whom the Word was given, but it was also in relation to all things of history which are recounted in the Word, and also as to every detail of the three Sacred Languages in which the Word is written, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. We are taught that every word in the Word opens to infinity. From this alone we can see the marvels of Providence in the giving of the Word.

It was indeed necessary for Swedenborg to have a remarkable understanding of the Doctrines given through him. He had an important function to perform in the spiritual world in conjunction with the Last Judgement, which required an understanding on the part of Swedenborg.

We indeed read, "Since the Lord cannot manifest Himself in Person, as shown above, and nevertheless has foretold that He was to come and establish a New Church, which is Nova Hierosolyma, (or the New Church) it follows that He will do this by means of a man, who is able not only to receive these Doctrines in his understanding, but is also able to publish them by the press...I affirm in truth; as also from the first day of the call I have not received anything whatever pertaining to the Doctrines of that church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while reading the Word." T.C.R. 779

Swedenborg received a perfect illustration for the sake of the coming of the Lord, but as we have said we must not confuse Swedenborg's understanding with the Infinite truth contained in the Writings, which is the Lord Himself in His coming.

In science and philosophy, Swedenborg, as to his understanding, in many things was far in advance of his times. In the nineteenth century, many things which Swedenborg had foreseen, were confirmed by the scientific development of the times. This fact gave those who read the Writings of Swedenborg an affirmative attitude based on a natural rational approach, which, in Providence, was necessary at that time. If this had not been the case, scarcely anyone would have accepted the New Church. As long as this state prevailed, the New Church had a somewhat rapid growth.

During the twentieth century there has been a remarkable scientific development, and in this development many things have appeared to contradict the teachings found in the Writings of Swedenborg, and has brought the New Church into the position in many respects similar to the position, Protestantism found itself in, a century ago.

While the learned, science has been corroding faith a century or two earlier; in the later part of the nineteenth century with the great increase of scientific education combined with Biblical criticism it became more and more difficult for educated persons to have a literal faith in the Bible as the Word of God.

Some still cling to a literal interpretation, others lost their faith in the Bible, while many in the churches, while giving up the faith in the Divine authority of the Bible, still claimed that in the "spirit of the Gospels" was the salvation of the world. But as to what this spirit was there was little agreement. Some only saw it as a social gospel. The virgin birth, miracles, including the resurrection, were denied by many, and the emphasis was shifted away from the Kingdom of heaven to an external improvement of life in this world. The sole Divinity of the Lord was questioned by many of the churches. Such an attitude does away with ninety-five percent of the teaching of the Gospels. Instead of faith men came more and more to have religious opinions, which became more and more uncertain, and on which there is little agreement. The churches came to lose all foundations, no rock upon which the church could rest. Such an attitude has become so prevalent that even Protestant ministers have asked the question, "Can Protestantism be saved?" This doubt and uncertainty is now more and more infecting the Catholic Church; in a similar way as it affected the Protestant Church a century earlier.

In recent years the New Church has been faced with a similar problem. Many scientific facts are coming to light which throw doubt on the literal teachings of the Writings of Swedenborg. The most striking of these is the habitability of the moon, of Venus, and of the other planets of our solar system, while the problem concerning the earths in the universe is best known in the New Church, there are many similar ones, which bring doubts to the learned mind if one approaches the Writings from the science of the world.

We can see the Divine Providence in this. It is better to have no faith than to have a faith merely based on a natural rational belief, which is merely of the light of the world, apart from the light of heaven. The Word could have been written with an obvious external perfection, which would have compelled belief. But such a belief would not have left men in freedom. It would have compelled men to an external faith, where there was no internal faith, that is no seeing of truth in the light of heaven. Such a faith would have been similar to the faith of the ancient Jewish church when they were compelled to believe by miracles. In relation to the New Church it is easy to see that it, on going to the moon, the little men were found exactly as described in the literal sense of the Earths in the Universe this would compel many to accept the New Church while their hearts were opposed to the internal teaching. Thus the New Church would greatly increase in numbers, but it would lose its soul.

The purpose of the Word, the purpose of Divine Revelation, is not to teach us scientific facts, it is not to persuade the natural rational mind. The Divine Purpose of the Word, including the Word in which the Lord has made His Second Coming, is to teach us concerning the Lord and His Kingdom; and the regeneration of man. All things in the Word which appear to be of history or science represent things of the Lord and of His Kingdom, and of the regeneration of man by the Lord. In reading the Word we must therefore strive to elevate the mind above the things of mere science and history and see how they apply to our spiritual life, for

there is nothing in the Word when opened interiorly which does not apply to our spiritual life; but we in many cases have to be elevated into the light of heaven and away from the mere light of the world to see how the things in the Word apply, and this is a slow process. Also there are guards or cherubim, not only in the Old and New Testaments, but also in the Writings of Swedenborg, which is the Third Testament, which prevent us from entering further than we are prepared to enter. If we were to enter further than we are prepared to enter, we would profane internal truths, or like the man who entered without a wedding garment, we would be cast out.

If we think from our own feelings and reason, we ask with a certain resentment against the Lord, why does the New Church grow so slowly? Why are there so many difficulties in the way? But if we trust in the Lord's Providence we can see that it is of the mercy of the Lord that the church grows little by little as the Lord can prepare the way and regenerate men.

In celebrating Swedenborg's birthday while indeed we may honor Swedenborg as a man, our honor should be internally directed to the Lord, whose servant he was when the Lord came down to us in His Second Coming.