

Emanuel Swedenborg: His Life & Mission



In terms of intellectual stature and original, creative thinking, Swedenborg has been compared to Leonardo da Vinci. Yet, for the most part, the world remains in ignorance of the significant contribution made by this Swedish genius in so many fields of human endeavour, and of the veritable mine of enlightenment to be found in his esoteric writings which give a blueprint for individual spiritual development and growth.

These writings are known to have influenced the earliest anti-slavery movements and many of the great thinkers and religious leaders who have helped shape western culture during the past 200 years. They also largely inspired the establishment of infant education in Germany and England in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Whilst their impact has spread far and wide, it has been largely forgotten that they were such a source of inspiration. Today, though, as the world enters a new era with a growing thirst for an understanding of the purpose of life and the workings of the human psyche, there is a re-awakening of interest in, and appreciation of, the immensely valuable insights to be gained from the contents of Swedenborg's works. His name and writings are becoming increasingly known.

His Life

Born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1688, Emanuel was the third child of Lutheran Bishop Jesper Svedberg and his wife Sara. Endowed with a remarkable mind, he grew up to be one of Sweden's most illustrious men of science. In an era when scientists were few and limited, Swedenborg investigated the physical universe from many directions. He wrote some thirty three scientific works embracing such widely differing subjects as metallurgy, mineralogy, physiology, mathematics, cosmology, and the structure and function of the brain.

His principal achievements in science include:

- ☆ *First to propound the modern nebular hypothesis of creation*
- ☆ *Made discoveries leading to crystallography*
- ☆ *Developed theories on the nature of energy*
- ☆ *Discovered many anatomical functions*
- ☆ *Pioneered in the study of Magnetism*
- ☆ *Wrote the first algebra book in Swedish*

He made some remarkable discoveries, anticipated theories now accepted by modern science and designed some useful inventions:

- ☆ *Heavier-than-air aircraft*
- ☆ *Ear Trumpet*
- ☆ *Airtight Stove*
- ☆ *Submarine*
- ☆ *Mercury Pump*
- ☆ *Musical Machine*

During this period of outstanding mental activity he worked in an important government position as a Royal Assessor (Engineer) of Mines contributing significantly to the revitalisation of this industry in his country. He travelled extensively throughout Europe, taking notes everywhere on the latest scientific marvels, meeting the leading scholars of the day, always searching, wondering, probing the mysteries of life.

He became an able bookbinder, clock maker, cabinet maker, engraver, marble inlayer. He mastered nine languages, ancient and modern.

His Mission

His stated purpose in pursuing a scientific career was to understand the working of the soul. On reaching the boundaries of human knowledge of his day, he gradually realised that he was not going to achieve his objective. He turned to anatomy in his search for the soul in the human body. This first led him to uncover a good number of anatomical workings such as the function of the ductless glands and the synchronous action between the brain and the lungs. Then philosophical considerations regarding the soul took his attention before coming to appreciate that rational deductions postulating its existence could not be proved. Finally, Swedenborg was brought to see that trying to discover the answers he sought could not be determined through science and philosophy but only known by revelation - from above and from within. He became a spiritual explorer. At fifty, Swedenborg relinquished government work plus his scientific and anatomical research. Whilst continuing a normal, active life for a gentleman in his position, being a member of the Upper House of the Swedish Parliament, he began a detailed study of the Bible following a series of mystical experiences. It may sound extraordinary, but Swedenborg writing a year or so before his death in London in 1772, claimed that his spiritual faculties had been opened for twenty-seven years enabling him to become a citizen of two worlds at the same time - this natural plane of which we are all conscious and the spiritual dimension of consciousness into which we fully enter when the physical body ceases to function. Swedenborg continued to use his scientific abilities to analyse his other-worldly experiences whilst seeing himself simply as a servant of the Divine to reveal spiritual truth and knowledge.

The profoundest questions about the existence of God, the creation of the world, our spiritual dimension, and the Divine government of the natural and spiritual worlds, are all discussed in one or other of the approximately thirty volumes which comprise Swedenborg's spiritual writings. He saw these things as a God-given response capable of satisfying the questioning and the probing of men and women in full possession of their rational and critical faculties.

Spiritual Writings

Arcana Coelestia - Heavenly Secrets (1749-1756)

Apocalypse Explained (1757-1759)

Heaven and Hell, From Things Heard and Seen (1758)

Four Doctrines (1763)

- *The Lord, Sacred Scriptures, Life, Faith*

Divine Love and Wisdom (1763)

Divine Providence (1763)

Apocalypse Revealed (1766)

Marriage Love (1767)

True Christian Religion (1771)

Miscellaneous Spiritual Works (1758 - 1769)

including *Worlds in Space, Last Judgment, The Heavenly City*

Spiritual Works (1761-1772)

published posthumously including *Prophets and Psalms, The Coronis, and Canons*

Although Swedenborg wrote in Latin, his works have now been translated, either in whole or in part, into the majority of the world's languages.