

THE WORD OF THE LORD AND THE MIND OF SWEDENBORG.

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February, 1971
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We read: "Without the Coming of the Lord into the world, no one could have been saved. It is similar at this day wherefore unless the Lord comes again into the world in the Divine True, which is the Word, neither can anyone be saved." (T.C.R. 3.)

To anyone who has an open mind this is a clear statement that the Writings of Swedenborg are the Word of the Lord; for the Lord made His Second Coming in the Divine Truth, and, as stated above, this truth is the Word.

If the Writings are the Word they must have the characteristics which make the Word to be the Word.

There are four characteristics which make the Word to be the Word.

One: The Word is in a perfect continuous Divine Series. (see A.C. 1659, 2102, 7933, 4442.)

Two: The Word, in every part, treats of the Glorification of the Lord and the regeneration of man. (see A.C. 3540.)

Three: Every word in the Word opens to Infinity. While I have not been able to locate the place that says every word of the Word opens to Infinity, this teaching is implied in the following statements: "There are inexhaustible things in every word of the Word." (A.C. 1936².) "Every word in the Word is from the Lord." (A.C. 771.) "There is not a single word used in the Word that does not involve a celestial arcanum." (A.C. 4136. see also A.C. 1869, 1870.)

Four: "Every Divine work is complete and perfect in ultimates." This is said of the Word in the Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture no. 28.

If we read the Writings in the light of the world, they do not appear to have the above described characteristics which make the Word to be the Word.

They do not appear to be in a perfect Divine series, nor do they appear to treat in every particular of the glorification of the Lord and the regeneration of man. They appear to treat much of the history of Churches and, at times, of other historical events. They describe many things seen in the spiritual world and in the earths of the universe. They do not appear to be perfect in ultimates, for they have apparent errors of history, of scientific facts, and even at times of words.

Such appearances in the letter are cherubim or guards which hinder those who are not prepared from entering the paradise of their internal sense.

In this respect they are not unlike the Old and New Testament where also we find apparent historical errors, and things not in agreement with scientific facts.

The perfection of the Word in ultimates, lies in this: that it is a perfect ultimate of its internal and this can only be seen to the degree that we are in the light of Heaven.

It has some times been said that the Writings are a different kind of Word, not having the above stated characteristics; but this idea is contrary to the plain teaching of the Word itself, for we read: "That the Book of Job is a book of the Ancient Church is evident, as before said, from its representative and significative style; but it is not of those books which are called the Law and the Prophets, because it has not an internal sense which treats solely of the Lord and of His Kingdom; for this is the one thing that makes a book of the genuine Word." (A.C. 3540⁴.)

We are frequently warned against the idea that the Divine Providence is in generals, and not in particulars, and least singulars. The supreme work of the Divine

Providence is in the giving of the Word. The Divine Providence in the giving of the Word is not only in respect to the preparation of the mind of him through whom the Word was given, but also as to the historical facts which are in the Word, and the knowledges, acquired by the human race which are brought into the Word, and also in respect to the words of sacred languages in which the Word is written, even to the letters. That the Hebrew letters are of Divine origin is known. That this is true of the Greek letters can be seen from what is said of Alpha and Omega. That this applies to the Latin letters, can be seen from the following: "In the spiritual Heaven, the writing is in Roman letters." (S.D. 5561.)

It has at times been said that in the Old Testament the basis is even in the letters, in the New Testament in the Words, and in the Writings in the ideas. Words, especially words in a Divine order, signify ideas, and we are frequently told that every word in the Word is significant. Ideas can only exist in the mind; it can not be said that a book has ideas; although all the words, in the books of the Word signify ideas. The words of the Word in the supreme sense signify ideas in the Divine Human of the Lord, which are infinitely above the ideas of men or angels.

In an article by Eric Sandstrom in The New Church Life of January, 1971 entitled, "Swedenborg's Preparation as to the Will", he calls Swedenborg a "revelator", an expression not uncommonly used in the Church. This expression appears to involve a confusion of thinking concerning the relation of Swedenborg as a man and the Word of the Lord.

The Apocalypse commences with the words: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." (Apoc. 1:1) The Third Testament is a Revelation of the Lord, which He gave to Swedenborg. The Lord is therefore the only Revelator. Neither John, nor anyone else through whom the Word was written is ever called a Revelator.

In the article, he quotes the following: "One must not love angels more than God; for in comparison with the Lord no respect must be paid to them." Mr. Sandstrom continues: "He, (Swedenborg) is increasingly aware of his calling; this is what is meant by the 'indescribable grace'. But he is also aware of the dangers attached to it, to others and to himself, and in an outburst of zeal he even felt as though he might wish to inflict harm on harm, nay, even extreme harm, if this should be necessary to prevent that veneration be turned to himself rather than to the Lord." (New Church Life. January 1971, p. 14.)

It appears to me it is just this veneration of Swedenborg here warned against which might be derived from Mr. Sandstrom's article.

There is a passage in the True Christian Religion from which it might be concluded that Swedenborg received the Infinite Divine doctrine in his understanding. We read: "The Second Coming of the Lord is affected by means of a man to whom the Lord has manifested Himself, 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. . . He will do this by means of a man, who is able not only to receive the Doctrines of this Church in his understanding but also to publish them by the press." (T.C.R. 779.)

Compare the above with the first verses of Luke, where we read: "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus. . ." (Luke 1:3) It is obvious that to interpret what Luke calls his "perfect understanding" to mean that he understood all that is contained in the Gospel of Luke, is irrational and it would be equally irrational to interpret the above number about Swedenborg to mean that Swedenborg understood all that is contained in the Writings.

The Writings or Third Testament is the Lord Himself in His Second Coming, and is therefore Infinite. Swedenborg's understanding was finite; and there is no ratio between the Infinite and the finite.

What Swedenborg understood compared to what is contained in the Writings or Third Testament is as a drop to the ocean. That this is so is clearly evident from the following: "This spirit said . . . There is a palace here which is called the Temple of Wisdom; but no one can see it who believes himself to be very wise, still less he who believes he is wise enough, and less yet one who believes himself to be wise from himself. This is because such are not in a state to receive the light of wisdom 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 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 relatively so slight, sees that Temple of Wisdom; for it is the inner light which enables him to see it. So, because I had often thought, and had cause to acknowledge, first from knowledge, then from perception, and finally from inner light, that man has so little wisdom, behold it was granted me to see that temple." (T.C.R. 387)

The reason the Word is the Word is not on account of the understanding of the one through whom it was written. Some, through whom the Word was written, understood very little, some understood much more. Some who wrote the Old Testament only recorded the historical things with which they were acquainted. Some of the Prophets, we are told, heard voices and understood very little of what they wrote.

Job, we are told, is a Book of the Ancient Church; he was of "the sons of the east" from whence later came the wise men to the Lord in His infancy, and he was the last of those who understood correspondences. The Book of Job, we are told, is an "excellent and useful work," yet it is not the Word, (see A.C. 2683, C.L. 532, A.E. 422²⁰, A.E. 740¹⁴), while through some who lacked the wisdom of Job, the Lord wrote the Word.

We read: "To prophesy signifies to teach the Word, because a prophet means, in the highest sense, the Lord, and in the relative sense one who teaches the Word, but in an abstract sense, the Word and Doctrine from the Word. . . By prophets here and elsewhere in the Word are meant, in the nearest sense, such prophets as those were in the Old Testament through whom the Lord spake; but in the spiritual sense those prophets are not meant, but all whom the Lord leads. With those also the Lord flows in and reveals to them the secrets of the Word, whether they teach or not. . . In many passages prophets are mentioned, and no one has any other idea of them than that the prophets of the Old Testament, through whom, . . . He dictated the Word, are meant, but in the spiritual sense (are meant) all whom the Lord teaches. . . Who are in a spiritual affection of truth. . . For the Lord teaches those, and flows into their understanding and enlightens; and this is more true of them than of the prophets of the Old Testament, for they did not have their understanding enlightened, but the words they were to say and write they received merely by hearing, and did not even understand their interior sense still less their spiritual sense. . . Prophets in the spiritual sense mean all who are wise whether they teach or do not teach." (A.C. 624 4,13,15)

For important reasons those through whom the New Testament was written had to have more of an understanding of what they wrote than was the case with the prophets of the Old Testament. They were prepared for this as to the understanding and will by the teaching the Lord gave them, when in the world. Some, like David, through whom Books of the Old Testament were written, were evil men. Matthew and John, we are told, are in Heaven, and this applies in all likelihood to Mark and Luke.

John certainly had some interior understanding of what he wrote, yet the epistles of John, unlike his Gospel and the Apocalypse, are not the Word, although they are important books of the Church containing Divine truths.

In the case of Swedenborg it was necessary that he had a far greater understanding of what he wrote, and we indeed marvel at what must have been his understanding, yet this was but a drop compared to the ocean, as to the contents of the Word given through him.

If Swedenborg understood all that is contained in the Word written through him, he would be a kind of God, or at least super-human. He would be infinitely wiser than any man or angel who ever was or ever will be, no matter how much Heaven and the Church progress. He could not, therefore, be in a society of Heaven, but would have to be a kind of arch-angel far above the societies of Heaven.

We may realize that our understanding is relatively little compared to Swedenborg's and that is good.

Swedenborg deserves great respect, but let us not venerate him, lest we should be "inflicted with the extreme harm," against which he warns.