

ANCC Sydney Seminar

Session on The Word Explained/Pre-Arcana Struggle

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Introduction

Anyone who can produce an 8 volume work, only to say, No, that's not quite right, and start another instead, gets my enormous respect...

We are going to look at the process of necessary struggle leading to breakthrough.
'Israel' –he who wrestles with God (and overcomes)
We can share our own experiences of times of struggle leading to breakthrough...

If Swedenborg hadn't written/struggles with the WE he could not have written or 'got' the AC ?????

Swedenborg, midlife, moved rapidly from studying the natural world philosophically to a study of God within creation, as if the two suddenly swapped places

It involved a build-up, a pressure that finally broke through to a very different outcome

Fact...

Swedenborg, sensing that the Bible has a deeper meaning of some kind, but still unclear what it is, does several things –

- Learns Hebrew and Greek

- Makes a full Biblical Index

- Begins a systematic study of the Bible text from his own ideas of its meaning

All this is happening during a very transitional period of his life, shifting from science to spiritual realities – very unsettled, very new and at times dramatic...

He is also writing (does he ever sleep?) several other things –

- his own drama poem of Creation (in 3 parts) – The Worship and Love of God

- a manuscript explaining Genesis 1-3 – The History of Creation

- his own spiritual experiences as they happen to him – Spiritual Diary 1747-65

- his own record of his dreams and attempts at interpretation – Journal of Dreams

So, he has several things on the go...all around about the same period of his late 50s.

He becomes disturbed, agitated, unsettled, sometimes agonised...

We're zooming in on the Word Explained (WE) with several things in mind...

- He frequently struggles with it

- Soon after leaving WE he begins writing AC (covering some of the same ground)

- The AC is totally different to WE right from the very opening...

- Instead of struggle there is a calm assurance that this is a revelation

- So, Q ... what happened between the two?

We'll dip in to WE and sometimes AC and work with it from the text...

One more thing...

The development of Swedenborg's mind as we might see it through his writing is fascinating...(sheet)

Study of natural things

Study of natural things but including higher causes (an early Louise Hay!)

(classic example of this is Generation (last part of Principia) in which purely anatomical studies are paralleled with corresponding higher causes of the forms)

The higher cause increases and manifests itself in a Biblical focus (gets call from Lord)

Systematic indexing – BI, H/G

Personal journaling – SD, JD (confirming and challenging his 'shift')

Writes WE – add to

Leaves off WE and begins to write AC (all this within about 5 years)

AC produced – reservoir of spiritual insights stemming from Genesis/Exodus – add to Inter-chapter material

Inter-chapter material plus some exposition leads to books on specific topics HH, EU etc.

Middle period of writing is systematic and thematic/topical (more solid)

Later writing adds his own spiritual world experiences – CL, AR, TCR especially

Final major work is TCR which fully systematises the new Christian theology.

Draw points from this...

The Struggle and Breakthrough process – as WE may well experience it

Ask and you will find, Seek – given to you, Knock, opened to you. But 'Keep on...'
Explore...

The taking of Jericho process

- Learning a new skill – step process involving various watersheds
- Working with the text reversing around to the text working with you
- The curious 'influx' factor in life
- The Chinese chrysalis folktale
- The creative process and the typical 'composer' sequence
- Early and later phases in relationships
- Pride and humility
- The extent to which you focus your mind
- Lateral thinking, thinking outside the square
- The two circles
- ...invite other experience examples of where struggle leads to breakthrough

The Word Explained – Fact Sheet

WE is Swedenborg's major writing immediately prior to AC. It is strikingly different from it.

Written over a period of 15 months – November 1745 to February 1747

Covers Genesis to Jeremiah, but Isaiah and Jeremiah are patchy, 'left off' (cf AC)

Not published – Latin text was in 1850s and 8 vol English was in 1927

Terms used differ very much from terms used in the Arcana – examples

God Messiah, only-begotten Son of God, Victim for mankind, Parent (ie. God)

Moves in and out of literal meanings and spiritual meanings meshed together

Interesting feature is that Swedenborg (in WE) talks of using automatic writing

This is only occasional and in direct contrast to his normal deductive interpretation

He says that he was 'told' to destroy such pieces of writing which he did (a pity!)

Evidence of being caught up in standard Lutheran theology (tri-personal)

Relates many Biblical events in terms of the Christ (G-M) still to come as Saviour

Seems to have a firm belief in a personal devil and his crew

The language style is very different from later AC – rambling, convoluted, jerky

Points made and attempts at meanings begin well but often peter out awkwardly

A constant undercurrent that he's onto something but can't fully see what it is

Occasional passages that in wording pre-figure the style of the Arcana

Occasional points made that pre-figure the teaching in the Arcana (such as degrees)

Both of these seem short-lived before falling back into grappling with meanings

Much explained later is linked back to the situation of A+E losing paradise in Eden

At times Swedenborg talks about the inevitable end-times of the elect and damned

Overall, WE has the approach of mankind's spiritual development rather than individual regeneration as is clearly seen in AC

Interestingly, there are regular sections of 'inter-chapter material', one after ch 9 and then regularly after ch 28 onwards.

A comparison of WE and AC styles using Genesis 29 v 19

Genesis 29.19

“And Laban said, ‘It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.’ “

Word Explained (577)

At that time it was the right of parents, and a matter for their decision, to betroth their daughters to whatever man they would. This is evident from the subsequent verses of the present chapter; also from chapter 24.50-51, in application to Rebekah; and, moreover, from other passages.

This right represented in a type the right of decision whereby men could attach themselves to any church whatever. Moreover, at that time many gods were worshipped among the gentiles, and hence there were many quasi churches. From the Divine Word, this is well known to have been the case in Judea, Palestine and the neighbouring countries. Those churches, however, were not churches, since their worship was idolatrous and profane.

For beside the One God there is no other, and beside the one-only Messiah, the only-begotten Son of God to whom is given by Jehovah the Parent all power in heaven and on earth, there is no other. He it is, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who chose this house with which he was in the relationship spoken of above as a brother and as his bone and his flesh. Therefore, being divinely led, Laban now said: *It is better that I give her to thee than that I give her to another man.* Moreover, he asks that Jacob remain with him, and consequently with the gentiles who are understood by him.

Arcana Caelestia (3825)

This verse means the means by which interior truth is joined to that good. This is clear from the meaning of the ‘reward’ of which the words in this reply are a definite promise, as the means by which the two are joined together. Rachel representing interior truth and Jacob representing good.

As regards the joining of the good meant by Jacob to the good represented by Laban through interior truth represented by Rachel this is an Arcanum (secret of heaven) which cannot be easily described. A clear idea of both kinds of good, and an idea of interior truth, must be gained first.

Let it be stated briefly that with everyone who is being regenerated, the good of his natural, like that represented here by ‘Jacob’ is first of all joined to good like that represented by ‘Laban’ through the affection for interior truth which is represented here by ‘Rachel’ and subsequently together with the good of the rational and its truth, represented by ‘Isaac and Rebekah’.

By means of that initial conjunction a person is in a right state for receiving internal or spiritual truths, which are the means by which the natural is joined to the rational, that is, the external person to the internal.

Make and invite comparisons between the two commentaries

The opening paragraphs of the Arcana

THE Word in the Old Testament contains secrets of heaven, and every single aspect of it has to do with the Lord, his heaven, the church, faith, and all the tenets of faith; but not a single person sees this in the letter. In the letter, or literal meaning, people see only that it deals for the most part with the external facts of the Jewish religion.

The truth is, however, that every part of the Old Testament holds an inner message. Except at a very few points, those inner depths never show on the surface. The exceptions are concepts that the Lord revealed and explained to the apostles, such as the fact that the sacrifices symbolize the Lord, and that the land of Canaan and Jerusalem symbolise heaven (which is why it is called the heavenly Canaan or Jerusalem [Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:16; 12:22; Revelation 21:2, 10]), as does Paradise.

The Christian world, though, remains deeply ignorant of the fact that each and every detail down to the smallest, even down to the tiniest jot1 enfolds and symbolizes spiritual and heavenly matters; and because it lacks such knowledge, it also lacks much interest in the Old Testament.

Still, Christians can come to a proper understanding if they reflect on a single notion: that since the Word is the Lord's and comes from him, it could not possibly exist unless it held within it the kinds of things that have to do with heaven, the church, and faith. Otherwise it could not be called the Lord's Word, nor could it be said to contain any life. Where, after all, does life come from if not from what is living? That is, if not from the fact that every single thing in the Word relates to the Lord, who is truly life itself? Whatever does not look to him at some deeper level, then, is without life; in fact, if a single expression in the Word does not embody or reflect him in its own way, it is not divine.

Without this interior life, the Word in its letter is dead. It resembles a human being, in that a human has an outward self and an inward one, as the Christian world knows. The outer being, separated from the inner, is just a body and so is dead, but the inward being is what lives and allows the outward being to live. The inner being is a person's soul. In the same way, the letter of the Word by itself is a body without a soul.

The Word's literal meaning alone, when it monopolizes our thinking, can never provide a view of the inner contents. Take for example this first chapter of Genesis. The literal meaning by itself offers no clue that it is speaking of anything but the world's creation, the Garden of Eden (Paradise), and Adam, the first human ever created. Who supposes anything else?

The wisdom hidden in these details (and never before revealed) will be clear enough from what follows. The inner sense of the first chapter of Genesis deals in general with the process that creates us anew—that is to say, with regeneration—and in particular with the very earliest church; and it does so in such a way that not even the smallest syllable fails to represent, symbolize, and incorporate this meaning.

But without the Lord's aid not a soul can possibly see that this is the case. As a result, it is proper to reveal in these preliminaries that the Lord in his divine mercy has granted me the opportunity for several years now, without break or interruption, to keep company with spirits and angels, to hear them talking, and to speak with them in turn. Consequently I have been able to see and hear the most amazing things in the other life, which have never before come into people's awareness or thought.

In that world I have been taught about the different kinds of spirits, the situation of souls after death, hell (or the regrettable state of the faithless), and heaven (or the blissful state of the faithful). In particular I have learned what is taught in the faith acknowledged by the whole of heaven. All of these topics will, with the Lord's divine mercy, be explored further in what follows.

Note – the remarkable numbering of the Arcana and what it seems to suggest – management of material

retrospectively (see 1234 etc) 'as will be explained further in what follows' (even nos. !!!)

An extract comparison of Exodus 24 in The Word Explained

4628

By the mountain is meant God Messiah. As regards the classification, there is first a single man, Moses, then three men, namely Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and finally seventy elders. Mention is then made of the people who are not to go up. By this classification of those who were to go up to Jehovah is represented the general classification of the grand society of those who will go to make the kingdom of God Messiah.

A similar classification was also observed by God Messiah when he was in the world, the principal division being into twelve, like the twelve tribes, then there are the three classes, and finally the seventy, being six from each tribe, six times twelve being seventy two, thus seventy.

As regards a likeness thereof in man who is a least society, this is not yet allowed me to know. Still, that there is a likeness can be evident from the fact that man's first and principal essence is the soul, which is here represented by Moses, and also usually by a king or by a chief, who alone was to draw near, inasmuch as it is ruled by God Messiah alone and by the Holy Spirit proceeding from Jehovah the Father through God Messiah.

Thus the representation was made by one man, Moses, in that Moses alone drew near. As touching the others, namely, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, these were in the second class of those who were to go up, for in perfect order, which is represented here, the intellectual mind goes up, because it is lifted up to God Messiah.

As to whether the seventy elders who were to go up with them, represented the inferior mind, this appears to be the case, because it is from that mind that man is lifted up to God Messiah. This can be better seen from what I, by the divine mercy of God Messiah, I have previously learned from experience. In regard to affections, whether these too will go up, and how, this is still a mystery to me, for it now appears to me that the affections of the spirit are acquired as the body of the affections of the celestial mind.

As to the others, that is to say, the people, these represent the body. This cannot go up, for the body itself cannot go up into the heaven of God Messiah, unless by the body is meant the merely natural. But to me, these matters are still arcane (a mystery), that is, they are still obscure in their most general aspect.

...then follow several isolated Exodus 24 phrases, given with suggested meaning, but also with much obvious speculation that they might mean this or that...