

A New Age View of the Bible

By Brian Kingslake

Matter & Spirit

What is the difference between a living person and a dead corpse? A beautiful woman has more or less the same features whether she is alive or dead: you may say she 'looks the same'. But what a difference in any relationship you may have with her! If alive, she is a body with a living spirit which animates and controls her, enabling her to react and respond to a loving approach from others. A dead corpse is incapable of any response.

In this New Age we are becoming very conscious that there is a living spirit within the whole universe, and that this spirit is derived from God himself. We perceive how, in the wonders of Nature, spirit meets and blends with matter – just as it does in you and me as self-conscious human beings. On a higher plane we see how the Divine meets and blends with the Human to produce the whole universe.

The Word

John the Evangelist states in the opening verses of his Gospel that: *"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."* He was thinking primarily of God coming into the world as the man Jesus; but his statement refers also to the process by which the Divine Wisdom clothed itself in human language and thoughts, to produce our Sacred Scriptures or Bible, which we appropriately call the 'Word of God.' Our Bible is the **Word made flesh** – a body beautiful in itself, but deriving its unique beauty from the fact that it is animated by the Divine Spirit from within.

The Parable Style

This explains why Jesus always taught in parables. *'He did not say anything to them without using a parable.'* Mat 4:34. A parable has been defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It contains two levels of sense, running parallel. One dealing with such things as a highway robbery (The Good Samaritan), migrant labour (The Prodigal Son) and pay differences (Labourers in the vineyard), and the other inner meaning dealing with human regeneration and man's relationship with God. In all these stories, the spiritual is within the natural, giving it life and form. We are familiar with the parable style in our Lord's teaching, but less familiar with the idea that the whole of the Divine Word from beginning to end is in the parable form, not only in general but also in minute particular.

Symbolism and Allegory in the Word

I have called this a 'New Age View of the Bible', but there is nothing really new about it. Philo of Alexandria (approximate contemporary with Jesus: Origen in the 3rd century: the great hymn writers ... most people who are familiar with the Scriptures have perceived that they are intensely symbolical and allegorical. But no one seems to have had a clear understanding of a consecutive internal sense, acting as a soul within the body, giving it life. The reason for this ignorance is, of course, that we are living on the material plane, whereas the inner sense deals exclusively with spiritual concepts, which are far beyond the capacity of most of us on earth to comprehend. We shall only understand fully after death when we take up the life of heaven.

Emanuel Swedenborg, the great Swedish seer (1688 – 1772) having had his eyes opened into the spiritual world, saw the spiritual sense of the Word more clearly than anyone else. *He demonstrated this in the many volumes of his Arcana Coelestia* (Heavenly Secrets) and his *Apocalypse Explained*. In these and other works Swedenborg has given the "correspondence" of nearly every word of the Bible, and the Representative Significance of many of the Biblical characters and nations; also various principles of interpretations. It is now possible for a devout reader, with opportunities for research and meditation, to enter into the spiritual sense of almost any passage in the entire Word of God.

Correspondences

What does Swedenborg mean by 'correspondences'? Two or more things are said to 'correspond' if they are basically the same thing on different levels of manifestation. As an illustration, think of steam pouring out of a boiling kettle. Superheated steam is invisible. As it cools off, it becomes visible as water vapour. It settles out on a cold wall as drops of water in a liquid state. In winter these drops may solidify as ice. Steam, vapour, water and ice all 'correspond' one to another.

Better still, think of a smiling face; the smile on the face 'corresponds' to a happy thought in the mind. The happy thought and the smile are the same thing on two different levels; mental and physical. So with anger and a scowl.

To search for the spiritual sense of any passage of Scripture, we must try to see what it means on the spiritual level. For example, the first chapter of Genesis deals literally with the creation of the world. But on a spiritual level it describes the six stages through which a man must pass in order to be created an angel of heaven. The literal sense is mere legend and may or may not be scientifically acceptable; the spiritual sense is the Divine Truth itself.

The Early Legends

None of the people mentioned by name in Genesis Chapters 1 – 10 actually lived as individual men and women; rather they are **representative** of types of groups of people of a certain spiritual quality. Adam was not the first man, as is generally assumed. There had been people on earth probably for thousands of years before Adam: see Genesis 1: 26-29. Adam in fact represents the first **church** or religious epoch. Cain was a branch of that church which held that faith was more important than charity or love; this killed love which is represented by Abel. (Doesn't this happen sometimes today!) The Flood was a subsequent inundation of falsity which brought the first religious epoch to an end. Noah represents the beginning of the second epoch. And so on.

The Histories

With the arrival of Father Abraham in Genesis 11, legend gives place to real history. But even here the literal story has been presented, under inspiration, in such a form as to carry an internal spiritual sense.

For example, the story of the Children of Israel in Egypt deals with man's slavery to worldly interests and knowledge; their 40 years wanderings in the wilderness represent our trials and temptation, until we reach the 'Promised Land' of a settled determination to be God's people. The temple represents the Church; the three kings, Saul, David and Solomon, indicate a development through three degrees; Assyria represents false reasoning and Babylon represents love of self or pride. So, in this vast arena of history, covering Old and New Testament, we get an insight into every aspect of man's life of regeneration: his states of captivity and liberation, his temptation of combats, his defeats and victories and finally his entry into the Holy City, which is the heavenly state of blessedness in the presence of God. The human authors were probably quite unaware of the presence of the Spiritual Sense; it flowed from the Lord into their minds and pens as they wrote, without their being conscious of it. That is why we call the Bible the "inspired Word of God."

The Gospels

The four Gospels also have an internal sense, but this is less deeply hidden than the internal sense of the Hebrew Word. It is nearer the surface and more easily perceived by man, because here the Lord Himself tells us plainly of the Father. Nevertheless, even the Gospels cannot be correctly understood except in the light of their spiritual sense. Without guidance the reader can be led into many and great heresies: as for example, that the Father and Son are two separate Persons, instead of the One Person only.

The Apocalypse

The Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation, is different again. Here we find ourselves back in the atmosphere of the Old Testament prophets. Its spiritual sense bears upon the end or liquidation of the First Christian epoch, and the establishment of the New Church call the New Jerusalem – a process which is actually taking place around us at the present time. The Apocalypse is indeed the spiritual textbook of the New Age.

Why all the Obscurity?

Why is the Divine Truth given to us in such a round a bout way? Why all this obscurity, symbolism and allegory? Why aren't we permitted to see God's wisdom is all its brilliance, bare and unveiled and as it really is?

Well of course, if it were so, most of us would be dazzled. We should harm it and it would harm us. The great advantage of the parabolic style is that it is adapted to the needs of people in every degree of spiritual development. The simple, even children, can understand it in simplicity and the wise, even the angels themselves, can understand it according to their wisdom. Thus the Bible in its present form links us all together, men and angels, and unites us in a wonderful way with our Heavenly Father.

An analogy is often made with the clouds. The clouds shield man from too bright a radiation from the sun, yet they convey the light and heat of the sun to the world in a suitably modified form. Note that the substance of the clouds, like the literal sense of the Bible, is taken from the earth, but is raised up into position by the sun, which surely is a good analogy to 'inspiration.' Those who succeed in penetrating through the literal sense of Scripture to the spiritual sense within, see the 'Son of Man appearing in the clouds with power and glory.' Mark 13:26. In fact, it is because many people are doing this today that we call the present era the New Age. It is the Age of the Lord's Second Coming.

N.B. Not all the books bound up in our English Bible are part of the Word of God and carry a consecutive Internal sense. In the Old Testament, only those do so which were contain in the old Hebrew Canon {the Law, the Former and the Latter Prophets, the Minor Prophets and the Psalms. See Luke 24:44) The rest, called by the Jews the 'Holy Books', were never regarded as having the same degree of inspiration and were included only at the end of the Hebrew Bible, after Malachi. In the New Testament, the 'inspired books', in this technical sense, consist only of the Gospels and Revelation. They alone can be regarded as 'God's Word', the rest being 'Holy Books' like the non-canonical works included in our Old Testament.

Some extracts from Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell" follow. The numbers refer to paragraphs.

87. There Is a Correspondence of Everything in Heaven with Everything in the Human Being

People today do not know what "correspondence" is. There are many reasons for this ignorance, the primary one being that we have moved away from heaven because of our love for ourselves and for the world. You see, people who love themselves and the world above all focus on nothing but earthly matters because these provide gratification to their more outward senses and pleasure to their moods. They do not attend to spiritual matters because these offer gratification to their deeper senses and pleasure to their minds. So they set such matters aside, saying that they are too lofty to think about.

The early people behaved differently. For them, knowledge about correspondences was the pearl of all knowledge. By means of it, they gained intelligence and wisdom, and by means of it those who were of the church had a communication with heaven. Knowledge about correspondences is in fact angelic knowledge.

The earliest ones, who were heavenly people, did their thinking from correspondence like angels, so they could even talk with angels. Further, the Lord was quite often visible to them, and taught them. Nowadays, though, this knowledge has been so completely lost that people do not know what correspondence is.

88. Now, without some grasp of what correspondence is, nothing can be known in clear light about the spiritual world or about its inflow into the natural world, nothing at all about what the spiritual is relative to the natural, nothing in clear light about the human spirit that is called "the soul" and how it affects the body inwardly, nothing about our state after death. Because of all this, I need to define it and explain what it is like. This will also pave the way for matters that are to follow.

89. First, I need to state what correspondence is. The whole natural world is responsive to the spiritual world - the natural world not just in general, but in detail. So whatever arises in the natural world out of the spiritual one is called "something that corresponds." It needs to be realized that the natural world

arises from and is sustained in being by the spiritual world, exactly the way an effect relates to its efficient cause.

By "the natural world," I mean all that extended reality that is under our sun and that receives its light and warmth from it. All the things that are sustained in being from that source belong to that world. The spiritual world, in contrast, is heaven, and to that world belong all the things that are in the heavens.

90. Since a human being is a heaven and a world in least form in the image of the greatest (see [57](#) above), there is a spiritual world and a natural world within each of us. The deeper elements, which belong to our minds and relate to our intelligence and volition, constitute our spiritual world, while the outer elements, which belong to our bodies and relate to our senses and actions, constitute our natural world. Anything that occurs in our natural world (that is, in our bodies and their senses and actions) because of our spiritual world (that is, because of our minds and their intelligence and volition) is called something that corresponds.

91. We can see in the human face what correspondence is like. In a face that has not been taught to dissimulate, all the affections of the mind manifest themselves visibly in a natural form, as though in their very imprint, which is why we refer to the face as "the index of the mind." This is our spiritual world within our natural world. Similarly, elements of our understanding are manifest in our speech, and matters of our volition in our physical behavior. So things that occur in the body, whether in our faces or in our speech or in our behavior, are called correspondences.

92. We can also see from this what the inner person is and what the outer person is, namely, that the inner is the one that is called the spiritual person, and the outer the natural person. We can also see that they are as distinct from each other as heaven and earth, and that everything that happens and comes forth in the outer or natural person does so from the inner or spiritual one.

93. We have been talking about the correspondence of our inner or spiritual person with our outer or natural one. In what follows, though, we need to discuss the correspondence of heaven in its entirety with the individual human being.

94. It has already been explained that heaven in its totality reflects a single person, and that it is a person in image and is therefore called the universal human. It has also been explained that for this reason, the heavenly communities that make up heaven are arranged like the members, organs, and viscera in a human being. So there are communities that are located in the head, in the chest, in the arms, and in the particular parts of these members (see above, [59-72](#)). The communities that are in a particular member, then, correspond to the like member in a human being. For example, the ones in the head in heaven correspond to our head, the ones in the chest there correspond to our chest, the ones in the arms correspond to our arms, and so on for the rest. We continue in existence because of this correspondence, for heaven is the only basis of our continued existence.

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