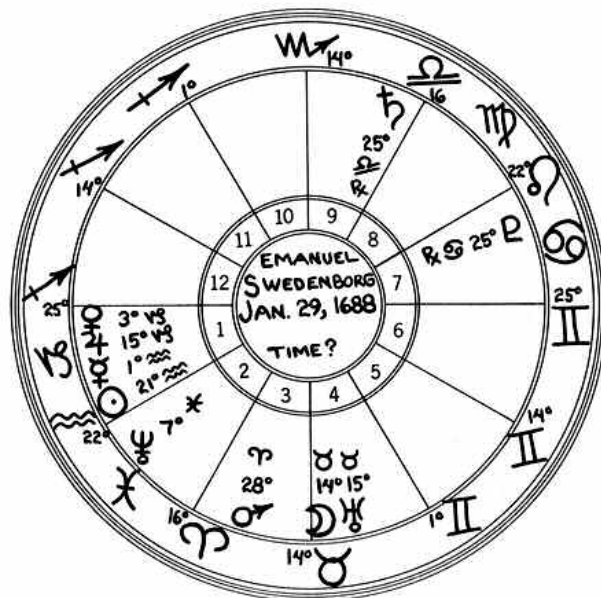


BOOK REVIEWS

Emanuel Swedenborg— Seeker, Scientist, Seer

FOR A CULTURE where the subject of angels is nearly as familiar and fashionable as global warming, DNA, and fiber optics, it may be difficult for the 21st century westerner to appreciate what Emmanuel Swedenborg was up against a quarter millennium ago when he stated that he was in almost continuous contact with angels. Now “channeling,” Elder Brothers, discarnate Masters, ESP, and other terms describing aspects of the superphysical have been assimilated into our consciousness and experience. In the mid-eighteenth century angels were confined to the Bible and the margins of Catholic doctrine. It would be one thing if Swedenborg were simply imbalanced, a crank. But he was one of the most learned men of his age. Before he began to delve into the invisible worlds, Swedenborg published over one hundred works summarizing the knowledge in all the known sciences. His attainments were such that Emerson was moved to describe him (in *Representative Men*) as “A colossal soul [who] lies vast abroad on his times, uncomprehended by them, and requires a long focal distance to be seen....One of the... mastodons of literature, he is not to be measured by whole colleges of ordinary scholars.”

As a young man, Swedenborg’s thirst for knowledge was unquenchable, or, as he expressed it, he had an “immoderate desire” for all subjects, especially astronomy and mechanics. He became fluent in nine languages, while most of his writing was in Latin, the scholarly language of his day. He learned bookbinding, cabinet making, instrument making, engraving, marble inlay, lens grinding, and mechanics. He was a hands-on person, a true Son of Cain.



Horoscope from Circle Book of Charts, Julian Calendar

He made his own telescope and microscope. He designed and engraved the complex forms required to make a world globe. He put forth interesting ideas for a submarine, a flying machine, and a rapid firing air gun. A working version of his airplane was built and flown in the late nineteenth century. He developed the world’s largest drydock, an experimental tank for ships, stoves, an ear trumpet, methods for pumping, a fire extinguisher, a musical machine, house heating, and a steel rolling mill. He directed a fourteen mile portage of small ships over mountains and valleys to help his king win a battle. Does this sound like the activity of an impractical mystic? A kook? Nor were these all his accomplishments. The king of Sweden appointed Swedenborg to be head of the country’s mines. He traveled to other countries to learn of the latest developments in mining and on horseback toured mines and mine shafts in his own land. His interest in the earth, mineralogy (he founded the science of crystallography), and his fine concentration and clear orderly methodology is suggested by his natal Jupiter posited in the cardinal earth sign Capricorn, which trines the conjunction of Moon and the ruler of his sun sign (Aquarius, co-ruled by Saturn) in the fixed earth sign of Taurus, as well as a trine of his Aquarian Sun and a square of

his Aquarian Mercury to form-giving Saturn, exalted in Libra. A partial list of the titles of his published works include, *Fossils*, *Stereometry*, *Echo*, *Algebra* (he was Sweden's leading mathematician), *Earth's Revolution*, *The Magnet*, *Hydrostatics*, *Blast Furnaces*, *Principles of Natural Things*, *On Sulfur and Pyrites*, *Empirical Psychology*, *The Human Body*, *The Mechanism of Body and Soul*, *Corpuscular Philosophy*, *Muscles in General*, *Red Blood*, *The Five Senses*, *Rational Psychology*, *The Generative Organs*, *Declination of the Needle*, *Characteristics and Mathematical Philosophy of Universals*, *Dreams*.

Swedenborg was interested in processes that enabled men to do better things. He was involved in anatomical dissections and regarded as one of the foremost masters of his day. Based on these studies he was able to make extensive observations and conclusions (in a four volume work) regarding the structure and operation of the brain. Of special note was his recognition of the pituitary gland as the "arch gland" in the body economy—this finding two centuries before the advent of endocrinology. He was also the first to discover the function of the cerebellum.

In fact, unbeknownst to him at the time, Swedenborg was looking for the soul of man in his anatomical studies. He had to exhaust the physical basis for human experience before going on to the invisible. At fifty-six, Swedenborg had mastered all known science. Then he embarked on what was to be his boldest and greatest discoveries, for which his prior work was just a preparation and grounding. He began to explore the nature of the soul, first reading all he could and then doing self-analysis. He sought to catch the soul at work, to observe the mind and feelings in action, a study now called phenomenology. Over a short transitional time, the superlatively grounded scientist of the extended physical world became a mystic whose subject matter was the boundless Within. He systematically recorded his dreams and inner experiences, first in his *Journal of Dreams*, then in his five-volume *Spiritual Diary*. It is at this point that Wilson Van Dusen begins his book *The Presence of Other Worlds, the Psychological/Spiritual Findings of Emmanuel Swedenborg* (Chrysalis Books, Westchester, PA, 1973). As the entire known world had been the object of Swedenborg's omnivorous and relentlessly focused investigation, now the investigator himself

became the object of his inquiry.

Himself a psychotherapist, Van Dusen, after reading all the principal writers in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, concluded that "only Carl Jung even approached the stature of Swedenborg. Swedenborg knew personally, at first hand, that Self which Jung knew only by speculation on its symbolic manifestations."

He began this journey into the noumenal world the same way he had approached the phenomenal world—head first, boldly, nothing off limits, and yet methodically and impersonally. He assumed a condition of "passive potency," clearing his mind of the throng of evanescent notions and natural desires so that consciousness is in the realm of pure intellect where it "enjoys inmost repose and inmost delight." Here the whole mind is drawn together, the sphere of thought is illuminated, and, "by a certain consensus...inmosty dictates that a thing is true or good, or that it is false or evil. In this way our intellect is perfected in judgment which grows mature." Does not this inward referencing resonate with the direction given by Max Heindel to appeal to the inner forum to determine the truth of any matter? For Swedenborg, this confirmation of truth was a kind of mental photism whereby a thought meets inward approval in the form of a lighting up of the mind.

Swedenborg explored the sleep (hypnagogic) state as a prelude to waking-conscious entry into the invisible worlds, somewhat in the manner of Edgar Cayce. According to Van Dusen, Swedenborg "explored the hypnagogic state more than anyone else has before or since." He entered into an intense state where his bodily awareness was either reduced or completely eliminated. Like the intrepid Moses Maimonides, who tested poisons on himself, Swedenborg induced trance-like conditions to explore the desire and thought worlds. However, his Ego awareness was sufficiently developed that he could think in this state and retain a memory of his experiences. His only difficulty was in finding a suitable way to explain these occurrences because earthly language is keyed to the world of the senses. The hypnagogic state seems to have related Swedenborg to the Desire World, whereas the trance state put him in the World of Thought.

Recall that Max Heindel indicates the best time to practice concentration with a view toward entering the world of dreams (Desire World) is just upon

waking from sleep. Likewise does Swedenborg write that the time when man “has not yet shaken off sleep from his eyes...is the sweetest of all, for heaven then operates into his rational mind in the utmost tranquility.”

Because Swedenborg was storming heaven, he was especially subject to negative exposure from adversarial spirit influences, whose entry into his consciousness he described as infestation: “While I was in the first infestation, I cried to Jesus for help, and it went away.” Like Padre Pio, the Cure D’Ars, and other Christian saints whose spiritual progress was fiercely opposed by demonic beings, Swedenborg was besieged by noxious spirits, often purporting to be angels of light and truth. He soon learned that great caution and alertness were essential to avoid deception: “When spirits begin to speak with man, he must beware lest he believe them in anything; for they say almost anything; things are fabricated by them, and they lie; for if they were permitted to relate what heaven is, and how many things are in the heavens, they would tell so many lies, and indeed with a solemn affirmation, that man would be astonished.”

Swedenborg contended that “Man does not produce anything false and evil from himself, but it is the evil spirits with him who produce it, and at the same time make the man believe that he does it of himself. Such is their malignity. And what is more, at the moment when they are infusing and compelling this belief, they accuse and condemn him, as I can confirm from many experiences.”

While possession was a well-known occurrence in Biblical times, today people have largely denied spirit influence, applying psychological terms to explain mental aberration. This is all the more dangerous in that malevolent beings can work undetected. Swedenborg writes that the prophets experienced an influx from the world of spirits, manifesting in dreams, visions, and inspired speech: “I desired to

know in what manner these men were actuated by spirits. I was shown by means of a living experience. To this end I was for a whole night possessed by spirits, who took such possession of my body that I had only a very obscure sensation that it was my own body.” For more than fifteen years Swedenborg was in daily converse and interaction with angels: “I have spoken with them; and then I understood all.”

Swedenborg could control and direct his spiritual investigations. Nor did he attempt to exploit his

powers for personal gain or to impress others. Though able to perform so-called miracles, he declined to do so because they have a coercive effect on belief and destroy free will in spiritual matters. Only choices made in freedom really affect the individual’s eternal nature and destiny. Impressive, miraculous displays tend to affect the externals of belief. Even Swedenborg’s voluminous writings were anonymous until near the end of his life.

Nevertheless, he did upon occasion accede to requests to demonstrate to others that such powers were possible,

when he thought it would benefit their approach to life. Queen Louisa Ulrica of Sweden had heard of Swedenborg and personally inquired if he could really converse with deceased persons. He assured her he could, whereupon she, apparently with considerable skepticism, asked him to convey a message to her recently deceased brother.

When they next met, Swedenborg imparted a message from her brother which so shocked the queen that she had to retire. She said later that he had reported what no other living person knew. Commenting on the sensation this incident created, Swedenborg dismissed it as a trifle, adding that his main objective was to lead people to the real nature of the spiritual and to open up for them the hidden meanings of the Bible.

Still, human nature being what it is, the anecdotes of Swedenborg’s extranormal human abilities are better known than: his prodigious contribution to the

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

Taller than the others, this man
Walked among them, at a distance,
Now and then calling the angels
By their secret names. He would see
That which earthly eyes do not see:
The fierce geometry, the crystal
Labyrinth of God and the sordid
Milling of infernal delights.
He knew that Glory and Hell too
Are in your soul, with all their myths;
He knew, like the Greek, that the days
Of time are Eternity’s mirrors.
In dry Latin he went on listing
The unconditional Last Things.

—Jorge Luis Borges

occult understanding of Scripture (as set forth in his masterwork, the twelve-volume *Arcana Coelestia*, the six-volume *Apocalypse Explained*, and the two-volume *Apocalypse Revealed*); his first-hand description of the spiritual worlds (as detailed in *Heaven and Hell* and the aforementioned five-volume *Spiritual Diary*); and his empirical study of the human mind (set forth in the previously cited works, as well as in *The Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom*, and *Heavenly Doctrine*).

Some of the accounts of Swedenborg using his extrasensory powers are not without their humor. A certain Archbishop, whose greatest pleasure consisted in playing a card game called Tresett, and who had lately lost one of his gambling friends, Erland Broman, met Swedenborg in a large company a short time after Broman's death, where he wished to amuse himself and the rest of the company at Swedenborg's expense. He asked him therefore in a jocular tone, "Bye the bye, assessor [of the King's mines], tell us something about the spirit world. How does my friend Broman spend his time there?" Swedenborg answered instantly, "I saw him but a few hours ago shuffling his cards in the company of the evil one, and he was only waiting for your worship to make up a game of Tresett." We see which of the two interlocutors became the subject of the company's mirth.

Some forms of extrasensory perception do not require an ability to enter the spirit worlds. Swedenborg's ability to know what was happening in other parts of the world at the time of their occurrence served as the basis for two of his most famous disclosures. In one instance, while attending a party in Amsterdam, in the middle of a conversation he seemed to change radically. When asked the reason, and after much coaxing, he described in a somber and convincing manner the death of Peter III of Russia, who was ignominiously strangled in prison. The partygoers were able later to confirm by newspaper accounts the manner and exact time of the emperor's death, as foretold.

On another occasion, when in Gothenberg in the company of fifteen guests, Swedenborg suddenly became pale, and upon being asked the cause said that a fire was burning in Stockholm, three hundred miles away. He described in detail the fire's origin and what was being destroyed. Two days later every

facet of his description was confirmed.

To put him to the test, a skeptical merchant asked Swedenborg to inquire after a friend who had just died of consumption. The merchant wanted to know the topic of their last conversation just prior to the man's death. Swedenborg asked the man's name and agreed that the merchant should call on him in eight days for an answer. When they met, the seer stated that the subject of their last talk was the restitution of all things. He then proceeded to relate with the greatest of precision the content of the full exchange. "How fares my friend," asked the merchant, "Is he in a state of blessedness?" "No," Swedenborg answered, "he is not yet in heaven; he is still in Hades, and torments himself continually with the idea of the restitution of all things." The merchant was astonished. "My God! What, in the other world." Swedenborg replied, "Certainly; a man takes with him his favorite inclinations and opinions; and it is very difficult to be divested of them. We ought, therefore, to lay them aside here."

Swedenborg shunned publicity. While he wanted people to become aware of the living reality of the spirit worlds, he realized that most people were inveterate scoffers and were only interested in spectacular displays of "freak" abilities: "I am well aware that many will say that no one can possibly speak with spirits and angels so long as he lives in the body; and many will say that it is all a phantasy, others that I relate such things in order to gain credence....But by all this I am not deterred, for I have seen, I have heard, I have felt." Elsewhere he writes, it "has been permitted me to associate with angels, and to talk with them as with man; and also to see what is in the heavens, and what is in the hells, and this for thirteen years; and to describe them from things seen and heard in the hope that ignorance may be enlightened, and unbelief dispelled."

Swedenborg did not explore or explain the law of rebirth. This truth, apparently, was not open to him. But for his time, when persons were burned or asylumed for such pronouncements, his achievements and insights were singular and remarkable: "I cannot but open up those things of the Word that are called mystical, that is, its interior things, which are the spiritual and celestial things of the Lord's Kingdom." □

—C.W.