

Heavenly Secrets



*Introducing Swedenborg's
major work*

“Arcana Caelestia”

Julian C Duckworth

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Swedenborg Centre
ABN 39 929 678 230
1 Avon Road, North Ryde, Sydney
New South Wales, 2113
Australia
Telephone: 02 9888 1066
Email: saa@swedenborg.com.au
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SWEDENBORG'S "ARCANA CAELESTIA"

"Arcana Caelestia" is one of the world's masterpieces, yet this vast storehouse of spiritual understanding is little known in the world, perhaps in part due to its sheer size.

This booklet aims to help a reader of the Arcana delve into its contents and find their way around to get the best from reading and studying. It will also be of help to those who have done some reading of the Arcana but who would like to know more and become familiar with the work as a whole.

For the sake of convenience the phrase "the Arcana" will be used throughout.

The title of the work "Arcana Caelestia", which is in Latin, roughly translates as "Heavenly Secrets" suggesting that many things in the Arcana are a revelation of things as yet not known.

"THE ARCANA"

The Arcana is made up of twelve volumes in English or eight volumes in its original Latin, the language which Swedenborg used in all his spiritual writing. Swedenborg wrote the Arcana between 1749 and 1756, taking each volume in turn to the printer and publishing it at his own expense. Amazingly, he wrote out each volume twice, the second manuscript being a legible copy for the printer.

The Arcana has been translated and published a number of times, the most recent English translation being by John Elliott. This edition was completed in 1999, and is published by The Swedenborg Society in London. It is scholarly and it has been put in clear readable English. It has largely replaced the earlier translation of the 1950's.

This previous translation, however, remains valuable to a serious reader of the Arcana because its translation is extremely meticulous.

The Swedenborg Foundation in America also publishes a twelve volume set (without an Index), the translation dating back to the early 1900's. There are also translations into some of the world's other major languages.

The Arcana text is also available in both English and Latin as part of the NewSearch computer program which provides a search tool and a concordance.

The Arcana deals mainly with the spiritual meaning in the first two books of the Bible: Genesis and Exodus. Genesis has 50 Chapters, Exodus has 40. Each volume of the Arcana covers about eight of these chapters. Exodus begins in Volume 9. There are also innumerable cross-references to verses in other books of the Bible making it a valuable resource for finding spiritual meanings in the Bible as a whole. The exposition of Genesis and Exodus is covered sequentially verse by verse. Swedenborg's general approach is to give an initial summary of the general spiritual meaning of the whole chapter (headed "Contents"), then an outline of each part of the chapter, before going methodically into the verse-by-verse meaning.

Regularly between the sections dealing with a Biblical chapter, there are other sections on different themes and spiritual topics. Sometimes there are two sections between Chapters, one coming at the end and a different topic put before the beginning of the next Biblical chapter. Several of these themes run over many chapters, even through several books. A full table of the arrangement and layout of the Arcana is given later in this booklet.

A large number of these topics - commonly known as the 'inter-chapter material' - are ones which Swedenborg later used as the basis for a book in its own right, and it is very interesting to compare and contrast the two in terms of content and approach. For example, the material in the book "Heaven and Hell" is radically different from what Swedenborg presents in several Chapters in the Arcana headed "Awakening from Death", "Entry into Eternal Life" and "The Nature of the Life of a Spirit.". The difference lies in what is covered and presented; the underlying spiritual teaching is the same in both.

Swedenborg numbered each paragraph consecutively (frequently referring back to numbered paragraphs for reference and related reading). Rev. J. F. Potts later subdivided long paragraphs for convenience and reference in The Potts Concordance.



WHEN THE ARCANA WAS WRITTEN

The Arcana is the first of Swedenborg's theological writings and it was written soon after his mind was opened directly into the spiritual world and given an immediate revelation from the Lord.

One of the characteristics of the Arcana is its sense of conviction of the truth of what is being said. It is very assured, and this feeling remains throughout the whole work. If you read through the first five paragraphs of the Arcana you can see this is evident from the outset and you will have a good example of its calm assurance.

It is also important to note that when Swedenborg turned his mind directly towards spiritual things he began to see them expressed in the correspondences of the Bible. He composed a Biblical Index (“Index Biblicus”) which in its cross-referencing of Biblical passages would have been invaluable to him when writing the Arcana.

Swedenborg seems to have had a complete grasp of its content, flow and sequence while writing the Arcana. This is perhaps a sign of his extraordinary intelligence and his distinctly scientific approach. It could also be due to the fact that he had come to see the truth as an organic whole, a special revelation to him from the Lord. Many times he quotes previous paragraphs by number and refers the reader back to them. He also frequently mentions that a particular point will be dealt with later. In another book, “The Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem” he accompanied each Chapter’s material with comprehensive references to various numbers from the Arcana containing related material.

THE STYLE OF THE ARCANA

Having briefly looked at the overall shape of the Arcana, it is very important - perhaps even essential - to be familiar with the style of the writing and the way the material develops. While this at times certainly varies, there is a general style which runs consistently through the whole work.

It helps to see the Arcana almost as a reservoir from which much water, or truth, can be drawn. While it is very organised and methodical in its arrangement, much of the content works like a reservoir. A particular verse in Genesis or Exodus is often the springboard - or tap - from which a lot of related teaching emerges as well as covering the

specific correspondences and spiritual meanings of the words and phrases and giving an interpretation of the verse as a whole.

Swedenborg frequently talks about other things like the nature of the Divine, the essential relationship of good and truth, the life of angels in heaven, spirits inhabiting hell, or the state of the wicked in this world, or he provides some insight on ancient wisdom or some linguistic outline of a word in the original Hebrew language.

He moves around freely and creatively, using the verse as a starting point. The result is an extraordinary synthesis of spiritual ideas. Yet there is no haphazardness here, although, as you read through several paragraphs in succession, you may find a number of questions or related insights coming to mind. You may well discover that Swedenborg appears to have anticipated these, or had similar mental processes himself, because your question is often answered or an insight touched upon within the next few paragraphs. This kind of revelation is in the very nature of truth, and truth's structures reflect the form and processes of the human mind.

Another characteristic of this style is that the most original and profound points tend to occur in the middle of a paragraph, almost as though the process to get to that point strongly required the writing preceding it.

A FEW PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

At this point you might find helpful some suggestions for your own personal recording and referencing of things you find in the Arcana.

It is a very good idea to highlight or underline particular sentences that strike you as profound or

important. While this defaces text, the advantages outweigh the spoiled look.

It is worthwhile at times to pencil a vertical line in the margin next to a significant paragraph or few lines. Noticing a gem of a quote and searching for it later is a waste of time.

You may like to annotate the margins with very brief personal insights that come to you when reading, or put these in a notebook or in a computer file.

It is also helpful to put associated paragraph numbers alongside a paragraph to flag a link or signal related ideas. If you read other works of Swedenborg this technique becomes very helpful in bridging topics across books, but remember to do it in both books to properly cross-reference them.



SWEDENBORG'S TERMINOLOGY

In the Arcana Swedenborg adopted an exact terminology to outline the spiritual meaning of Genesis and Exodus, and to fully describe the developments in our own spiritual growth and transformation (called “regeneration”) and the Lord’s work of turning his humanity into something divine (called “glorification”). It is essential to gain a good understanding of the terms used. This lies outside the scope of this booklet, but there are a number of other publications available which cover this. Three that are particularly helpful are:

- ▶ Glossary of Terms and Phrases used by Swedenborg
Compiled by J. S. Bogg
Published by The Swedenborg Association, USA ISBN 1-883270-02-2
- ▶ Words in Swedenborg and their meanings in modern English
by Frank Rose (booklet)
Published by the General Church, USA
ISBN 0-910557-13-6
- ▶ Swedenborg Researcher's Manual
by William R. Woofenden
Published by the Swedenborg Scientific Association, USA
ISBN 0-915221-65-9
This includes a useful glossary of technical and specialised terms.

A SAMPLE OF THE GENESIS MATERIAL AND ITS SPIRITUAL MEANING

Genesis 1-11 are made-up histories for the sake of their meaning.

Genesis Chapter	Spiritual Content of Chapter
1 Seven days of creation	Summary of the distinct stages of regeneration
2 The Garden of Eden	The Celestial state and its perception
3 The Fall	The Proprium (awareness of self-life) and the origin of evil
4 Cain and Abel	Heresy of faith without charity. The Lord's preservation of charity

5	Genealogies	Sequence of states of spiritual consciousness among the most ancients
6	Preparation for Flood	Decline into evil with ancients - the form of the new spiritual state
7	The Flood	Temptations - the protection and preservation of the spiritual mind
8	The End of the Flood	The new spiritual condition outlined in terms of its faith and charity
9	The Rainbow	Regeneration and receptivity of charity
10	Genealogies	Sequence of states of spiritual consciousness among the ancients
11	Tower of Babel	Decline into false beliefs - the eventual raising up of representations
Genesis 12 onwards are drawn from true history.		
12	Call of Abram	The Lord's state from infancy to youth, from obscurity to realisation
13	Abram and Lot	The Lord's Internal and External and their relationship and growth
14	Kings in Battle	The Lord's temptations (spiritual conflicts) in his inner development

15 Abram's Vision	The Lord's perception about the final states of human spiritual life
16 Hagar conceives	The Lord's first rational state and its condition
17 Covenant, Circumcision	The Lord's union of the Divine and human; his union with humanity
18 Promise of Isaac	The Lord's perception of the Rational - his grief over the human race
19 Lot flees Sodom	Decline of spiritual life from charity - Preservation by separation
20 Abraham and Abimelech	The Lord's instruction in charity and faith from its celestial nature
21 Birth of Isaac	The Lord's Divine Rational and his merely human rational
22 Abraham tested by God	The Lord's severest and inmost temptations, and their effect



LEVELS OF MEANING WITHIN THE WORD

As one becomes more familiar with Swedenborg's spiritual interpretation of the Bible, it can be seen

that he deals with different levels of meaning, often moving easily between them. Basically there are four levels of meaning which are summarised as:

Celestial meaning

The Lord's glorification
The nature of Divine love

Spiritual meaning

Spiritual regeneration processes

Internal Historical meaning

The spiritual rise and decline of successive
periods in human consciousness
(spiritual ages or 'churches')

Natural meaning

The truths of the literal statements and the
narratives themselves

These are all various deeper or inner meanings. They can also be described as a hierarchy of higher truths, the base of which is the text and its story. Swedenborg sometimes refers to this 'physical' level as 'the sense of the letter of the Word'.

***THE FIVE GENERAL HISTORICAL
PERIODS OF HUMAN SPIRITUAL
CONSCIOUSNESS***

As in many spiritual philosophies, the sequence of human spiritual development from its beginnings to its present state is seen by Swedenborg to be one in which changes of consciousness occurred through Divine intervention and for the purpose of

mankind's preservation. Swedenborg refers to five such periods in his writings:

MOST ANCIENT CHURCH (Adam)

A state of perception (Eden)

ANCIENT CHURCH (Noah)

A state of conscience (Ark)

ISRAELITE CHURCH (Jews)

A state of mere representation (Ritual)

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A state of redemption by incarnation
(Christ)

NEW CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A state of both faith and charity (Holy City)

Note that Swedenborg's use of the term 'church' does not refer to any organisational or ecclesiastical body. By 'church' he means the degree or level of spiritual awareness and life at a particular point in time, universally among mankind.

In outlining the course of these five periods or states of human spiritual awareness, Swedenborg makes it very clear that every successive state rises but then declines, and that the Divine makes provision for this with another new, yet different and specially appropriate state, drawn from the remnant of the good of the previous state. He also suggests that the final state of the human race - as a new Christian church - is one which will never decline because it is in possession and use of both faith and charity together.



A BRIEF LOOK AT ONE CHAPTER

Having described Swedenborg's arrangement of material, his typical method and creative approach, let us turn to a Chapter in Genesis and see what we find there. We can use Genesis Chapter 35 for the exercise. The relevant Arcana material is in Volume 6 and runs for about 52 pages between paragraphs 4536 and 4621. This is one of the shorter Chapters in the Arcana.

First, let us look at the Biblical material in Genesis 35. It is quite late on in the story of Jacob. Several major events occur: Jacob returns to Bethel; God changes Jacob's name to Israel; Rachel gives birth to her second son Benjamin, Jacob's twelfth son; Rachel dies; the twelve sons of Jacob are listed according to their mothers; finally Isaac, Jacob's father, dies.

One gets a rather artificial and limiting view by selecting a Chapter in isolation to act as an example of the Arcana, because both Biblically and in terms of spiritual meaning, things follow on one after another as the result of what came before. Because this is very important we shall look further at this idea of a sequence later.

In paragraph 4536 Swedenborg describes the overall contents of Chapter 35. It deals with the internal sense which describes how all things in the Lord Jesus Christ's Natural level of being were made divine, his interior aspects being represented by 'Israel'. Attainment of even more interior aspects, where the Rational resides, is described by the birth of Benjamin.

Notice that Swedenborg relates the Genesis narrative to various internal processes in the Lord's mind and life. This development is a key feature of the Arcana, and it stretches from Volume 2 to the end of Genesis in Volume 8. It primarily involves the stories of Abram, Isaac and Jacob and particularly the story of Joseph and his brothers.

In 4537 (referring to a paragraph simply by using its Arcana paragraph number) there is a summary of the meaning in verses 1-4. 4553 gives the same for verses 5-7; 4562 for verse 8; 4566 for verses 9-13; 4579 for verses 14-15; 4584 for verses 16-20; 4597 for verses 21-22; 4602 for verses 22-26; and 4611 for verses 27-29.

It is worth scanning your eye over these summaries to get an overall sense of the spiritual meaning. In passing notice the many number references that are frequently listed by Swedenborg.

We will concentrate on the first sub-section of verses 1-4 covered in 4537 to 4552 (15 paragraphs). If you have time, read them through and do not be too concerned about not fully understanding everything.

The summary in 4537 brings out several key spiritual themes for this part of Genesis 35: perception, the Divine Natural, holiness, casting aside falsities, divine providence, and when truth is placed above good. Life and action are also mentioned.

We can begin to synthesize these, with the help of the story's narrative.

Jacob is to travel to Bethel and build an altar. He prepares his household, telling them to cast away foreign gods and to change their clothing. He tells them what God has told him to do and speaks of what God has done for him. They give him the

foreign gods and jewels in their ears and Jacob hides them under the oak at Shechem.

Two main things stand out:

- ▶ The intention to journey which spiritually describes some kind of progress and forward movement.
- ▶ The casting away of idols which spiritually describes some need to turn away from wrong beliefs.

These two are one process - spiritual progress always has a goal and always involves work or effort. If we relate this to the earthly life of the Lord we can say that in his mind was a growing awareness of his life's purpose and a deepening realisation of what he would have to deny himself to achieve it, that is, the temptations this would involve. If we relate this to ourselves we could say that as spiritual life becomes stronger in us we begin to understand its purpose and our need to leave behind the ideas we previously held.

Now we will look at various things in the more detailed main section of the Arcana material.

4538 discusses what the Natural level means both in terms of the Lord and ourselves. Here, a key idea is that the Natural level relates to putting beliefs into practice in life. It is about the way you live and the person you are. In the early stages of this, the emphasis is on living according to truth; later this emphasis changes to something deeper - the love of good, but good still from the truth that has been understood. 4538 is, as a whole, a very full treatment of this process, both in terms of the Lord's inner perception, and also of the way in which the Lord similarly regenerates a person from a state of simply understanding truth, to adopting good as his way of life.

You may like to read through 4538 and highlight what you feel are the clearest and most important sentences. 4539 mainly deals with the meaning of Bethel, and Swedenborg helpfully points out that in Hebrew, Bethel means 'the house of God' which spiritually means the Natural (as described above).

Towards the end there is an interesting comment on Canaan, Jerusalem and the house of God as being higher levels towards which we are meant to climb.

4542 points out, using the reminder that Jacob stole his older brother Esau's birthright, that truth always has a tendency to put itself above good, and that while this initially has a purpose in our regeneration, the two must eventually be reversed.

4545 deals with purification and holiness, and makes clear that washing is an action which symbolises the way in which we are made holy. It also introduces the idea that human beings must be in communication with heaven or be like wild animals, lacking any restraints and eventually annihilating one another. And it adds that because there was no means of communication in the time of the Israelites, the Lord provided for this through symbolic representations such as washing.

4550 outlines how, in handing over - turning away from - wrong thinking (falsities) these are to be given to Jacob who represents good in the natural level of life. This good itself is what casts aside falsities.

The last two paragraphs, 4551 and 4552 are particularly long and complex, in a way that is very typical of the Arcana. Swedenborg introduces a true idea here in 4551 and it is to do with the jewels in the ears representing how false ideas are cast aside through obedience to God in our actions -

and then he writes extensively on how every person is a mixture of truths and false ideas, and how these are brought into true order and dealt with by the Lord. And read at the end of 4551 where Swedenborg adds an interesting factual comment about nose-jewels and ear-jewels.

4452 continues this treatment, concentrating on the deceptiveness that exists in our natural life and the way in which false ideas must be cast down to the lowest possible level of natural life and seen to be there clearly so that they can be kept in their place and no longer have power over our spiritual life. This is in stark contrast to a person who is not led by the Lord but by evil, in which what is true has been cast out to the circumference of life and where evil and falsehood are at the centre.

We need not go further into this Chapter, having covered enough in this first section to understand some of the ways in which Swedenborg develops the details and the mechanics that are involved in the processes of the Lord's glorification and our own path of regeneration. While Swedenborg elaborates on many things, he does not move far from the central topic he is dealing with.

“The things which exist during a person's regeneration are completely unknown to him. If he was acquainted with only one ten thousandth part of them, he would be astonished. There are innumerable and in fact secret ways by which a person is led to the Lord, and only some of them shine forth from the internal meaning of the Word.”

Arcana Caelestia 3179

THE INTER-CHAPTER MATERIAL

Below is a list, with number references, of the topics given by Swedenborg at the beginning and end of most of the Chapters in the Arcana.

The inclusion of the material in the Arcana in this arrangement may have been the result of a simple decision by Swedenborg to insert important subject matter between Chapters. It has been suggested that there might be a link between the spiritual content of a particular Chapter and the additional material preceding or following it.

In paragraph 71 Swedenborg writes, “Now because these matters [of his personal experiences in the spiritual world] would be diffuse and disjointed if they were included among those that have to do with the Word, let them in the Lord’s mercy be appended in some order before and after each Chapter as sections additional to information included here and there in any Chapter.”

Awakening from death	161-181
Entry into eternal life	182-189
	314-319
The nature of the life of a spirit	320-323
Various ideas held about the soul	443-448
Heaven and heavenly joy	449-459
	537-553
The communities that make heaven	684-691
The hells	692-700
	814-831
	947-970
Vastations (separation processes)	1106-1113
The Most Ancient Church	1114-1129
	1265-1272
Position, place, distance in the next life	1273-1278
	1376-1382
The perceptions and spheres of spirits	1383-1400
	1504-1520

Angelic light	1521-1534
	1619-1633
Angelic speech	1634-1650
	1757-1764
Inner meanings of scripture	1767-1777
	1869-1879
Visions and dreams	1880-1885
	1966-1983
The Last Judgment	2117-2134
Children in heaven	2289-2309
Memory after death	2469-2494
Those outside religion after death	2589-2605
Marriage and adultery	2727-2759
Human freedom	2870-2893
Representations and Correspondences	2987-3003
	3213-3227
	3337-3352
	3472-3485
The Universal Human	between 3624
	and 5726
Disease	5711-5726
The End of the Age	between 3353
	and 5071
Presence of spirits and angels with a person	5846-5866
	5976-5993
Influx and interaction of the soul and body	between 6053
	and 6626
Charity and faith	between 6627
	and 10831
The inhabitants of other planets and earths in the universe	between 6695
	and 10837



THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF EXODUS

The spiritual meaning of Exodus is given in Volumes 9 to 12 of the Arcana.

There is a basic difference between the spiritual material that is presented in Genesis on one hand and in Exodus on the other. The Genesis stories revolve very much around the individuals that are Abraham, his family and descendants, their wives and concubines and ultimately the sons of Israel from whom the 12 tribes will spring.

In this respect, their spiritual meaning is closely associated with the internal processes of understanding and perception in the mind of the Lord during his life in this world, the inmost realisations of his own Divinity and his purpose for coming into the world. The glorification process is dealt with, in which his human would become fully Divine, as well as the temptations that he inevitably went through and overcame to achieve this union within himself.

Exodus, as a narrative, deals with a ‘people’ - the children of Israel who are led by a divinely-appointed leader Moses. They go through the journey from slavery in Egypt to the land of Canaan, their ancestral homeland where Abraham had lived. Swedenborg covers the spiritual meaning of Exodus very thoroughly, relating it primarily to the growth and development of spiritual life within each person, calling this the “church” within us, or the kingdom of heaven.

The same degree of powerful spiritual insight is found just as much in Swedenborg’s writing on Exodus as in the exposition of Genesis, and on the whole the style and method is identical.

FURTHER PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

Many people have read right through the twelve volumes of the Arcana. This has its advantages, but there are also difficulties, one of which is the amount of time involved. If you do read through it entirely, you will undoubtedly find yourself becoming very familiar with the stories of Genesis and Exodus and equally with the sequence of broad spiritual meaning in terms of the Lord's development and our own path of regeneration. This is invaluable.

But to begin with, should you want to immerse yourself in Swedenborg's process of thought and development, it really does pay to read through the Arcana's treatment of a whole Chapter including the actual Bible Chapter which is given beforehand. It is also good to hand yourself over to the process and allow Swedenborg to, as it were, take you by the hand and guide you through it.

It is perhaps best to leave the last word to Swedenborg in the form of a quotation from the Arcana. It is from 4814 and is one of many paragraphs where Swedenborg describes the effect there is among the angels when a person in this world is reading the Word of God.

"When a person reads the Word and from this thinks of a certain time and of things taking place at that time, the angels present with him do not perceive anything to do with a certain time but instead the aspects of a state, to which also those things correspond."

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Bible Study Notes

by Anita Dole

Swedenborg Foundation

Six Volume Set

ISBN 0-88785-357-6

Our Soul's Awakening: Allegory of the Genesis Story

by Thomas King

Swedenborg Association of Australia

ISBN 0-949463-23-X

A Life of Jesus Little Known

by William Worcester

Massachusetts New Church Union

The Path: The Inner Life of Jesus Christ

by Geoffrey Childs

Fountain Publishing

ISBN 0-9659164-6-4

The World Within the Bible

(A Handbook to Swedenborg's Arcana Caelestia)

by William Wunsch

Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints

ISBN 0-7661-0353-6

The reading material referred to in this booklet may be obtained from the Swedenborg Centre using the same contact details as given on the inside cover.

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