

SWEDENBORG IN THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC: POPULAR AND  
INTELLECTUAL RESPONSES TO THE DOCTRINES OF  
EMANUEL SWEDENBORG, 1784 – 1817

by

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For my Father, who believed in me first.

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by

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My dissertation argues that the theology of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was an influential presence in Early America and deserves more historical attention. In their response to this theology, early advocates of Swedenborg's doctrines demonstrated a desire for reconciliation between Enlightenment reason and Christian Scripture, while those opposed to Swedenborg's doctrines often highlighted the subjective nature of Swedenborg's Biblical exegesis, revealing social fears regarding the potential instability of the Bible as a moral blueprint for society.

During the early years of nation building, Americans often struggled with feelings of doubt and skepticism in relation to their Christian faith which culminated in public and private cultural and ecclesiastical debates about religious "truth." Long touted as religious bugbears, Enlightenment rationalism and scientific modes of thinking were central to these debates, leading to many forms of rationalization and explanation as Early Americans struggled to accommodate science to faith, at times committing to one side or the other in an effort to escape the dark cloud of religious skepticism. In *Protestants in an Age of Science*, Theodore Bozeman argued that evidence of

accommodating Enlightenment thinking to Protestant Christianity occurred in America as early as 1820, however, in examining Early American religious modes of thinking through the lens of Swedenborgian doctrine, I find that this accommodation began decades earlier. Through an analysis of Swedenborgian thought, it becomes apparent that a small group of American thinkers committed to both Enlightenment reason and Christian doctrine, promoting a Biblical hermeneutic based on Swedenborg's theory of correspondences that promised to reconcile reason and revelation, and in doing so, heal social and religious divides. This project focuses on port cities where Swedenborgians first congregated on U.S. shores such as New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, as well as on the transatlantic exchange of ideas with England. Utilizing primary sources from Early American newspapers, personal letters from Swedenborg archives, published sermons, and religious treatises, my work expands our understanding of religious thought in the Early American Republic by examining the voices of those who supported and opposed Emanuel Swedenborg's religious doctrines.



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## INTRODUCTION

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) is a well-documented historical figure: both scientist and Christian mystic, both dismissed as insane and worshiped as the voice of scriptural truth.<sup>1</sup> During the last 27 years of his life, Swedenborg published over 20 theological works that captured the visions and mystic revelations he experienced. These theological works outlined Swedenborg's new revelations from Jesus Christ and made the following claims: that the Last

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<sup>1</sup> There are a plethora of histories and biographies about Swedenborg's life in which the focus is Emanuel Swedenborg as an historical figure. Although biographical studies do not resonate strongly with this dissertation, I believe it is important to note how past scholars have thought about Swedenborg historically in order to provide a more thorough foundation from which to place Swedenborgian-driven studies. Notable works include Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002). This book aims to place the biographical details of Swedenborg's life within the context of eighteenth-century scientific and religious debates in order to argue that Swedenborg's religious writings are a product of the time period in which he lived. Additional works include: Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of His Thought*, Trans. Tomas Spiers and Anders Hallengren (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000). In this text, Lamm works to debunk Swedenborg's spiritual claims by demonstrating how Swedenborg may have had access to an existing corpus of esoteric material. Lamm's overarching argument suggests that Swedenborg was purely borrowing and compiling knowledge from a vast esoteric tradition, as opposed to truly experiencing mystical revelations. See also: Gary Lachman, *Swedenborg: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2009). In this book Lachman takes less of an academic stance yet provides a thorough overview of Swedenborg's life and scientific and religious works, arguing that Swedenborg's writings and subsequent influence on spiritual movements deserves more prominent recognition in the canon of religious studies than previously conceded. In addition to biographies, there are a number of earlier books dedicated to the history of the New Jerusalem Church, which arose as a religious organization based on Swedenborg's writings. These religious histories focus on the rise and growth of the New Church as well as the lives of the members who subscribed to the orthodoxies of the New Church and the religious writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. One of the most thorough and well-respected studies of the New Church is: Maguerite Block, *The New Church in the New World* (New York: Swedenborg Publishing Association, 1984), which offers a comprehensive overview of the history of the New Church from inception through the mid twentieth century. In addition, Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Annals of the New Church: With a Chronological Account of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg, Vol. I. 1688-1850* (Philadelphia: Academy of the New Church, 1898), and William Ross Woofenden, *Swedenborg Researcher's Manual: A Research Reference Manual for Writers of Academic Dissertations* (Bryn Athyn: The Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1988) also act as thorough historical reference works which provide information about New Church members and institutional New Church growth. While these historical and reference works are important to acknowledge in terms of how they contribute to the canon of Swedenborgian-driven studies, they are only tangentially related to this study in that they provide an example of how Swedenborg and the New Church have been studied in the past. For additional Swedenborgian New Church histories see: Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church* (London: Hodson and Son, 1861), Benjamin F. Barrett, *The New Church, — Its Nature and Whereabout* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remson & Hafflinger, 1877), George M. Field, *The Early History of the New Church in the Western States and Canada* (New York: E.H. Swinney, 1879), James Reed, *Swedenborg and the New Church* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, & Co., 1880), Ednah C. Silver, *Sketches of the New Church in America* (Boston: Massachusetts New-Church Union, 1920).

Judgment had occurred in 1757 and that the Millennium had already begun, that correspondences existed between the celestial and earthly realms, and that Swedenborg had attained this wisdom through his conversations with God and angels. These conversations, and the knowledge Swedenborg gleaned from them, are the basis of his lasting fame. Swedenborg's dialogue with God and angels offered a vision of the universe that extended much further than Earth's solar system and contained many other inhabited planets. Swedenborg's religious writings argued for a hierarchical universe that allowed for more than one heaven, as well as a middle world where spirits resided and could act as intermediaries between the earthly and heavenly worlds. In addition, Swedenborg believed in the essential separation between the human body and soul and claimed that true divine meanings could be revealed in the words and numbers of the Holy Bible when translated through the newly discovered science of correspondences.

Copies of Swedenborg's religious doctrines were brought to America in 1784, quickly spread, and by the middle of the nineteenth-century, Swedenborg had become a household name. In this dissertation, I acknowledge the deep imprint Swedenborg left on American culture and utilize his doctrines and theological writings as the primary methodological lens through which to analyze American thought during the early years of Swedenborg's introduction to America. More specifically, in this dissertation I examine how Americans chose to understand Swedenborg's works during the early years of nation building (1784-1817) in order to shed light on a previously under-examined strand of religious thinking from the Early American Republic. However, while I focus primarily on American thinkers, this study is at times informed by the transatlantic movement of news and opinions between England and the U.S.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, I aim to make a case for Swedenborgian theology as a religious presence in Early America and argue that this system of thought deserves more historical attention in this time period. During the first few decades of the American Republic, Emanuel Swedenborg was a subject of cultural debate. There is documentation that Swedenborg was read by, or at least familiar to, many of the most impactful names and “loudest” historical voices from the period of the Early Republic, including Thomas Jefferson, Hannah Adams, Abigail Adams, John Adams, Timothy Dwight, and George Washington, all of whom alluded to Swedenborg in personal correspondence, published works, or engaged directly with members of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) Church.<sup>2</sup> In addition, layman letters, stories, and opinion pieces were written to proclaim public support or rejection of Swedenborg’s doctrines, while Swedenborgian New Church members printed sermons and periodicals to promote Swedenborg’s particular theology. At times, Swedenborgian material made its way

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<sup>2</sup> For sample primary sources written to or received by these individuals that note a reference to Swedenborg see: “To Thomas Jefferson from C. W. F. Dumas, 24 March 1790,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-16-02-0142>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 16, 30 November 1789–4 July 1790, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 265–266.], “To George Washington from the Members of the New Jerusalem Church of Baltimore, 22 January 1793,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0017>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, 16 January 1793–31 May 1793, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 40–41.], “John Adams to Abigail Adams, 14 December 1794,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-10-02-0195>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 10, January 1794–June 1795, ed. Margaret A. Hogan et al., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 304–305.], Hannah Adams, *A View of Religions, in Two Parts* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1801), infoweb.newsbank.com, Timothy Dwight, *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Theological Institution in Andover* (Boston: Farrand, Mallory and Co., 1808), infoweb.newsbank.com, “John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 2 February 1813,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-05-02-0507>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 5, 1 May 1812 to 10 March 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 595–596.]. Although not American, Mary Wollstonecraft also made mention of Swedenborg in her famous *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. See: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (Boston: Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, 1792), America’s Historical Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

from England to be reprinted in newspapers such as the *Philadelphia Evening Post* (Philadelphia, PA), *The Norwich Packet* (Norwich, CT), *The Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), and *The New York Packet* (New York, NY). However, there was also original content printed in Early American newspapers such as *The Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), *The Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), and *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), as well as original New Church literature such as *The Temple of Truth* printed in Baltimore, MD. Analyzing this written material illuminates the manner in which a subset of Early Americans in specific port cities argued and thought about religion, demonstrating core preoccupations with the role of reason in relation to Christian belief, and an earnest focus on social and religious reconciliation. With records of intellectuals, politicians, clergymen, and laymen engaging with and reacting to Swedenborg's theology, what remains is an obvious awareness of Swedenborg in the Early American Republic and a historical duty to analyze the manifestation of that awareness. Yet, the scholarly discourse on Swedenborg in America glosses over the Early American Republic, yielding primarily to studies of mid-to-late nineteenth century America where Swedenborg's theology has been academically situated as a foundational pulse for spiritual and metaphysical movements such as Transcendentalism and Spiritualism (Carroll, Gutierrez, Schmidt), as inspirational text for religious countercultures such as Mormonism and Christian Science (Albanese, Juster, Butler) or as an intellectual cornerstone for literary figures and thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry James Sr. (Matthiessen, Corrigan, Versluis).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>For relevant scholarship on American Spiritualism that discuss Swedenborg's importance to the movement see: R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism*

Even in the historical vein of American religion, scholarly studies have produced wildly inconsistent treatments of Swedenborg's cultural impact. Some pertinent scholarly histories of American religion acknowledge and thoroughly analyze Swedenborg's importance to American culture (Schmidt, Carroll), while other studies make overwhelming claims about Swedenborg's importance to American culture that are underwhelmingly explored (Ahlstrom, Butler, Albanese, Cox). Other thematically relevant histories reference Swedenborg, but do not accord him any importance (Taves, Braude, Abzug, Holifield), and finally, some relevant studies fail to

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in *Antebellum American* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012), John B. Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004), Molly McGarry *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

For relevant scholarship on Swedenborg and religious countercultures see: Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

For relevant scholarship on Nineteenth-century American literature that discusses Swedenborg see: F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941) which identifies Swedenborg's importance but does not examine Swedenborgian culture. Additional academic studies of 19th century American literature which identify Swedenborg's influence on literary figures include: Howard Kerr, *Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972) which gives credit to Swedenborg for his influence, but does not provide much in-text analysis. Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). In this book, Versluis grants Swedenborg a four page examination in chapter two titled "European Esoteric Currents," arguing that "[w]ithout doubt, the most influential European esotericist for nineteenth-century America was Emanuel Swedenborg...Swedenborg's name and influence are to be found virtually everywhere, even where it seems unlikely, and will recur as we examine the background of the American Renaissance"(19). However, Versluis omits mention of Swedenborg from the following chapter titled "Esotericism in Early America." John J. Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2004). Kucich does acknowledge the existence and impact of Swedenborg on both elite and working class American cultures and claims that Swedenborg's "explorations of the spiritual world provided much of the theoretical framework for American spiritualism" (121), but decidedly downplays Swedenborg's influence on American literature and culture to focus instead on older existing forms of spiritualism. Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) makes reference to Swedenborg's ideas informing the Spiritualist landscape. In John Michael Corrigan, *American Metempsychosis: Emerson, Whitman, and the New Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) Corrigan analyzes the thoughts and writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman in order to argue that both men were influenced by esoteric beliefs, yet only acknowledges Swedenborg as a referential figure of influence even though his ideas are central to Corrigan's theory.

acknowledge Swedenborg or his impact on American thought and culture at all (Hatch, Noll, Porterfield).<sup>4</sup> While the Swedenborg Society in London, England and the Swedenborg Foundation in West Chester, Pennsylvania have made great strides in publishing Swedenborg-driven studies to help correct the lack of scholarship on Swedenborg's influence, Devin Zuber's *A Language of Things: Emanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination* (University of Virginia Press, 2019) marks one of the first scholarly studies focused entirely on Swedenborg's impact on American culture published by an academic press.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the full impact

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of thematically relevant books that thoroughly analyze Swedenborg's impact on American culture see: Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), and Bret E. Carroll *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

For examples of thematically relevant books that accord Swedenborg a historical place of importance but do not deeply analyze his impact on American culture see: Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People 2nd ed.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

For examples of thematically relevant books that reference Swedenborg but do not analyze his impact on American culture see: Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), Robert H. Abzug *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

For examples of thematically relevant scholarly studies that do not mention Swedenborg at all see: Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> For additional relevant academic studies of Swedenborg's influence on thought and culture published by The Swedenborg Society or The Swedenborg Foundation see: Friedemann Horn, Trans. George F. Dole, *Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 1997), John Chadwick, *Swedenborg and His Readers: essays by John Chadwick*, Ed. Stephen McNeilly (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2003), Stephen McNeilly, ed., *On the True Philosopher and the True Philosophy: essays on Swedenborg* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2003), Alfred J. Gabay *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Counter-Culture and its Aftermath* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2004), Stephen McNeilly, ed., *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2004), Stephen McNeilly, ed., *Between Method and Madness: Essays on Swedenborg and*

of Swedenborg and his theology on American culture remain inconsistently examined in scholarly works, and in general overlooked in studies of religion and culture in Early America.<sup>6</sup> This study aims to address this oversight.

The second goal of this study is to engage in a close analysis of those who were talking about Swedenborg in Early America in order to provide a clear assessment of what they were saying and why this response is important to listen to. This dissertation will not be a history of the Swedenborgian New Church, but is instead a history of how American thinkers, including those who considered themselves parishioners of the New Church, responded to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. In defining “response,” I aim to clarify that this methodological lens looks at the ways in which certain American thinkers and writers reacted to Swedenborg’s doctrines. It is important to note that the response study differs from the traditional lens of an influence study. In the latter, a thinker’s influence on American thought and culture is analyzed by tracing how specific ideas from one or more seminal works have shaped the content of subsequent writing by contemporary or later authors. In contrast, the response study examines

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*Literature*, (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2005), Stephen McNeilly, ed., *The Arms of Morpheus: Essays on Swedenborg and Mysticism* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2007), Wouter Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant: Three Perspectives on the Secrets of Heaven* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2007), John S. Haller Jr., *Swedenborg, Mesmer, & the Mind/Body Connection: The Roots of Complementary Medicine* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2010), John S. Haller, Jr., *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2012), Stephen McNeilly, ed., *Philosophy, Literature, Mysticism: An Anthology of essays on the thought and influence of Emanuel Swedenborg* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2013), John S. Haller Jr. *Distant Voices: Sketches of a Swedenborgian World View* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2017), Malcolm Peet *Medicine, Mysticism and Mythology: Garth Wilkinson, Swedenborg and Nineteenth-Century Esoteric Culture* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> The few scholarly studies that do examine Swedenborg’s existence and impact in the Early American Republic include: Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), and Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).



how a body of work is influenced by the ideas of intellectual forefathers. Distinguishing between an influence study and a response study means I have elected to focus not on passive intellectual genealogy but instead on how thinkers have been animated by specific Swedenborgian ideas and how they have chosen to understand those ideas.<sup>7</sup>

In examining the response to Swedenborg in America it becomes apparent that two intellectual reactions developed from his writings. The first reaction developed from an examination of Swedenborg's source of divine wisdom. Since Swedenborg claimed to have received his wisdom from conversations with God, angels, and other celestial beings, he models a decidedly passive reception of knowledge that is impossible to prove and resulted in debates about his mental sanity and worthiness as a mystic and receptacle of heavenly wisdom.<sup>8</sup> As noted above, in many studies of Spiritualism, mysticism, and esoterica in America and the Western world, Swedenborg is a natural figurehead, often meriting at least a chapter dedicated to discussing his history, influence, and/or the subsequent rise of Swedenborgians, if not identified entirely as the impetus for an important religious development or argumentative thread.<sup>9</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> For a recent notable "reception" study of American thought see Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). For a compilation of scholarly essays on this genre see: *New Directions in American Reception Study*, Eds. Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent academic study of prophet voices in Early America see Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Other important academic studies of western esotericism that acknowledge Swedenborg's religious, social, or cultural impact on the western world include Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), which provides a chronological overview of the major thought developments and figure-heads of western esotericism. According to Goodrick-Clarke, Swedenborg, his visions, and his writings are a major aspect of the rise and growth of theosophy in the eighteenth-century. In his assessment of Swedenborg, Goodrick-Clarke mainly focuses on the content of Swedenborg's religious doctrine as he works to identify and demonstrate long standing, correlating themes between Swedenborg's esoteric predecessors and nineteenth and twentieth-century esoteric successors. Like Sydney Ahlstrom, Goodrick-Clarke also argues that Swedenborg's strict adherence to Biblical Scripture in presenting his vision and interpretation of the spiritual world strongly contributed to his success as a visionary. In Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), Faivre also presents an introductory text to the study of Western Esotericism that

reacting to Swedenborg as a historical mystic, naysayers spread accusations of insanity, while supporters either downplayed the source of his wisdom or compared him to Jesus's disciples in order to prove Swedenborg's saintly worthiness.

However, the second intellectual reaction to Swedenborg in Early America developed from an examination of Swedenborg's wisdom and the rational manner in which his doctrines promoted a synthesis between reason and revelation. Swedenborg's own theology argued that one could reinterpret the Bible to discover the true divine wisdom contained within the spiritual sense of scriptural text by applying the science of correspondences to Biblical exegesis. This active relationship with the Bible not only relied on Enlightenment-driven methods of scientific investigation, but it also modeled a synthesis of Christianity and rationalism, provided a new Biblical hermeneutic to interpret divine meaning, and placed reason as central to arguments about religion. This line of thinking, which arose from Swedenborg's theology, emphasized the importance of the human mind in understanding and assessing God's truths and gave rise to cultural debates about the legitimacy of specific Swedenborgian doctrines as well as Swedenborg's science of correspondences. While proponents of Swedenborg rejoiced in the

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acknowledges Swedenborg's influences and outlines his conception of western esotericism as an academic discipline. Faivre makes sweeping claims regarding the influence and relevance of Swedenborg and his writings in relation to esoterica and religious developments in the 18th and 19th centuries arguing that Swedenborg's work "contributes much to spreading to a wide public the idea of universal relationships" (72). In Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Wouter Hanegraaff argues that "western esotericism" as an academic subject is only defined by its rejection in academia as a negative counter-category. Hanegraaff does not focus on Swedenborg as a figurehead of esotericism, but rather presents him as a foundational individual, who he then uses to help categorize thinkers that he discusses. The brevity of Hanegraaff's focus on Swedenborg in this book may be partly explained by the fact that in one of his earlier studies: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (New York: State University of New York, 1998), Hanegraaff discusses Swedenborg at greater length, going so far as to identify his writings as a "crucial historical phenomena" in the context of esotericism transitioning into occultism and as a "crucial influence" to 19th century spiritualism (423).

belief that his Biblical hermeneutic could reconcile Enlightenment reason with Christian Scripture and thereby heal religious and social divides, those opposed called his science into question by highlighting the seemingly subjective nature of Swedenborg's correspondences. Accepting Swedenborg's doctrines proved too steep a price for many to pay. Dependent on a revisionist form of Christianity that required readers to believe in reinterpretations of Scripture, Swedenborg's science of correspondences and resulting doctrinal claims ultimately led to religious pushback and social fears regarding repercussions to Biblical authority should Swedenborg's theology prove true.

A dialectic tension exists between these two lines of thought: one relying on source, the other on content, one considered passive and the other active, one requiring blind faith in Swedenborg as a mystical prophet, and the other requiring reason and rationality for true comprehension of divine wisdom. Those who engaged Swedenborg's works in Early America frequently navigated between these two poles, at times acknowledging, committing to, or rejecting both, and at times ignoring one to focus on the other. This study foregrounds that fluctuating, liminal space to focus on a small number of American and transatlantic voices that found commonality believing in and advocating for a new Christian theology; one with mysticism at its base, and rationality at its forefront. Contrary to the manner in which Swedenborg's theology has been identified as influential to the individualism of Transcendentalists or the otherworldly focus of Spiritualists, the early version of Swedenborgianism in America was decidedly societally focused. Early advocates of Swedenborg earnestly believed his theology could heal the divides perceived between different religious factions, theological beliefs, and Biblical inconsistencies, as well as the ever-widening gap

between Enlightenment-driven scientific rationalism and the divine truths of Scripture. In analyzing the voices of Early American Swedenborgians, there is an appreciable yearning for not just community, but reconciliation between seemingly irreconcilable forces. Indeed, Swedenborgians' increased focus on rationalism and reason in relation to religious Scripture speaks to the difficulty some Early Americans must have experienced accommodating rationalism to Christianity or accommodating Christianity to the rationalism born from Enlightenment ideals.

A number of authors have examined the relationship between religious beliefs and Enlightenment reason. For example, in *The Enlightenment in America* (1976), Henry May sees differing strands of Enlightenment thought as the expression of underlying religious skepticism, implicating religion as a natural impetus for Enlightenment inquiry. However, Theodore Bozeman's *Protestants in an Age of Science* (1977) comes closest to analyzing the accommodation of Enlightenment-driven scientific thinking to Protestant Christianity in early nineteenth-century America. Bozeman posited that, contrary to academic consensus, efforts to accommodate scientific modes of thought to Protestantism occurred in America well before Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Bozeman examines the years 1820-1860, however, my work expands on Bozeman's premise to argue that Swedenborgian religious thought offers an example of attempts to accommodate Enlightenment thinking to Protestant Christianity decades before the start of Bozeman's study. In analyzing the religious belief system of a small group of like-minded citizens who aimed to be accepted into the Protestant fold based on adherence to the Bible, the Swedenborgian preoccupation with accommodating

Enlightenment thinking to Christian doctrine points to a greater awareness of the important roles that both science and Christianity would play in shaping nineteenth-century America.

Every chapter in this study examines aspects of the intersection between Enlightenment rationality and Christian theology during the period of the Early American Republic through the lens of Swedenborgian theology. In chapter one, I provide an overview of Swedenborg's most impactful religious doctrines and analyze the letters of merchant James Glen who first brought Swedenborg's doctrines from London to America in 1784. Since Glen gave the first lectures on Swedenborg in America, analyzing his letters provides insight into the context and stance from which Swedenborg's theology was first presented to an American audience, unearthing a specific worldview shaped by Swedenborgian doctrines which relied on a synthesis of Enlightenment ideals and Christian theology. In chapter two, I examine the popular response to Swedenborg in America by analyzing newspapers, letters, sermons, and periodicals. Based on my research, I posit four specific reasons why proponents and opponents of Swedenborg were attracted to his writings and discuss how this response legitimized his existence as a religious figure in Early America. In addition, this chapter looks at how Swedenborg's doctrines offered an Enlightenment-driven, reason-based theology that synthesized rationality and Christian Scripture and proved attractive to a subset of Early Americans. In chapter three, I analyze the writings of Reverend John Hargrove, the first ordained minister of the Swedenborgian New Church in America. Hargrove was an active participant in the production and circulation of New Church material and promoted a specific form of Biblical exegesis that was based on Swedenborg's science of correspondences. Hargrove believed that divinity was inherent to the act of rational thinking. From the basis of this belief, he promoted a Biblical hermeneutic that could reinterpret

the Bible based on scientific fact and provided a system of interpretation that was formulated on ethical grounds. Finally, in chapter four, I analyze formal ecclesiastical debates about Swedenborg's doctrines from the pens of Methodists, Unitarians, Anglicans, Jesuits, and Deists. These debates explore the opinions of opponents and proponents who argued about the legitimacy of Swedenborg's religious system. Biblical stability in light of Swedenborg's science of correspondences features strongly in these debates, which grapple with the repercussions of opening the Bible to new forms of interpretation as well as the potential social and religious repercussions of accepting Swedenborg's theology. In the conclusion, I examine 1817 as the end-date of this study, marking the year the Swedenborgian New Church formalized with their first General Convention in the United States of America.

I should qualify this study by acknowledging that I frequently interchange "New Church member" with "Swedenborgian." I also conflate "rationalism," "reason," "Enlightenment," and "science," to refer to a way of thinking born from investigative and contemplative methodologies that assume truth can be found through close examination of subject matter. I should also acknowledge that while the title of this study is "Swedenborg in the Early American Republic" and focuses primarily on American citizens, it does not purport to provide a uniquely American response to Swedenborg. Given the transatlantic movement of information, news, opinion pieces, and correspondences between England and America at this time in history, the word "American" refers primarily to the geographical constraints of the primary sources I analyzed — the majority of which were from American newspapers and thinkers — rather than to a claim of distinction, contrast, or comparison.

Academic scholarship has overlooked Swedenborg's seminal introduction to American readership for years, electing to focus instead on how Swedenborg and his religious doctrines impacted mid-to-late nineteenth century cultural movements. However, since Swedenborg's writings first came to American shores in 1784, this indicates a clear gap in the historiography of Swedenborgian thought in America. This study takes a closer look at that gap and the originating foundations of Swedenborg in America to find that the early version of Swedenborgianism on U.S. shores was staunchly Bible-centric and promoted a synthesis of Enlightenment rationalism and Christian theology which aimed to convert believers by arguing that Swedenborgian doctrine could heal social and religious divides. Regardless of whether Swedenborgian thought was chided or lauded, disdainfully disregarded or enthusiastically explored, Early Americans were talking about Swedenborg. By holding up a historical microphone to these voices I aim to illuminate that discourse.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE FIRST PUBLIC PROCLAMATION

This study of Emanuel Swedenborg in America begins on June 5th, 1784, when South American plantation owner James Glen arrived in Philadelphia with knowledge of Swedenborg's religious doctrines. James Glen lived in Demerara, now a historical region of Guyana on the northern coast of South America, but he would travel back to London for visits. Before leaving London this particular year, Glen had attended a meeting with a few other men to discuss the writings of Swedenborg who had died in London twelve years earlier.<sup>10</sup> After arriving in Philadelphia, Glen placed the following advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to announce his public lecture on Swedenborg's doctrines and his theory of correspondences: "[a] Discourse on the extraordinary science of Celestial and Terrestrial Connections and Correspondences, recently revived by the late honorable and learned Emanuel Swedenborg, will be delivered by Mr. James Glen, with an humble Pupil and Followers of the said Swedenborg's at 8 o'clock on the evening of Saturday the 5th of June 1784, at Bell's Book-Store, near St. Paul's Church, in Third Street Philadelphia" (emphasis in original).<sup>11</sup> Carl Odhner notes that of those in attendance at this first lecture, the following decided to embrace Swedenborg's doctrines: Francis Bailey,

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<sup>10</sup> During his life and within the writings he left behind, Swedenborg never indicated an interest in, or enthusiasm for, the founding of a religion or church in his name. However, ten years after his death, London-based printer Robert Hindmarsh received a French translation of the Heavenly Doctrines in London (Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Annals of the New Church: With a Chronological Account of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg, Vol. I. 1688-1850* (Philadelphia: Academy of the New Church, 1898), 117). By January of 1783, Robert Hindmarsh, in conjunction with Peter Provo, William Bonington and John Augustus Tulk, began to organize informal meetings at Hindmarsh's house in order to study Swedenborg's writings. A first of its kind, on December 5th, 1783, Hindmarsh and associates issued a notice to advertise a public meeting in London in order to bring together those who had read Swedenborg or were interested in learning more about his religious writings. On December 12th, 1783, this group of men attended a second meeting attracting several new members, including plantation owner James Glen.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20.



John Young, Myers Fisher, and James Vickroy.<sup>12</sup> Glen then delivered two more lectures on June 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> before traveling to Boston. There he gave a final lecture at the Masonic Green Dragon Tavern, soliciting the interest of Mr. Joseph Roby and Major Joseph Hiller, and subsequently departed for his final destination in South America.<sup>13</sup> According to Carl Odhner, these lectures “constitute[d] the first public proclamation of the Heavenly Doctrines, by the living voice, in America or anywhere else in the world.”<sup>14</sup>

For the remainder of his life James Glen continued to be a devout reader of Swedenborg and kept up a regular written correspondence with individuals back in England. Dated from between 1802 and 1811, these letters demonstrate Glen’s enthusiasm and reception of Swedenborg’s doctrines. For example, in the seventh letter from the collection, Glen writes:

For my own part by the mercy of the Divine human it is now in the 29th year since I first saw I received that divine work the heaven and hell of Swedenborg, since then not for an hour have I hesitated a moment to see & feel, their divinity. — But still, I only find myself beginning, beginning to see & to feel their excellence & dignity, & this, I humbly presume, by the mercy of the Divine human will be my state in eternit (sic), eternally beginning.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to providing an example of how Swedenborg’s writings were both personally internalized and externally expressed by a devout believer of his works, Glen’s letters offer a window into the main subject matter driving discourse about Swedenborg and his theology in the period of the Early American Republic. In particular, these letters demonstrate doctrinal focal points around interpretations of the Christian Millennium and Holy Trinity, as well as

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<sup>12</sup> Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Details of Glen’s journey from: Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Annals of the New Church: With a Chronological Account of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg, Vol. I. 1688-1850* (Philadelphia: Academy of the New Church, 1898), 121.

<sup>14</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 121.

<sup>15</sup> James Glen to Undisclosed Recipient, March 53 (1810), Letter 7, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

Swedenborg's science of correspondences. In doing so, this analysis previews the central concerns expressed by Swedenborgian proponents and opponents as they navigated this religious system during the period of nation building in the United States. Glen's letters also demonstrate a unique synthesis of Enlightenment ideals and Christian doctrine born from Swedenborg's religious system. This synthesis would later become a breeding ground in America for deeper social debates about the moral foundation of Christianity and the relationship between reason, rationality, and religion. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I aim to provide an overview of the main tenets of Swedenborg's theology in order to enable a deeper examination of the American response to this belief system. Secondly, I offer an analysis of Glen's collection of letters to demonstrate how he incorporated the overarching principles of Swedenborgian doctrine into his own life and ultimately shaped a specific worldview that was tethered to an entanglement of Christian theology with Enlightenment thought.

Glen set off from Boston in mid-June of 1784. Shortly after his departure, it was recorded that a box containing New Church material addressed to Glen from Robert Hindmarsh arrived in Philadelphia. Since Glen had already departed, the books were sold at a public auction and physical New Church writings were thus dispersed on American soil.<sup>16</sup> Several informal reading groups were formed immediately following this first dissemination. Of particular note was a group organized by Francis Bailey who was "[p]rinter of the State of Pennsylvania, editor and publisher of *The Freeman's Journal*, and a close friend of...Benjamin Franklin..."<sup>17</sup> In 1787, Francis Bailey printed *A Summary View of the Heavenly Doctrines* by Anglican priest and early

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<sup>16</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 121-122.

<sup>17</sup> Marguerite Block, *The New Church in the New World* (New York: Swedenborg Publishing Association, 1984), 75.

Swedenborgian convert, Rev. John Clowes, which became the first New Church text published and distributed in America.<sup>18</sup> In 1789 official Swedenborgian reading groups were formed in Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, Boston, and Cambridge. In addition, Francis Bailey issued a call for subscriptions to the publication of *True Christian Religion* and received at least fifty subscribers, including Benjamin Franklin, and Robert Morris.<sup>19</sup> In the wake of Glen's departure, Swedenborg-related material began to be published in port cities along the east coast of the newly formed United States of America.<sup>20</sup> Notable works published during the following decade include: 14 pages of extracts from *Heaven and Hell*, along with Vol. 2 of *True Christian Religion*, extracts from *Swedenborg on the Trinity*, and the first New Church sermon preached by Rev. James Wilmer in Baltimore, titled *A Sermon on the Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Church: being the first promulgated within the United States*.<sup>21</sup> As a testament to efforts toward formalizing as a religious organization, in 1793, a number of New Church members in Baltimore decided to send a copy of *True Christian Religion* to President General Washington, to which he

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<sup>18</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 131.

<sup>19</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 146.

<sup>20</sup> Additional Swedenborgian material published in Early America includes the following works listed in Odhner's *Annals of the New Church*: *The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1792), 171, *The Divinity of Jesus Christ proved, being a reply to Dr. Priestley's "Appeal to the Serious," with some observations upon Arianism* (Philadelphia: Samuel Wetherill, 1792), 171, *Nine Questions respecting the Trinity*, *A Short Account of the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg (founder of the New Jerusalem Doctrines), and his Theological Writings*, and *The Liturgy of the New Church, together with Hymns* (Baltimore: Samuel & John Adams, 1792), 169-170, *Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Love and Wisdom* (Boston: Folsom & Andrews, 1794), 177, John Clowes, *A Letter of exhortation and admonition to all such as cordially receive the Testimony of the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg* (Baltimore: Robert Carter, 1794) and (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1794), 182, *Treatise on the Nature of Influx* (Boston: Folsom & Andrews, 1794), 178, *Arcana Coelestia* (Boston: J. Belknap, 1794), 178, *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord* (Boston: William Hill, Folsom & Andrews, 1795), 182, *Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Providence* (Boston: Hill, Thomas & Andrews, 1796), 184, *The Delights of Wisdom concerning Conjugal Love* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1796), 184

<sup>21</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 169-171.

sent a cordial reply of gratitude back.<sup>22</sup> In 1794 American readers may have been exposed to Swedenborg's famous *Arcana Coelestia*, since that year Rev. William Hill emigrated from Liverpool and settled near Boston where he deposited a number of copies of *Arcana Coelestia* in the Harvard College Library.<sup>23</sup> Thomas Hall published *On the New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* in Boston in 1794, and in Philadelphia, Francis Bailey published a laudatory poem by early Swedenborgian convert Philip Freneau titled "On the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg's Universal Theology."<sup>24</sup> There are also documented instances of Swedenborgian material existing in the South, as well as having been transported west of the Alleghenies during the first few decades of the Early American Republic.<sup>25</sup>

By 1800, all the most well-known works by Swedenborg had been printed in America and were, if not in circulation, at least available for consumption by the general public. As Kenneth A. Lockridge notes in *Literacy in Colonial New England*, literacy rates in Colonial America and the Early American Republic were unusually high, with literacy in New England at 90 percent and in the South at 67 percent by 1790.<sup>26</sup> So while only a small percentage of the

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<sup>22</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 172.

<sup>23</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 176.

<sup>24</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 177-178.

<sup>25</sup> In *Annals of the New Church*, Odhner notes that Judge John Young, who first attended one of James Glen's original lectures was "...the chief means of introducing the Doctrines west of the Allegheny Mountains" (151). Judge Young not only moved to Greensburg, PA in 1795 where he continued to spread the word about Swedenborgian doctrine, but it was also Judge Young who supplied the famous "Johnny Appleseed" (John Chapman) with New Church literature in the early 1800's for his travels out to plant apple trees and discuss Swedenborg with the early settlers of Ohio (451). Circulation of Swedenborg in the South was much less dispersed, however, in *The New Church in the New World*, Maguerite Block notes that "there were readers of Swedenborg in Virginia some years before James Glen delivered his memorable lectures in Philadelphia. The libraries on the great plantations were made up of books imported from Europe, and it is not altogether surprising that a copy or two of Swedenborg's Latin editions were found among them" (82). Block goes on to list a number of white male plantation owners who were known to have large libraries and copies of some of Swedenborg's writings including Robert Carter, Lord Thomas Fairfax and his sons Thomas Fairfax and Bryan Fairfax, Arthur and William Campbell, Dr. John Cabell, Rev. Hugh White, and Col. Robert Carter (83).

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial (New England)*, (New York: Norton, 1974)

American population may have sought out Swedenborg's works, a majority of the population would have been able to engage with these texts should they have been exposed to them. Given the advancements in printing technology and the increasing emphasis on print to communicate ideas as well as consolidate and solidify social, political, and religious beliefs, it is no surprise that Swedenborgian New Church members placed special emphasis on text circulation and printing.<sup>27</sup> In light of the number of Swedenborg's works that were published by 1800, and in consideration of the expansion of print culture in the period of the Early American Republic, a strong case can be made for the likelihood of exposure to Swedenborg's doctrines.

In acknowledging the widespread publication of Swedenborg's texts, it is pertinent to briefly examine Swedenborg's best-known works. The following three books contain the bulk of Swedenborg's religious doctrines and his most influential theological ideas. *Arcana Coelestia*, written and published between 1749 and 1756 in London, is a well-known title. To summarize its contents, William Ross Woofenden writes:

This work explains in detail the inner or spiritual meaning of the books of Genesis and Exodus. Between chapters the author added a wide variety of essays on doctrinal subjects as well as a number of articles descriptive of his other-world experiences. Some of the topics are continued from chapter to chapter. Many of these interchapter articles were

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<sup>27</sup> For additional academic studies on print culture in early America see: Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill: Published in association with the American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, *The Press & the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2004), David A. Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein, *Early African American Print Culture* 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), Bolton Valencius and David Spanagel et al, "Science in Early America: Print Culture and the Sciences of Territoriality," *Journal of the Early Republic* 36, no. 1 (2016): 73–123. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1772427947/>, Jared Gardner, *The Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

later abstracted, rewritten and published separately by Swedenborg in four small works in 1758.<sup>28</sup>

Another extremely well-known and influential monograph by Swedenborg is *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell From Things Heard and Seen* commonly known as *Heaven and Hell*. This work was published in 1758 by Swedenborg. Woofenden also summarizes *Heaven and Hell*, writing:

This work contains the substance of articles appended to the first 21 chapters of Genesis in *Arcana Coelestia*, rewritten and rearranged to deal in order with heaven, the intermediate world of spirits, and hell. There have been at least twenty distinct translations or revisions of translations since the book first appeared in English in 1778. It is without doubt the most frequently published of all of Swedenborg's works.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, *True Christian Religion*, published in 1771, was Swedenborg's last book. This work proved popular as it provided a sweeping overview of Swedenborg's entire theology. *True Christian Religion* featured chapters on the following subjects: "1. God the Creator. 2. The Lord the Redeemer. 3. The Holy Spirit. 4. Sacred Scripture. 5. Decalog. 6. Faith. 7. Charity. 8. Freewill. 9. Repentance. 10. Reformation and Regeneration. 11. Imputation. 12. Baptism. 13. Holy Supper. 14. End of the Age. There is [also] a supplement with many particulars about the spiritual world."<sup>30</sup>

It is apparent from the list above that Swedenborg's own religious system is tied very closely to Judeo-Christian traditions, as well as to Scripture. In fact, both Ahlstrom and Goodrick-Clarke argue that Swedenborg's adherence to Christian Scripture in presenting his

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<sup>28</sup> William Ross Woofenden, *Swedenborg Researcher's Manual: A Research Reference Manual for Writers of Academic Dissertations* (Bryn Athyn: The Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1988), 73.

<sup>29</sup> Woofenden, *Swedenborg Researcher's Manual*, 78.

<sup>30</sup> Woofenden, *Swedenborg Researcher's Manual*, 112-113.

interpretation of the spiritual world strongly contributed to his success as a visionary. Goodrick-Clarke elaborates on this claim:

Swedenborg's theosophy involves intermediaries, correspondences, and access to the higher worlds, [but] it lacks the mythical and dramatic elements of earlier and contemporary theosophy, such as the fall, reintegration, transmutation, and rebirth. Instead, Swedenborg offers a relatively sober, matter-of-fact mesocosm full of spirits...where knowledge may be gained, scripture expounded, and new theological ideas developed.<sup>31</sup>

I will argue, however, that regardless of his adherence to Scripture, Swedenborg's distinct religious system has two overarching principles which tie his theology together: that of a belief in a divine influx/essence of correspondences that spans across a tripartite division of the universe, and a belief in the divinity contained within the written words of the Bible. It is from these principles that Swedenborg offers his reinterpretation of Scripture and his vision of the New Church born from the true doctrines of Christianity. Organizing the content of Swedenborg's religious theology into these two subsets, while analyzing how James Glen wrote and thought about these beliefs, will demonstrate how Glen reframed his worldview based on Swedenborg's overarching principles and promoted a religious system that offered a synthesis of Enlightenment ideology and Christian theology.

The first overarching aspect of Swedenborg's religious system is a belief in a divine essence or influx that communicates and corresponds through a tripartite universe. Sydney Ahlstrom speaks to this aspect:

Swedenborg's formal principle, his method of disclosing the Bible's spiritual meaning — as against the literal, historical sense of the letter — was a corollary of his doctrine of correspondences, which may be said to be his material principle...In Swedenborg's system there are three distinct orders of being: the natural world of mineral, vegetable, or

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<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 155.

animal “ultimates,” the spiritual, and the celestial...When interpreted through Swedenborg’s special visions, the Bible clarified the correspondences that linked together the one system of God.<sup>32</sup>

This “one system of God” suggests that God’s communication with the world is through correspondences. In *True Christian Religion*, Swedenborg expands on his claim regarding the existence of correspondences between realms:

That each thing and all things in nature correspond to spiritual things, and in like manner each and all things in the human body, has been shown in the work *Heaven and Hell*...What the spiritual things are to which all these things corresponded has been shown in *Arcana Coelestia*, published at London...Since then, Divine things present themselves in the world in correspondences, the Word was written by pure correspondences; and because the Lord spoke from the Divine he spoke by means of correspondences; for whatever is from the Divine falls into such things in nature as correspond to Divine things, and these then store up in their bosom Divine things, which are called celestial and spiritual.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of “as above, so below,” stems from a belief in the tripartite division of the universe which dictates correspondences between the three realms and dates to classical antiquity. In further contextualizing Swedenborg’s theology, the concept of hierarchical correspondences can also be traced back to both a Jewish Kabbalistic understanding of the interconnectedness between nature and the divine, as well as a Hermetic belief in the “hierarchy of things” that existed between the material and spiritual, and the lower and higher realms.

The works of Francesco Giorgi provide an example of how these realms were discussed in Christian Cabalist texts.<sup>34</sup> Giorgi’s most important works were *De harmonia mundi* (1525) and

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<sup>32</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People 2nd ed.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 485.

<sup>33</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Containing the Universal Theology of The New Church Vol. 1*, Trans. John C. Ager (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 327-328.

<sup>34</sup> Christian Cabala is the result of a merging between Hermetic and Jewish Kabbalah texts within Christian mystical beliefs which arose during the Renaissance.



*Problemata* (1536), both of which were influenced by Pico della Mirandola's writings, and demonstrate not only Cabalist thought, but a belief that the Cabala could prove the truth of Christianity.<sup>35</sup> Francis Yates explains Giorgi's thoughts regarding the higher and lower realms:

The supercelestial world is the world of the intelligences or angels... These highest influences pour down through the stars, and by the stars Giorgi means the seven planets ... The planets are linked to the angelic hierarchies and the Sephiroth... In the third or elemental world the divine, angelic, and stellar influences percolate down into the terrestrial world, and govern the movements and combinations of the elements.<sup>36</sup>

The similarities between Christian Cabalist texts and Swedenborg's own religious doctrines are clear. For example, consider the following passage from *True Christian Religion*, which further clarifies Swedenborg's stance as it relates to the tripartite division of the universe:

[T]hat there is a progression to infinity in the three degrees of height, in that the first degree, which is called the natural degree, cannot be perfected and elevated to the perfection of the second, which is called the spiritual degree; nor this to the perfection of the third, which is called the celestial degree... This may be illustrated by the atmospheres, of which there are three degrees. There is a supreme aura, under this the ether, and below this the air; and no quality of the air can be raised up to any quality of the ether, nor any quality of the ether to that of the aura; and yet in each there is an ascent of perfections to infinity.<sup>37</sup>

Although the terminology is slightly different, the three realms Swedenborg describes as celestial, spiritual, and natural are clearly analogous to the Christian Cabalistic supercelestial, celestial, and terrestrial realms. There is also a parallel between the magical hermetic influences that pour down on Earth, and the divine essence that, according to Swedenborg, flows with "unceasing influx" from the heavens onto Earth.

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<sup>35</sup> Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 34.

<sup>36</sup> Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, 38-39.

<sup>37</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. I*, 53-54.

It is from this framework of a belief in a divine essence corresponding between realms that Swedenborg makes the following claims. First, Swedenborg believes that there is only one God and that a universal influx from God is received in the souls of men,<sup>38</sup> that angels and men are made from God's form and substance,<sup>39</sup> and that God is infinite: "There is a universal influx from God into the souls of men of the truth that there is a God, and that he is one."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Swedenborg makes the claim for freewill within the tripartite division of the universe, arguing that an individual's ability to make spiritual decisions of their own accord occurs in a midway space between heaven and hell:

But to make it comprehensible how man can be kept midway between heaven and hell and thereby in spiritual equilibrium from which he has freedom of choice, it shall be briefly explained. The spiritual world consists of heaven and hell; heaven then is overhead, and hell is beneath the feet, not, however, in the center of the globe inhabited by men, but below the lands of the spiritual world, which are also of spiritual origin, and therefore not extended [spatially], but with an appearance of extension. Between heaven and hell there is a great interspace, which to those who are there appears like a complete orb. Into this interspace, evil exhales from hell in all abundance; while from heaven, on the other hand, good flows into it, also in all abundance...Every man, as to his spirit, is in the midst of this interspace, solely for this reason, that he may be in freedom of choice.<sup>41</sup>

Swedenborg then goes on to explain that this space where freedom of choice exists also proves that predestination and the implication that God caused evil is false. Swedenborg writes:

Hence sprung, one after another, direful heresies based upon that faith and man's impotence in spiritual things, and also that most pernicious heresy, predestination, which was treated of in the preceding section; all of which imply that God is the cause of evil, or that he created both good and evil. But, my friend, put faith in no council, but in the Lord's Word, which is above councils...It may be thought that giving to man freedom of choice in spiritual things was the mediate (sic) cause of evil; consequently, that if such

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<sup>38</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. I*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. I*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. I*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Containing the Universal Theology of The New Church Vol. II*, Trans. John C. Ager (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 658.

freedom of choice had not been given him, he could not have transgressed. But, my friend, pause here, and consider whether any man could have been so created as to be a man without freedom of choice in spiritual things. If deprived of that, he would be no longer a man but only a statue. What is freedom of choice but the power to will and do, and to think and speak to all appearance as if of oneself? Because this power was given to man in order that he might live as a man, two trees were placed in the garden of Eden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and this signifies that because of the freedom given him, man is able to eat of the fruit of the tree of life or of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>42</sup>

Swedenborg also offers opinions on sin and regeneration, claiming that people are born with “the inclination to” evil within them, but not actual evil. In addition, he believes that the story of Adam and Eve is just a representative story and a metaphor for the first church on Earth. Swedenborg therefore argues that evil did not enter humankind because of Adam’s wrongdoing, but rather that evil simply exists in the world and that men inherit an inclination toward evil from their parents, but may choose whether or not to engage in evil acts because of their freedom of choice.<sup>43</sup> Swedenborg writes that “[f]rom all this it follows, that man is not born into actual evils, but only into an inclination to evils, but with a greater or lesser proclivity towards particular evils; consequently after death man is not judged from any inherited evil, but from the actual evils which he himself has committed.”<sup>44</sup> However, Swedenborg does argue that regeneration is necessary for a person to enter heaven and that this regeneration is linked to the spiritual plane:

It has been said that man becomes spiritual by regeneration, but this does not mean that he becomes spiritual as an angel is in himself, but that he becomes spiritual natural; that is to say, that the spiritual is inwardly in his natural, just as thought is in speech, or as will is in action, for when one ceases the other ceases...[f]rom all this it can now be seen that a regenerate man is in communion with the angels of heaven, and an unregenerate man with the spirits of hell.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 673-674.

<sup>43</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 718.

<sup>44</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 719.

<sup>45</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 790.

From these passages it is apparent that Swedenborg's belief in the tripartite division of the universe and correspondences between realms drives his interpretations of man's relationship with good and evil and the necessity for regeneration.

In his letters to New Church members, James Glen engages with several of Swedenborg's central religious claims, both shaping his worldview to align with Swedenborg's religious system and offering insight into what aspects of Swedenborg's theology attracted his attention. In these letters, it is apparent that Glen believes in Swedenborg's correspondences between realms because he argues that the only way to truly have insight into life is to understand the relationship that exists between heaven and earth. In Letter 3 Glen writes to an undisclosed recipient in England:

But to a recipient of the new church...they confirm the truth of this [sighting from the spiritual world], that no transaction whatever in nature is not foreseen, well known and even pre-acted in the spiritual world; the whole nature being altogether an external effect from an internal cause, & thereby [indecipherable] strengthen & confirm our humble confidence in the paternal care of the divine, in most highest, without whom, not a sparrow falleth to the ground. — And in such thick, dark are those who consider nature & matter to be the whole of existence.<sup>46</sup>

The assuredness of Glen's belief in the spiritual world is apparent here, as is his understanding and reliance on correspondences between realms to make sense of world events. Glen argues that even the smallest of events — the example of a sparrow falling to the ground — are transacted in the spiritual world before playing out in the terrestrial realm. Glen posits that everything which happens on Earth is simply the aftereffect of events occurring in the spiritual world; analogous to shadows on the wall of a grand spiritual play with echoes of Plato's cave allegory in *The*

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<sup>46</sup> James Glen to AB, Feb. 11, 54 (1811), Letter 3, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

*Republic*. Historian Wouter Hanegraaff makes a similar observation of Swedenborg's worldview. Hanegraaff claims that by utilizing Jane Williams-Hogan's interpretation of Antoine Faivre's theory of western esotericism to understand Swedenborg's worldview, he was able to extrapolate that "[f]or Swedenborg, the post-Cartesian scientist, nature and the natural 'has no life of its own, even though it mirrors and can reveal the spiritual, and corresponds to it.' In other words: the constellation of a "higher" spiritual world of Life is mirrored by a lower material world, which is dead."<sup>47</sup> Instead of feeling, however, as if human existence is diminished with the knowledge that life on Earth is purely a reflection from realms above, Glen finds solace in his knowledge, arguing that those who do not understand the nature of the spiritual and celestial realms will never live in true clarity, and are destined instead to life within a "thick, dark."<sup>48</sup> Glen also advocates for the "reading" of nature by promoting the idea that heavenly truths can be found in examining the aftereffects of natural life on Earth and in doing so promotes the Enlightenment-driven belief in utilizing human reason to examine and understand the natural world. Here, the Swedenborgian intersection between Enlightenment ideals and Christian divinity is apparent in Glen's ability to turn observation of the natural world into a deeper examination of divine truths.

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<sup>47</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (New York: State University of New York, 1998), 426.

<sup>48</sup> Glen, Letter 3, Pacific School of Religion.

Glen also applies his knowledge of Swedenborg's correspondences to interpreting and understanding dreams. In Letter 1, he offers an analysis of a correspondent's dream in relation to a discussion about correspondences between realms.<sup>49</sup> Glen writes the following:

Your dreams which I believe Mr. M? Showed me in 1786, when I now see them I think me very plain, & very expressive representations of states according to the wonderful laws of the spiritual worlds, where such representations often appear. As to the first appearance I think was a representation of the influx of divine truth then beginning to irradiate your understanding.<sup>50</sup>

In this passage, Glen not only accepts the division of the universe and the existence of a spirit world but analyzes his correspondent's dream as an affirming metaphor and representative proof of the existence of other realms above the terrestrial plane. Glen also directly acknowledges the existence of a divine essence, or "divine truth" that travels from a higher realm as an influx onto the earthly plane in order to provide truth to men. In Letter 2, Glen goes deeper into dream analysis, offering a breakdown of the different parts of his correspondent's dream and what those images represent. Glen writes:

My idea of your dream is, a street in a town, doctrine in general, a burying ground the old church. — it is full of fine monuments, the divine truths of the world falsified, murdered and buried, a white building, the small beginnings of the N.C. a loud & most affecting voice saying, stir up &c — that every individual recipient is to look alone to the sun of life for influence & consider himself as a free will recipient, a church in its least form, & be led by no man, — a man in black coming out of the white house without speaking — total separation on both sides mutually of the recipients & rejicients [rejected].<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Swedenborg believed in the importance of dreams. He began recording his dreams in a journal kept from 1743-1744 around the age of 56. This collection of writings, now titled *Emanuel Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams and Spiritual Experiences*, was known of in Swedenborgian circles and may have impacted Swedenborgians' relationship to their dreams, although the actual journal was not published until 1918.

<sup>50</sup> James Glen to AB, June (1808), Letter 1, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

<sup>51</sup> James Glen to Undisclosed, May 9, 52 (1809), Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

In this letter not only does Glen accept and affirm Swedenborg's religious claims regarding free will and the divine influx, but he advocates for metaphorical thinking. He argues that in order to see and understand the correspondences that exist between realms, one must understand representations and think metaphorically. Glen finds a street analogous to Swedenborg's doctrine, a burying ground representative of the Old Church, church monuments as symbolic of misrepresented divine truths, and a white building as a metaphor for the beginning of Swedenborg's "New Church." Likewise, for Glen, a loud voice represents Swedenborg's claim that men should look to the heavens for the influx of divine truth and believe in free will. The image of a man in black departing from a white house symbolizes the separation that exists between those who have chosen to receive Swedenborg's New Church doctrines, and those who have not. The analogies chosen by Glen in his dream analysis depend on referential knowledge of Swedenborg's science of correspondences and strongly affirm Swedenborg's religious system. Not only does Glen choose to draw a parallel between a burial ground and the Old Church, but he also draws a clear distinction between those who have accepted Swedenborg's doctrines, and those who have not: for Glen the right and wrong choice is literally black and white. Glen's dream interpretation also strongly advocates for the Enlightenment-driven denunciation of old institutions of power and former sources of authority. The overarching message regarding truth — whether divine or natural — is that one must come to divine wisdom of their own accord and with their own abilities. To that effect, Glen writes "every individual recipient is to look alone to the sun of life for influence & consider himself as a free will recipient."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Glen, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

In addition to analyzing the dreams of others, Glen also calls upon knowledge of Swedenborg's correspondences to interpret his personal dreams. In Letter 1, Glen writes the following in reference to five different dream scenes:

Now all the particulars in each of the five appear to me as exact representatives of states according with the astonishing exactiefs (sic) of representations in the wonderful spiritual worlds, far beyond the powers of human ingenuity to effect or conceive, which your own mind will see in the light of the science of correspondence as clear as I do, by the mercy of the divine human.<sup>53</sup>

In this passage, Glen again draws parallels, but this time between dream sequences and the different spirit planes, arguing that the scenes from dreams appear as exact representations of the different spirit worlds. Even if these parallels may be perceived as extreme or a stretch of the logical mind by the letter's recipient, Glen rationalizes his conclusion by arguing that these representative states within human dreams are outside the purview of thinkers, or "far beyond the powers of human ingenuity to effect or conceive."<sup>54</sup> One may consider how it is that Glen has insight into these representations if they are inconceivable to humans? To this he would answer that Swedenborg's science of correspondences provides him the clarity he needs to see the parallels between the earthly and spiritual planes. In this instance, there is again a synthesis of Enlightenment ideals and Christian divinity as Glen applies an analytical framework (originally designed to clarify divine knowledge) to the interpretation and clarification of dream scenes that otherwise would not offer accessible knowledge. Beyond Glen's usage of Enlightenment rhetoric, he also demonstrates efforts to independently discover insights about the divine world,

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<sup>53</sup> James Glen to AB, June (1808), Letter 1, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

<sup>54</sup> Glen, Letter 1, Pacific School of Religion.



and in doing so, is further promoting a religious system that closely binds Enlightenment ideals to Christian ideology.

In addition to utilizing Swedenborg's correspondences to interpret dreams and meaning in nature, Glen also frequently references the spirit world that exists above the terrestrial plane both to explore and explain its existence, as well as make sense of the current state of the world. Glen writes "I believe in the celestial heavens, if the points are written, they are different & convey a higher sense than the points written in the spiritual & spiritual — natural heavens; & it is therefore with great reason that the clergy of Britain are averse to a new translation of the word, because it can be so translated as to infringe on their fables."<sup>55</sup> In this passage, Glen clearly delineates a hierarchy between realms (celestial and spirit, as well as celestial and spiritual and terrestrial), but he also criticizes the current religious establishments in Great Britain. Glen claims that these establishments are against a new translation of the Bible because it would reveal falsehoods about how it had been translated. Glen believes that he has a deeper understanding of Swedenborg's science of correspondences and is therefore better able to see how aspects of life on Earth may correspond to aspects of life on other spiritual planes, a vantage point that offers him insights into earthly and spiritual truths. Glen utilizes this knowledge to make sense of his place in the world. For example, Glen compares the corresponding earthly and spiritual realms, finding fault with and aligning the earthly realm with a lower state than the higher spiritual realm:

But I hate to see any man assume the dictator, it smells in my nose like the stinking carrier of the love of self & of the world. — There are no clergy as a distinct order in the celestial heavens — still, in this poor hole of nature they must be or no church can exist. I

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<sup>55</sup> James Glen to Undisclosed, April 11th (1810), Letter 4, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

humbly thank the divine mercy that I never wrote one word to you from a desire to dictate, nor to any man, being always by the mercy of the divine human willing to advance in into higher states well knowing that my low low states are in fact No: nothing.<sup>56</sup>

In this passage, Glen ruminates on the hierarchies that man creates on Earth. Glen judges the current church hierarchy negatively, using words such as “hate,” “dictator,” “smells,” “stinking,” “poor,” and “hole” to communicate his displeasure with current religious establishments and power structures while also setting up a contrast between these establishments and Swedenborg’s New Church. Glen’s argument here is that men have lost sight of the true hierarchy that exists in the universe as demonstrated by the ecclesiastical and governmental hierarchies that wrongly afford some men power over others. By maintaining his view of the world from within the framework of Swedenborg’s celestial, spiritual, and natural planes, Glen can adamantly condemn those who assume false positions of power and impose their will on others. This condemnation echoes the Enlightenment-driven examination of social contracts from the context of religious belief, as Glen internalizes Swedenborg’s doctrines in order to rationalize passing judgment on those who adhere to the manmade hierarchies of the terrestrial plane.

In discussion about the existence of Swedenborg’s spiritual and celestial worlds, Glen frequently wrote about life after death. Glen’s view on death and dying was relatively positive, as he expressed joy at the thought of discarding his material body and transporting his spiritual body to a higher plane of existence. Glen writes in Letter 2 that “[a]s to the death of the material body, it is what all men should expect; tho I well believe that in the divine mercy of God the salvator (sic) your time & mine in this poor hole of nature will now be very short. — May his

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<sup>56</sup> James Glen to Undisclosed, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

infinite mercy give us an easy & gentle transition, Death is not an extinction but a continuation of life, it is only a transit.”<sup>57</sup> From Glen’s point of view, after the death of the human body, the spirit physically travels from the terrestrial plane into the spiritual and celestial planes to exist infinitely. Glen’s version of life after death is clearly dependent on Swedenborg’s tripartite division of the universe as well as his system of correspondences. Glen also provides additional details about what he believes will occur in the spirit world after death. In a different discussion of the afterlife from Letter 1, Glen writes that “[o]ne of the most heartening ideas at death, is I think, that when by the mercy of the divine human we shall be able to chuse (sic) our own society, even in the world of spirits, this is one of the blessed laws. The divine mercy gives in all an easy & peaceful removal from this poor hole of a corruptible body into his own glorious world of correspondence.”<sup>58</sup> Glen’s comments here provide a fuller vision of his anticipated afterlife. While he identifies the physical body as corruptible, it is then inferred that any spirits traveling through correspondences from human bodies to higher planes are impervious to this corruption; after death, man’s spirit becomes impeccably virtuous. Glen also makes an interesting claim about the spirit’s ability to “choose” its own society, a choice that Glen labels a “blessed law.” Having lived during the era of revolutions, Glen’s desire for social reformation and freedom to shape society and organize the rules and regulations it must abide by is unsurprising. In his ideations on Swedenborg’s writings, Glen demonstrates the way Swedenborgian theology and Enlightenment ideals shape his worldview.

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<sup>57</sup> Glen, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

<sup>58</sup> Glen, Letter 1, Pacific School of Religion.

The second major overarching principle of Swedenborg's theology is his belief in the divinity contained within the written words of Scripture. Swedenborg argues that the actual words and letters written in the Bible are divine truth because, through correspondences, they hold a holy spiritual essence within them:

That the Lord when in the world spoke by correspondences, that is, when he spoke naturally he also spoke spiritually, can be seen from his parables, in each word of which there is a spiritual meaning... That in all these particulars there is a spiritual sense and therefore a Divine holiness, no one sees except he who knows that the Word has a spiritual sense and who knows what that sense is.<sup>59</sup>

Swedenborg expands on his explanation of the spiritual sense contained within each word of the Scripture, offering a further description of where words hold a divine essence and how this impacts man's relationship with God: "Yet the style of the Word is the Divine style itself, with which no other style can be compared, however sublime and excellent it may seem. The style of the Word is such that there is a holiness in every sentence and in every word, and even in some places in the very letters, and thereby the Word conjoins man with the Lord and opens heaven."<sup>60</sup> Swedenborg also explains how the words of the Bible came to hold this spiritual essence within them stating that "[i]n the sense of the letter the Word is in its fullness, its holiness, and its power, because the two prior or interior senses, which are called spiritual and celestial, exist simultaneously in the natural sense which is the sense of the letter."<sup>61</sup> Interestingly enough, this argument regarding the existence of correspondences and the holy, spiritual essence within the words of the Bible allows Swedenborg to contradict the centuries-old, Puritanical belief in an

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<sup>59</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. 1*, 325.

<sup>60</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. 1*, 317.

<sup>61</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. 1*, 338.

angry, vengeful God. Instead, Swedenborg argues that God only imputes good, and that by interpreting the Old and New Testaments with a knowledge of correspondences and the divine word, he can prove that God is not angry:

That the Lord imputes to man good and not evil, while the devil (meaning hell), imputes evil and not good to him, is a new thing in the church; and it is new for the reason that in the Word it is frequently said that God is angry, takes vengeance, hates, damns, punishes, casts into hell, and tempts, all of which pertain to evil, and therefore are evils. But it has been shown in the chapter on the sacred Scriptures that the sense of the letter of the Word is composed of such things as are called appearances and correspondences, in order that there may be a conjunction of the external church with its internals, thus of the world with heaven. It is also there shown that when such things in the Word are read these very appearances of truth, while they are passing from man to heaven, are changed into genuine truths, which are that the Lord is never angry, never takes vengeance, never hates, damns, punishes, casts into hell, or tempts, consequently does evil to man. This transmutation and changing in the spiritual world I have frequently observed.<sup>62</sup>

Divinity within words was not a concept first put forth by Swedenborg, but rather dates to beliefs stemming from Hermeticism, the study of the Jewish Kabbalah, and later, the merging of the two within Christian Cabala. In fact, one of the most powerful arguments of Christian Cabalist writers stemmed from a belief in the divinity of words and names. Christian scholar Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) was the first to explain how Hebrew letters might confirm Christianity as the true religion stating “[t]he argument is that the name ‘Jesus’ is the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable name Yahweh, the four-lettered (Hebrew)...name of God but with a medial S inserted. The meaning implied...is that the S in the name of Jesus makes audible the ineffable Name (composed only of vowel sounds) and signifies the Incarnation, the Word made flesh or made audible.”<sup>63</sup> Henry Cornelius Agrippa, a wandering German theologian,

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<sup>62</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion* Vol. 2, 841.

<sup>63</sup> Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, 23.

astrologer, and alchemist, also presents the name of Jesus as “now all-powerful, containing all the power of the Tetragrammaton, ‘as is confirmed by Hebrews and Cabalists skilled in the Divine Names’” in his book *De occulta philosophia*.<sup>64</sup> The attention given to Hebrew letters and their specific combinations clearly descends from a Kabbalistic belief in the Torah as an organism infused with God’s wisdom and divinity, but more importantly as containing God’s true name.

This belief in the divinity and wisdom of words apparent in Swedenborg’s works suggests a Kabbalah influence, as does the importance given to the shape and sound of each letter in terms of containing some greater wisdom.<sup>65</sup> In the following quote, Swedenborg explicitly links this Kabbalistic belief with Christianity:

It is in the mouth of all that the Word is from God, is divinely inspired, and therefore holy. But yet it has been unknown hitherto where within it its Divinity resides. For in the letter the Word appears like a common writing...But he who so thinks does not reflect that the Lord Jehovah, who is the God of heaven and earth, spoke the word by Moses and the Prophets...that the Lord the Saviour...spoke...many things from His own mouth, and the rest by the spirit of His mouth...Hence it is...that in His words there is spirit and life...<sup>66</sup>

It is apparent that Swedenborg not only views language as holy, but as containing wisdom as well. From this point of view, all aspects of language: words, letters, the shapes of letters, and sounds are infused with an organic quality. Swedenborg’s belief that it was God who originally

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<sup>64</sup> Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, 44.

<sup>65</sup> Cathy Gutierrez also comments on the influence of Kabbalism in Swedenborg’s religious system arguing that “Swedenborg shares two primary tenets with Kabbalism — a two-tiered system of reality in which the lower world was a poor reflection of the higher one and a concept of the Grand Man — a cosmic design that was then reflected in the making of humans...Although the precise origin of Swedenborg’s articulation of the Grand Man remains obscure for the moment, the entire strain of Western hermetic thinking flows into it and through him, into America.”

Quote from: Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato’s Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel M. Warren, *A Compendium of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* 2nd ed. (New York: The New Church Board of Publications, 1880), 95.

spoke all words, thereby gifting his divine spirit to language, gives credence to a belief in the power of letters. If all individual letters, shapes, and sounds are divinely infused, then it is logical that permutations of these letters may also contain certain power or reveal divine wisdom.

Therefore, Swedenborg's Kabbalistic framing of God's relationship to words and letters promotes belief in a holy essence contained within letters and words themselves.

Swedenborg's belief in the divinity of words is apparent within his religious doctrines. For example, in his discussion of the Ten Commandments, Swedenborg argues that the individual written words of the Decalogue spiritually contain all things:

In the spiritual and celestial senses the Decalogue contains universally all the precepts of doctrine and life, thus all things of faith and charity, because the Word in each and all things of the sense of the letter, or in general and in every part of it, conceals two interior senses, one called the spiritual sense and the other the celestial; also Divine truth in its light and the Divine good in its heat are in these two senses. And because the Word in general and in every part of it is so constituted, the ten commandments of the Decalogue must needs be explained according to these three senses, called the natural, the spiritual, and the celestial...Unless one knows the nature of the Word, he can have no idea that there is an infinity in every least particular of it, that is, that it contains things innumerable, which not even angels can exhaust...Such is the Word of the Lord in its least particulars, and such especially is the Decalogue; for this, because it teaches love to God and love towards the neighbor, is a brief summary of the whole Word.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, Swedenborg also takes a stance on good works, arguing that by analyzing the corresponding meaning of words, it is proven that good works are dependent on faith and charity:

Good works are not produced by charity alone, still less by faith alone, but by charity and faith together. This is because charity apart from faith is not charity, and faith apart from charity is not faith (as shown above, n. 356–361). Wherefore charity cannot exist by itself or faith by itself; and it cannot be said that charity in itself produces any good works, or faith in itself.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. 1*, 416–417.

<sup>68</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. 1*, 524.

Swedenborg goes on to justify his claim by examining the wisdom and meaning found in the words “faith” and “charity.” He explains that charity and faith together are analogous to the joining in marriage of husband and wife in order to produce offspring. Swedenborg writes that “[m]oreover in the Word “husband” and “father” signify in the spiritual sense the good of charity, and “wife” and “mother” the truth of faith. This again makes clear that neither charity alone nor faith alone can produce good works, as neither the husband alone nor the wife alone can produce offspring.”<sup>69</sup> By claiming the spiritual, infinite essence of words to uphold his analysis and translation of the Bible, Swedenborg is able to offer new interpretations of old Biblical lessons and passages.

There are two other doctrinal topics that Swedenborg addresses from within the framework of belief that words contain an organic, spiritual sense: baptism and the Millennium. Regarding baptism, Swedenborg argues that no-one truly understands what the word means but claims that the action of baptism refers to spiritual washing, not physical washing. The author writes that “[w]ithout a knowledge of the spiritual sense of the Word no one can know what the two sacraments, baptism and the Holy Supper, involve and effect...[t]he washing that is called baptism means spiritual washing, which is purification from evils, and thus regeneration.”<sup>70</sup> The second important doctrinal topic to note, driven by an interpretation of the spiritual essence of words within Christian Scripture, is Swedenborg’s stance on the Millennium, or the Second Coming of Christ. One of Swedenborg’s most famous claims was that the Millennium had begun

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<sup>69</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. I*, 525.

<sup>70</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 870.



in 1757. Swedenborg argued that the Second Coming of Christ did not refer to God's physical presence on Earth, but instead to the establishment of a New Church. Swedenborg writes that "[t]he Lord's coming is not his coming to destroy the visible heaven and the habitable earth, and to create a new heaven and a new earth, as many, from not understanding the spiritual sense of the Word, have hitherto supposed."<sup>71</sup> Swedenborg goes into greater detail regarding the Second Coming, and reiterates that God will not physically arrive or destroy anything, but instead will spiritually help to establish and build the New Church, as well as spread the new reinterpretation of Christianity that Swedenborg has espoused. Swedenborg writes:

That this second coming of the Lord does not take place for the purpose of destroying the visible heaven and habitable earth, has been shown in the preceding section. That it is not for the purpose of destroying anything, but to build up, consequently not to condemn but to save those who since his first coming have believed in him and also those who may hereafter believe in him, is evident from these words of the Lord... That the last judgment took place in the spiritual world in the year 1757 has been shown in *Last Judgment* (London, 1758); and further in *Continuation on the Last Judgment* (Amsterdam, 1763). To all this I can testify, because I saw it with my own eyes in a state of full wakefulness. The Lord's coming is for the purpose of forming a new heaven of those who have believed in him, and for the purpose of establishing a new church of those who shall hereafter believe in him, inasmuch as these two are the ends for which he came.<sup>72</sup>

Swedenborg's Millennial claim impacted those who had read or were familiar with his works by instilling the belief that they were currently experiencing the Millennial age and that the time to build and disseminate information about the New Church was now.

In returning to the letters of James Glen, it is apparent that he affirms Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible based on the spiritual sense of the word, suggesting that too few men truly read and understand the Scriptures because they are blinded by dogma:

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<sup>71</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 998.

<sup>72</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. II*, 1001-1002.

In reading the hebrew psalms, I see plainly that they can be translated in places, so as to correspond more exactly with the glorious truths of the new church. I entertain great respect for all the translations both ancient & modern; but translators have always been biased (sic) & influenced more or less by the doctrines of their own churches for Swedenborg truly says, every man reads the word in the light of the doctrine of his own church. — alas, how few read the word at this day!<sup>73</sup>

It also becomes clear that not only was the Millennium a topic of great importance to Glen, but belief in Swedenborg's Millennial dates greatly impacted Glen's worldview. Glen wholeheartedly believed he was living during the Second Coming, going so far as to date his own letters written in 1809 and 1810 as year 52, and year 53, to account for the fact that he considered 1757 as the start of a new era, the coming of Christ, or year zero.<sup>74</sup> Glen expresses gratefulness for his chance to exist during the Millennium, claiming in Letter 6 that he is now free: "[t]hanks to the blessed, we live in 1809 = 52 no longer under the infernal influence of old falses and evils, & all these old I totally abhor & abominate."<sup>75</sup> Glen also argued that because the Millennium had begun, it was apparent who was saved and who was not because humanity's imperfections were made clear. In a letter dated May 9th, 52, Glen writes:

Principle the human race at this day is dead, buried & putrid in the love of self & of the world — it is now in the 52 year after the last judgment. I believe there are none now in the world of spirits upon whom this judgment was accomplished so that everyone there in 15 months at the most after death begins to enter his internal state & is apparent, exactly according to his own inmost love — then surely on this earth men will now be seen either pro or con & not in a lukewarm state, externally draconic & internally for the N.C. [New Church]. In fact I believe such is the state of human nature at this day, that every man's

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<sup>73</sup> Glen, Letter 4, Pacific School of Religion.

<sup>74</sup> Glen provided calculations to support this Millennial start date in: James Glen to Undisclosed Recipient, Letter 5, Nov. 19, 45 (1802), Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies: "I have received (sic); M' Tulk in Calculations may be thus analized (sic); by the best Chronology Daniel prophesied before the Advent of the Lord, 543 9 fears and in Daniel 8th: 13: 14, 2500 Days of Years (or 2300 Years, accounting each Day for a year) were the Duration of Treading under Feet which 2300 Days of Years subtracting 543 the Number of Years Daniel prophesied before the Advent of the Lord comes exactly to 1757 the Year of the last Judgment."

<sup>75</sup> James Glen to Undisclosed, July 9, 52 (1809), Letter 6, Pacific School of Religion: Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

internal is soon seen in his words & actings, if he is a free man all happenings, or external separate from internal was done away at the last judgment.<sup>76</sup>

In this passage, Glen argues that the Millennium has unearthed men's true natures, allowing those who adhere to New Church doctrine to clearly see who is saved, and who is not. Glen also believes that the Second Coming has forced men to face themselves and choose what type of man they want to be writing "surely on this earth men will now be seen either pro or con & not in a lukewarm state...[i]n fact I believe such is the state of human nature at this day, that every man's internal is soon seen in his words & actings..."<sup>77</sup> In affirming this view of the world, Glen advocates for freedom from oppressive power structures, arguing that the Millennium has provided insight into who has been saved internally based on their external actions. Those who act from external freedom demonstrate internal freedom. In this example, Glen again finds within Swedenborg's religious system a strong synthesis of Enlightenment-driven beliefs and Christian doctrine and utilizes both to shape his unique worldview.

In addition to clarifying the state of mankind, Glen also analyzes natural and social events as if the Millennial age had already begun. For example, Glen sees natural disasters as the workings of the Millennium, arguing that these events are proof of this age because they have, by design, successfully removed evil and non-believers from Earth. In his second letter, Glen writes "[i]t would appear — that hurricanes, desolating wars, pestilences & other great & consummating, vastating (sic), desolating evils in nature are efficient in producing the dejection of infernal spirits into their own hells & this removing them from this world of nature."<sup>78</sup> Later in

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<sup>76</sup> Glen, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

<sup>77</sup> Glen, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

<sup>78</sup> Glen, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

the letter Glen expands on his claims regarding the repercussions of the Millennium, anticipating a negative impact on Europe as well as men face judgment in the form of war and disease. Glen states:

I believe that before the N.C. [New Church] finds reception in Europe, Europe will be desolated by the desolations of wars, pestilences &c & Babylon & the Dragon trampled underfoot, that in the loves of self & the world will by violence be crushed. — Otherwise it appears to me that in 40 or 50 years of successive deterioration an infernal [incoherent word] Will invade the christian world. 52 years after the divine [incoherent word] has done all he possibly can do to save mankind, & yet all this more & more subcalcated (sic) every day, Where must this end??<sup>79</sup>

By interpreting natural and social disasters as confirmation of Swedenborg's claims regarding the start date and the unfolding of the Millennium, Glen solidifies his belief in Swedenborg's translation of the Christian Bible. Writing in 1809, the disasters Glen references would presumably include the violent French and Haitian revolutions. In light of these revolutions, Glen chose to see evidence that Swedenborg's Millennial claims were coming to fruition within the Enlightenment-inspired revolutionary impulses of the day. Lastly, there is a sense of desperation in Glen's letters, expressed by his adamant argument for New Church growth in order to save Earth and humankind. Glen's exasperated "[w]here must this end??" strongly implies the solution must be the spread, reception, and acceptance of Swedenborg's New Church.

Glen truly believed in an existing life force within every word of the Bible. Consider this quote in which he acknowledges that not even higher celestial beings will ever truly understand the awe-inspiring nature of the divine word: "[t]o be taught out of the word is to be taught by the

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<sup>79</sup> Glen, Letter 2, Pacific School of Religion.

Lord himself, all states of...[t]he word, & a man can best describe his own state by quoting those places in the whence he draws...hope, confidence, & patience. The highest angel in highest heaven is only beginning to receive the light and heat contained in the infinite divine word, and will only be beginning forever.”<sup>80</sup> In this passage, Glen attempts to capture the depth and divine nature of the words of the Bible by describing the impossibility of the very task he undertakes. According to Glen, even beings in higher realms (in this example the “highest angel in highest heaven”) are unable to understand the nature of the divine word, forever just beginning to understand the depth and infinite nature of God’s language.

Glen’s belief and adherence to Swedenborg’s reinterpretation the Old and New Testaments impacts his interpretation of other subject areas as well. For example, in Letter 4, Glen makes an argument about translation, claiming that the Hebrew of the Old Testament needs to be better translated in order to correspond more closely to Swedenborg’s religious doctrines. However, he acknowledges the difficulty inherent to translating words that are essentially alive with power. Glen writes:

In reading the hebrew psalms, I see plainly that they can be translated in places, so as to correspond more exactly with the glorious truths of the new church...however an exact translation of the hebrew word is totally impossible, the identical force, power & import of the individual words can only be found, in within themselves, & even this in a low degree by the most learned in this poor low life of nature. — Many worthy & learned men in England, Holland & Germany &c (sic) have within these 40 years past, given new translations of parts of the word, every one of them deserves thanks & applause, but yet, they all differ in some things, & yet they are all very right, they translate each in his own light, just as every man reads in his own light.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Glen, Letter 3, Pacific School of Religion.

<sup>81</sup> Glen, Letter 4, Pacific School of Religion.

In giving credence to the new, variable translations of Christian Scripture based on Swedenborg's science of correspondences, Glen affirms one's ability to read the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg's interpretive key and come to divine truths for himself or herself, again promoting the Enlightenment-driven belief in the power of personal examination to discover definitive truths.

In addition, Glen also advocates for Swedenborg's stance on the Holy Trinity. Swedenborg himself rejects the material interpretation of the Holy Trinity as three separate beings, arguing instead that the Holy Trinity has been misinterpreted and in truth refers to three essentials within God that correspond to three essentials within man: "These three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are the three essentials of the one God, which make one, like the soul, the body, and operation in man. At this day human reason is bound, as regards the Divine Trinity, like a man bound with manacles and fetters in prison..."<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, Swedenborg makes a logic-based argument against the modern interpretation of the Holy Trinity, arguing that belief in three gods not only goes against mathematic principles, but blasphemously advocates for polytheism:

I gather that you have conceived and cherish an idea of the triune God that is wholly natural, sensual, and even material, and that there inevitably follows from it the idea of three gods...Furthermore, you admit that God is one, in that you make the essence of these three persons one and indivisible; while yet you do not allow anyone to say that this one God is one person, but he must say that there are three persons and this you do lest the idea of three gods, such as you entertain, should be lost; also you ascribe to each person a property different from those of the others. In all this do you not divide your Divine essence? And this being so, how can you say and also think that God is one? I could excuse you if you had said that the Divine is one. How can anyone on hearing that 'The Father is God, the son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and singly each person is

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<sup>82</sup> Warren, *A Compendium*, 86.

God,' possibly think of God as one? Is it not a contradiction, to which assent is utterly impossible?<sup>83</sup>

Glen's stance regarding the Holy Trinity assimilates Swedenborg's point of view and utilizes this opinion to form a harsh judgment of modern translations of the Bible. Glen argues that a misunderstanding of the divine meaning within the words of Scripture led to a false interpretation of the Holy Trinity. He then urges receivers of Swedenborg's doctrines to persevere in their Protestant faith and ability to discover scriptural truths for themselves. In Letter 4 Glen writes:

...after the infernal doctrine of three persons was established in christendom & this vulgate has more or less influenced every translation since that time. — These remarks do not at all detract from the infinite importance of every translation, as these all open a broad & spacious way to heaven for every simple good soul. — My meaning only is that the word contains such infinite treasures of wisdom & love as the highest celestial angels can never comprehend in all eternity...And if the word & revelations of Swedenborg are so abominated at this day, the recipients of all degrees, may rejoice & escult (sic), while the Divine Human in his holy proceeding gives strength to persevere. For my own part, I am only beginning, beginning, beginning, to see (not perceive) & receive their infinite & eternal contents.<sup>84</sup>

Glen's diction indicates his disappointment with the perceived mistranslation. Yet again, he finds the fault lies with man's inability to truly comprehend the divine content and spiritual depth contained in each scriptural word, even though he acknowledges there is value to retranslating the Bible. By subscribing to Swedenborg's spiritual sense of the word, Glen structures his worldview on specific beliefs regarding man's relationship to divine knowledge, affirms his membership with other like-minded Swedenborgians, and advocates for their perseverance in the face of persecution. While Glen remains dependent on Swedenborg's interpretive key for access

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<sup>83</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Vol. 1*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Glen, Letter 4, Pacific School of Religion.

to this divine knowledge, in emphasizing his own ability to “see” not simply “perceive” the divine depth of meaning contained in scriptural texts, Glen also affirms the Enlightenment-driven belief in man’s ability to come to informed conclusions based on investigation and reason, and therefore upsets and redefines former sources of authority.

The infusion of Swedenborgian doctrine that James Glen left on the shores of the newly founded United States of America was small, but nevertheless profound. A faithful believer in Swedenborg and his theology, Glen described the depth of his view of Swedenborg as a true Christ-like figure:

You are pleased to inform that among other books you have the true christian religion, this was the last Swedenborg himself printed, it was finished before 13 July 1771= 14 he died the 29th March following this work I consider as the most admirable & important of all his books, it is the brain & spinal marrow the whole, the rest complete the human form. Astonishing, that a man of 83 years of age should be able to write so, and save strength to correct the press. This has always been to me an internal evidence that Swedenborg was that man chosen as the medium of the full and complete advent of God for salvation.<sup>85</sup>

Glen identifies Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion* as the capstone of his theology, heaping praise on the work and the writer and justifying his own belief in Swedenborg. In doing so, Glen validates Swedenborg’s credibility as a medium chosen by God for the salvation of humanity. In responding to Swedenborg’s world of correspondences and spiritual sense of the word, Glen examined doctrinal issues inherent to Christian theology, such as the Holy Trinity, Millennium, freewill, and the nature of heaven and hell. While advocating for Swedenborg’s religious system, Glen also revealed the way this religious system promoted an inherent synthesis of Enlightenment thought and Christian theology that also provides insight into the specific

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<sup>85</sup> Glen, Letter 7, Pacific School of Religion.



Swedenborgian doctrinal content Americans responded to in the period of the Early American Republic. In the following chapter, we leave James Glen to examine the trail of publications that were printed and disseminated in American port cities. Examining these publications and the Early American thinkers that wrote about them reveal that many of the same topics which both exalted and vexed James Glen were found worthy of examination by others as well.

## CHAPTER 2

### NOT JUST ANOTHER MYSTIC

The first public proclamation of Swedenborg's doctrines was given during an important transitional phase in American history. The American Revolutionary War had officially ended only the year before in 1783, the bloody French Revolution would begin in five short years, and the move from colonies with colonists to a sovereign nation with citizens was marked by a number of pertinent developments in relation to the shaping of a uniquely American political, social, and religious culture. The First Continental Congress arranged their first formal meeting a decade earlier in 1774 and began to set the tone for the push for independence. Continental Congress modeled a debate culture that impacted politics and the shape of government at the federal and state level while reverberating into social and religious culture during the Revolutionary and Early American Republic period as well. In 1784, the United States of America was coming to terms with what it meant to be a sovereign nation and formalizing what it meant to be a country truly open to all religious creeds.

As James H. Hutson notes in *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries*, the effervescence of religiosity existing prior to and leading into the years of the Early American Republic (roughly 1789-1829) widely impacted American life. Recounting how, at the first Continental Congress, a disagreement arose over beginning proceedings with a prayer due to the wide variety of religious beliefs represented by members of the First Continental Congress, Hutson argues that “[t]his episode reveals that by 1774 pluralism had become a distinguishing feature of American religion and that Congress would embrace religion at its earliest

opportunity.”<sup>86</sup> In 1784, a wide variety of religions were indeed represented by these newly identified American citizens. Puritans, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Quakers existed alongside Millennial-minded evangelical religions arising out of the First Great Awakening, such as Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Minorities of Jewish and Catholic believers along with Deists were also part of the religious milieu in the Early American Republic. Additionally, as explored in Susan Juster’s *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution*, religious prophets and seers were also an influential aspect of religious culture during this period. Juster writes that prophets, seers, and diviners were not unusual in the Millennial culture of Early America. In fact, Juster notes that “[t]he prophets of the 1790s and early 1800s had [great] visibility...The creation of a vigorous public sphere of coffeehouses, newspapers, corresponding societies...transformed...national culture in the 1790s...The general diffusion of millennial expectation reached further into the reading public during the “age of revolution...”<sup>87</sup> It is from within this foment of religiosity in America that Swedenborg’s revelations found both a receptive and a critical audience.

So, why did Swedenborg receive attention during a period when blossoming religious pluralism and public prophecy were a common feature of Early American culture? According to Leigh Eric Schmidt, in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*, Swedenborg’s popularity in early and mid-nineteenth century America can be explained primarily based on his genteel background and connection with the supernatural. Schmidt argues that Swedenborg’s distinguished family name and known social standing provided his

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<sup>86</sup> James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 95.

<sup>87</sup> Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 7-8.

theological claims greater credibility than that assigned to the average prophet: “Swedenborg proved hard to confine...because of certain social advantages. An aristocratic cosmopolitan, he carried the respected standing of a natural philosopher, and these badges of genteel credibility helped his experimental reports of angelic conversations gain a hearing that they would have otherwise been denied.”<sup>88</sup> Schmidt also argues that it was the supernaturalism of Swedenborg’s theology which primarily attracted proponents in Early America: “Whatever else gained him his considerable readership...the leading impetus was surely the mystic’s numerous points of connection with popular forms of supernaturalism.”<sup>89</sup> Schmidt’s claims are problematic, however, primarily because they assume that without a purported high-class social reputation, or supernatural bent, Swedenborg’s theology would have been denied a widespread social reception. As stated above, though, supernaturalism was a commonplace aspect of religious culture that simultaneously confirms and negates Schmidt’s rationale for Swedenborg’s popular reception in America. While the supernaturalism of Swedenborg’s theology may have found a receptive audience in an American culture already primed for supernatural claims, the supernatural element of Swedenborg’s writings would certainly not have been particularly conspicuous in a culture seemingly steeped in it. As we will examine as well, there is evidence to the contrary that suggests Swedenborgian proponents actively downplayed the supernaturalism of Swedenborg’s doctrines in an effort to gain ecclesiastical acceptance. Likewise, while Swedenborg’s high-class social reputation was often highlighted by his devotees who frequently

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<sup>88</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 204.

<sup>89</sup> Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 206.

referred to him as Baron Swedenborg in advertisements, it is problematic to claim that Swedenborg's aristocratic background awarded him special considerations since there is evidence that American audiences were drawn to a wide variety of prophets and seers from all strata of society. Considering these facts, Schmidt's oversimplification of Swedenborg's popularity and reception in the Early American period must be reexamined.

In a closer inspection of the American response to Swedenborg, I have found a more comprehensive rationale for Swedenborg's reception and credibility as demonstrated within primary documents from the Early American period. These responses indicate that American readers of Swedenborg engaged deeply with his theology and took his writings seriously enough to defend or deny his religious claims for the following reasons, all four of which I will elaborate upon:<sup>90</sup>

1. Swedenborg's theology aligns closely with Christian Scripture.
2. Swedenborg himself was not alive and actively preaching or gaining followers. Instead, genuine Christian ministers were accepting and teaching his doctrines.
3. In contrast to the judging, angry God of Calvinism, and the revolutionary, Millennial strand of thinking which foretold a gloomy end to the world, Swedenborg's doctrines were overwhelmingly positive and appealed to a war-weary and divided citizenship.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> In *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), Sydney E. Ahlstrom notes seven aspects of Swedenborg's religious writings that he argues contributed to their widespread appropriation, yet he does not examine either in great detail: 1. Optimism, 2. Comprehensiveness, 3. Made the Universe religiously intelligible, 4. Dealt with every historical doctrinal issue, 5. Provided freedom from ancient dogmas, 6. Asserted the freedom of Man, 7. Maintained focus on Bible for doctrinal interpretations (483-484).

<sup>91</sup> Susan Juster explores this gloomy millennial strand of thinking in her book *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), writing: "Prophets spoke largely in the tragic mode...Wherever they looked, they saw a bloody cycle of sin and retribution, endlessly repeated until God intervened to end time altogether. Millenarian visions offered a dystopic reading of the truly world-shaking events of the 1780s and 1790s" (4).

4. Swedenborg utilized his education and scientific background to couch his religious claims in a rationalism that appealed to Enlightenment-minded thinkers.<sup>92</sup>

Although Swedenborg was a well-known name in nineteenth-century America, historical scholarship tends to pluck the foray of Swedenborgian theology away from the mainframe of American religious beliefs by labeling Swedenborg and the subsequent rise of the New Church in America as a religious fringe movement existing outside of mainstream Christian American religions. The distinction between mainstream religion and fringe religion has admittedly softened in the past few decades with academic studies such as Ann Taves' *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, Jon Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, and Wouter Hanegraaff's *Esotericism and the Academy*. All of these studies explicitly or implicitly promote inclusivity and wider definitions of "religion" within academia, though greater efforts could be made to loosen the doctrinal knots tied around the canon of American religious studies.<sup>93</sup> In particular, I aim to advocate for a greater inclusion of Swedenborgians within this canon. This chapter will first argue that the claims made by Leigh Eric Schmidt regarding Swedenborg's social popularity are shortsighted. I will then offer a more thorough exploration of Swedenborg's reception in America during the period of the Early American Republic. The second part of this chapter will examine how the

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<sup>92</sup> In *Hearing Things*, Leigh Eric Schmidt does give nod to Swedenborg's scientific background as an attraction to early American readers, yet Schmidt argues that this scientific alignment was primarily utilized by followers to promote Swedenborg's reputation, rather than arguing (as I do) that Early Americans were attracted to the scientific nature of Swedenborg's theology. Schmidt writes: "A scion of the Enlightenment and the right social circles, he was hard to dismiss as a vulgar enthusiast...[b]ecause Swedenborg had first been a student of astronomy and anatomy, a Cartesian rationalist...his admirers were able to accrue greater credit for him as a visionary" (204).

<sup>93</sup> See: Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 12, Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990): 4, Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 3.

Enlightenment rationalism found in Swedenborg's writings attracted proponents and was utilized by New Church members to promote, defend, and understand Swedenborg's religious doctrines. In doing so, this chapter provides an analysis of what attracted Early Americans to Swedenborg and his religious writings, explores how Early Americans argued about doctrinal distinctions, and provides a unique example of how a small religious organization strengthened its doctrinal stance by tightly aligning its religious beliefs with Enlightenment-era reason and rationalism.

*Part I: Early American Interest in Swedenborg*

In considering the reasons why Early Americans were attracted to Swedenborg's writings, an obvious explanation lies in how closely Swedenborg's theology aligned with Christian Scripture. As the son of Jesper Swedenborg, who was both a Theology professor at Uppsala University and Bishop of Skara, Emanuel Swedenborg was exposed to Christian philosophy from a young age and raised a Lutheran in the Church of Sweden. As discussed in the previous chapter, Swedenborg's religious claims were closely tethered to Christian Scripture. This fact was not lost on Early American readers of Swedenborg, who either closely compared Swedenborg's doctrines to the Bible in order to disdainfully disprove the validity of his claims, or marshaled the fact that Swedenborg's doctrines did align with the Bible in order to prove that his writings must actually be divine revelation and theological truth.

For example, Early American advertisements promoted Swedenborg's works not only by claiming they would reveal divine secrets, but also by integrating them with Christian Scripture. In the following advertisement for a published booklet which contained a summary of Swedenborg's major theological claims, the major selling point is how Swedenborg's claims were already predicted in the Bible: "Just Published...A Summary View of the Heavenly

Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church. Which was foretold by the Lord in Daniel, chap. vii. 13, 14, and in the Apocalypse, chap. xxii. 1, 2.”<sup>94</sup> This advertisement also lists Biblical topics covered in Swedenborg’s “Summary View” in order to appeal to a wider audience: “Of the Lord as Creator...Of the Divine Trinity...Of the Ten Commandments...Of Faith...”<sup>95</sup> In addition, New Church converts frequently cited Swedenborg’s close alignment with Christian Scripture as a defense against disbelievers or naysayers. In a 1789 edition of *The Freeman’s Journal*, a weekly periodical published in Philadelphia from 1781-1791 by early Swedenborgian convert Francis Bailey, this alignment with the Bible is cited as a reason why readers of Swedenborg should be convinced of the validity of his claims:

Some pious readers have at first been startled at those Relations [sic, Revelations], and considered them the production of a disordered imagination; but when they had reflected on the revelations made to the Prophets in the Old Testament, and those to the Disciples and Apostles in the New; and that mankind, at this day, are as much the objects of the Almighty’s care as at any former period...they have received them with as full conviction of their reality and truth as any of the doctrinal parts.<sup>96</sup>

In the same edition of *The Freeman’s Journal*, Bailey had also received letters from his readers countering an attack on Swedenborg’s religious writings published in *The Freeman’s Journal* the previous week by a writer who went by the alias Philanthropos. In a rebuttal letter written by “A Lover of Truth,” the author vilifies Philanthropos for making claims without closely studying Swedenborg’s work, arguing that Philanthropos must be:

[O]ne of those sticklers for opinion — those blind devotees to a system — who have more than once set the Christian world in a blaze. That such men, who willfully shut out the light, should be opposed to the doctrines of Swedenborg, is not surprising...[b]eing

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<sup>94</sup> “Just Published,” *The Freeman’s Journal* vii, cccxxx (Aug 1787): 4, America’s Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>95</sup> “Just Published,” 4.

<sup>96</sup> Francis Bailey, “True Christian Religion,” *The Freeman’s Journal* ix, cdxix (29 April 1789): 1, America’s Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.



fully convinced of the truth of the doctrine of Swedenborg, and of their being strictly conformable to scripture, I wish, if possible, to prevent further misrepresentations of them by those who go about to deceive.<sup>97</sup>

More than a decade later, the connection between Swedenborg's theological writings and the Christian Bible is clear, as Swedenborgians faced accusations of elevating Swedenborg's doctrines to the status of Christian Scripture and therefore placing both on equal divine footing. In this example, New Church Reverend John Hargrove faced published criticism in the context of a larger cultural debate: "You deny that the writings of E. Swedenborg are by your society received into the canons of the holy scriptures," Hargrove's critic writes, "[b]ut, sir, this is an *evasion*, not a *denial* of my charge: I do not say that you have incorporated those writings into the bible- but that you hold them, as to their truth, and authority, on an equal footing therewith. Dare you deny this fact?"<sup>98</sup> While this letter demonstrates an instance in which Swedenborg's close theological connection with Christianity resulted in religious criticism, it also speaks to the fact that this connection captured readers' attention and forced them to take pause in deciding whether or not Swedenborg's theology was worthy of consideration, inadvertently legitimizing Swedenborg's religious presence during this time period.

These examples demonstrate how supporters of Swedenborg's doctrines advocated, defended, and supported Swedenborg's religious system from the stance of alignment to Christian Scripture, finding enough commonality with Christian Scripture within his body of work to abandon their former Protestant beliefs and convert to New Church theology. On the other hand, the fact that New Church members were facing opposition from the public suggests

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<sup>97</sup> A Lover of Truth, "Philadelphia, April 24, 1789," 1.

<sup>98</sup> John Burk, *The War Dance No War Whoop. No. II* (Baltimore, 1804): 21, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

there were individuals who felt Swedenborg's claims were religiously substantive enough to threaten their own belief system and required a debilitating and delegitimizing attack. The close relationship between Swedenborg's doctrines and Christian doctrines leads us to the second reason Swedenborg's writings gained credibility in the Early American period, which is that genuine Christian ministers were accepting and teaching his doctrines.

As stated earlier, prophets and seers were a commonplace aspect of religious culture in the Early American period. The abundance of religious prophets was often detrimental to the validity of individuals who professed to seeing spirits, hearing God, and having access to esoteric wisdom to make predictions about the present and future state of humanity. Examples of religious Millennial prophets during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries include farmer Noah White, Richard Brothers, Jemima Wilkinson, and Joanna Southcott.<sup>99</sup> Susan Juster expands on the character of these prophets in the Early American Republic:

There were hundreds, possibly thousands, of Noah Whites in Britain and North America in the late eighteenth century...Some of these prophets and prophetesses are familiar figures...Richard Brothers, the self-declared "Nephew of Christ" whose antics landed him in a private asylum for over a decade in the 1790s;...Joanna Southcott, the matriarch of British millenarianism whose "mystical pregnancy" in 1814 captivated the London press; Jemima Wilkinson, the American Quaker who abandoned her sect and her female identity to preach as the "Publick Universal Friend" during the revolutionary war...Most [prophets] were as earnest and likeable as Noah White, but a few were simply cranks, imposters who exploited the immense interest in millenarianism in the 1790s and early 1800s for personal gain...At the most basic level, anyone could be a prophet, for the signs God provided were everywhere...Nature provided many clues, but so too did less transparent fields of study such as astrology, mathematics, and history. At its most arcane, prophetic calculations involved knowledge of dead languages and of obscure texts...Even at its most sophisticated, however, true prophecy required a leap of faith...The elusive element that transformed dry scholastic calculation into inspired prediction carried many prophets out of the realm of the natural world and into the

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<sup>99</sup> Juster, *Doomsayers*, 3.

supernatural one, where...they heard voices, had strange dreams, fell into trances, were guided by angels to celestial realms, and saw ghostly apparitions.<sup>100</sup>

Based on Juster's study, it is apparent that the sources of Swedenborg's professed wisdom (dreams, voices, and visits to celestial realms) were like those of other prophets in this period. However, I argue that because Swedenborg was already deceased by the point at which his writings were gaining traction with an American audience, the prophet, in essence, was removed from his predictions. This allowed his readers a buffer between Swedenborg the human seer and Swedenborg's divine wisdom, thereby strengthening the credibility of his claims. For this wisdom to be socially accepted, however, Swedenborg's theology needed a mouthpiece — a source of authority to espouse and proclaim Swedenborg's visions as doctrinal truth — which was found in the trend of genuine Christian ministers renouncing their positions to become preachers of the New Church. Examples of renunciation include Adam Fonerden and John Hargrove, who left their posts as Methodist ministers in Baltimore to become New Church ministers in 1798. Their jointly written farewell letter to Methodism dated June 5th, 1798 was published in the periodical *The Aurora* and read:

As a very important change has taken place in our sentiments, respecting an article of the christian religion...we have...come to this conclusion: That it is best for us peaceably and quietly to withdraw ourselves, and resign our membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church...we trust none of you can find just cause to suspect our sincerity...We do not wish to enter into any controversy with any person or persons upon earth...yet we conceive it may be but consistent with our present duty, calmly and meekly to mention, that the leading article in which *we* differ from *you*, is, the *doctrine of the Trinity*...We have not adopted this belief in a hasty precipitate manner, not yet because we have found it in certain *human writings*; but because we find it to be a doctrine contained in the word

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<sup>100</sup> Juster, *Doomsayers*, 3-4.

of GOD, from the whole of which we learn, that God is *one in essence* and in *person* (emphasis in original).<sup>101</sup>

As is evident in this passage, Fonerden and Hargrove aimed for their transition from Methodism to the New Church to be as amiable as possible. They also pointed out the doctrinal differences between their previous and newfound beliefs, foreshadowing decades of arguments to come between Methodists and Swedenborgians regarding the correct Biblical interpretation of the Holy Trinity. While Methodist theology dictates belief in a one-substance triune God containing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Swedenborgian interpretation of the Holy Trinity argues that Jesus Christ is the one God. Additionally, according to Swedenborg, any references to a Trinity in the Bible should be interpreted through his science of correspondences and actually indicates that God contains within him three essential principles of divine love, divine wisdom, and divine proceeding powers, which correspond to man's soul, body, and mental operation.

Fonerden and Hargrove were not the only ministers leaving their stations in congregational churches to join the New Church. Additional converts include Rev. James Wilmer Jones, an Episcopal clergyman who preached New Church sermons in Baltimore in 1792; Dr. Cummings, a Baptist clergyman who began spreading New Church doctrines to people in Bath, Maine in 1792;<sup>102</sup> Elias Hicks, a Quaker preacher was noted preaching New Church doctrines in Philadelphia in 1817; and Rev. Manning B. Roche, another Episcopalian who left his church in 1822 for the New Church as well.<sup>103</sup> Rev. Manning captures the internal struggles

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<sup>101</sup> Adam Fonerden and John Hargrove, "A Valedictory Address to the people called Methodists," *The Aurora*, Vol. I (London: The Aurora Press, 1799), 6-8.

<sup>102</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 165-166.

<sup>103</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 80-81.

he faced in making his decision to leave: “Painful indeed it is for me thus to speak...painful not to leave a corrupt church, but to leave you...Never did I come to make a greater sacrifice...But it is unavoidable. I cannot preach contrary to my conscience.”<sup>104</sup> Block goes on to note that “[t]his must have been the state of mind of many clergymen of other denominations who gave up assured incomes and social position for the bleakly uncertain prospects of the struggling little new sect.”<sup>105</sup> Swedenborg’s doctrines assuredly gained credibility at the hands and mouths of ministers who already had reliable reputations as clergymen from past sermons and congregations. There is a strong correlation between the timing of Swedenborg’s death and the time period and manner in which his religious doctrines gained an audience in the newly established American Republic. Whether the response from this audience was positive or not, that Swedenborg’s writings were taken seriously enough to warrant a response demonstrate a serious consideration of Swedenborg’s theology.

The third reason Swedenborg’s writings are found to have generated interest in Early America is that, contrary to the judging, angry God of Calvinism and the Millennial doomsayers of the era, Swedenborg’s doctrines were overwhelmingly positive and appealed to a war-weary and divided citizenship.<sup>106</sup> Calvinist theology, which wielded doctrinal influence over Puritanism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism, offered an angry, all-knowing, omnipotent

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<sup>104</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 80.

<sup>105</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 80.

<sup>106</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt contrasts Swedenborgians to Calvinist theology in his book *Hearing Things*, writing “Swedenborg was also well tailored for the American religious milieu in many of his liberal doctrinal emphases, which were easy to make part of a mounting anti-Calvinist polemic. (In one of his visions, Swedenborg encountered Calvin in the spirit world, and it turned out the reformer had been spending altogether too much time in an otherworldly brothel). On original sin, predestination, and the damnation of infants, Swedenborg adopted sharply anti-Calvinist views, in keeping with wider Enlightenment currents” (205).

God who ruled over the innately depraved and sentenced all to a life of sin and uncertainty regarding whom among them were predestined as the Elect to be saved. Calvinist theology and Puritan thought had a demonstrative influence upon the religious mindset of the American colonies.<sup>107</sup> In addition to the psychological impacts of Calvinism, Early Americans also faced a dooming Millennial culture which promulgated the belief that the Messiah's return to save true believers would come in conjunction with total destruction of the world. Susan Juster expands on this negativist mindset which existed among prophets and seers as well: "Prophets spoke largely in the tragic mode, though not without traces of the comic and the ironic. Wherever they looked, they saw a bloody cycle of sin and retribution, endlessly repeated until God intervened to end time altogether. Millenarian visions offered a dystopic reading of the truly world-shaking events of the 1780s and 1790s."<sup>108</sup>

In contrast to the heavy judgment of Calvinism and Millennial doomsayers, Swedenborg's central tenets presented God's relationship to man as loving and positive. They promoted a beautiful view of mankind's present and future state in the world, which would have been understandably attractive to an American audience during this time period. For example, instead of damnation and hellfire, Swedenborg claimed that the Millennium had already occurred and that the destruction written about in the Bible was in fact a symbolic reference to the slow

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<sup>107</sup> See: Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939); Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>108</sup> Juster, *Doomsayers*, 4.

decay of the old Church in order to make way for the rise of the Swedenborgian New Church. This positive reframing and reinterpretation of religious doctrines is explicitly mentioned in contemporary discourse on the writings of Swedenborg. For example, in an article titled “Anecdotes of Swedenborg,” Nicholas Collin, a Rector of the Swedish Church in Philadelphia, produces a three-part assessment of Swedenborg’s character, moral virtues, and religious claims. Collin summarizes that “[s]ome of Swedenborg’s doctrines on the happiness of a future state are very pleasing to cultivated minds: — His good sense and philanthropy in peopling heaven with all the good among the human race was the more estimable, because those generous sentiments were not professed by many Christian theologians in his time.”<sup>109</sup> Those who closely read Swedenborg felt this positivity surround their own newfound religious enthusiasms as well. The following passage demonstrates Swedenborg’s religious sentiment in a letter from New Church members in Baltimore to the newly elected President George Washington:

We feel ourselves among the number of those who have occasion to rejoice, that the Word literally is spiritually fulfilling; that a new and glorious dispensation, or fresh manifestation of divine love, hath commenced in our land; when, as there is but One Lord, so his name is becoming one throughout the earth; and that the powers of light, or truth and righteousness, are in an eminent degree, universally prevailing, and even triumphing over darkness; when all corruptions in church and state shall be corrected to the gospel state of divine love and wisdom, and the love of God and man be the only ground of action throughout christendom.<sup>110</sup>

In this letter, words such as “rejoice,” “fulfilling,” “new,” “glorious,” “fresh,” “love,” “light,” “truth,” “righteousness,” “triumphing,” and “divine,” carry the positive connotation of the new

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<sup>109</sup> Nicholas Collin, “Anecdotes of Swedenborg,” *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* (18 August 1801): 1, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, iw.newsbank.com.

<sup>110</sup> “An Address to George Washington,” *The Aurora*, Vol. I (London: The Aurora Press, 1799), 52-53.

and promising future infused within Swedenborg's writings and internalized by readers of his works.

This positive sentiment is profusely expressed in New Church sermons as well. For example, in an 1802 sermon preached to President Thomas Jefferson and members of Congress in Washington, New Church pastor John Hargrove states:

We constantly maintain, that the essence of all true religion is Love. Love to our *Saviour God*, supremely, and *love* to all mankind, from a pure heart, fervently — that this love to God is best manifested by our *obedience* to what we believe to be his divine laws; and the love of our neighbor, by “*doing unto every man as we would they should do unto us*,” from a principle of pure philanthropy, and, that nothing less than the constant exercise of these acts or graces, can constitute the truly religious and virtuous man...every man's good or evil actions, and affections, will be imputed unto him, by a *good* and *just* God (emphasis in original).<sup>111</sup>

Additionally, in an 1804 sermon, Rev. Hargrove again preached to Thomas Jefferson's administration in the Capitol in Washington. In this sermon Hargrove states:

The numerous and valuable improvements in all the arts and sciences, which have so rapidly succeeded each other during the last half century, contribute to convince the men of the Lord's New Church that a *new order of things* has taken place in the spiritual world and is thence daily manifesting its happy effects in the natural world...[i]t is likewise a pleasing and sure presage of increasing knowledge and liberality, that on all such occasions, it is seldom enquired whether these improvements were first suggested by a Whig or a Tory, a Jew or a gentile...the bloody and infernal sword of religious intolerance and persecution, are now...sheathed, through the mild, but extensive climates of these United States (emphasis in original).<sup>112</sup>

The basic sentiments from Hargrove's sermons are not only ones of happiness, love, and goodwill, but are focused solely on the positive developments occurring in the world: the

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<sup>111</sup> John Hargrove, *The Substance of a Sermon, on the Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church; Delivered the 26th of December, 1802 before the President of the United States and several Members of Congress*, 1802 (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1803): 12, 19, Early American Imprints, iw.newsbank.com.

<sup>112</sup> John Hargrove, “A Sermon, on the Second Coming of Christ, by John Hargrove,” (25 December 1804) *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*, Vol. 2. Ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1573.



advancement of art and science, the growth of religious tolerance, and the spread of social equality. With the United States still navigating reverberations from the American Revolution, and the dust barely settled from the end of the bloody French Revolution in 1799, the positive point of view Hargrove takes is decidedly impressive in its ability to magnify social, cultural, and religious progress while disregarding the negative — violence, death, prejudice — and the fear-based, often conspiratorial focus of Early Americans. The positivity demonstrated in Swedenborg's writings, and identified by readers of his works, evidently contributed to the reception of his religious doctrines.

The fourth reason that demonstrates why Swedenborg and his writings held enough credibility to warrant a reaction from Early American readers is related to the way in which he constructed his assertions. This reason also relates more broadly to the argument of the rest of this chapter, which is that Swedenborg utilized his education and scientific background to couch his religious claims in a rationalism that appealed to Enlightenment-influenced liberal thinkers. While other scholars have identified a synthesis of Enlightenment science and Christian Scripture in Swedenborg's writings, I argue that this synthesis was not only an impetus for interest in Swedenborg's theology during the period of the Early American Republic, but was also used to promote New Church doctrine.<sup>113</sup> As explored in the introduction, Swedenborg's

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<sup>113</sup> See for example Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), who identified Swedenborg's synthesis of science and Christianity as important to understanding mid-nineteenth century Spiritualism in America. Cox wrote: "A 'savvy synthesizer of natural philosophy and immediate revelation,' Swedenborg wedded the language of empirical science to a dualistic reading of Scripture, coming to the recognition that there was an absolute truth beyond the external senses and asserting that the quest for spiritual knowledge would awaken entire new realms of sensation and open the gates to the influx of celestial knowledge" (12). See also Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), who also identified Swedenborg's synthesis of science and Christianity as important to understanding mid-to-late nineteenth century American cultural thought. Menand wrote: "Swedenborg...was a mystic...[and]...a highly accomplished man of science in eighteenth-century Sweden...he

scientific background is well-known. After graduating from Uppsala University in 1709, Swedenborg continued his studies of astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and mechanics in England before returning to Sweden in 1715 to engage in experimentation within the field of natural science. Prior to his spiritual awakening in 1743, Swedenborg held the position of assessor to the Swedish Royal Board of Mines and published approximately seventy-seven works of a literary or scientifically academic nature. Published works by Swedenborg include such titles as “On the Motion and Repose of the Earth and the Planets,” “Anatomy of our most subtle Nature, showing that our moving and our living force consists of vibrations,” “A new Method of finding the Longitudes of Places, on land at sea, by Lunar observations,” “Economy of the Animal Kingdom,” and “Anatomy of all the Parts of the Larger and Lesser Brains” and demonstrate the breadth of Swedenborg’s experimentation within the field of natural science.<sup>114</sup> In *Plato’s Ghost* Cathy Gutierrez writes that Swedenborg’s treatises demonstrated “the new impetus in science toward inductive reasoning and empirical data gathering.

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intended his theological writings to provide a kind of unified-field theory of the cosmos, a system in which religious was congruent with modern scientific thought. When his work became fashionable in America, in the 1840s, it appealed particularly to rational and scientific minds. Swedenborgianism was a religion for liberals” (89). See also Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), who does identify the importance of Swedenborg’s synthesis of Enlightenment science and Christian doctrine to attracting Early American converts, but mainly looks at this synthesis within the context of the pervasive supernatural “oracular mode” (206) of mystical experience and does not examine how Swedenborg’s synthesis of Enlightenment reason and Christian doctrine was utilized by Early Americans to promote social and religious reconciliation. Schmidt wrote: “A scion of the Enlightenment and the right social circles, he was hard to dismiss as a vulgar enthusiast, one of the weak-minded and credulous...Because Swedenborg was clearly as committed as anyone to the advancement of knowledge, because he brought all of his energies for precise mappings and classification to his grand tours through heaven and hell, his followers were able to present this kabbalistic mystic and pietist pilgrim as...a man of science” (204).

<sup>114</sup> Samuel M. Warren, *A Compendium of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* 2nd ed. (New York: The New Church Board of Publications, 1880), xxxviii-xxxix. For publication dates see: “On the Motion and Repose of the Earth and the Planets” (1718), “Anatomy of our most subtle Nature, showing that our moving and our living force consists of vibrations” (1719), “A new Method of finding the Longitudes of Places, on land at sea, by Lunar observations” (1721), “Economy of the Animal Kingdom” (1740-1741), and “Anatomy of all the Parts of the Larger and Lesser Brains” (1740).

[Swedenborg's] many books on chemistry, the animal kingdom, and the nature of the physical world show a man generally at the vanguard of his era, and his theories on the divisible properties of matter resemble contemporary accounts of atoms and molecules."<sup>115</sup> Given his publication history, it is clear that Swedenborg was profusely influenced by and engaged in the questions, explorations, and societies which arose in the age of the European Enlightenment. As such, the religious writings produced by Swedenborg in the last thirty years of his life were doubtlessly informed by the Enlightenment zeitgeist.

A return to Swedenborg's last work and summary overview of his doctrines, *True Christian Religion* should illustrate the way in which Enlightenment principles informed his religious writings. For example, in a list of eight reasons given to support the argument that the Holy Trinity is only one divine body, two of the reasons utilized human "rationality" as the basis of their claims: "...3. There is in all the world no nation possessing religion and sound reason that does not acknowledge a God, and that God is one...5. Human reason can, if it will, perceive and be convinced, from many things in the world, that there is a God, and that he is one."<sup>116</sup> In these quotes, Swedenborg posits reason and rationality as sources of authority in the quest to understand God. The positioning of human "reason" as a knowledge base for religious inquiry is decidedly an Enlightenment-driven shift and one which Swedenborg utilized to his advantage in

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<sup>115</sup> Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>116</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Containing the Universal Theology of The New Church Vol. 1*, Trans. John C. Ager (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 9. Note that while this stance on the Trinity seemingly aligns with that of early 19th century Unitarians, the Swedenborgian interpretation of the Holy Trinity utilizes Swedenborg's science of correspondences to argue that the Trinity referenced in the Bible contains a divine sense clarified through correspondences which demonstrates a Trinity of essential principles within God. Unitarians reject the Holy Trinity based on the law of non-contradiction which argues that something cannot be both true and not true at the same time and that therefore three persons cannot be one person.

his writing, even when the source of that knowledge base may have seemed fantastical. In expanding on the claim that human reason proves the existence of one God, Swedenborg describes an interaction he had with angels in which they discussed minute details of the operation of nature as proof of the influx and reflection of one divine God on the natural world. In this conversation, scientific details about insects, their behavior, and anatomy reveal Swedenborg's Enlightenment-informed working knowledge base. For example, in describing the insect world, Swedenborg writes that "...the sight of the [human] eye is so gross and material that it sees many small insects as a single obscure object; and yet each one of these is organized for sensation and motion, and is consequently endowed with fibers and vessels, with a minute heart and pulmonic tubes, with minute viscera and with brains..."<sup>117</sup> In describing caterpillars, Swedenborg writes "[t]hose worms...crawl into suitable places, enclose themselves in a covering, and thus place themselves in a womb from which to be born again; and there they become chrysalids, aureliae, nymphs, and finally butterflies."<sup>118</sup> Additionally, a scientific knowledge of bees is apparent in the following passage where Swedenborg writes that "[a]ny one (sic) can find evidences in favor of a Divine in the visible things in nature when he gives thought to what is known of bees, their knowing how to collect wax from roses and blossoms, to suck out honey, to build cells like little houses...their smelling from a distance the flowers and herbs from which they collect wax for their houses and honey for food, being loaded with which they fly back straight to their hive."<sup>119</sup> In these passages, Swedenborg demonstrates an Enlightenment-

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<sup>117</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion* Vol. 1, 18.

<sup>118</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion* Vol. 1, 19.

<sup>119</sup> Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion* Vol. 1, 20.

minded sensitivity to reason and scientific methods of investigation as sources of authority regarding divine knowledge and the natural world. Swedenborg also demonstrates the breadth of his education in scientific exploration, experimentation, and observations of nature that enabled him to couch his religious claims in overarching scientific and rationalist terms.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Swedenborg's readers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not only identifying and reacting to Enlightenment ideations in Swedenborg's works, but were also using their own Enlightenment-derived ideals to understand Swedenborg's religious body of work. This utilization helped Swedenborgians support and promote their position as proponents of Swedenborg's doctrines, as well as defend Swedenborg's works to inquisitive audiences and naysayers alike. My analysis will demonstrate that Swedenborgian believers identified Enlightenment ideals found within Swedenborg's doctrines, and employed their own understanding of science, reason, and rationality for the purpose of defending and understanding Swedenborg's theology. Ultimately, this approach allowed supporters to tout Swedenborgian theology as the perfect synthesis of Enlightenment reason and Christian Scripture, and therefore the solution to religious and social reconciliation.

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<sup>120</sup> As Ahlstrom pointed out, in his synthesis of natural science and religion, Swedenborg's writings offer a vision of the world that is religiously intelligible. The investigation and examination of God in nature finds resonance in Deist beliefs regarding God's relationship to the universe.

## *Part II: Swedenborg's Theology and Enlightenment Rationalism*<sup>121</sup>

There are conflicting scholarly viewpoints on the relationship between Enlightenment thought and religious belief during the period of the Early American Republic.<sup>122</sup> Scholarship has shifted from tracing distinct linear patterns of Enlightenment thought as divergent from religious beliefs, to simultaneously studying differing strands of Enlightenment-driven thinking with underlying religious tension, to most recently splintering sources in order to analyze how Americans grappled with emotional states such as doubt and skepticism as they related to both Enlightenment rationalism and religious faith. Specifically, some authors advocate for integral relationships between Enlightenment thought and religious beliefs such as Theodore Bozeman in *Protestants in an Age of Science* who argues that natural science had an impact on religious thought by demonstrating that the American mind was not wholly taken up with Transcendentalism and Romanticism but was strongly influenced by Enlightenment ideals many decades prior to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Bozeman transitions to argue that Americans used these ideals to merge scientific methods and findings with Christian doctrine

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<sup>121</sup> As noted in the introduction, I frequently conflate the terms reason, rationality, science, and Enlightenment to capture a way of thinking born from investigative, contemplative methodologies that assume truth can be found through close examination of subject matter. For the purpose of clarity, this chapter defines Enlightenment thought with Henry May's broad definition of Enlightenment-driven thinking: "that we understand nature and man best through the use of our natural faculties." From: Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xiv.

<sup>122</sup> For additional scholarly studies that address religion and the Enlightenment in the early American republic see: Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment 1750-1820* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Alfred J. Gabay, *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2004), Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

and Biblical Scripture.<sup>123</sup> Henry May offers his book *The Enlightenment in America* as evidence of the Enlightenment functioning “as religion,” arguing that different Enlightenment strands of thought existed between 1688 and 1815 that revealed a continual underlying tension with Protestantism as “[m]en of the late eighteenth century...seldom thought about any branch of human affairs without referring consciously to some general beliefs about the nature of the universe and man’s place in it...The denials and defiances of Enlightenment skeptics and materialists are denials and defiances of religious doctrine, usually religious in their own intent.”<sup>124</sup> Scholars such as Nathan Hatch attribute less importance to the relationship between Enlightenment and religious thought. Hatch argues that Enlightenment rationalism was simply one of many factors contributing to the rise and development of popular theology and, perhaps ironically, to a decline in studious learning and tradition.<sup>125</sup> Newer scholarship, such as Christopher Grasso’s *Skepticism and American Faith*, looks at how religious skeptics and devout Christians employed Enlightenment rhetoric to their advantage, ultimately arguing that:

While the efforts to promote enlightenment and Protestant Christianity overlapped considerably in the Early American republic, the difference was that for the faithful, worldly learning was always to be supplemented and corrected by revelation; the progress of science and the struggle for freedom were thought to be directed by providential grace; and public scholarly and political debate were always to be informed and bounded by the truths of the Bible.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

<sup>124</sup> Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), xiii, xiv. Note May’s definition of a Moderate Enlightenment finds resonance with Swedenborgians in terms of their emphasis on order and rationality. So too does May’s Revolutionary Enlightenment align with the Swedenborgian belief in a new Millennial era as the Old Church crumbles and the New Jerusalem Church rises in its place.

<sup>125</sup> Nathaniel Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 35.

<sup>126</sup> Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 155.

Regardless of the interpretive lens, as previous scholars have noted, Early Americans were cognizant of living in an “enlightened” era, or at least called upon specific language to depict themselves as existing in contrast to the dark ages.<sup>127</sup> In his New Church sermon from 1792 James Wilmer Jones gives testament to this claim:

Oh! The thick mist of ignorance, the long night of darkness, that hung over the nations for upwards of a thousand years, from the 5th to the 16th century. — But oh! The more than thrice deplorable vice? Of those unfriendly beings to themselves and their saviour God, who in this 18th age or century lie carelessly down, like the ox or the ass, without a single desire to be rightly acquainted with their Creator, or their own souls, especially when the Lord Jehovah, by a fresh manifestation of his divine love towards the sons and daughters of men, has caused the bright and luminous start of the north to appear already in our horizon, and hereafter, with unceasing radiance, to shine throughout the nations of the west.<sup>128</sup>

By analyzing the ways in which Swedenborgians and New Church members identified Enlightenment rationalism within Swedenborg’s works and capitalized on their own understanding of Enlightenment ideals to promote, defend, and understand Swedenborg’s doctrines, this study offers an examination of how a small group of Early American thinkers interacted with a religion that was born out of the Enlightenment, and strengthened their own theology by aligning their religious beliefs with Enlightenment-era reason and rationalism.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See: Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), Caroline Winterer, *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>128</sup> Jones, *A Sermon*, 15.

<sup>129</sup> Of course, as noted in the introduction, this interaction was complicated by the mystical, otherworldly source of Swedenborg’s knowledge. However, Swedenborgians in the period of the Early American Republic decidedly downplayed Swedenborg’s mysticism to the best of their ability. In *Skepticism and American Faith*, Christopher Grasso also references this fact, writing: “[t]he seer’s admirers were publicly careful to stress the rationality of the new doctrines rather than their supernatural source- Swedenborg’s visits to heaven and hell and his conversations with the angels, devils, and spirits he met in the spirit world. Advocates recognized that the seer’s visions were often “stumbling blocks” for outsiders” (134).



As previously explored, New Church members frequently engaged in the promotion of Swedenborg's religious writings. From translating and publishing Swedenborg's works and New Church periodicals, to circulating tracts and New Church sermons, American Swedenborgians desired to disseminate Swedenborg's theology and share New Church truths. A closer look at the language used to promote Swedenborg's doctrines will demonstrate how New Church members utilized Enlightenment rhetoric to engage with and appeal to Early American readers. An advertisement printed June 2, 1784 in Francis Bailey's *The Freeman's Journal*, reprinted a few days later in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, and reprinted the following month in *The Vermont Journal*, announces James Glen's public lecture with the following language:

For the sentimentalists. A Discourse on the extraordinary science of celestial and terrestrial (sic) connections and correspondencies...This sublime science teaches us from every object in the world of nature to learn things spiritual and heavenly: It is the most ancient and excellent of all sciences, being that whereby the holy Scriptures were written...The Knowledge of this useful science has for many ages been lost to this world...The honourable Emanuel Swedenborg the wonderful restorer of this long lost secret, through the Divine Mercy, for the last twenty-nine years of his life, had the most free and open intercourse with spirits and angels, and was thus taught this science of heaven. From his invaluable writings and conversations with gentlemen who have studied them, the Discourser (sic) hopes to convey some idea and taste of this science of sciences, to the wise and to the good of every denomination.<sup>130</sup>

With a focus on science, education, and learning, the tone of this advertisement is decidedly driven by Enlightenment rhetoric. While the word "science" itself is used seven times in this quote selection, additional choice diction includes "nature," "learn," "knowledge," "writings,"

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<sup>130</sup> "For the Sentimentalists," *The Freeman's Journal* iv, clxiii (2 June 1784): 2, America's Historical Newspapers, iw.newsbank.com. For additional discussion on sentimentality in the Revolutionary period see Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Knott writes that in reconstituting society after the American Revolution, citizens focused on "sensibility" as important to social regeneration, arguing: "[s]ensibility was human sensitivity of perception and thus comprised the fundamental link of self and society. Man's sensibility to the world around him was deemed a natural basis for social action, a means of healthy self-formation and social connectedness" (1).

“conversations,” “studied,” and “wise,” which all similarly connote an educated insight into science and knowledge being proffered to those who believe themselves enlightened enough to understand the information. In this advertisement, Swedenborg is characterized as a studious philosopher who engaged in the serious study of the “science of heaven” with spirits and angels and thus came to understand its secrets, as opposed to a spiritual enthusiast, chosen seer, or prophet who divined religious truths through flashes of God-like insight. The tone of this advertisement, along with the characterization of Swedenborg and his knowledge-base, frames this announcement in Enlightenment terms that would appeal to a like-minded readership.

On April 4th, 1789, Francis Bailey published another weekly edition of *The Freeman’s Journal* which generally contained an advertisement for Swedenborg’s works on the front page. In this publication, as part of the printing and subscription promotion, Bailey included a description of Swedenborg’s works (along with a quote from an unnamed spokesperson in England) to help promote Swedenborg’s published titles. The description read:

A learned and pious divine, in England, speaking of the Baron’s writings, says, “Their progress is still and gentle. No external appearances of great awakenings, visions, &c. But all is internal, sure and well founded. — The learned and the simple-minded are brought to a conviction of the truth of doctrines which they could never understand before, and, what is of much greater consequence, to a change of nature and holiness of life. All is *rational*, *manly*, and *sublime*. — No religious cant, no Pharisaical formalities, no hypocritical pretences, no Puritanical grimace (emphasis in original).<sup>131</sup>

In this passage, Swedenborg’s religious doctrines are clearly distanced from the ungrounded religious enthusiasms of prophets and seers. In addition, words such as “well founded,” “learned,” “simple-minded,” “truth,” “nature,” “rational,” and “manly,” demonstrate the use of

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<sup>131</sup> *The Freeman’s Journal* ix, clxiii (29 April 1789): 1-4, America’s Historical Newspapers, [iw.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com).

Enlightenment diction that further distinguishes the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg as educated and credible in comparison to other prophet-like figures claiming to have access to divine and religious truths. Where once religious texts and monarchical, ecclesiastic, or aristocratic figures were considered the sole authorities and sources of knowledge, Swedenborgians utilized Enlightenment-driven rhetoric to claim that the reason and rationality found within Swedenborg's religious system of interpretation would allow readers to clearly understand holy doctrines, and therefore open a gateway to natural, physical, and spiritual truths as well. In navigating both orthodoxy and enthusiasms, Swedenborg's theology was touted as progressive and scientifically grounded in an appeal to Early American audiences.

Additional material in support of the Enlightenment-framed promotion of Swedenborg includes a poem by American Revolutionary writer Philip Freneau, titled "On the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg's Universal Theology." This 58-line poem was originally printed by Francis Bailey in 1788 and details figurative and literary images that capture the core elements of Swedenborg's religious doctrines. In particular, the poem describes a divine influx of truth from the heavens onto Earth and explains how Swedenborg's religious writings will help rational people clarify and understand the purity of truths that have been hidden or warped by unenlightened minds. The first eight lines of the poem illustrate how Swedenborg's religious writings were promoted through the lens of Enlightenment ideals:

In this choice work the curious eye may find  
The noblest system to reform mankind,  
Old truths confirm'd that sceptics have deny'd,  
By most perverted, and which some deride.  
HERE truths divine in heavenly visions grow  
From the vast influx on our world below.  
Here, like the blaze of our material sun,

Enlighten'd Reason proves that GOD IS ONE.<sup>132</sup>

In this poem, Freneau couches Swedenborg's theology in language that promotes the Enlightenment-driven pursuit of truth through the faculty of human reason. In addition to blatantly stating that Swedenborg's doctrines, and in particular his argument against the Holy Trinity, are proven by "enlightened reason," Freneau's diction such as "system," "reform," "curious," "truths," and "confirmed" all connote reason and rationality which would appeal to an Enlightenment-influenced readership. Freneau also juxtaposes the figure of a curious, open-minded individual pursuing truth, to the closed-minded, derisive "sceptic" who clouds and perverts the truth. This juxtaposition only makes vague reference to a comparison between pre and post Enlightenment society but would appeal to readers who identified as open-minded and scholarly. In cultivation of this readership, Freneau continues:

THEN slight, ah slight not this instructive page  
For the low follies of a thoughtless age,  
Here, to the truth by reason's aid aspire,  
Here the gay visions of the blest admire;  
Behold that heaven in these neglected lines,  
In whose vast space perpetual day-light shines...  
All there is MIND! — that intellectual flame,  
From whose vast depth Platonic visions came,  
In which creation ended and began,  
Flows to this abject world, and beams on man.<sup>133</sup>

In these lines, Freneau presents man's intellectual, reasoning mind as capable of receiving and understanding truth, knowledge, and wisdom. Freneau promotes (as noted in the title) Swedenborg's writings as universal truth, claiming that Swedenborg's theology offers rational,

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<sup>132</sup> Philip Morin Freneau, "On the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg's Universal Theology," *The Miscellaneous Works of Mr. Philip Freneau* (1788): 76-77, Evans Early American Imprint Collection, quod.lib.umich.edu.

<sup>133</sup> Freneau, "On the Hon.," 76-77.

reasoning minds a new way to understand the world in the form of an interpretive legend for the mapping of universal knowledge. Freneau's framing of Swedenborg's doctrines as written and designed for the rational thinker doubtlessly attracted an Enlightenment-minded readership already prone to reading and studying in pursuit of truth. Lastly, *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository* (a monthly periodical published from 1812-1813 in New York, Boston, and Baltimore aimed at discussing Swedenborg's doctrines and promoting and defending New Church theology) best summarized in the preface to Volume I the Enlightenment-driven focus of New Church members with the following claim:

The editors are well aware...that such a publication ought to be conducted on a plan adapted to readers of every class and description. They believe that *Natural* and *Scientific* truths, so far from being incompatible with genuine theology, are absolutely necessary to constitute a well-informed mind; and that their attainment, (at least in some degree) is so essential, that no man can possibly become spiritual or religious without them.<sup>134</sup>

In considering the relationship between science and theology, it will be helpful to also analyze the ways in which readers of Swedenborg utilized Enlightenment ideals, such as rationality and the scientific pursuit of truth, to defend attacks on Swedenborg's credibility and his doctrinal claims. On December 25th, 1804, Rev. John Hargrove preached a sermon to President Thomas Jefferson, cabinet members, senators, representatives, and interested general public members. In the preface to this sermon, Hargrove stated:

[I]t is a fact, that whenever any theological idea or system which is apparently new is announced, or submitted to the consideration of the christian world, "*a hue and cry*" of heretic, and blasphemer is immediately resounded and reverberated; and the most hostile and illiberal opposition manifested against all such annunciations, even by many who positively refuse to examine the premises (sic)! Such ignorant and bigoted opposers to

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<sup>134</sup> Editors, "Preface to Vol. I," *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository* (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1812): iii, Rpt. by (London: FB & c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

the growing state of gospel knowledge, should reflect, however, that there is a sure promise left unto the church of God...(emphasis in original).<sup>135</sup>

This was the third sermon Hargrove had delivered to President Jefferson and his administration. To be invited back was surely an honor and a sign of general curiosity and interest in Swedenborg's religious claims. However, Hargrove's statement clearly indicates an awareness of social and religious denunciation of Swedenborg's doctrines. As we will explore in chapter three, in the face of negative attacks on Swedenborg's theology, Hargrove systematically appealed to reason and rationality to quell naysayers during his sermons. This approach was in line with the defensive strategy used by other New Church members as they also called upon Enlightenment rhetoric to systematically shame naysayers and defend the content of Swedenborg's religious doctrines.

For example, on April 29th, 1789 Francis Bailey printed a front-page response in *The Freeman's Journal* that he had written in response to a letter received from an author by the pen name of Philanthropos. In this response, Bailey acknowledged the letter from Philanthropos in order to invalidate specific claims made by said author. In the process of invalidation, however, Bailey provided insight into the types of attacks faced by Swedenborgians. Bailey wrote:

In your letter to me, published in our last, you have taken the liberty of condemning the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and without even giving reason to believe you have read them, heroically pronounce his doctrines, — "Erroneous, false, and contradicting the scriptures — Giving the God of truth the lie — Vain dreams — Dreadful blasphemy — Horrible blasphemy — Pernicious, poisonous and detestable doctrine," &c.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> John Hargrove, "A Sermon, on the Second Coming of Christ," 1574.

<sup>136</sup> Bailey, "To Philanthropos," 1.

In this passage, Swedenborg's doctrines are presented as contradicting Scripture, false, blasphemous, "poisonous," and essentially dangerous. Instead of attacking the supernaturalism of Swedenborg's mystical experiences and knowledge, as Schmidt claimed in *Hearing Things*, this passage demonstrates that some Early Americans opposed Swedenborg on the basis of his theology. This finding suggests that in the cacophony of Early America, Swedenborg was taken seriously enough to warrant a defense or denial of his religious claims. While Swedenborgians soldiered on in an effort to present the rational, stable side of Swedenborg's doctrines, this vitriolic response also demonstrates an example of rationality assuming the role of foremost authority as Philanthropos made judgment calls about the credibility of Swedenborg's theology from the basis of reason: it is deemed "erroneous" and therefore false.

In his response to Philanthropos, Bailey focused on the anonymous author's quick and thoughtless assumptions, both admonishing him for making unresearched claims and being unreligious, as well as pointing out personal shortcomings, particularly regarding his lack of scholarship:

Now, sir, this *short and easy method* of proving your positions will do well enough with some people, but those who have the Berean spirit...yet they will not be satisfied without examining "whether these things be so"...Think seriously on the subject, and for your own sake obtain some knowledge of the writings you have decried, before you deal out any more of your own, or the anathemas of others, lest it should be enquired of you (emphasis in original).<sup>137</sup>

In utilizing "Berean" in the context of his response, Bailey was referencing the people of Berea in the Bible who "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so"

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<sup>137</sup> Bailey, "To Philanthropos," 1.

(emphasis in original).<sup>138</sup> Bailey’s admonishment of Philanthropos is layered. With this Biblical reference, Bailey can both accuse Philanthropos of being unreligious in his refusal to seriously consider religious Scripture like the Bereans did — thereby placing Swedenborg’s doctrines on equal footing with the Bible — while also emphasizing the importance of closely examining texts before coming to conclusions about their contents. Bailey argues that Philanthropos should “think seriously” and “obtain some knowledge” as opposed to taking shortcuts and relying on previously held assumptions or biases. By emphasizing study, examination, thinking, and analysis, Bailey calls upon man’s ability to come to informed, rational truths through the intellectual pursuits promoted by the Enlightenment belief in reason while simultaneously promoting Swedenborg’s theology by aligning it with these valued skills.

An additional letter was also published in the same edition of *The Freeman’s Journal* which offered support to Bailey’s claims and provided another admonishment of Philanthropos’ earlier accusations. Self-styled “A Lover of Truth,” this author also argues that Philanthropos did not adequately study and assess Swedenborg’s writings to support the claims he made. A Lover of Truth writes:

On reading the piece signed *Philanthropos* in your last paper, I could not help reflecting how fortunate it is for you that you, live in an age when the mist and thick darkness which has long covered man’s minds, is dispelling as the dew before the morning sun. Had your lot been cast in the ages, when the creeds and confessions of faith were framed...you would most certainly have felt the fatal effects of the spirit of their framers, with a liberal portion of which *Philanthropos* is endued, for even proposing to [not] publish any part of the writings of the enlightened Swedenborg. Your correspondent’s assuming the signature of a *Philanthropist*, and pretending that regard to the welfare of souls is his motive, for wishing to prevent the publication of Swedenborg’s Universal Theology, shews (sic) us that men may easily take names to themselves, without really possessing any of the qualities signified by them...I advise him, therefore, seriously to

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<sup>138</sup> Acts 17:11 (New American Standard Bible).



peruse the writings; and, if his opposition proceeds not from bigotry to a system, worldly interest, or some other wrong bias, I have no doubt they will carry full conviction to his mind (emphasis in original).<sup>139</sup>

In this passage, A Lover of Truth focuses less on the quick and easy method in which the previous author came to conclusions about Swedenborg, and more on reprimanding Philanthropos. He does so by comparing the contents of the letter to the previous dark ages and therefore infers that Philanthropos himself is not an enlightened or educated individual. A Lover of Truth strengthens this insult with his own chosen name, and emphasizes that the self-styled name of “Philanthropos,” does not adequately capture the character of its bearer, who does not “really possess...any of the qualities signified by [it].” A Lover of Truth signs off by repeating what Bailey had already laid claim to, which was impressing upon Philanthropos the need to spend time in serious study of Swedenborg’s texts before coming to conclusions about the content of Swedenborg’s doctrines. In this example, not only does A Lover of Truth demonstrate an awareness of the enlightened age of his current society, but he also capitalizes on Enlightenment rhetoric to call attention to how Philanthropos failed to utilize the tools available to him — reason and rationality — when studying and analyzing a text to come to informed truths about the world.

Philadelphia’s *Independent Gazetteer* also featured a letter on June 26th, 1789 that was written in response to a published attack on Swedenborg. In contrast to the previous two letters which focused on doctrinal content, this response was written to defend the reputation of Swedenborg’s character and mental state. The author, who went by the initial “A,” writes “I

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<sup>139</sup> A Lover of Truth, “Philadelphia, April 24, 1789,” *The Freeman’s Journal* ix, cdxix (29 April 1789): 1, America’s Historical Newspapers, iw.newsbank.com.

noticed an anonymous scrap in one of your late papers, respecting *Emanuel Swedenborg*; in which the writer insinuates that that good man was insane; — please therefore to give the following extract of a letter, a place in your paper, and oblige, Yours, &c. A.”<sup>140</sup> Following this preface, a letter written by “T. Hartley,” is printed in which Swedenborg is depicted as a reputable individual and his religious doctrines deemed divinely inspired:

That so highly gifted a messenger from the Lord...should meet with the reproach of being beside himself, will be so far from appearing strange to such as are acquainted with the scriptures...It may reasonably be supposed, that I have weighed the character of our illustrious author in the scale of my best judgment, from the *personal knowledge* I had of *him*, from the *best information* I could procure concerning him, and from a *diligent perusal* of his writings, and according thereto I have found him to be the sound divine, the good man, the deep philosopher, the universal scholar, and the polite gentleman (emphasis in original).<sup>141</sup>

In this response, the author Hartley, and by association “A.,” argue that the claims regarding Swedenborg’s mental state are false, and that Hartley can provide a more informed opinion of Swedenborg based on evidence gathered from different sources. These sources include personal knowledge, outsider knowledge, and a close reading of Swedenborg’s works. This excerpt demonstrates that Hartley associates Swedenborg with philosophers, scholars, and gentlemen in order to create a sense of credibility and respect for Swedenborg and his works. In addition, Hartley’s assessment of Swedenborg is supported not just with opinion, but with credible sources and a close study of Swedenborg’s works. This approach reveals Hartley’s Enlightenment sensibility and awareness of audience’s values. Hartley’s letter is an example of how Swedenborgians aligned themselves with Enlightenment ideals to defend Swedenborg and his

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<sup>140</sup> T. Hartley, “Mr. Oswald,” *The Independent Gazetteer* viii, 1106 (29 June 1789): 1, America’s Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>141</sup> T. Hartley, “Mr. Oswald,” 2.

theology. The letter also demonstrates the type of remonstrance Swedenborg's critics faced when they strayed from the Enlightenment roads of learning, study, and personal exploration.

These roads are wisdom is especially apparent in the New Church's explanation of Swedenborg's religious doctrines. New Church sermons, and descriptions of Swedenborg's writings demonstrate the ways in which Swedenborgian supporters utilized Enlightenment knowledge to understand Swedenborg's religious thought and advocate for Swedenborg's most controversial claims. In 1792, James Wilmer Jones preached a New Church sermon in the Baltimore Courthouse. In this sermon, Jones offered a general history of the Christian church and introduced listeners to New Church theology in order to demonstrate how Swedenborg's doctrines aligned with the Bible. Jones writes: "[f]rom the early ages of the Church, errors in doctrine as well as in worship have invariably been introduced...It will be proper therefore...*first* to inquire into some of the causes, why false worship and unfound doctrine have been introduced" (emphasis in original).<sup>142</sup> Jones laid the groundwork for a more thorough discussion of Swedenborg's doctrines by quickly transitioning into an explanation of how Swedenborg's science of correspondences corrected Biblical errors and doctrinal falsities and offered believers a true understanding of God's divine word. In a preface to his discussion, Jones claims "[t]here is a false philosophy which leads to infidelity, to atheism, to death! But there is a divine philosophy which connects physics with metaphysics, that leads to Heaven and life everlasting!"<sup>143</sup> In suggesting that Swedenborg's "divine philosophy" will unite science and religion, Jones

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<sup>142</sup> James Wilmer Jones, *A Sermon, on the Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Church* (Baltimore: Goddard & Angell, 1792): 7, Early American Imprints, iw.newsbank.com.

<sup>143</sup> Jones, *A Sermon*, 6.

entangles his sermon with Enlightenment ideals. Exploring Swedenborg's interpretation of the Holy Trinity will demonstrate how Jones drew upon Enlightenment knowledge to clarify and justify Swedenborg's doctrines. In advocating for Swedenborg's interpretation of the Holy Trinity Jones states that "[t]o a mind well-disposed, how plain it is then to discern a Trinity in the Lord by a Trinity discernible in every individual man! For in every individual man there is a soul, a body, and operation; and so it is also with respect to the Lord...wherefore the Trinity in the Lord is divine, but in man it is human."<sup>144</sup> In this passage, Jones states that the living functions of humans are analogous to the Holy Trinity by arguing that every man is in possession of a physical body, a soul, and mental operation. This body, soul, and mind triune acts as a microcosmic example of God's macrocosmic Divine Trinity of love, wisdom, and proceeding powers. Additionally, in the "notes explanatory" section that follows his sermon, Jones expands on his discussion of the Holy Trinity, writing:

To divide the Godhead into separate persons is as absurd as to suppose a minister of the church teaching from the pulpit what ought to be believed and practiced, and another minister standing near him, and whispering in his ear that he teacheth (sic) what is right and good, and then both commissioning a third minister to descend into the temple, and open the ears of the people, and infuse in their hearts the good advice which was given...A Divine Trinity, divided into distinct persons, each whereof singly is Lord and God, is as ridiculous also as to suppose three suns in one world, the first in the upper firmament, the second near it, and the third in the firmament beneath, which encompasseth (sic) angels and men, and introduceth (sic) the heart and light of the two former, with all power, into their minds, hearts, and bodies, and subtilizes, clarifies, and sublimes them, like fire acting upon bodies in a retort; but who cannot see, that in such a case, man would be instantly reduced to ashes?<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Jones, *A Sermon*, 12.

<sup>145</sup> Jones, *A Sermon*, 18.

In this passage, Jones calls upon Enlightenment-driven scientific knowledge of astronomy and the positioning of planets around one sun to emphasize his argument regarding the Holy Trinity. By demonstrating a knowledge of science, Jones not only positions himself as an enlightened, rational-minded reverend, but is also able to couch his religious sermon in enlightenment terms and marshal Swedenborg's science of correspondences to revise a long-established Christian doctrine.

On January 5th, 1800, Rev. John Hargrove delivered a sermon in Baltimore at the opening of a New Church Temple. This sermon, titled "On the True Object and Nature of Christian Worship," offered parishioners a discussion of the merits of New Church doctrine in relation to Christian Scripture. It focused on Swedenborg's theories regarding the spiritual sense of Biblical words and the Holy Trinity. In expanding on the analysis of how New Church members utilized science and rationality to understand and defend Swedenborg's doctrines, the focus in this section will be on the spiritual sense of Biblical words. Hargrove writes:

[M]any passages in the "*law and the prophets*," if taken in the mere literal sense, proclaimed war and death not only against the true principles of science and reason but also against all the glorious and adorable attributes of God! Not so the genuine or spiritual sense of the WORD, as now in mercy revealed, in the neglected but profound writings, of that rational philosopher and enlightened seer, Emanuel Swedenborg. This sense, by preserving the most respectful aspect towards all the divine attributes, and cordially recognizing the true principles of science and reason, *rescues* the holy word of inspiration, from the growing contempt to which it would otherwise hereafter be evidently exposed: — while at the same time it opens an inestimable and inexhaustible fountain of *true* science and *heavenly* wisdom, which has been hidden from past ages, and generations (emphasis in original).<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> John Hargrove, *A Sermon on the True Object and Nature of Christian Worship: Delivered at the Opening of the New Jerusalem Temple in the City of Baltimore. On Sunday, the 5th of January, 1800* (Baltimore: Acting Committee of the New Church, 1800): 8, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

In this passage, Hargrove explains how Swedenborg's science of correspondences reveals the true spiritual meaning of words by pairing his explanation with the positive attributes of science and rationality. Hargrove draws a parallel between those who dismiss scriptural authority and those who are against the "principles of science and reason," and thereby pairs reason and revelation as core aspects of Swedenborg's theology in order to solidify his readership as educated and devout. Hargrove's positioning tightens the argument that Swedenborg's interpretation of the divine sense of Biblical words is a science itself, since understanding this divine sense of words provides readers the ability to unlock the mysteries of Christian Scripture. Hargrove appeals to his readership through the lens of Enlightenment ideals by claiming that the wisdom attained through an understanding of the spiritual sense of words is analogous to the wisdom attained from understanding true science. With this approach, Hargrove can position Swedenborg's doctrines as *the* knowledge needed to align religion with science by providing a complete explanation of how his science of correspondences unlocks the "*true* science and *heavenly* wisdom, which has been hidden from past ages, and generations."<sup>147</sup>

In expanding on his discussion of Swedenborg's spiritual sense of the word, Hargrove offers an example from the Bible:

But do I not already hear some secret murmurs, excited even in the breast of genuine piety, and reason to break out against me in the following words: *Presumptuous* (sic) *mortal!* "*Canst thou by searching find the Almighty to perfection?*" Thy temerity is as thin /as it is irreverend (sic): — "*Clouds and darkness are covering to him.*" I would answer. These clouds which are the literal sense of the holy *word*, are *now*, through the increasing influence of the "SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS," on our scientific atmosphere, in such a state of rarefaction, as to become, to the man of the *New Church*, as a sacred mirror; — reflecting on his rational faculty, "*The Glory of God*," — or spiritual sense of the word; whereby a *general*, and now *necessary* salvation will be effected in the

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<sup>147</sup> Hargrove, *A Sermon*, 8.

Christian world, from *infidelity* and *superstition*. To the enlightened and reflecting Christian of the present day, who is familiar with the pages of antient (sic) history, it must appear extremely astonishing to find that God should formerly suffer all nations to “*walk in their own ways*,” whereby, “*they changed as it where, the glory of the incorruptible GOD, into an image made like unto corruptible man; and to fourfooted beasts and creeping things*.” The consequence of which was, that the most preposterous ceremonies, and inhuman rites prevail’d, not only amongst savage nations, but even through the civiliz’d and polish’d states of Greece and Rome, at the very zenith of their scientific glory (emphasis in original).<sup>148</sup>

Here, Hargrove offers an analogy to clarify the positive function of Swedenborg’s spiritual sense of the word. Hargrove claims that understanding the spiritual sense of the word is like a sun shining on science, and to the New Church member, like a sacred mirror that reflects his own rational faculties back to him. This example argues that a believer in Swedenborg’s doctrines need only utilize his rational faculties to understand how the spiritual sense of the word functions in order to illuminate the Bible’s true meaning. In this example, Hargrove chose to draw parallels between how man’s rational faculties provide a clear path to understanding knowledge, and how the spiritual sense of the word provides a clear path to understanding the Bible. Hargrove’s use of rationalism to clarify the function and definition of Swedenborg’s spiritual sense of words demonstrates how New Church members understood Swedenborgian doctrine through the lens of Enlightenment thought.

In the 1813 edition of *The Halcyon Luminary*, a section titled “Doctrines of the New Jerusalem” explains how to approach a close reading of the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg’s correspondences:

It being the avowed purpose of the Editors of this Magazine to furnish the world with a new, but rational system of divinity, it becomes them to state, in a fair and candid manner, those principles which they conceive to be founded in truth, and which, they

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<sup>148</sup> Hargrove, *A Sermon*, 9.

trust, will meet the approbation of every intelligent and impartial reader... Emanuel Swedenborg, the founder of this New Church, whose tenets are peculiarly distinct from every other system of divinity in Christendom, draws all his doctrines from the holy scriptures, which appear at the same time to be grounded in true philosophy. The author points out an entire new and singular way of reconciling the apparent contradictions in Scripture, by having recourse to two kinds of truth, which he distinguishes into genuine and apparent. He maintains, that the Holy Scripture, as well as every thing (sic) in nature, is resolvable into one or the other of these two kinds of truth. Thus when it is said, that the sun rises or sets, this is only an apparent truth, as the genuine truth is, that the earth revolves round its own axis, and causes that appearance: yet there is no impropriety in speaking according to appearances; nay, it would be a manifest absurdity, in the above instance, to speak, in common conversation, according to the genuine truth. Just so it is with the Scriptures, which are written in a style adapted to the comprehension of the simple, and in many parts are not genuine, but apparent truths.<sup>149</sup>

This passage demonstrates how New Church proponents employed key Enlightenment terminology such as “rational,” “fair,” “principles,” “truth,” “intelligent,” and “impartial” when discussing Swedenborg’s doctrines in order to couch their explanations and discussions in rationalist terms. This rationalism is then applied to a discussion of Swedenborgian theology which explains how Swedenborg’s doctrines not only differ from Christian theology but should be understood through close reading of the Bible in order to make sense of Christian Scripture. *The Halcyon* editors write that Swedenborg provides readers a way to reconcile contradictions in the Bible. They then offer an analogy to better explain how applying Swedenborg’s correspondences to the Bible offers a rational clarity to these contradictions. The difference between genuine and apparent scientific truths is presented as analogous to the difference between figurative and literal Biblical truths, further tightening the relationship between Enlightenment science and Christian Scripture. It is telling that this analogy draws on a

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<sup>149</sup> “Doctrines of the New Jerusalem,” *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. II (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1813): 8-9, Rpt. by (London: FB & c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).



contemporary scientific understanding of the universe: “Thus when it is said, that the sun rises or sets, this is only an apparent truth, as the genuine truth is, that the earth revolves round its own axis, and causes that appearance.” It is here that the authors call upon scientific knowledge to clarify their own understanding of how Swedenborg’s theology functions when used to elucidate the Bible, demonstrating that *The Halcyon* editors chose to understand Swedenborg’s doctrines from the standpoint of scientific and rational principles. The editors read Swedenborg through an Enlightenment-driven rationalist lens and interpret his doctrines for their readership through this lens as well. The three examples analyzed from 1792, 1800, and 1813 demonstrate a twenty-year trend of the terminology and rhetoric Early Americans Swedenborgians called upon to interpret their religious faith, as well as the way New Church members drew on scientific knowledge to elucidate Swedenborgian theology.

In considering the ways New Church members utilized Enlightenment principles to promote, defend, and understand Swedenborg’s doctrines, it becomes clear that for those who accepted and adhered to Swedenborgian doctrine, this theology offered an important synthesis of Enlightenment rationalism and Christian Scripture. Since New Church members believed the Millennium had begun in 1757, the typical Evangelical focus on preparing society and saving souls for the impending return of Jesus Christ was conspicuously absent. This refocused the devout goodwill of Swedenborgians from rescuing society to repairing society and allowed the New Church to offer solutions to existent social and religious divisions that would have been front and center to a war-weary, religiously pluralistic, and debate-infused American citizenry. As Swedenborgians drove efforts to spread Swedenborg’s writings and gain additional New Church members, they remained focused on promoting reconciliation between religious and

scientific truths. The New Church's framing of Swedenborg's doctrines demonstrates this effort toward reconciliation and suggests that rationalism, reason, and logic represented a value framework from which Early Americans argued about religion. While many scholars focus on the way Swedenborg's theology was appropriated during the Second Great Awakening in mid-nineteenth century America, backtracking the scope of Swedenborgian studies to the Early American Republic is equally important to expanding historical understandings of how and when the accommodation of Enlightenment science to Protestant Christianity began. Analyzing the writings and sermons of the New Church's most prolific and outspoken preacher from the Early American period, Rev. John Hargrove, offers a deeper analysis of how and why New Church members employed Enlightenment rationalism to clarify and promote Swedenborg's religious system.

## CHAPTER 3

### JOHN HARGROVE AND THE SCIENCE OF SWEDENBORGIANISM

Often considered the first truly ordained New Church minister and an historical patriarch of the New Church, John Hargrove produced a voluminous amount of New Church material during the period of the Early American Republic. An Irish immigrant, twice-married man, ordained Methodist preacher, freemason, and father of eight, Hargrove's first introduction to Swedenborg's heavenly doctrines occurred in the context of attempting to disprove their claims.<sup>150</sup> In 1794, Hargrove read James Wilmer's *Consolation: Being a Replication to Thomas Paine, and Others, on Theologics*. Wilmer was an Episcopalian who utilized New Church doctrine to support his case against Deism. In examining this publication, Hargrove was driven to read Swedenborg's works more closely in order to make a case against Wilmer's arguments. What Hargrove found, however, was that the deeper he dove into Swedenborgian doctrine, the more convinced he became that they were divinely inspired and communicated doctrinal truths.<sup>151</sup> As a result, Hargrove chose to leave the Methodist church and from July 1789 until his death on December 6th, 1839, he was an active figurehead of the American chapter of the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church.<sup>152</sup> From 1800-1812, not only was Hargrove considered the only minister of the New Church in America, but he was also elected president of the first

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<sup>150</sup> From Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 437: "Born in Ireland, 1750, [Hargrove] emigrated to America in 1769, joined the Methodist church in 1777, and was ordained a preacher in 1795 by Bishop Asbury."

<sup>151</sup> Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press), 133.

<sup>152</sup> From Block, *The New Church*: "The development of the New Church [in 1798] now centers around the person of the Rev. John Hargrove, who had been ordained by Francis Asbury of the Methodist Church...In spite of having eight children to support, after being thrown out of his teaching position by the Methodists, as well as losing his clerical salary, he stuck doggedly to the New Church, and became in time its highly honored patriarch" (90-91).

New Church General Convention held in Philadelphia in 1817, and re-elected ten more times over the next decade.<sup>153</sup> As the mouthpiece for the American Swedenborgian New Church, Hargrove's documents provide deeper insight into the mindset of Americans that subscribed to New Church theology. An examination of Hargrove's personal letters, religious sermons, and published documents will demonstrate how he utilized Swedenborg's science of correspondences to promote a unique form of Biblical exegesis based on a hermeneutic that synthesized Enlightenment rationalism and Christian Scripture. In Hargrove's hands, this Biblical hermeneutic also lent itself to subjective reinterpretations of the Bible which resulted in social and religious pushback that was publicized in several public debates. The public debates Hargrove engaged in demonstrate his desire to maintain a respectable reputation to promote the New Church as well as his determination to fight back against the prejudice he felt was keeping him from adequately supporting his family.

As Grasso notes, Hargrove became an ordained minister of the New Church in 1800 without pay, tutoring children on the side to make ends meet, and not finding gainful employment with the Baltimore city registrar until 1808.<sup>154</sup> Hargrove's decision to leave the Methodist fold, sacrificing financial comfort in the pursuit of personal religious truth, would undoubtedly have been a source of anxiety for a family man. That Hargrove needed income is documented in two letters written by Arthur Campbell, member of the Virginia House of Delegates, to James Madison in 1801 and 1802 asking if Madison may help Hargrove obtain a position of public employment. "Dear Sir," Campbell writes in his 1802 letter:

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<sup>153</sup> Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, 437.

<sup>154</sup> Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 136.

I take the liberty to introduce to your notice, a Mr. Hargrove of the City of Baltimore, lately known as the Editor of a publication entitled the *Temple of Truth*. He is lately from misfortunes, become rathe(r) straitned (sic) in his circumstances, and woul(d) now be glad of accepting some public employment in the City he lives...he is an honest Man, of strict integrety (sic). He may be something eccentric in his religious tenets, but his notions on that subject will be a security for his honesty. For my own part, I value original geniuses, that dare to think, and speak, different from the multitude, if they believe truth to be on their side.<sup>155</sup>

Hargrove himself bemoaned his own financial situation in a personal letter written to Mr.

William Jenks on January 24th, 1805, just a few months after involvement in a public debate dubbed the ‘War Whoop’ controversy: “[t]he society here is too small, & their circumstances too limited to do much for me as yet, moreover as we have built a Temple, (with other citizen’s help) and also a preacher’s house, in wch. (sic) I now live rent free, & but for prejudice, that infernal friend (sic), which keeps very many Citizens from sending their children to me, I could maintain, with my own labor, (as I have always done) my family, with decency.”<sup>156</sup>

Claims of ecclesiastical illegitimacy and doctrinal disputes were two of the greatest uphill battles Hargrove faced as pastor of the New Jerusalem Church. However, he did make efforts to utilize existing political and social structures to try and assuage the prejudice he felt was unjustly oppressive. For example, in 1804, Hargrove and other New Church members wrote and filed a New Jerusalem Church Constitution with the city of Baltimore for official recognition and consideration as a religious institution. In this constitution, Hargrove is named as the officiating minister and seven other men are named as the trustees and church committee members. The New Church Constitution dictates who is eligible for church membership and what their beliefs

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<sup>155</sup> “To James Madison from Arthur Campbell, 25 January 1802,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, [founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/02-02-02-0604](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/02-02-02-0604).

<sup>156</sup> “John Hargrove to Mr. William Jenks,” *Personal Letter*, Jan. 24, 1805, Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Pacific School of Religion.

should be; the internal functioning of church proceedings, including the election of ministers and trustees; record keeping; constitutional amendments; church property; ministerial duties; and the process whereby successors are chosen.<sup>157</sup> In a description of ministerial beliefs, a relationship to Swedenborg is specified and an emphasis on the importance of understanding the Bible through the lens of the spiritual sense of the word is highlighted with the following quote from Article I of the New Church Constitution:

...that he believes in the divine inspiration, sanctity and authority of the books which compose the holy scriptures as particularized by the Baron Emanuel Swedenborg: and that he will preach no doctrine contrary thereunto, or to the tenets contained in the theological writings of the said Emanuel Swedenborg; believing that he was sent by the Lord Jesus Christ, to open the true spiritual sense of the holy scriptures for the benefit of the future church of Christ.<sup>158</sup>

Hargrove's unwavering faith in the ability of Swedenborg's science of correspondences to illuminate God's true message to humankind and rebuild the Christian church is evident in formal documents such as the constitution. It is also apparent in the personal decisions Hargrove made and the hardships he was willing to endure to preserve, disseminate, and promote this new approach to Biblical exegesis.

Hargrove's application of Swedenborg's science of correspondences took the form of a malleable Biblical hermeneutic which he promoted in the name of reinterpreting and therefore unearthing the Bible's hidden truths. This application further demonstrates how Swedenborgians utilized Enlightenment rhetoric and scientific knowledge to promote a form of Biblical reinterpretation which synthesized science and Scripture in an effort to heal religious divides. In

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<sup>157</sup> *A Copy of the Incorporated Constitution, of the New Jerusalem Church, in the City of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1804): 4-7.  
Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>158</sup> *A Copy of the Incorporated Constitution*, 4.

advocating for this synthesis, Hargrove suggests that there is a divinity inherent to the expression of rationality when applied through the lens of Swedenborg's science of correspondences. This divine expression of rationality was frequently offered by Hargrove as evidence that God's true spiritual message could be revealed with a reinterpretation of Scripture. At other times, however, Hargrove molded Swedenborg's science of correspondences into an interpretative system which promoted general allegorical readings of the Bible on seemingly subjective ethical principles. This interpretive system was couched in rational language but appears to have been primarily utilized to attract parishioners by offering a form of Biblical exegesis which could align personal belief systems with Christian values and therefore seemingly assuage any manner of ethical conundrums or moral tensions resulting from controversial scriptural passages. Both forms of Biblical reinterpretation faced criticism from those outside the church and indicate a general social concern regarding the untethered ecclesiastical ground of Swedenborgian New Church doctrines.

### *Part I: Rational Thinking as Divine Act*

Right around the turn of the century, Hargrove became involved in several public controversies that brought Swedenborgian New Church doctrine to the forefront of the press. After leaving the Methodist church and his teaching position at a Methodist academy in 1789, Hargrove devoted himself wholly to bolstering the growth of the New Jerusalem Church. This devotion included engaging with the modus operandi of Early American print and debate culture by writing correspondences to interested parties, publishing sermons, and answering the accusations of New Church critics. Hargrove also found himself drawn to engaging in theological debates, primarily to defend the cause of Christianity, but also to capitalize on

opportunities to tout Swedenborg's doctrines. In June of 1801, Hargrove sent a letter to the *Temple of Reason*, and addressed it to Baltimore resident Mr. Denis Driscoll, former Catholic minister and editor of the first Deist periodical produced by Elihu Palmer's New York Deistical Society.<sup>159</sup> In his letter, Hargrove pointed out a few interpretive Biblical errors he believed were made by Driscoll's Deist writers and requested that his "remarks find admittance, speedily, into the *Temple of Reason*."<sup>160</sup> Hargrove attempted initially with this first correspondence to find common ground with Driscoll, claiming in his letter that he agreed with the *Temple's* motto "[t]ruth is great and will prevail," arguing that:

[I]ts prevalence has been confined to very narrow limits. *Scepticism* and *Superstition*, those hoary headed enemies of genuine truth and brotherly love, have too long held mankind under the most gloomy and painful bondage; I trust, however, that "*the night is far spent and the day at hand*," when the united efforts of all the lovers of truth, shall hurl these despots from their thrones; and when *Reason* and *Religion* shall fully unite their sacred and all-powerful influence in promoting truth and righteousness in the earth (emphasis in original).<sup>161</sup>

Hargrove subsequently attempted to methodically undermine the Deistical claims to reason and truth by pointing out that the Biblical passages Deists identified as logically inconsistent could be clarified with knowledge of Swedenborg's science of correspondences. "It is an acknowledged truth...", Hargrove wrote, "that there are many *apparent* contradictions in the *letter* of Scripture, for the *Deist* to exhibit, and require an explanation of, from the *Christian*, it is the more surprising that the *Temple of Reason*" should seek to increase these contradictions where they

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<sup>159</sup> Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 130. For an informative examination of Deism in early America, Denis Driscoll, and Elihu Palmer see Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>160</sup> John Hargrove, "Baltimore, 22nd June, 1801 Mr. Driscoll," *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 6, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>161</sup> Hargrove, "Baltimore, 22nd June," 2.



are not to be found!” (emphasis in original).<sup>162</sup> In support of clarifying these apparent contradictions, Hargrove continued:

St. Paul informs us, that all Scripture is given by inspiration from God; and is “*profitable for doctrine, reproof and instruction in righteousness.*” If this is the case then, or if the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God, they must contain a recondite sense, which doth not appear in the *letter*; as that, it must be confessed, affords us scarce any “*instruction in righteousness,*” in many places; but on the contrary, exhibits some apparent contradictions. The reason of this is because the Scriptures being the WORD OF GOD, must necessarily be like unto their author; and therefore partake of his essence, which is altogether *spiritual*, the mere *letter* therefore, if rested in, *killeth*, as our Lord declares; but on the contrary, the *spirit*, that is, the true spiritual sense, alone, “*giveth life.*”...The *literal* sense, in many passages, proclaim war and death against the principles of true science and reason, as well as against the attributes of God; but when the genuine or spiritual (sic) sense is explained, every “*stumbling block*” is removed out of the way; then, even the “*rough ways of the Lord become smooth*” — the “*crooked ways straight,*” and every passage appears fraught with heavenly wisdom. It is then, when through a love of truth and goodness, for their own sake, we are thus permitted to *enter within the vail of the word*, that all *apparent* contradictions vanish; and the whole tenor of the sacred pages *appear* harmonious and divine (emphasis in original).<sup>163</sup>

In this passage, Hargrove relies on Enlightenment rhetoric to emphasize the Swedenborgian New Church Bible hermeneutic. Hargrove argues that there is a spiritual sense within each letter and word of the Scripture that reveals God’s true message to man, and that far from undermining the principles of science and reason, this spiritual sense within the Bible is best understood by a rational mind that can identify and therefore align scientific truths with Christian Scripture.

Contrary to Hargrove’s hope for inclusion and engagement in serious religious debate, Driscoll refused to reprint the New Church reverend’s correspondence, chiding Hargrove by acknowledging receipt of the letter, but stating in the next edition of the *Temple of Reason* “[w]e must beg leave to inform our reverend correspondent, that the Temple of Reason is not

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<sup>162</sup> Hargrove, “Baltimore, 22nd June,” 5.

<sup>163</sup> Hargrove, “Baltimore, 22nd June,” 4-5.

established for every furious fanatic and wild visionary to *rant* and *cant* away in it” (emphasis in original).<sup>164</sup> Hargrove could not let this insult go unanswered. The very next week, he sent another letter to the *Temple of Reason*, rebuking Driscoll for his lack of respect and unwillingness to reprint the letter or engage in reasonable debate about contemporary theology: “I assure you, sir, I expected a very calm and candid reply from the editor of the “*Temple of Reason*,” not in a stile (sic) of railing and evasion...”<sup>165</sup> When Hargrove was again denied a reprint in the *Temple of Reason*, and again acknowledged but chided by Driscoll, he decided to take action and raise funds to start his own periodical. This endeavor he aptly titled the *Temple of Truth*, which sparred with the *Temple of Reason* for thirteen weeks until the final edition was published on October 31, 1801.<sup>166</sup>

The rise of Deism in America, cultivated during the Revolutionary and Early Republic periods, in part, by published works from such thinkers as Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and Anthony Collins, has been explored by historians from a number of different perspectives.<sup>167</sup> While early

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<sup>164</sup> Denis Driscoll, “From the “Temple of Reason,” 1st July, 1801,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 6, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>165</sup> John Hargrove, “Baltimore, 4th July, 1801 Mr. Driscoll,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 8, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>166</sup> It appears Rev. Hargrove spent money out of his own pocket as well to fund the *Temple of Truth*, for at the end of its run, the editor of the *Temple of Truth* noted that Hargrove suffered a loss of eighty dollars. From: “Address from the Chief Editor of the Temple of Truth, to his Patrons,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 174, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>167</sup> Hargrove provides testament to the influence of these thinkers on American deistic culture by chiding them in his first letter to editor Denis Driscoll: “I believe that God is ONE...both in *essence* and in *persons*; this, in my opinion, is the *true* and *only* FOUNDATION of all genuine theology; but that no divine superstructure, corresponding to this ample and permanent base, was every (sic) erected or designed to be erected on this FOUNDATION...But, it is asserted, that the *Bible* cannot be that superstructure; because Monsieur Voltaire, Don Calmet, and Tom Paine, declare that it is no better than a huge, irregular, gothic structure, which evidently betrays the ignorance of the builder, having no beauty in the design, nor proportion in the parts, and is now nearly undermined by modern philosophy and ready to tumble into ruins” (emphasis in original). From: John Hargrove, “Baltimore, 22nd June, 1801 Mr. Driscoll,” *The Temple of Truth*, 3.

academic studies attempted to simply trace the social, political, and religious avenues in which Deism rose to popularity, subsequent studies analyze the intellectual lineage of Deism as examined through the lens of specific thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and other American Founding Fathers. This approach intends to, as Kerry S. Walters states, “unravel its philosophical, theological, and ethical tenets.”<sup>168</sup> Other scholarly studies contextualize the rise of Deism within the political conditions of philosophies such as Republicanism, finding an intricate relationship between political developments and religious thought.<sup>169</sup>

In *Skepticism and American Faith*, Christopher Grasso dedicates a section to John Hargrove and the New Jerusalem Church as an illuminating counter response to Deism, arguing that Hargrove answered the rising cry of Biblical skeptics with Swedenborg’s science of correspondences:

...Hargrove agreed...that the Bible, as it was commonly read and interpreted by most Christians, was shot through with inconsistencies and contradictions. Once rational readers had shaken off the “blind reverence” for the scriptures that they had learned at their mothers’ knees, Hargrove realized, these problems were enough to drive them to skepticism. The solution, he argued, was not to remain skeptical about Christianity and try to prop up a bogus religion of nature in its place but to discover the “spiritual or allegorical” sense beneath the literal meanings of scriptural passages — to discern the patterns of meaning that did indeed reveal a wonderfully harmonious and rational

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<sup>168</sup> Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992),

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<sup>169</sup> For scholarly studies of Deism in America see: Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), G. Adolf Koch, *Religion of the American Enlightenment* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Kerry S. Walters, *Revolutionary Deists: Early America’s Rational Infidels* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2011), Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

theological system. Without directly mentioning the seer whose visions had revealed that system, Hargrove pointed toward Swedenborg's theology..."<sup>170</sup>

As Grasso points out, much social and religious pushback to Deism took the form of staunch opposition. However, Hargrove's response to the Deistical *Temple of Reason* is unique in that he offered Swedenborgian doctrine as a solution to bridging the divide between the rationally driven arguments of the Deists and the incorruptible divine truths of the Bible. Promoting a new approach to Biblical interpretation, though, was not the only way that Hargrove distinguished New Church theology from Deism. The significance of Swedenborgian beliefs regarding the role and importance of human reason in conjunction with God's divinity cannot be overstated. Grasso notes that, in his first letter to Driscoll, Hargrove called himself a "good deist" because "he believed in a single God...and because he championed the use of reason."<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, Hargrove quickly qualifies his self-labeling by adding that he is more than just a Deist, he is a "Christian deist," who, Grasso writes, "endorsed the divinity of the Bible as well as the rationality of nature...[h]uman reason might be the best guide to truth, but it could not be the final judge on religious matters because it was always adulterated by prejudices and passions."<sup>172</sup> However, Grasso's assessment of Hargrove's beliefs regarding the relationship between human reason and Biblical truth may not adequately capture the depths of Swedenborgian New Church sentiments. While Hargrove did praise and revere the use of human reason in assessing God's true word, he also frequently argued for an integral relationship between reason and revelation

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<sup>170</sup> Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 132.

<sup>171</sup> Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 131.

<sup>172</sup> Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 132.

based on Swedenborg's religious doctrines.<sup>173</sup> In fact, this argument endorses a synthesis of reason and revelation and insinuates that there is a divinity inherent to the expression of human reason when applied to the interpretation of the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg's science of correspondences.<sup>174</sup> Analyzing Hargrove's polemics against Deism in the *Temple of Truth* will illuminate this distinction.

In his final edition of the *Temple of Truth*, Hargrove writes in his concluding remarks that “[t]he whole duty, and best interest of man, is fully contained in the holy scriptures, when *rationally explained*; consequently nothing more essentially concerns us than to be properly instructed in this religion” (emphasis in original).<sup>175</sup> Although the *Temple of Truth* was written to contradict the principles and apparent moral dangers of Deism, and therefore leans toward pointing out the weaknesses inherent to the use of human reason, Hargrove continually hinted at

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<sup>173</sup> John Hargrove, “Select and Important Distinctions between Adulterated Reason and Genuine Truth,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 128-129, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>174</sup> A number of scholars have identified a similar, interrelated relationship between reason and revelation in Swedenborg's doctrines. See Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 17 who wrote: “[Swedenborg's] attitude toward these experiences showed that he was still very much the scientist; that is, he claimed simply to be recording what he was permitted to observe. At the same time, however, he emphasized the importance of intuitive as opposed to sensory sources of knowledge and insight, insisting that spiritual truths were not discovered by the intellect alone but rather were revealed by heaven to the inner eye. Whatever the source of his insights, he elaborated from them a metaphysical system in which spirit and matter existed not in a dichotomous relationship of mutual exclusivity but rather as complementary and inseparable dimensions of a single and universal whole.” See also Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 201 who wrote: “[Swedenborg] and his Anglo-American progeny, who crystallized into the Church of the New Jerusalem...were particularly savvy synthesizers of natural philosophy and immediate revelation. More eclectic than most evangelicals, Swedenborgian seekers fused the empiricist exactitude of experimental philosophy to a dualistic spiritualizing of the scriptures...Everything harbored hidden correspondences; all the world was a hieroglyph. To Swedenborg and those who followed his lead, the trick to reharmonizing the universe was not to ignore the materialistic, rationalistic, and experimental dimensions of the Enlightenment, but to transmute them into a spiritual inquiry every bit as thorough, substantial, and precise.” See also Robert Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (2003), 12 who wrote: “The trick...was to ignore the material and rational in favor of transforming them into the spiritual, to see the eternal and infallible counterpart lying beyond the ephemeral and fallible part, and by so doing, to “throw open the arcana of scripture and the mysteries of the heavenly world to rational understanding and empirical report.”

<sup>175</sup> John Hargrove, “A Final Extract from the Temple of Reason with a Final Reply,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 193, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

a deeper relationship between rationality and divinity by frequently pairing the two in his arguments. In the 11th edition of the *Temple of Truth*, Hargrove penned an essay titled “Selected and Important Considerations on the Humanity of the Deity.” In this essay, Hargrove claims that all of humanity resides within God. He then posits a relationship between man’s body and soul, stating that “every rational and considerate person knows that *man* is not *man* merely by virtue of his *external* form or *body*, but principally by virtue of his spirit or *soul*, which is a *form* recipient of love and wisdom from God” (emphasis in original).<sup>176</sup> Hargrove also implicitly argues that knowledge of God’s divine influx based on Swedenborg’s doctrines helps to explain man’s rationality and free will:

It has already been observed that the true distinguishing, constituent, principles of the human nature are *rationality* and *free will*: these principles indeed in man, who is a finite and sinful creature, are both very limited, and depraved; but in God they are infinite, and perfect. Viz. *divine love*, and *divine wisdom*, Man receives his rationality and free will by influx from the deity. His rationality by an influx of the divine wisdom into his understanding, and his free will by an influx of divine love into his will (emphasis in original).<sup>177</sup>

In this passage, Hargrove posits a symbiotic relationship between reason and revelation. Since man needs rationality to understand how Swedenborg’s science of correspondences elucidates the Bible’s true messages, but this rationality is only receivable from an influx of divine wisdom from God, Hargrove essentially argues that engaging in rational thinking about the Bible is to engage with God’s influx, and therefore is a type of divine action. By aligning rationality with

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<sup>176</sup> John Hargrove, “Selected and Important Considerations on the Humanity of the Deity,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 160, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>177</sup> Hargrove, “Selected and Important,” 161.

true religious insight, Hargrove promotes Swedenborg's entanglement of rational thinking, divinity, and Biblical exegesis.

From the contextualized belief that man's rationality is received through God's divine influx, consider the following statement by Hargrove celebrating the opening of the first New Church temple in Baltimore:

These clouds which are the literal sense of the holy *word*, are *now*, through the increasing influence of the "sun of righteousness" on our scientific atmosphere, in such a state of rarefaction, as to become, to the man of the *New Church*, as a sacred mirror; — reflecting on his rational faculty, "*The Glory of God*," — or spiritual sense of the word; whereby a *general*, and now *necessary* salvation will be effected in the Christian world, from *infidelity* and *superstition* (emphasis in original).<sup>178</sup>

This passage exemplifies Hargrove's message that reading the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg's correspondences reflects (through God's influx) man's rational faculty. Hargrove further solidifies this symbiotic relationship between reason and revelation with the following passage from the same sermon:

But my beloved and respected audience permit me to assure you, that it is a heresy of the greatest magnitude and replete with the most dangerous consequences to suppose, or maintain that Reason and Revelation, are at variance with each other; for they are both, equally the voice of God, — which must be consistent with itself, whatever the voice of man may be.<sup>179</sup>

Hargrove extends this relationship between reason and revelation to worship as well. "In order therefore that our acts of worship, may be approved," Hargrove preached at the same sermon, "as well as our persons, by the Lord Jesus Christ our *Savior* and our *God* we must worship him not

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<sup>178</sup> John Hargrove, *A Sermon on the True Object and Nature of Christian Worship: Delivered at the Opening of the New Jerusalem Temple in the City of Baltimore. On Sunday, the 5th of January, 1800* (Baltimore: Acting Committee of the New Church, 1800): 9, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>179</sup> Hargrove, *A Sermon on the True*, 17.

only in Spirit, but in Truth also, that is, our worship must be not only pious, but rational” (emphasis in original).<sup>180</sup> By emphasizing an integral relationship between divinity and rationality in which the expression of rational thinking can be seen as a divine act, Hargrove not only proffered a solution to the seemingly irreconcilable doctrinal differences between Deism and Christianity, but he also posited a functional duality between the qualities of pious belief and rational assessment that acted as central to New Church theology and the New Church Biblical hermeneutic.

## *Part II: Enlightenment Rhetoric, Science, and Swedenborg’s Biblical Hermeneutic*

Like all Protestant religions, New Church theology was firmly couched in close reading and interpretation of the Holy Bible. However, unlike Protestant religions, Swedenborg’s doctrines overlay this Biblical analysis like a revealing map key, providing New Church readers with a new hermeneutic to interpret and clarify the Bible’s most debate-worthy passages.<sup>181</sup> The

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<sup>180</sup> Hargrove, *A Sermon on the True*, 21.

<sup>181</sup> Other scholars have observed Swedenborg’s Biblical map key. See J.F.C. Harrison’s *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979) who wrote: “Every object in the universe, argues Swedenborg, has an interior meaning, is represented of some truth, and corresponds to some inner, spiritual order. The Bible is written by ‘correspondences’: it has an internal, spiritual sense, as well as an outward, literal meaning. ‘The Word,’ he writes, ‘has a spiritual sense, which is within the natural sense, just as the soul is within the body’” (73). See also Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) who wrote: “Among [Swedenborg’s] biggest allures was as an inspired guide to scriptural interpretation, with much of his theological writing taking the form of extended commentaries on the hidden spiritual meaning of Biblical texts, recondite correspondences beneath the literal words” (204). See also Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato’s Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) who wrote: “Swedenborg had applied the theory of correspondences to writing itself, particularly scripture, claiming that words had interior and exterior meanings, to the extent that a fully interior reading of the Bible would result in a creation that was unrecognizable as dependent on the exterior text. This system...rendered every word a stand-in for another concept based on association...” (130). See also Rachel Oberter, “‘The Sublimation of Matter into Spirit’: Anna Mary Howitt’s Automatic Drawings,” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* Eds. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012) who wrote: “Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic so influential to the spiritualists, was a product of the Enlightenment, insisting on the fixity and universality of symbols. He emphasized the possibility of decoding and characterized his work as a ‘hieroglyphic key’ to the Bible, confident in his ability to reconstruct past meanings...Swedenborg intended his books to function like a dictionary, which would help people translate the figurative language of the Bible” (349-350).



premise of this hermeneutic is based on Swedenborg's science of correspondences which reinterprets Biblical words and phrases based on the assumption that God's true message has been hidden within Scripture and hitherto not realized or understood by man until Swedenborg received the key to interpretation through his conversations with God and angels.<sup>182</sup> Rev. Hargrove believed that Swedenborg's correspondences functioned like a Biblical hermeneutic and these correspondences became the theological basis on which he staked his religious claims. In promotion of this hermeneutic, Hargrove frequently reminded inquirers and believers alike that God gave mankind rational faculties in order to understand the laws of natural science and Swedenborg's science of correspondences. In addition, as previously examined, Hargrove continually emphasized that there is a divinity to be found within the expression of reason and rationality. Swedenborg's hermeneutic, therefore, is one which strongly intertwines divine Scripture and Enlightenment rationalism. Hargrove's application of this hermeneutic to interpretation of Biblical Scripture and religious sermons offers historians the opportunity to recontextualize competing perceptions of reason and Christian divinity during the Early American Republic.

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<sup>182</sup> From John Hargrove, *The Substance of a Sermon, on the Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church; Delivered the 26th of December, 1802 before the President of the United States and several Members of Congress*, 1802 (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1803): 8, Early American Imprints, iw.newsbank.com: "This stile, however, of representing sacred and celestial things by the visible things of the world, in process of time became miserably adulterated, and shockingly profaned, insomuch, that what was first intended only to represent certain affections of the human mind, or attributes of the deity, were in following ages held up as different Gods, and through the aid of superstition, honored with divine worship! This ancient stile alluded to, the men of the new church are taught to call the science or doctrine of *correspondencies*, a science long lost to the church of God, but now again restored, through the divine mercy of the Lord, in the neglected, but astonishing pages of that rational philosopher and heaven-taught scribe, Baron Emanuel Swedenborg."

In 1799, John Hargrove received a letter from a Mr. Wheeler, who had written asking for a “view of the general outlines or leading doctrines of The New Jerusalem Church.”<sup>183</sup> Hargrove wrote back that he would communicate some particulars and generals as well as send a book with his return correspondence. In his response from Baltimore, dated March 26, 1799, Hargrove outlined the doctrines of the New Church. He first aligned Swedenborg’s New Church theology not with any organized religion but with the “Essentials of Religion.”<sup>184</sup> In articulating the particulars and generals of the New Church to Wheeler, John Hargrove made reference to faulty Biblical interpretations of the Millennium, and the Holy Trinity, and further examined a claim regarding the relationship between God and emotions, arguing that God is ““Essential Love,”” which is the chief passion or affection of the humanmind (sic).”<sup>185</sup> In his sermons and letters to the public, Hargrove perpetually emphasized the importance of understanding the apparent and genuine truths that Swedenborg’s science of correspondences revealed in order to truly interpret Christian Scripture. In his letter to Wheeler, Hargrove clarifies the New Church position on Scripture and correspondences by writing that “you may please to remember that the scripture says “[t]he sun riseth & the sun goeth down” this also is an apparent truth only; or an expression accomodated (sic) to the prejudices of men in that age of the world; for every man of Science now knows that the Sun never Rises & Sets; but continually remains Stationary in the Centre of our System; & that it is the Earth’s Revolution on our own axis that produces the appearance of the Suns rising & Setting” (emphasis in original).<sup>186</sup> In this example, Hargrove introduces an

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<sup>183</sup> “John Hargrove to Mr. Wheeler,” *Personal Letter*, March 26, 1799, Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Pacific School of Religion.

<sup>184</sup> “John Hargrove to Mr. Wheeler.”

<sup>185</sup> “John Hargrove to Mr. Wheeler.”

<sup>186</sup> “John Hargrove to Mr. Wheeler.”

analogy based on scientific principles to explain how Swedenborg's correspondences reveal the distinction between a word's literal definition and spiritual definition. As mentioned previously in chapter one, Swedenborg believed that everything in the natural world corresponded to everything in the spiritual world and to everything in the divine celestial world.<sup>187</sup> Since God spoke from the celestial realm, yet man spoke from the natural realm, God's exact meaning could only be deciphered if the correspondences between the three realms were clarified. With Swedenborg's writings functioning as the map legend to elucidating these correspondences, Hargrove and New Church members believed they had the key to true Biblical interpretation. In a sermon he delivered before President Jefferson and members of Congress in 1802, Hargrove expounds on the functioning of this celestial, internal meaning hidden within Biblical words and passages:

We fully subscribe to the Divine inspiration, sanctity, and authority of the *word of God*; believing that it contains a recondite or *Spiritual sense* within the *literal* sense, as the *soul* is within the *body*. That in this internal or spiritual sense of the word, is contained all the treasures of divine wisdom, which will be more and more revealed, unto the future church of God, in proportion as the science of correspondency becomes better understood, and more cordially acknowledged; and, that this inestimable science is now again restored, in the humble and sincere lovers of Scriptures, in the profound but neglected pages of the theological writings of the Baron Emanuel Swedenborg (emphasis in original).<sup>188</sup>

Ten years later, Hargrove's message regarding the spiritual sense of the word had strengthened with supporting Biblical references as demonstrated by an excerpt from the 1812

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<sup>187</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion Containing the Universal Theology of The New Church Vol. 1*, Trans. John C. Ager (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 327-328.

<sup>188</sup> John Hargrove, *The Substance of a Sermon on the Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church; Delivered the 26th of December, 1802 before the President of the United States and Several Members of Congress at the Capitol, in the City of Washington* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1803): 13-14, Early American Imprints, [iw.newsbank.com](http://iw.newsbank.com).

edition of the monthly periodical *The Halcyon Luminary*. Hargrove wrote to an enquirer of New Church theology:

‘My words are *spirit, and they are life*.’ (John vi. 63.) And hence the apostle to the Corinthians (2 Epistle iii. 6.) tells us that ‘*the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life*,’ whereby we are taught, not only that there is a *spiritual* sense, interiorly in the holy scriptures; but that all the energy and *life* of the word reside in this internal or spiritual sense; while resting in the mere letter will be attended with the destruction or *death* of all the principles of science and reason (emphasis in original).<sup>189</sup>

Linking Swedenborg’s correspondences to the recovery and safeguarding of human reason and scientific principles is a frequent theme Hargrove summoned in his sermons and public defenses of New Church theology. “There are many sincere and scientific Christians in this day,”

Hargrove wrote in 1812 in response to a curious New Church inquirer, “...who no longer view the sacred and inspired pages as a mere *natural history* of the creation of the universe...as *one* of this number, I am free to add, that if the scriptures be only viewed in this light, they are the most imperfect, obscure, and unintelligible history of the kind that ever was written” (emphasis in original).<sup>190</sup> In returning to Hargrove’s response to Wheeler, it is evident that his letter provides an example of the subject matter and manner in which Hargrove utilized Enlightenment rhetoric and scientific knowledge to promote and defend New Church theology. In using scientific knowledge to throw relief on Biblical rhetoric and solidify reasoning through the lens of contemporary knowledge, Hargrove set the tone for decades worth of arguments made on behalf of the New Jerusalem Church. His message was clear: men of science, reason, and understanding must rationally see that there are literal absurdities in the Bible that cannot be taken at face value.

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<sup>189</sup> John Hargrove, “To Theodore,” *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. I (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1812): 114, Rpt. by (London: FB &c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

<sup>190</sup> John Hargrove, “To Theodore,” 113.

Those who experience strife at this knowledge should look to Swedenborg's science of correspondences to reconcile these incongruities.

John Hargrove wrote a lot about Swedenborg's science of correspondences and spiritual sense of the word, but it will be helpful to explore how exactly this literal to spiritual transliteration produced specific New Church interpretations of the Bible. Analyzing Hargrove's interpretation of doctrinal issues and specific Biblical passages will also illuminate how the New Church utilized contemporary scientific knowledge to clarify and justify the internal functioning of the New Church Biblical hermeneutic. The two most important doctrinal issues promulgated by the New Church were new interpretations of Jesus's Millennial Second Coming and pending judgment, and the Holy Trinity. Hargrove continually upheld Swedenborg's assertion that the Millennium had begun in 1757, never wavering in his claim that the Second Coming alluded to in the Bible was actually a metaphorical reference to the rise of God's new Christian church and the fall of the old church.<sup>191</sup> In 1802, Hargrove preached *Substance of a Sermon* to President Jefferson and members of Congress. In this sermon Hargrove elucidates the New Church stance on the Millennium:

We are led to believe that the *first* period of the gospel is now at an end, and that the prophetic annunciations respecting the *last judgment* and the *end of the world*, are now

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<sup>191</sup> Hargrove firmly believed Swedenborg was a divine medium and mouthpiece for the Lord's second advent into the world, as demonstrated in this letter by Hargrove to Doctor Samuel Brown in July of 1803: "There is something very singular connected with the Idea of Swedenborg's Divine Mission to Announce the Second Advent of the Lord: He wrote all his Theological works in Latin; Now Pilate put a Writing over our Lord's Head, when he was crucified, signifying that he was "King of the Jews"; and the writing was in Hebrew, in Greek, & in Latin. St. John's Gospel XIX Ch. 20 v. Who cannot be struck, that this writing was of the Divine Providence? And insinuated, that an acknowledgment of the Divinity of the Lord, should be promulgated unto the World of mankind in these three Specified Languages particularly. The Jewish Dispensation, we know, was given by inspiration from God, in Hebrew, — the 1st Period of the Christian Dispensation in Greek; and now behold a 2d Period of the Gospel — The Latter day, or New Jerusalem dispensation is given in Latin. I cannot help feeling impressed with this Remark" (emphasis in original). From: "John Hargrove to Doctr. Saml. Brown," *Personal Letter*, July 4th, 1803, Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Pacific School of Religion.

fulfilled. That the *latter* only signifies the *consumation* (sic) *of the age*, or end of the churches which have prevailed for many ages past, both as to *life*, and *doctrines*; and the *former*, only an exploration, examination, and condemnation of all those evil and false principles which have brought the church to its end. We cannot doubt of this being the case, when we take a serious and impartial view of the present state of Christianity in the world: Numberless sects and denominations now exist in the Christian church, and no two of them are agreed, even in what they themselves esteem essential doctrines! *We*, not only say this — it is a plain and incontrovertible fact...we cannot but conclude that what our Lord says in the xxiv. chap. of St. Mathew’s gospel, is now accomplished and fulfilled. *The Sun*, (or divine love) is *darkened* — *The Moon*, (or genuine faith) *is turned into blood* — *and all the Stars of Heaven* (or all divine illumination) *is fallen* (from the firmament of the Church,) ... (emphasis in original).<sup>192</sup>

In this passage, Hargrove provides a glimpse into the Swedenborgian world of correspondences, giving New Church translations for a few Biblical phrases. These include the sun corresponding to God’s divine love, the moon corresponding to genuine faith, and the stars corresponding to God’s divine illumination.<sup>193</sup> In addition, Hargrove posits that the state of incongruity within the Christian world is evidence that the Millennial destruction of the “present state of Christianity” has already begun in order to allow for the establishment and growth of the New Jerusalem Church.

In another sermon given on Christmas day in 1804 and dedicated entirely to examining the “Second Coming of Christ,” John Hargrove expanded on the New Church’s stance regarding the Millennium, offering deeper insight into how Swedenborg’s correspondences were applied to new interpretations of the Bible, as well as to the scientific premises framing his arguments.

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<sup>192</sup> John Hargrove, *The Substance of a Sermon on the Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church; Delivered the 26th of December, 1802 before the President of the United States and Several Members of Congress at the Capitol, in the City of Washington* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1803): 14, Early American Imprints, iw.newsbank.com.

<sup>193</sup> These translations are directly from Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia* which offers a passage-by-passage explication of the books of Genesis and Exodus based on Swedenborg’s understanding of how the science of correspondences illuminated the true spiritual meaning of Scripture. See: Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, Vol. I, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010), www.swedenborg.com, 19.

Hargrove began his sermon by stating the basic stance of the New Church respecting the Millennium and Jesus's judgment on the world:

The men of the New Jerusalem church...[affirm] that the Messiah...has actually effected his second general advent, "in the spirit," not many years ago — by a gracious revelation of the spiritual sense of his holy word...that he has thereby effected an exploration, and judgment unto condemnation...and [has] brought the first period of the Christian church to its consummation; and that this is what is signified in the sacred pages..."<sup>194</sup>

Hargrove proceeds to tighten his argument regarding the Millennium by aligning Swedenborg's correspondences and Biblical interpretation with contemporary science, claiming that to disagree with New Church doctrine is equivalent to disagreeing with science itself. "...I would ask the impartial and scientific Christian," Hargrove begins, addressing his audience with the very adjectives with which he aims to align New Church doctrine, "what necessity can there be...for all "*this wreck of matter, and this crush of worlds?*" What affinity can there possibly be, between the guilt and punishment of the men of this world, and the destruction of all other worlds in the universe? Or, by what law are all these stupendous worlds which are scattered through the immensity of space, to gravitate towards this?" (emphasis in original).<sup>195</sup> Here, Hargrove questions the basis of traditional Biblical interpretation with modern-day scientific knowledge by arguing that Newton's law of gravity does not allow for other planets and worlds existing throughout the reaches of space to be brought into Earth's gravitational pull. He expounds on this argument a few pages later to provide a clearer interpretation of the Biblical passages that address the Millennium through the lens of Swedenborg's science of correspondences:

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<sup>194</sup> John Hargrove, "A Sermon, on the Second Coming of Christ, by John Hargrove," (25 December 1804) *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*, Vol. 2. Ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1577-1578.

<sup>195</sup> Hargrove, "A Sermon, on the Second Coming," 1583-1584.

It is true, it is also written, that at the second coming of our Lord, “*all the stars of heaven shall fall to the earth*”; but if any christian understands these words in the mere literal sense, he betrays his great ignorance of the vast magnitude and indefinite number of those mighty worlds, and system of worlds, which the Almighty Creator hath exhibited to our wondering view, as well as of the universal and immutable laws of gravity and attraction. By the “*stars of heaven*” then, which are to “*fall unto the earth*,” previous to the second advent of the Lord, I understand, that at that period, all illumination, respecting the word of the Lord, will fall into its lowest state, so that the sacred pages of divine inspiration, may be said to cease yielding their heavenly light, and be, as it were, extinct in the firmament of the church. That the above, is actually the true sense of “*the stars of heaven falling unto the earth*,” will, I presume, appear sufficiently evident to the candid and pious christian, who is conversant with the sacred pages of divine inspiration (emphasis in original).<sup>196</sup>

In this passage, Hargrove is consistent with his previous interpretations of stars as corresponding to God’s illumination. He also displays his grasp of contemporary scientific knowledge and entangles modern day science with Swedenborg’s correspondence-based Biblical hermeneutic. In order to truly understand how Swedenborg’s science of correspondences illuminates Biblical passages, Hargrove argues, one must be fully versed in scientific knowledge to recognize the inherent errors contained within literal readings of the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, Hargrove’s sermon goes so far as to implicitly argue that scriptural meaning is only truly decipherable when analogies to scientific discoveries can elucidate the errors of literal readings. This argument strongly aligns Swedenborgian theology with Enlightenment science and provides insight into the type of reader Hargrove aimed to attract: educated, liberal, intellectual.

Hargrove continued to undermine traditional Biblical interpretations of the Millennium by paralleling key Bible passages with contemporary scientific knowledge. In this example, Hargrove emphasized knowledge of Earth’s four elements to argue that a Biblical passage which

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<sup>196</sup> Hargrove, “A Sermon, on the Second Coming,” 1588-1589.



referenced the melting of all elements could not be read literally through the lens of human rationality:

When, therefore, we are told in another place...that at the second coming of the Lord, “*The elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up*”; we are not to understand the words in their mere literal sense (for this is forbidden both by the dictates of illuminated reason, and the known principles of science); we can, therefore, only correctly view them in the same sense in which St. Peter understood Joel; to wit, in a spiritual sense. For, with respect to the natural elements, he could not possibly allude to these; as he must have known, that three out of four, usually called elements, have always been in a fluid state; consequently, there would be no propriety in announcing that air, fire or water should be made to “*melt with fervent heat,*” at the second coming of the Lord; no my beloved, the elements that shall then melt, or pass away, must certainly mean those erroneous elements of theology which have too long obtained in the Christian church, and brought it to its consummation (emphasis in original).<sup>197</sup>

Hargrove also deconstructed a Biblical passage referencing God’s Second Coming and judgment to the world in order to proffer both a new interpretation of God’s ethereal makeup, as well as clarify what His advent and judgment upon the world really meant. In this example, Hargrove used the known laws of natural science to argue that humans cannot apply these laws to a knowledge of God who must inevitably exist outside of them. Hargrove states:

To the mere natural man who has never elevated his ideas of the Deity above matter and space, it is probable that this doctrine, of God’s descending into this world, and ascending to heaven again, may appear altogether paradoxical, if not futile; such persons, however, with all their boasted attainments in science, and the knowledge of nature, stand in need of still further instruction respecting the God of nature; both as to his divine essence, as well as his divine existence. For, how silly and absurd would it be, to imagine that the Almighty and Omnipresent Creator of all worlds, is “*such a being as ourselves,*” having a fixed residence, or local abode in any one part of the universe which he has made? Seeing, that if it be the work of his hands, and the effect of infinite love, wisdom and power, the Creator himself must have existed before *nature, space and time*; consequently, must be altogether distinct from nature and space, as to his divine essence, and from time, as to his divine existence. And yet, illuminated reason may perceive, that the Deity, at the same time, must exist in and through all matter, and in and through all

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<sup>197</sup> Hargrove, “A Sermon, on the Second Coming,” 1587-1588.

space, though distinct from both; even as the human soul exists in, and through flesh and blood, and yet is distinct from both; the latter being composed of material particles, the former of spiritual principles (emphasis in original).<sup>198</sup>

This application of scientific principles to the explication of how Swedenborg's science of correspondences illuminates Biblical passages is evident in the New Church stance regarding the Holy Trinity as well. Swedenborg was firmly anti-Trinitarian, arguing for the existence of only one God. Hargrove and New Church members, entrenched in Swedenborg's anti-Trinitarian stance, took up arms on behalf of this cause. In the previously discussed letter to Wheeler, Hargrove scoffed at what he saw as a doctrine rife with contradictions and irrationalities:

Look into the 1st & 2nd articles in your Discipline book...In the 1st it is [illegible] that God is a Being without Body, parts or persons" etc. — "and in unity of this Godhead there are 3 Persons"!!! So here you have 3 persons for your God; and yet it is said he is NOBODY; for it is not plain that if God has no Body, he must consequently be NOBODY; now if this is not downright atheism, I am mistaken...In the 2nd Article of your religion, however...you will perceive the doctrine of the 1st Article contradicted & given up; for it is expressly said that the Godhead and Manhood were found together in ONE person never to be divided whereof is ONE Christ Very God & Very Man. Now if this be true, as it certainly is, that the Godhead & Manhood were joined together in ONE person never to be divided why do they Divide them into 3 persons; or may I not ask if the Godhead and Manhood were join'd together in ONE person, to wit in Christ; what is (sic) become of the other 2 persons (emphasis in original).<sup>199</sup>

In this passage, Hargrove demonstrated how the argument regarding the Holy Trinity is rife with contradictions. Since the ephemeral being of God must be whole, Hargrove argues, He therefore could not be broken into three persons as portrayed in a Methodist discipline book! In order to utilize Biblical passages to support anti-Trinitarian claims, Hargrove called on reason to undermine the concept of the Trinity while offering mathematical and scientific concepts as

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<sup>198</sup> Hargrove, "A Sermon, on the Second Coming," 1581.

<sup>199</sup> "John Hargrove to Mr. Wheeler," *Personal Letter*, March 26, 1799, Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Pacific School of Religion.

cornerstones of knowledge to question the rational and religious confidence of his listeners.<sup>200</sup> In his sermon at the opening of the New Church temple, Hargrove emphasized the importance of language having a fixed meaning in order to undermine contemporary interpretations of the Holy Trinity:

The power of expressing our thoughts to each other by human language, is justly acknowledged to be one of the chief felicities, and characteristics of man...it is absolutely requisite that we attach to each word a positive and fixed meaning...Thus for instance, when the scriptures inform us that “God is a spirit,” we readily conceive that he is an immaterial being; and as the same scriptures emphatically call him holy; and the “Holy one of Israel;” it is but just and logical to conclude that GOD, and the HOLY SPIRIT...imply ONE and the same person and no more: How then, in the name of every thing rational, can this name or term, to wit, The Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, which was evidently designed to express the whole essence or integer of the Deity, be made use of with any degree of propriety to signify only a fractional or third part of him? Can a part be equal to the whole? Or rather can the whole be contained in a third part? (emphasis in original).<sup>201</sup>

Here Hargrove spotlights the importance of words having a constant and fixed meaning in order to aid consistent language comprehension, claiming that terms such as “holy spirit” and “holy ghost” should not carry different definitions or suggest connotations other than what was intended by God. Here, Hargrove uses basic math to clarify his point, claiming that false translations of these terms have divided the whole of God into parts. This is a division which Hargrove argues is blasphemous and impossible, as God’s infinity cannot be parsed or contained within a third of a whole. In a sermon preached a few years later, Hargrove elucidates how the

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<sup>200</sup> There are noted similarities between this argument and arguments made a few decades later by Unitarians (see William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity”). While the foundation of New Church and Unitarian arguments about the Holy Trinity resonate with each other, it’s important to remember that, unlike Unitarians, Swedenborgians believed in a Trinity of God’s three essential principles composed of divine love, divine wisdom, and divine proceeding powers which correspond to man’s soul, body, and operation.

<sup>201</sup> John Hargrove, *A Sermon on the True Object and Nature of Christian Worship*, 15.

New Jerusalem Church utilized Swedenborg's science of correspondences to both solidify their stance on the Holy Trinity and issue a new Swedenborgian interpretation of the Bible:

The members of the Lord's New Church, cordially recognize and sincerely subscribe to the true and scriptural doctrine of the Trinity; but at the same time reject the modern doctrine of a Trinity of *persons* in the Deity. A TRINITY there certainly is, and *must be*, in God — not a Trinity of *persons*, however, but of essential divine *principles*, viz. The divine love, the divine wisdom, and the divine proceeding powers; like unto soul, body, and operation in man. THAT these principles are all united in the sole and individual person of *Jesus Christ*...is as evident from Scripture authority, as that two and two makes four...if it *could* be proved from Scripture, that there actually were three *separate* and *distinct* persons, who were each independent of the other...it would at once prove the doctrine of a plurality of *Gods*, and establish polytheism...(emphasis in original).<sup>202</sup>

In this passage, Hargrove acknowledges the existence of a divine Trinity referenced in the Bible but argues that this Trinity refers to the essential principles wholly contained within God, not to a division of God's divinity into three different people. Hargrove again references the simplicity of known math principles to emphasize how straightforward and rational it is to see God's divine Trinity as contained within the Deity, claiming that to interpret the Trinity in any other way is equivalent to denouncing monotheism in favor of polytheism.

Hargrove clarified exactly how Swedenborg's science of correspondences illuminates the true meaning of the Holy Trinity in his sermon *On the Second Coming of Christ* from 1804:

...in the Deity, whom we call Jehovah-God, there exists a divine Trinity; not of persons however, but of essential principles, which principles, when rightly apprehended, we have no objection to call Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; or, to speak more intelligibly, the *Divine Love*, the *Divine Wisdom*, and the *Divine proceeding Power*, which trinity also, corresponds unto that, in every individual man, to wit, his will, his understanding, and their proceeding affections and perceptions; hence therefore, it is written that "*God created man in his own image and in his own likeness* (emphasis in original).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> John Hargrove, *The Substance of a Sermon*, 16.

<sup>203</sup> John Hargrove, "A Sermon, on the Second Coming of Christ," 1581.

In this passage, Hargrove expands on Swedenborg's interpretation of the Holy Trinity by associating the "Father" with "Divine Love," the "Son," with "Divine Wisdom," and the "Holy Ghost" with "Divine proceeding Power."<sup>204</sup> This insight into how New Church members understood the Bible in light of Swedenborg's correspondences demonstrates a commitment to the values of love and wisdom. In referencing Swedenborg's Trinity as corresponding principles from God to man, Hargrove reminds readers that they are truly the microcosm created in the image of God's macrocosm. Analyzing the New Church stance on the Millennium and Holy Trinity also demonstrates Hargrove's commitment to scientific and mathematical knowledge. In arguing for a connection between the divine Scripture of the Bible and the rational faculties God has granted man to understand scientific findings, Hargrove offers the New Church Biblical hermeneutic as a healing salve for the conflict between the rational contradictions of the Bible and the incorruptible divinity of God's word.

In addition to reinterpreting weighty theological topics such as the Millennium and the Holy Trinity, Hargrove also applied the science of Swedenborg's correspondences to other Biblical passages in order to clarify those which readers may have struggled rationally to come to terms. Hargrove found an outlet to publicize translations of Christian doctrine from the literal

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<sup>204</sup> Hargrove appears to have taken liberties translating these correspondences. See Swedenborg's stance on the Holy Trinity in his book *True Christian Religion*: "Every one acknowledges that these three essentials- the soul, the body, and operation, were and are in the Lord God the Saviour...The Divine of the Father is therefore, like the soul in man, His first essential. That the Son whom Mary brought forth is the body of that Divine soul, follows from this; for nothing but the body conceived and derived from the soul is provided in the womb of the mother. This therefore is the second essential. Operations form the third essential, because they proceed from the soul and body together, and the things which proceed are of the same essence with those which produce them." In *Arcana Coelestia* Swedenborg writes: "From the Lord's Divine Human itself proceeds the Divine truth which is called the Holy Spirit; and because the Lord was Himself the Divine Truth, when He was in the world He Himself taught the things which were of Love and faith...That the Holy Spirit is the Divine truth which proceeds from the Lord's Divine Human, and not any spirit or any spirits from eternity, is very manifest from the Lord's words..." Both passages from: Samuel M. Warren, *A Compendium of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* 2nd ed. (New York: The New Church Board of Publications, 1880), 86-87.

to the spiritual sense of the word in the New Church periodical *The Halcyon Luminary*.

Published from 1812 to 1813 as a monthly periodical, *The Halcyon Luminary* offered a plethora of information designed to further disseminate New Church doctrine and solidify the reputation of Swedenborgians as a respectable Protestant organization. Most of the content in *The Halcyon Luminary* examined New Church theology in the form of poems or essays penned specifically to disseminate religious Swedenborgian doctrines. Other content was simply written to communicate news about current events or developments specific to politics, commerce, and military movements. However, in some editions, Hargrove contributed letters to address questions from the public and engage with individuals who were interested in learning more about the New Church. For example, in 1812, Hargrove corresponded with a reader named “Theodore,” who had written in February to express his distress:

I find in the bible many apparent contradictions, inconsistencies and errors, which I am unable to reconcile with the purity, perfection and divinity of that Almighty Being...I have sought for information...but have always found the most difficult points either evaded, or treated of in such a confused manner as only served to convince me that those much wiser than myself were equally at a loss...I am now in the direct road to deism, not from choice, but because I cannot help it.<sup>205</sup>

The following month, Hargrove penned a response to Theodore that was published in the next edition of *The Halcyon Luminary*. Hargrove wrote:

The grand error of Christians, in this day, and the fruitful source of all the fanaticism and infidelity that prevails among professors of the gospel...originate in ignorance of the true style and interesting contents of the inspired writings. I would say with *Theodore*, either the scriptures are the “word of God,” or they are not; but if they be the *word of GOD*, then they must essentially differ from all other merely human writings; as much so as what is *spiritual* differs from what is *natural*, or that which is *infinite* from what is *finite*...But, as a sincere believer in Revealed Religion, I am under a conviction as

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<sup>205</sup> Theodore, “To the Editors,” *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. I (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1812): 60, Rpt. by (London: FB & C Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

*rational*, I trust, as it is *pleasing*... That the Holy Scriptures are indeed the word of God, and were written for our “*instruction in righteousness*,” written, however, in a peculiar style, long lost, but now about to be restored again upon the Church of God. This style may be called the *Science of Correspondences*... and consisted in a beautiful and impressive representation of spiritual things... (emphasis in original).<sup>206</sup>

After establishing Swedenborg’s science of correspondences as the foundation for explicating Biblical passages, Hargrove notes examples from antiquity of Biblical correspondences and then provides a chart of two columns side by side which list a complete content translation of the first chapter of Genesis from the literal to the spiritual sense of the word.<sup>207</sup> Correspondences identified include “heaven and earth” as the “internal and external of man,” “light” as “truth,” and “darkness” as “falses.”<sup>208</sup> These particular translations indicate that one focus of Swedenborgians was a turn inward toward the internal regeneration of man. For example, the darkness of night and the light of day become the internal truths and falsehoods of man. This example also demonstrates how Hargrove applied Swedenborg’s stated correspondences between literal and spiritual meanings to offer general allegorical readings of Biblical passages. For a closer analysis, this passage from the Bible: “and God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters,” when translated with the New Church Biblical hermeneutic became: “And the Lord gave a perception of the existence of an *internal* part in man, whence a distinction would be made between *natural sciences* and *spiritual*

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<sup>206</sup> John Hargrove, “To Theodore,” *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. I (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1812): 113-114, Rpt. by (London: FB & Co Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

<sup>207</sup> Hargrove, “To Theodore,” 114-115.

<sup>208</sup> These translations are directly from Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia* which offers a passage-by-passage explication of the books of Genesis and Exodus based on Swedenborg’s understanding of how the science of correspondences illuminated the true spiritual meaning of Scripture. See: Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Disclosure of Secrets of Heaven Contained in Sacred Scripture or The Lord’s Word Beginning Here with Those in Genesis*, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2007), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 35-36.

*illumination*” (emphasis in original).<sup>209</sup> Hargrove ended his letter to Theodore by stating that the story of creation is actually a “sacred allegory...[for the] *regeneration* of man” and reminds Theodore that the science of correspondences “will enable us to understand the true sense of every other mysterious and paradoxical passage of the bible” (emphasis in original).<sup>210</sup>

In responding to Theodore, Hargrove continued to emphasize the relationship between science and divinity. The previous passage exemplifies this relationship, as the corresponding translation for God’s order that the waters part is perceived as an allegory for a division between “*natural sciences* and *spiritual illumination*.” In his correspondences with Theodore, Hargrove relentlessly paired scientific knowledge and human rationality with man’s ability to truly understand the divine essence of the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg’s correspondences, as demonstrated in this quote:

In Jeremiah, also, (iv. Ch. 23 ver.) there is a passage equally singular, and equally in point. “*I beheld the earth, and lo! It was void, and the heavens, and they had no light: I beheld the mountains, and they were removed, and all the hills moved lightly: I beheld, and there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled.*” Here is a chaos almost as great as that described in the first chapter of Genesis...But where is the man, (or rather the wild fanatic) who can believe that the *natural* heavens had no light in Jeremiah’s days, or, that the earth had then no form, and that not a *man*, or a *bird* could be seen? Surely if there be any who can swallow these declarations as truth, in their mere literal sense, they may be considered as some of those which the same prophet describes in the verse preceding: “*Scottish children who have no understanding*” (emphasis in original).<sup>211</sup>

Hargrove insisted that a knowledge of natural science and a utilization of human rationality was not only necessary to understanding Swedenborg’s science of correspondences but was pivotal to

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<sup>209</sup> Hargrove, “To Theodore,” 116.

<sup>210</sup> Hargrove, “To Theodore,” 116.

<sup>211</sup> John Hargrove, “To Theodore,” 202-203.



man's ability to unearth divine truths hidden within Scripture's spiritual sense. This belief is a testament to the degree that Hargrove and other New Church members believed in an integrated, symbiotic relationship between reason and revelation. However, Hargrove's focus on allegory in addition to scientific principles alludes to a wider application of Swedenborg's science of correspondences. In weaving allegory into translations of the literal to the spiritual, Hargrove's explication of the Bible fluctuates between the Swedenborgian Biblical hermeneutic and a Swedenborgian system of interpretation where not all Biblical translations are dependent on scientific knowledge or rationality, but instead lean on subjective ethical preferences.

### *Part III: Swedenborg's System of Interpretation and Ethical Allegory*

In August of 1804, John Hargrove found himself embroiled in another public controversy, this time initiated by Rev. George Dashiell, a rector at a Protestant Episcopal Church in Baltimore. This controversy began when Rev. Hargrove attended a Native American tribal "War Dance" in Baltimore. Subsequently, Rev. Dashiell wrote a scathing public reproach of those in attendance, accusing attendees of supporting savagery and demonstrating antipathy to the cause of Christianity.<sup>212</sup> Hargrove took this reproach to heart and penned a response to Dashiell that was addressed to the editor of *The Baltimore Telegraph and Daily Advertiser*, Mr. Thomas Dobbin. "I am one of those unfortunate wights who attended the War Dance of the Indians," Hargrove wrote:

I profess myself also a "Private Christian," and of course am comprehended in that class so unjustly stigmatized by the Rev. Mr. Dashiell. The day has, however, passed over with me, and I believe with the world at large (at least the thinking part of mankind) when the

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<sup>212</sup> Dashiell may also have been upset by the insinuation in a previously published letter that he attended the War dance event as well. See: George Dashiell, *The War Dance No War Whoop being a reply to a letter from...George Dashiell* (Baltimore, 1804), 6, America's Historical Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

fulminations of a priest are made to drown the voice of reason, and silence the still small voice of conscience. His arguments, or rather his denunciations, have not yet convinced me of any impropriety of conduct — and notwithstanding he announces himself as the “Ambassador of God,” I must insist upon seeing stronger credentials than have yet appeared, before I read a recantation of my errors.<sup>213</sup>

Hargrove went on to argue that Dashiell had no righteous claim to judge others for attending the tribal ceremony, that he was abusing his power of influence as a priest, and that learning about more primitive cultures is inherently valuable to understanding humanity’s progress. “To arrive at a just knowledge of human nature,” Hargrove writes, “a progress through the history of the ruder nations is essentially necessary.”<sup>214</sup> Hargrove signed his letter “Curtius,” a possible reference to the mythological Roman Marcus Curtius whose self-sacrifice saved Rome in the name of courage.

A fellow reader of the *Telegraph*, later identified in the “War Whoop” controversy as John Burk, took up arms on behalf of Rev. Dashiell and in his own published response chastised Hargrove for his letter. Burk went so far as to accuse Hargrove of communicating “sentiments which I deem subversive of the pure Holy Spirit and practice of the christian religion.”<sup>215</sup> He proceeded to expand on why attending and therefore encouraging the savagery of the War Dance was anathema to Christian values, “inconsistent with a state of grace, and contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel,” and in essence, synonymous with the “pernicious effects” of the local theater or house of prostitution.<sup>216</sup> Burk argued that if Hargrove wanted to be educated on the progress of human nature he should have read a book instead of demonstrating support of

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<sup>213</sup> John Hargrove, *The War Dance No War Whoop. No. II* (Baltimore, 1804): 1, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>214</sup> Hargrove, *The War Dance*, 2.

<sup>215</sup> John Burk, *The War Dance No War Whoop. No. II* (Baltimore, 1804): 3, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>216</sup> Burk, *The War Dance*, 6-7.

savagery; a sentiment that he was sure all religious denominations shared. Burk's letter, dated August 23rd, 1804, was signed "A Friend to Plain Truth." Hargrove, unable to resist these slights, responded quickly in a letter published August 26th.<sup>217</sup> In this response, Hargrove accused Burk of hiding behind the guise of Quakership, engaging in religious fanaticism, and acting in a manner inconsistent with true Christianity. Hargrove argued that Burk:

*Proves NOTHING AT ALL, — except the expiring groans of American fanaticism, and its fruitless attempts to establish religious intolerance through the mild climate of our happy country. The apparent Friend should have recollected, that coming forward under the disguise of a Quaker was not sufficient to pass off dogmatical and unfounded assertions for logical and sound arguments...It is also much doubted...that it is less hostile, and contrary to christianity to step forward as "a busy body in other men's matters," and deal out two or three lusty blows of calumny and falsehood against John Hargrove, than to attend a War Dance (emphasis in original).<sup>218</sup>*

Tempers escalated after this letter, with several additional public responses published back and forth in the following weeks between Hargrove and Burk. Shots were taken on both sides with Hargrove addressing his letters to "John Burk, The Baker, in M'Clellan's Alley," and Burk responding sarcastically in his address to "Mr. John Hargrove, Cloth Weaver, alias, the truly legitimate Pastor of the New Jerusalem Temple."<sup>219</sup> Burk accused Hargrove of invalid religious credentials, both chiding him with associations to Swedenborg and to claims about the subjective nature of Swedenborgian Biblical interpretation, writing:

...it is said you are a wonderful master of scripture; that it is in your hands something like a piece of wax, and will bend any way, and every way, as may best suit your purposes, and farther, that you sometimes make use of a Bible which is not in the hands of

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<sup>217</sup> Authorship of this letter is unclear. One of Hargrove's close New Church associates may have written this response letter to Mr. Burk, or Hargrove may have written it in the third person.

<sup>218</sup> Hargrove, *The War Dance*, 9-10.

<sup>219</sup> *The War Dance No War Whoop. No. II*, 15, 19.

christians in general, I think it is called Arcana Celestia, or some such an out-landish name...<sup>220</sup>

In support of Hargrove, an anonymous New Church member published *A Short Reply, to Burk and Guy, with some Ripe Fruit for a Friend to Truth* in which Hargrove and Swedenborg are defended on the grounds of political and rational legitimacy. To defend Hargrove's credentials as a reverend of the New Jerusalem Church, the New Church layman reminded Burk that Hargrove was a legitimate clergyman by state law, writing:

[H]ad you made yourself acquainted with the laws of the state of Maryland, of which you call yourself a fellow citizen, on the subject of religious toleration, as well as on the subject of being released from just debts, you would have found that the legislature in their November session, 1802, passed an act granting the privilege for all religious societies to be incorporated, and by application to the clerk's office of Baltimore county court, you will find, that the reverend John Hargrove, is, in the constitution of the New Jerusalem church in the city of Baltimore, legally recognized as their present minister.<sup>221</sup>

In support of Swedenborg, however, the New Church layman called upon Enlightenment rhetoric, advocating for the legitimacy of Swedenborg's doctrines on the basis of science while aligning Swedenborg's doctrines with rationality and truth. The anonymous layman wrote that "[a]ll the Baron's doctrines, essential and necessary on the point, are proved by the holy scriptures, and it is in vain for Hell itself, and all its adherents, with the Guys, the D — ers and all other fanatical scriblers (sic) in its trail, to overset or disprove them: they are founded on the eternal truths of God, science and rationality."<sup>222</sup> In addition, this New Church layman reminds critics and opponents that the road to Deism and religious skepticism is a real social threat which

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<sup>220</sup> Burk, *The War Dance*, 14.

<sup>221</sup> A Layman, *A Short Reply, to Burk and Guy with Some Ripe Fruit for a Friend to Truth* (Baltimore, 1804), 6, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com

<sup>222</sup> A Layman, *A Short Reply*, 17.

can only be alleviated by utilizing Swedenborg's science of correspondences to clarify irrational interpretations of Biblical Scripture:

When therefore the man of science, and of an inquiring mind, reads these *apparent* absurdities in the scriptures, without any key of explanation, it staggers him, and he says within himself, these are all fables and Priestcraft, and he becomes a free thinker or deist; but when the difficult and obscure texts are explained in a rational manner to the understanding and conviction of the mind, he becomes a believer, if he is sincerely in the search of truth and in the love of goodness (emphasis in original).<sup>223</sup>

In his own responses to these attacks, Hargrove danced back and forth between attempts to undermine Burk's Biblical arguments, rescue his own clerical reputation, and promote the New Jerusalem Church. While Hargrove wholeheartedly believed in the divine truth of Swedenborg's spiritual revelations and his science of correspondences, religious and social sentiment toward Swedenborgianism during the period of the Early American Republic was that of distrust. Swedenborgians often faced criticism regarding their Biblical hermeneutic which, when applied to ethical passages of the Bible, was particularly susceptible to criticisms of subjectivity.

For example, in some inquiries posed by readers of *The Halcyon Luminary*, Hargrove answered questions regarding Biblical interpretations of violence and war, slavery, and eternal damnation. "A Constant Reader" wrote to *The Halcyon Luminary* to personally ask Hargrove to clarify a Biblical passage regarding how men should respond to violence. The writer states:

This doctrine of implied submission is founded, it appears, on the expression of our Lord, in his sermon on the mount (sic): "*Whose smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man take thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whosoever shall COMPEL thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*" If these precepts are to be taken according to the *letter*, the Quakers are certainly correct, and we immediately lose the right of forcibly defending our *persons, property, or liberty*. But as I have many doubts as to the correctness of this principle, you will confer a singular favor in relieving them. If

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<sup>223</sup> A Layman, *A Short Reply*, 20.

you will condescend to explain the *internal* or *spiritual* sense of the foregoing passage, some light may probably be thrown on the subject (emphasis in original).<sup>224</sup>

In his response, Hargrove first acknowledges that wars are driven by men's "lusts" yet claims that men have a duty to "[resist] the unjust aggressions of wicked men" and that God himself waged many spiritual wars.<sup>225</sup> Hargrove then reframes A Constant Reader's question to: "[i]s it lawful...to arrest or oppose the movements of infernal spirits" and offers the following reinterpretation of the previously quoted passage:

That the most pious christians will feel themselves compelled to forsake their former honest attachments to the *literal* sense of the precept...will soon appear on reflection...AN EXPLANATION OF THE PASSAGES IN ITS INTERIOR, OR SPIRITUAL SENSE. By *garments*, in the spiritual sense, are signified *truths*; for every one in the *spiritual* world, as well as in the *natural* world, are clothed with such *truths* as they have been principled and confirmed in...*Cloak*, therefore, signifies *exterior* truths, and *coat*, such truths as are more *interior*. "*If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have they cloak also*" — signifies, that if any one should strip us of our *interior* principles of faith...we should, in that case, yield to him those more *exterior* fallacies of doctrine, or of worship...The same kind of explanation also will apply to smiting us on our cheek and then turning the other; for the true signification of this passage is, that no good man, if reproved by another...should prevent this good man from reproving and thereby reforming him from any *evil* principle...Thus, "*give to him that asketh thee,*" &c. Signifies, that christians, particularly ministers of the gospel, should always be willing to *give* instructions to all who are in want, and are humble enough to invite such instruction (emphasis in original).<sup>226</sup>

In his response to A Constant Reader, Hargrove returned to the theme of internal regeneration, translating literal meanings to spiritual meanings with Swedenborg's charted correspondences. For example, Hargrove translated "garments" to "truths," "cloak" to "exterior truths" and "coat"

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<sup>224</sup> A Constant Reader, "To The Rev. Jno. Hargrove," *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. I (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1812): 250, Rpt. by (London: FB &c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

<sup>225</sup> John Hargrove, "To The Editors," *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. I (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1812): 305, Rpt. by (London: FB &c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

<sup>226</sup> Hargrove, "To The Editors," 305-307.

to “interior truths.”<sup>227</sup> Hargrove also interpreted passive reaction to loss or violence to mean that spiritually, one should help others reform their interior vices by encouraging personal regeneration through divine truth. In reframing A Constant Reader’s question, Hargrove utilized Swedenborg’s science of correspondences to reinterpret the posed Bible passage in such a manner that it affirmed the ethical position of the enquirer. Without a clear anchor to scientific knowledge to support this particular interpretation of the literal to the spiritual, it becomes evident in this example that at times the Swedenborgian New Church Biblical hermeneutic functioned as a system of interpretation that could align Bible passages with personal ethics.

As evidenced by the previous example, Hargrove’s stance was staunchly patriotic, which suggests that his application of Swedenborg’s science of correspondences was flexible enough to lend itself to forms of reinterpretation that fit early American values and modes of thinking. Despite bemoaning the prejudices that kept him in financial hardship and consigned the New Church to the fringes of religious society, Hargrove was decidedly an American patriot and on numerous occasions gave praising speeches in support of the American people and federal government. For example, a few months after the start of the War of 1812, Hargrove delivered a public speech to a group of army volunteers in Baltimore before they departed for the Northwestern army. This speech was reported by the Washington D.C. *Courier* and recorded that Hargrove inspired the troops by connecting patriotism and Christianity to the pursuit of freedom. Hargrove was quoted as follows:

That patriotism, or love of country...is every way consistent with the highest practice of Christianity, none but the gloomy misanthrope, or irrational fanatic, will deny; and that a

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<sup>227</sup> For Swedenborg’s interpretation of garments corresponding to truths see: Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, Vol. II, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2012), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 94.

defence of our country's rights, is among the best *proofs* of our patriotism...A longer endurance of British outrage, on our national rights, would only mark the degradation of the American character...Rise and face your old and proud oppressors...They are *mercenaries*: — you are *freemen*...Had I yet a son; had I fifty sons, I would not keep one (emphasis in original).<sup>228</sup>

In 1814, Hargrove gave another sermon in which he described the “*ruthless* rage of the British fleet and army” (emphasis in original) before enthusiastically exalting the rationality of the people and government bred by America:

Thus then it appears, that we are called, by every principle of piety and gratitude, to “*offer unto God thanksgiving*,” for being created rational beings, for enjoying the light of the glorious gospel; and may I not add, for the happy privilege of having a claim to the character of American citizens. For, let me ask, what other country, or kingdom upon Earth can boast of such a *mild, rational and liberal* form of Government as now exists in these United States? None! (emphasis in original).<sup>229</sup>

In linking Christianity to patriotism, and patriotism to a defense of the rational principles with which God endowed man to create the political and religious foundation of America, Hargrove continued to promote the New Church entanglement of rationality and piety while also demonstrating the ethical grounds upon which he would work to align New Church doctrine with Biblical Scripture.

In addition to promoting patriotism, Hargrove also called upon Swedenborg's science of correspondences to reinterpret scriptural passages that addressed contemporary issues such as slavery. In February of 1813, A Constant Reader wrote again to *The Halcyon Luminary*, stating that he was almost convinced of the truths conveyed by Swedenborg: “[y]our expositions of

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<sup>228</sup> “Piety and Patriotism,” *The Courier*, Vol. I, 27 (17 Oct. 1812): 3, America's Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>229</sup> John Hargrove, *Sermon, Delivered in the City of Baltimore, at the New Jerusalem Temple, October 20th, 1814, the Day Appointed and Set Apart for Public Thanksgiving; for the Late Deliverance of that City and its Inhabitants, from the United and Formidable Attack of the British Fleet and Army* (Baltimore: Munroe & French, 1814): 3-5, Early American Imprints, iw.newsbank.com.



different texts of Scripture, have almost confirmed in the belief that BARON SWEDENBORG...was an inspired man; and that the *science of correspondences*, is the true key to the *spiritual* sense of the Sacred Scriptures” (emphasis in original).<sup>230</sup> A Constant Reader went on to acknowledge that doubts remained, specifically because of the many passages in the Bible which did not make sense to him according to the principles of reason. In particular, A Constant Reader quoted a passage on slavery that he claimed, if read literally, would “seem to encourage runaway servants, in too great a degree; and, in so doing, encourage fraud and disorder.”<sup>231</sup> A Constant Reader identified this passage on slavery as “...the twenty-third chapter of Deuteronomy, the fifteenth and sixteenth verses read thus: “*Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee. He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which ye shall choose in one of thy gates where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him*” (emphasis in original).<sup>232</sup>

The following month, Hargrove published a response to A Constant Reader in which he demonstrated how Swedenborg’s science of correspondences and the New Church Biblical hermeneutic clarified the true meaning of the passage in question. Hargrove wrote that he shall “proceed to make a few remarks, on the true and *spiritual* sense of this singular passage, in order to show in what light, or point of view, it *ought*, and *will* be considered by the future Church of God” (emphasis in original).<sup>233</sup> Hargrove then translated individual words from the Bible into

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<sup>230</sup> A Constant Reader, “To the Editors,” *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. II (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1813): 77, Rpt. by (London: FB &c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

<sup>231</sup> A Constant Reader, “To the Editors,” 78.

<sup>232</sup> A Constant Reader, “To the Editors,” 77-78.

<sup>233</sup> John Hargrove, “To the Editors,” *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, Vol. II (New York: S. Woodworth & Co., 1813): 125, Rpt. by (London: FB &c Ltd., 2018), [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com).

their spiritual meaning, with “master” translated to “teacher,” “gates” to “grand introductory truths or doctrines,” and “servant” to those who “receive instruction from, and are under a kind of *bondage* to, these *Masters*, or teachers, in consequence of their state of ignorance [or] such as are in an inferior state of illumination, and also to such as are in bondage to their hereditary lusts” (emphasis in original).<sup>234</sup>

Hargrove quoted additional Biblical passages which supported the New Church’s translation of master and servant, before arguing that the science of correspondences illuminates the true meaning of the passage in question to an escape from the false doctrines of the old church. Hargrove writes:

Whenever we discover a person under bondage to religious errors, nobly exercising his rational faculty, in judging, condemning, and receding from those errors, into a state of impartial and free inquiry...Then we may behold, (as *spiritual* men) the Hebrew servant escaping from his former master...when we behold such...escaping from such states, into the marvellous (sic) light of the gospel, (in its *spiritual* sense) ...we ought not...to aid in *delivering*, or bringing back such persons to their *former masters* — to their past state of subjection to errors and to evils...Rather let us encourage them to “ *dwell with us, even in one of our gates, wheresoever it liketh them best*” (emphasis in original).<sup>235</sup>

While it is not surprising that Hargrove’s Biblical reinterpretation promoted the Swedenborgian New Church, or revered man’s rational faculties, this passage also demonstrates that the New Church Biblical hermeneutic lent itself to forms of interpretation that fit Early American values

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<sup>234</sup> Hargrove, “To the Editors,” 125-127. While Swedenborg did provide similar symbolic translations for the terms prophets (master) and gates, Hargrove may have taken liberties with his translation of servant. For Swedenborg on gates see: Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, Vol. I, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 168. For Swedenborg on prophet (master) see: Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, Vol. II, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2012), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 282. For Swedenborg on servant see: Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, Vol. I, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 290, and Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, Vol. II, Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2012), [www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com), 291.

<sup>235</sup> Hargrove, “To the Editors,” 127.

and personal ethics. Hargrove seemingly turns a blind eye to the question of slavery, and in his failure to condemn it, supports the status quo. In addition, by translating an inquiry about slavery into a chastisement of the Old Church and promotion of the New Church, Hargrove provides historians insight into why citizens like John Burk voiced concern that in Hargrove's hands Scripture was something like a piece of wax: easily bent to fit his whims.<sup>236</sup> Hargrove continually justified the New Church Biblical hermeneutic through the lens of Enlightenment rationalism, yet, by reinterpreting specific Biblical passages unrelated to scientific truths, Hargrove opened the door for pushback against the New Church Biblical hermeneutic. In this past example, Enlightenment rhetoric is called upon to tighten the relationship between rationality and Biblical inquiry, but there is no scientific basis from which to argue that the Bible passage in question is irrational aside from the ethical belief that runaway slaves should be returned to their masters. By claiming that he could reveal God's true meaning in this passage using Swedenborg's science of correspondences, Hargrove inadvertently opens the door for social and religious criticism. This application of ethical bias reveals both the subjective manner in which Early American Swedenborgians applied Swedenborg's system of correspondences to scriptural reinterpretation, as well as Hargrove's personal reluctance to run counter to cultural values.

At the foundation of the New Church's advocacy for a symbiotic relationship between reason and revelation, there is a cry for educating man's mind. New Church members argued that through increased rationality and a better understanding of science, men will gain the intellectual

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<sup>236</sup> Burk, *The War Dance*, 14.

capacity needed to come to a clearer understanding of the spiritual meaning of Biblical words. In a sermon delivered in Baltimore in 1814, Hargrove quipped: “As *Christians*, who are in possession of the bible, and permitted the free and constant perusal of the same, we possess, or ought to possess, far more rational and sublime conceptions of the Deity than any other people upon earth” (emphasis in original).<sup>237</sup> This argument reinforces the claim that the New Church Biblical hermeneutic is inherently tied to reason and rationality. By arguing that people cannot see the errors of the Bible without a clear understanding of science and reason, Hargrove insinuates that God’s true spiritual message within Scripture is clarified through the lens of these principles. Hargrove expressed these sentiments in a personal letter to Doctor Samuel Brown in 1803:

To men who are prepared by science, & are lovers of truth, for truth’s sake, the writings of Swedenborg carry a Conviction of the Genuine truths they announce; But others, who are filled with prejudices of former instructions, & have not Courage to lie open to conviction, nor piety to acknowledge their Convictions, we are to expect little else than opposition. Yet, in due time Swedenborg’s System, & Views of the Scripture must prevail; — or, what I cannot believe, the Christian Religion will fall, to rise no more; for no alternative to me appears, between these two States, the first a blessed & desirable one, the last truly to be deprecated by every good man (emphasis in original).<sup>238</sup>

According to Hargrove, it is through the illumination afforded by science and learning that men find themselves approaching a true understanding of the divine through rationality, thereby further linking the use of reason to divine revelation within New Church theology. By recontextualizing Early American mindsets regarding reason and revelation with the New Church hermeneutic, it becomes evident that Swedenborg’s science of correspondences enabled

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<sup>237</sup> John Hargrove, *Sermon, Delivered in the City of Baltimore*, 4.

<sup>238</sup> “John Hargrove to Doctr. Samuel Brown,” *Personal Letter*, Baltimore July 4th, 1803, Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Pacific School of Religion.

a small group of Early Americans to promote a unique form of Biblical exegesis that entangled Enlightenment reason and divine revelation in an effort to heal religious divides. In a sermon Hargrove delivered to his Freemason brethren after being elected grand chaplain of Maryland in 1811, he argued that true understanding requires an enlightened mind that can receive an idea born from both reason and revelation. “My enlightened and candid audience,” Hargrove preached, “let us examine all these opinions, with that impartiality which both reason and revelation approve of, in order to ascertain their truth or their fallacy.”<sup>239</sup>

Hargrove’s letters, sermons, and public discourse demonstrate New Church desires to maintain continuity between current-day scientific knowledge and Biblical prophecy. Instead of trying to force irrational readings of the Bible, Hargrove provided interpretations that allowed the New Church to supply ready answers to even the most bewildering Biblical passages. Analyzing Hargrove’s stance on Biblical exegesis reveals that Early American Swedenborgians believed the rational application of Swedenborg’s science of correspondences to Scripture not only clarified Biblical inconsistencies on the basis of scientific knowledge, but was itself a divine act. This analysis also shows that in an effort to heal Biblical irrationalities with Swedenborg’s science of correspondences, Hargrove vacillated between ethical and scientific grounds, at times aligning the unethical with the irrational. It is from a posited integral relationship between reason and revelation that Hargrove advocated for inclusion of the New Church into the greater Baltimore community. He fought for religious respect as a reverend, for status respect as a patriotic American, and for faith to save society from Deism and Christian skepticism. In battling the

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<sup>239</sup> John Hargrove, “Benevolence: The Substance of a Sermon Delivered before the Temple Lodge, No. 26,” *The Freemasons Magazine and General Miscellany* (1811-1812) 2, no. 1 (October 1, 1811), 8. Early American Imprints, iw.newsbank.com.

latter, Hargrove continually demonstrated how Swedenborg's science of correspondences could unite Scripture, science, and rationality, and in doing so, attempted to create religious acceptance for New Church doctrines as well. His attempts, at times, garnered an extreme response from individuals and organizations who either felt threatened or struggled to reconcile Swedenborg's religious doctrines with the seemingly subjective way his science of correspondences was applied to Biblical reinterpretation. Oftentimes, the response to this tension manifested itself in the form of local written attacks, but it also led to deeper transatlantic theological debates that merit closer consideration and will be the focus of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CLERGY DEBATE SWEDENBORG

On October 9th, 1790, the *Columbian Centinel* in Boston, MA reprinted a summary of a public debate held in London where attendees were asked to decide which religious organization was “most consistent with revelation and reason.” The attendees chose between the following: “the Arminian tenets of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley — The Calvinistick (sic) decrees upheld by the Rev. Mr. Whitfield and others — the Theology propagated by the late Emanuel Swedenborg, under the title of the new Jerusalem — or the doctrine of Universal Salvation, maintained by the Rev. Mr. Winchester.”<sup>240</sup> This debate was held by the Rev. Winchester and vote totals were not included in the publication. A decade later, the *Baltimore Daily Advertiser* published the findings of “The Debating Society” in which Wesley, Whitfield, and Swedenborg were again pitted against one another in order to give debaters the opportunity to decide which religious system was most consistent with the Bible. The notice published by the *Baltimore Daily* read: “[a]fter a variety of arguments in defence of the respective systems of doctrine, the question being called for, the votes stood thus, For Wesley, 19, Whitfield, 12, Swedenborg, 9.”<sup>241</sup> Evidence that Swedenborg was pitted against religious figureheads such as John Wesley and George Whitfield in public spaces demonstrates the extent to which Swedenborg had permeated the social and religious culture of the Early American Republic. These debates also demonstrate how Biblical adherence and scriptural consistency was upheld as a reference point from which to judge

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<sup>240</sup> “A London Paper of June 7, Contains the following article,” *Columbian Centinel* (9 October 1790): 30, America’s Historical Newspapers, [iw.newsbank.com](http://iw.newsbank.com).

<sup>241</sup> “The Debating Society,” *Baltimore Daily Advertiser* (30 December 1801): 3, America’s Historical Newspapers, [infoweb.newsbank.com](http://infoweb.newsbank.com).

religious legitimacy, ironically foreshadowing the very obstacle that continued to plague Swedenborgians for decades to come.

This chapter documents the formal criticisms aimed at Swedenborgians and the New Jerusalem Church by members of other religious institutions in the period of the Early American Republic.<sup>242</sup> These religious criticisms, written by Methodists, Unitarians, Jesuits, and Deists were inherently transatlantic in nature. While generally focused on specific Christian doctrines such as the Holy Trinity or the Millennium, these ecclesiastic criticisms identify a number of primary theological and social concerns regarding Swedenborgian doctrine exchanged between English and American voices. Analysis of these religious debates reveals two primary intellectual responses to Swedenborg: the first is a reaction to the irrational source base of Swedenborg's divine knowledge and the second is a reaction to the rational framework of his religious doctrines. These responses resulted in inherent tensions between what Swedenborg's religious system aimed to do, and what it was perceived as doing. As previously explored, Swedenborgians offered a salve to the Christian world in the form of Swedenborg's science of correspondences which aimed to heal the Biblical incongruities that existed between reason and revelation. What Swedenborgians were frequently perceived as doing, however, was upsetting the stability of the Bible and the ethical foundation of society by claiming that old truths could be reinterpreted through seemingly subjective analogies to offer new truths. This reinterpretation

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<sup>242</sup> For insightful studies that delve into the existence and impact of divergent Christian voices in the Early American Republic see: Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), Eric Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), Nathaniel Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).



was further complicated by the fact that Swedenborg's "science," while claiming reason and rationality as its base, was born from a seemingly irrational source dependent on out-of-body trips to other planets as well as conversations with angels and God to form its system. The resultant tension manifested in frequent accusations of Swedenborg's mental instability, which further complicated the New Church's claim to legitimacy and Swedenborg's claim to divine authority.

Analyzing both the written attacks and counterattacks published in response to the rise of Swedenborgian theology will illustrate these concerns as well as the manner in which ordained, and laymen New Church members defended their right to religious freedom and the doctrinal content of their beliefs. These religious debates will also demonstrate how the Swedenborgian New Church became inadvertently socially and religiously validated by those voices of opposition who chose to engage with them and therefore acknowledged them as a viable, albeit threatening, organization. I will first examine the formal ecclesiastical reactions to Swedenborgianism from Methodists, Unitarians, Anglicans, Jesuits, and Deists. Then, I will delve into additional attacks from unidentified religious voices which narrowed their concern to the manner in which Swedenborg's science of correspondences upset social consensus regarding Biblical semantics, and in doing so, threatened to topple the mainstay of social morality.

In 1801, John Hargrove began the 7th edition of the *Temple of Truth* by acknowledging the importance of adhering to the Bible: "The candid and serious Christian of whatever sect he may be, will readily confess that the *holy scriptures* are the true and only foundation of all revealed religion and of the christian faith; consequently, if these hitherto — esteemed inspired pages can be now proven to be a jumble of folly, superstition and impiety, the foundation of our

faith will and must be destroyed” (emphasis in original).<sup>243</sup> There is irony in the fact that the very charge Hargrove aimed at Deists was being used to attack his own dearly-held faith in Swedenborg’s doctrines. To defend against these charges Swedenborgians continually argued the opposite, claiming that the religious legitimacy of Swedenborg’s doctrines was proven by how closely they aligned with Christian Scripture, and how well they created cohesion between science, reason, and revelation by synthesizing irrational Biblical discrepancies.

### *Part I: The Methodist Response*

One of the greatest undermining attacks Swedenborgians in America faced was a damaging narrative regarding Swedenborg’s mental state prior to his death. The root of this controversy can be traced back to two publications: the first was in the 4th volume of *The Arminian Magazine* (1781) and titled “An Account of Baron Swedenborg,” and the second was a series of articles in the 6th volume of *The Arminian Magazine* (1783) titled “Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg.” Both publications were written by evangelical Methodist preacher John Wesley.<sup>244</sup> *The Arminian Magazine*, edited by Wesley and published in London in monthly installments, frequently contained letters from Baptist converts, anecdotes, sermons, and theological treatises. Purportedly agitated by losing several Methodists converts to the Swedenborgian New Church, from August to December 1783, Wesley included an installment of lengthy diatribes against Swedenborg’s doctrines in monthly editions of *The Arminian Magazine*. Most of these entries discussed relevant doctrines such as charity and faith, the Holy Trinity, the

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<sup>243</sup> John Hargrove, “On the True Nature, Dignity and Stile of the Sacred Scriptures,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 97, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

<sup>244</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt also mentions Wesley’s negative accounts of Swedenborg in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 203.

spiritual world, and the afterlife, and all were dedicated to undermining Swedenborg's theological claims. Wesley prefaced his "Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg" with a general background on Swedenborg's life and an anecdote from a Mr. Brockmer who Swedenborg had lodged with while in London in the 1740s. This preface was only one paragraph but painted an extreme picture of Swedenborg that implied his descent into insanity. According to Wesley:

Many years ago the Baron came over to England, and lodged at one Mr. *Brockmer's*: who informed me...that while he was in his house he had a violent fever: in the height of which, being totally delirious, he broke from Mr. *Brockmer*, ran into the street stark naked, proclaimed himself the Messiah, and rolled himself in the mire. I suppose he dates from this time his admission into the Society of Angels. From this time we are undoubtedly to date that peculiar species of insanity which attended him, with scarce any intermission, to the day of his death (emphasis in original).<sup>245</sup>

This description of Swedenborg is clearly both unfavorable and outlandish enough to take hold of a reader's imagination. The image of Swedenborg running stark naked into the street and rolling in muddy puddles as he declares himself the Messiah proved difficult to contain and impossible to correct, and continued to haunt New Church advocates for decades, oftentimes acting as the basis for demeaning doctrinal attacks. The presumption held thus: if the source base of Swedenborgian theology was considered circumspect, so too were the doctrines espoused by the New Jerusalem Church. Wesley attacked these doctrines with similar voraciousness, further highlighting the duality inherent to reactions to Swedenborg, where his irrational source of knowledge was entangled with the rational structure and claims of his theology.

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<sup>245</sup> John Wesley, "Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg," *The Arminian Magazine*, Vol. VI (1783): 438, Google Books, play.google.com.

Taking issue with all core elements of Swedenborgian doctrine, Wesley methodically depicted himself as a voice of scriptural authority while weakening Swedenborg's credibility by linking him to controversial 17th century Christian mystic Jacob Boehme. Wesley also used derisive diction to distance Swedenborg's religious claims from any form of reasonable or rational basis. "His dreams" Wesley writes, before launching into an exasperated criticism of Swedenborg's translations of the literal meaning of Biblical words into the spiritual, "are more extraordinary than those of Jacob himself."<sup>246</sup> Wesley continues:

[B]y a garden, a grove, woods, are meant Wisdom, Intelligence, Science; by the olive, the vine, the cedar, the poplar and the oak, are meant the Good and Truth of the Church, under the different characters of celestial, spiritual, rational, natural, and sensual. By a lamb, an ox, a sheep, a calf, a goat are meant Innocence, Charity, and natural Affection. By Egypt is signified what is scientific...Can any person of Common Understanding defend any of these expositions? Are they not so utterly absurd, so far removed from all shadow of Reason, that instead of pronouncing them the dictates of the Holy Ghost, we cannot but judge them to be whims of a distempered imagination?<sup>247</sup>

In addition to demonstrating concern about the subjective manner in which Swedenborg's Biblical exegesis upset the foundation of scriptural meaning, in subsequent monthly publications of *The Arminian Magazine*, Wesley worked to dismantle confidence in other Swedenborgian tenets. In an example on charity, Wesley quotes Swedenborg as saying: "Charity consists in *living well*. Charity consists in *willing what is good*," before arguing "[t]hat both these accounts are wrong is certain; but who can reconcile one with the other?" (emphasis in original).<sup>248</sup> On faith, Wesley quotes Swedenborg as saying that "[f]aith in general is a belief that whoever lives well, and believes right shall be saved," before stating that "[t]his definition is quite ambiguous:

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<sup>246</sup> Wesley, "Thoughts on the Writings," 439.

<sup>247</sup> Wesley, "Thoughts on the Writings," 440-441.

<sup>248</sup> Wesley, "Thoughts on the Writings," 495.

*believing right* may have a hundred different meanings. And it is utterly false, if that expression means any more than “A belief that God is”...I make no scruple to affirm, this is an errant nonsense as was ever pronounced by any man in Bedlam” (emphasis in original).<sup>249</sup> On the Trinity, Wesley writes that the “grand error which we learn from [Swedenborg’s] works is, That there are not three persons in One God...But he is not content with denying the Trinity...He excludes all that believe it from salvation...”<sup>250</sup> After expounding on Swedenborg’s argument regarding the Holy Trinity, Wesley summarizes his argument with: “This is a deadly mistake! Every one (sic) has a place in heaven, not *according to his ideas*, but *according to his works* (emphasis in original).”<sup>251</sup> On redemption, Wesley quotes Swedenborg again: “The Lord is now accomplishing Redemption, that is, subduing the hells, and bring the heavens into order, which has begun in the year 1757, together with the last judgment executed at the same time,” before stating with exasperation, “[w]hat heaps of absurdity are here! ...Redemption is “bringing the hells into subjection.” When were they not in subjection to the Almighty? “And reducing the heavens into order.” When was heaven, the abode of angels, out of order? “God’s omnipotence was an effect of his humanity.” Blasphemy joined with consummate nonsense.”<sup>252</sup> Wesley also quotes Swedenborg on God’s wrath in order to further distance New Church theology from serious religious consideration:

To those who affirm with Jacob Behme (sic), the Baron, and most of the Mystics, That there is no wrath in God, permit me to recommend the serious consideration of only one more passage of Scripture. *And the kings of the earth, and the great men...hide us from*

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<sup>249</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 495-496.

<sup>250</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 496.

<sup>251</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 498.

<sup>252</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 551.

*the face of him that fitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come”...Who but a madman can deny it? (emphasis in original).*<sup>253</sup>

Wesley goes on to quote a few passages from Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion* regarding his conversations with angels and spirits and then asks the reader: “Hysterical or Epileptic?”<sup>254</sup> He takes a similarly hostile stance towards Swedenborg’s arguments regarding creation, angels and man, the Word, and the afterlife in heaven and hell.<sup>255</sup> “The most dangerous part of his Writings,” Wesley contends, “I take to be the account which he gives of hell. It directly tends to familiarize it to unholy men, to remove all their terror, and to make them consider it, not as a *place of torment*, but a very tolerable habitation” (emphasis in original).<sup>256</sup>

Regardless of his many complaints, in numerous places throughout “Thoughts” Wesley makes clear that his main objection to Swedenborg is incongruity with the Bible. In the September edition of *The Arminian Magazine* Wesley writes that “[a]ny serious man may observe, that many of these [doctrines] are silly and childish to the last degree: that many others are amazingly odd and whimsical; many palpably absurd, contrary to all found Reason and many more. Contrary not only to particular texts, but to the whole tenor of Scripture.”<sup>257</sup> In the October edition, Wesley summarizes his opinions on Swedenborg by stating that “[i]n all this jumble of dissonant notions, there is not one that is supported by any Scripture, taken in its plain, obvious meaning. And most of them are as contrary to Scripture as to Common Sense.”<sup>258</sup> In November,

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<sup>253</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 609.

<sup>254</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 609.

<sup>255</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 611, 612, 613, 669.

<sup>256</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 674.

<sup>257</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 496.

<sup>258</sup> Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings,” 551.

Wesley delivered his most damning assessment of Swedenborg's theology with the following summation: "[t]his is my grand objection to the Baron's whole system relative to the invisible world: that it is not only quite unconnected with scripture, but quite inconsistent with it. It strikes at the very foundation of Scripture. If this stands, the Bible must fall."<sup>259</sup> By continually demonstrating how Swedenborg contradicted Biblical passages, by mocking Swedenborg with derisive diction, and finally by coming to the decisive conclusion that Swedenborg's theology is inconsistent with the Bible and therefore dangerous to mankind, Wesley makes the compelling argument that Swedenborgian doctrines should be rejected. Wesley writes passionately in his final paragraph on Swedenborg: "Let none of you that fear God, recommend such a writer...All his folly and nonsense we may excuse; but not his making God a liar...If the preceding Extracts are from God, then the Bible is only a fable. But if *all scriptures are given by inspiration of God*, then let these dreams sink into the pit from whence they came" (emphasis in original).<sup>260</sup>

The Swedenborg anecdotes published by Wesley in *The Arminian Magazine* in 1781 and 1783 began to re-circulate in American newspapers around 1789. Responses to these anecdotes varied from using Wesley's treatises as fodder for anti-Swedenborgian sentiment to outright incensed denial of their claims. For example, Philadelphia's *The Freeman's Journal* received a letter attacking Swedenborg with Wesley's "An Account of Swedenborg" affixed to the correspondence.<sup>261</sup> Also located in Philadelphia, *The Independent Gazetteer* republished Wesley's "Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg" in weekly segments in May of 1789.

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<sup>259</sup> Wesley, "Thoughts on the Writings," 611.

<sup>260</sup> Wesley, "Thoughts on the Writings," 680.

<sup>261</sup> "Mr. Bailey," *The Freeman's Journal* ix, cdxix (29 April 1789): 3, America's Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.

*The Norwich Packet* in Connecticut published an “Extract from a Letter from New York” in late May of 1789 which echoed sentiments from Wesley’s treatises, claiming that “[a] correspondent says, that the insanity, of Baron Swedenborg appears evident to every sensible person who will investigate his works.”<sup>262</sup> Reprintings of sections focused solely on Swedenborg’s insanity as per Wesley’s “An Account of Baron Swedenborg” were published by *The Federal Gazette* in Philadelphia and the *Philadelphia Evening Post* on December 14th, 1789. *The Daily Advertiser* in New York followed suit on December 18th, 1789 as did *The New York Packet* on December 19th, 1789.

John Wesley, who died in 1791, never faced an official response to his series of treatises on Swedenborg.<sup>263</sup> However, in 1849, *The New Church Repository and Monthly Review* in New York, edited by Swedenborgian and religious scholar Rev. George Bush, included in their second volume an unpublished, undated letter written by Rev. Hargrove in response to a resurrected publication of Wesley’s “Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg” in the *American Methodist Magazine* in 1797.<sup>264</sup> In a preface to the letter which was titled “Vindication of Swedenborg from the Misrepresentations of Wesley,” the editors write:

The following letter, we believe, has never before been published. It has been hitherto in the possession of the family of Mr. Hargrove, and from them has come into our hands.

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<sup>262</sup> “Philadelphia, May 8. Extract of a Letter from New-York,” *The Norwich Packet* (29 May 1789): 2, America’s Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>263</sup> In Manoah Sibly’s *A Brief, Calm, and Dispassionate Defence of the New Church Against the Foul and Calumnious Attack of an Anonymous Writer, Calling Himself, Amicus Veritatis* (Edward Hodson: London, 1815) he mentions an answer to Mr. Wesley by Mr. Robert Beatson of Rotherham published in the *Magazine of Knowledge concerning Heaven and Hell* (1791, vol. 2, pages 80 &c). In an unpublished letter, John Hargrove also claims that “Beatson’s Vindication” was an answer to Wesley’s treatises, however, it is unclear whether Wesley would have been aware of this response before his death the same year.

<sup>264</sup> “Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg,” *American Methodist Magazine*, Philadelphia Vol. VII (1797). Although this letter is undated, I surmise it was written sometime between 1804 and 1808 as Hargrove cites an 1804 letter written within his response to Wesley, but by 1808 reduces his writing expenditures as he becomes exceedingly busy with his employment at the Baltimore City Registrar.



The original is without date...the present letter presents the conduct of the founder of Methodism in some new lights, so far as it regards his treatment of Swedenborg's memory and writings, such as will scarcely fail, we think, to lower the tone of opprobrium with which many of his clerical followers are prone to assail those of their people who are known to be turning their attention to the doctrines of the New Church...They seem to be totally guiltless of the least approach towards a conception that the real question at issue is not whether Swedenborg was *sane* or *insane*, but whether what he wrote is *true or false* (emphasis in original).<sup>265</sup>

Here, the editors reference continuing tension between the Swedenborgian New Church and Methodism even sixty years after Wesley's first offending publication, while also touching on the actual distinction they believe should be driving debates about Swedenborg. Offended by the presumed falsehoods regarding Swedenborg's insanity originally circulated by Wesley, editors of *The New Church Repository* claim that a debate about insanity versus sanity is not a relevant question, but that instead arguments about Swedenborg should be aimed at discerning whether what he wrote was true or false. In its entirety, Hargrove's vindication of Swedenborg aims to undermine Wesley's claim to religious authority and identify potentially relevant hypocrisies in order to cast doubt on Wesley's motives for writing about Swedenborg. Hargrove also attempts to demonstrate that Wesley was not steadfastly committed to the pursuit of truth in order to argue that he therefore could not truly understand Swedenborg's religious revelations.

Hargrove begins his letter by acknowledging the historiography of Wesley's "Thoughts on Swedenborg," and claiming that he would like to add a few impartial remarks to the subject in light of his vehement faithfulness to Swedenborg. Hargrove states he wants to "[t]estify my veneration, gratitude and affection for that highly illuminated, truly pious, and greatly persecuted

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<sup>265</sup> "In a Letter from the late Rev. John Hargrove," *The New Church Repository, and Monthly Review. Devoted to the Exposition of the Philosophy and Theology Taught in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* Vol. II (1849): 24, Google Books, play.google.com.

man, the Baron *Emanuel Swedenborg*, to whom, under God my Saviour, I am chiefly indebted for all the *genuine* knowledge of the Scriptures that I now possess” (emphasis in original).<sup>266</sup> In his duty to the Swedenborgian New Church and his commitment to truth, Hargrove also claims he feels obligated to “comply with what I conceive to be the requisitions of duty from me, and thereby retain “the testimony of a good conscience” in my own breast...though I am...unskilled in the wily tactics of religious controversy, I despair not of producing the most unexpected and serious convictions upon the minds of all who may be liberal and patient enough to pursue the following remarks with impartiality and attention.”<sup>267</sup> With this statement, Hargrove subtly signals that his letter will vindicate Swedenborg by attempting to disprove Wesley’s credibility and by questioning Wesley’s ability to be impartial in his assessment of Swedenborg’s religious doctrines. This sentiment is expounded in the following statement:

It is granted that the Rev. Mr. Wesley was a very extraordinary character [who saw] ...great success in calling sinners to repentance, and [gave]...great labors as a preacher of the gospel...But certainly it would be very bad logic to infer from this, that all the religious and political doctrines which he held and propagated were true; or even that the *motives* which prompted his extraordinary labors were *pure*, and free from the defiling loves of self, and of dominion (emphasis in original).<sup>268</sup>

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, at times when attacked, Hargrove would lash out *ad hominem*, consigning himself to personal insults rather than staying focused on doctrinal disagreements. In this unpublished letter Hargrove follows that same tactic, identifying multiple avenues in which the purity of Wesley’s character might be called into question before

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<sup>266</sup> John Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg from the Misrepresentations of Wesley,” *The New Church Repository, and Monthly Review. Devoted to the Exposition of the Philosophy and Theology Taught in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* Vol. II (1849): 25, Google Books, play.google.com.

<sup>267</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 25.

<sup>268</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 25.

acknowledging that “[i]t is not my design...in this letter, to make any reply of a doctrinal nature to the various objections which Mr. Wesley has made...but chiefly to offer a few remarks on the manner, the unfair and ungenerous manner, which he has taken to answer the end he had in view.”<sup>269</sup>

Hargrove first compares Wesley to despotic rulers who confront any person or nation that stands in the way of their goals, similar to “that of Mr. Wesley to contend with every surrounding sect (or *spiritual* nation) which dared, in his day, to differ from him in any point of Christian faith or practice, or impede the rapid and enormous progress of his *religious* popularity and power” (emphasis in original).<sup>270</sup> Hargrove quotes from a pamphlet Wesley composed in response to a criticism of Methodism in which Wesley accuses a Mr. Hill of the very manners and practices he engaged in when crafting “Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg.” These include not reading all of Swedenborg’s writings before publishing a review, and not mentioning page numbers when criticizing potentially problematic statements. “I must beg leave to make a few extracts,” Hargrove writes, “in order to prove how ungenerous and how unjust Mr. Wesley’s *manner* of attacking Baron Swedenborg was, whatever might have been his genuine and interior *motives*” (emphasis in original).<sup>271</sup> Hargrove casts doubt on the source of Wesley’s information about Swedenborg by claiming that “Mr. Brockmer publicly testified that he never opened his mouth to Mr. Wesley on the subject,” and on Mr. Mathesius who “was, with all his *seriousness*, a violent and bitter enemy to the Swedenborgian Theology and actually became

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<sup>269</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 30.

<sup>270</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 26.

<sup>271</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 26.

*insane* himself a little after he propagated this report of the Baron, and was dismissed from his congregation in London...” (emphasis in original).<sup>272</sup> Hargrove goes on to argue that Wesley demonstrates a “*shameful* and *shocking* disregard for justice, truth or charity...in his unprovoked attack on Baron Swedenborg” (emphasis in original).<sup>273</sup> In support of this claim, Hargrove quotes a false statement that Wesley made regarding Swedenborg’s stance on faith and God, and then argues vehemently:

What will the admirers of Mr. Wesley’s honesty and candor think, or say, when they are assured that in all the Baron’s voluminous works there is no such expression!...tell it not...publish it not...lest the evil affections of the enemies of revealed religion be gratified in perceiving the little regard Mr. Wesley has paid to his own excellence and stated rules of religious controversy, any more than to the rules of justice, faith and Christian charity in his unprovoked attack on Baron Swedenborg.<sup>274</sup>

Hargrove includes evidence in his letter that suggests Wesley’s denunciation of Swedenborg was related more to a loss of Methodist converts than to a deep-seated belief in the falsity of Swedenborg’s doctrines. “So eager was he to break a lance with the dead,” Hargrove writes wryly, “or rather to arrest the progress of the Baron’s doctrines among his own societies, several of whom, both preachers and people, began about the period Mr. Wesley wrote his “Thoughts,” &c. to receive the Heavenly doctrines of the Lord’s New Church.”<sup>275</sup> Hargrove ends his letter with a pointed and sharp character attack. He calls Wesley both senile and ungodly, arguing that by the time Wesley wrote “Thoughts” he was already in his late 70s, “a period in life,” Hargrove concedes, “in which, we might charitably conclude, his memory at least, if not his understanding,

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<sup>272</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 28.

<sup>273</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 29.

<sup>274</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 29.

<sup>275</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 30.

was much on the decline.”<sup>276</sup> But the real icing on Hargrove’s insult cake is the revelation that Wesley was courting a 23-year-old Irish girl around the time he wrote “Thoughts.” This fact, corroborated by a Bishop in the Methodist Church, Hargrove finds both humorous and deplorable, arguing that readers must excuse Wesley’s “forgetful frame of mind” since “Miss Eliza, with all her attractive force and transcendent beauty of person, was, notwithstanding, not over prudent or pious in thus arresting the venerable attention of this hoary and celebrated Apostle of the day.”<sup>277</sup> Hargrove provided this information, it seems, not only to emphasize Wesley’s distracted and debased frame of mind when he wrote “Thoughts,” but also to offer a pointed comparison of John Wesley and Emanuel Swedenborg. Hargrove writes:

How differently engaged, from such merely earthly objects and sensual affections as occupied the mind of Mr. Wesley at the age of eighty-one...was the mind of Emanuel Swedenborg, when he was engaged in writing his *Arcana Coelestia*, his *Apocalypse Explicata*, or his *True Christian Religion*, when he arrived at the same venerable period of life?...It should be granted, however, that the profound discoveries of this great and good man, were, through the sublime illumination of his studious and retired mind, not easily to be apprehended by his too hasty and superficial readers; but to the impartial and scientific inquirers after truth, if patient enough to examine his system thoroughly, from a sincere desire to search after truth, they cannot fail of deriving the most solid satisfaction on every doctrine of revealed religion. To me, every page of his *Theology* contains a volume of instruction, and every sentence an oracle of truth; which, doubtless, in due time, when the prejudices of early education shall be dissipated, will be more and more admired, while modern systems shall be regarded no more.<sup>278</sup>

In ending his letter, Hargrove appeals to readers who consider themselves impartial seekers of truth to consider the personal, ungodly motivations that may have driven Wesley to write “Thoughts.” Throughout his letter, Hargrove also seems genuinely offended by what he

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<sup>276</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 31.

<sup>277</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 31-32.

<sup>278</sup> Hargrove, “Vindication of Swedenborg,” 32.

perceives as commentary born from a lack of scholarly thoroughness in reading and studying Swedenborg's works. Lastly, even more than religious prejudice, personal motives, or theological idleness, Hargrove is disdainful of the fact that Wesley spread false information. In promoting a religion that reconciled the seemingly incompatible principles of reason and divinity, Hargrove essentially argues that to be a Christian is to be in pursuit of truth. In spreading falsehoods about Swedenborg, Wesley is characterized as an ungodly, error-prone man caught up in the pursuit of power and earthly pleasures. The doctrinal and ad hominem attacks Wesley aimed at the Swedenborgian New Church not only thrust Swedenborgianism into the religious spotlight but are a fitting example of how these debates became a form of inadvertent validation and a catalyst for greater public discussion about the merits and pitfalls of Swedenborgian theology. As a common catalyst for subsequent attacks on the New Church, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the nature and response Wesley's writings on Swedenborg merited. While the New Church generally refrained from initiating attacks on other religious organizations, Swedenborgians were constantly on the defensive, taking up their pen in pursuit of defending and correcting claims regarding Swedenborg's mental state, the doctrinal content of his theology, and the process of his Biblical interpretation.

As a testament to the continual tension between Methodists and Swedenborgians, in 1814, an author self-styled Amicus Veritatis published *A Dialogue between Captain Condescension and Jack Honesty, Two British Tars, Concerning the Doctrine of Baron Swedenborg, and his followers; with some remarks concerning the late Joanna Southcott* in

Colchester, England.<sup>279</sup> Veritatis' *A Dialogue* features a fictional, satirical dialogue between a Captain and a young man named Jack discussing the social dangers of Swedenborg's doctrines. In an advertisement prefacing the conversation, the author writes that his intention is to "prevent the best interest of his fellow-creatures from being injured by the diffusion of the dangerous principles of the Baron."<sup>280</sup> This dialogue addresses a number of themes, but the primary one is the danger and deception of Swedenborg's doctrines, which are presented to the reader with ridiculing language and references to the originating rumor by Wesley regarding Swedenborg's mental state. Veritatis reminds Jack of the dangers presented by Swedenborg's writings:

The errors contained in the Baron's writings, are not indifferent, but awfully dangerous, to the souls of men: they strike at the vitals of christianity, destroy the foundation of a sinner's hopes...Of the Baron's account of heaven and hell, I must in particular observe, that the doctrine contained therein, is not only quite unproved, quite precarious from beginning to end, as depending entirely on the assertion of a single brain-sick man; but that, in many instances, it is contradictory to scripture, to reason, and to itself, but over and above this, it contains many sentiments that are essentially and dangerously wrong...<sup>281</sup>

Veritatis takes issue with Swedenborg's interpretation of the Holy Trinity, the Millennium, and the resurrection, as well as his descriptions of heaven and hell. In addressing one of the common counterarguments of the New Church, Veritatis explains to Jack that his assessment comes after a close and serious perusal of Swedenborg's works and is not the result of religious prejudice:

I sat down...to read and seriously consider some of the writings of Baron Swedenborg, I began with huge prejudice in his favor, knowing him to be a pious man, one of a strong

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<sup>279</sup> While the author's identity is unknown, Amicus Veritatis is accused in a later rebuttal letter as being a Methodist minister (A Friend to the Injured, and a Defender of Truth, *A Letter to Amicus Veritatis* (Colchester: Swinborne and Walter et al, 1815), 4, The Swedenborg Society, <http://swedenborg.libertyasp.co.uk>.)

<sup>280</sup> Amicus Veritatis, *A Dialogue between Captain Condescension and Jack Honesty, Two British Tars, Concerning the Doctrine of Baron Swedenborg, and his followers; with some remarks concerning the late Joanna Southcott* (Colchester: R.N. Rose, 1814), 2, The Swedenborg Society, <http://swedenborg.libertyasp.co.uk>.

<sup>281</sup> Veritatis, *A Dialogue*, 6.

understanding, of much learning. But I could not hold out long. Any one of his visions puts his real character out of doubt. He is one of the most ingenious, lively madmen, that ever set pen to paper. But his waking dreams are so wild, so far remote both from scripture and common sense, that one might as easily swallow the stories of Tom Thumb, or Jack the Giant-Killer.<sup>282</sup>

As the conversation continues, the Captain convinces Jack of the dangers of Swedenborg, demonstrating how Swedenborg's doctrines are not only inconsistent with Scripture, but blasphemous and against human reason. "It is very awful," the Captain says at one point, "to see how they corrupt the word of God."<sup>283</sup> After the Captain has explained how Swedenborg's interpretation of the resurrection is faulty and contrary to reason, Jack concedes that he agrees, claiming that, unlike Swedenborg, his beliefs align with the Bible and common sense: "I firmly believe it, and must believe it, while I believe the Bible, and have the use of my reason, and common sense."<sup>284</sup> Toward the end of the dialogue, the Captain reemphasizes Swedenborg's insanity, aligns Swedenborg with the English prophet Joanna Southcott (who proclaimed she was carrying the new Messiah at the age of 64), and encourages destruction of Swedenborg's works so that the world may forget his religious doctrines. Jack expresses gratitude for the Captain's wisdom and his narrow escape from heresy. "Yes, Jack," the Captain responds, "and you can never be sufficiently thankful to God for it; for you have escaped from such a mass of heresy and nonsense, as the world never saw, or heard of before. The Baron seems to have borrowed something almost from every heretic that has gone before him; his writings, with some exceptions, being a heterogeneous compound of Deism, Socinianism, Sabellianism,

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<sup>282</sup> Veritatis, *A Dialogue*, 5.

<sup>283</sup> Veritatis, *A Dialogue*, 19.

<sup>284</sup> Veritatis, *A Dialogue*, 17.



Mahometanism, &c.”<sup>285</sup> After aligning Swedenborg with other infidel religions, Veritatis finishes the dialogue by declaring acceptance of Swedenborg’s doctrines would be akin to rejecting Christianity: “I think, while any one...reads the word of God with prayer, he will not be permitted to fall into Swedenborg’s delusions; for if he does, he must have lost the grace he once possessed, feeling a dislike to the doctrines of christianity; being almost a Deist.”<sup>286</sup> By associating Swedenborg with Joanna Southcott and Swedenborgians with Deists, Veritatis demonstrates the extent to which he believes Swedenborg’s writings to be delusional, anti-Christian, and socially dangerous because of how far they veer away from mainstream interpretations of the Bible.

Amicus Veritatis was answered by two rebuttal articles. The first was printed in 1815 by anonymous author “A Friend to the Injured, and a Defender of Truth” who Carl Odhner identifies in *Annals of the New Church* as “probably, Rev. J. Proud.”<sup>287</sup> The second was written by Rev. Manoah Sibly (1757-1840), ordained Swedenborgian minister and one of the first preparers of New Church liturgy in England.<sup>288</sup> In *A Letter to Amicus Veritatis*, A Friend reproaches Veritatis for his article, claiming he is simply a Methodist who has attacked an innocent group of Christians seeking religious truth:

When a *man*, a *Christian Minister*, is obliged to call in Jack Tars, and use the *blunt* vulgar language of uncultivated sailors to accomplish his purpose, we may reasonably conclude he has got a bad cause in hand, and needs the worst agents to defend it...what injury have a few inoffensive, harmless, and serious men and women...done to you, that you must

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<sup>285</sup> Veritatis, *A Dialogue*, 27.

<sup>286</sup> Veritatis, *A Dialogue*, 28.

<sup>287</sup> Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Annals of the New Church: With a Chronological Account of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg, Vol. I. 1688-1850* (Philadelphia: Academy of the New Church, 1898), 248.

<sup>288</sup> For an excellent study of the Sibly Family see Susan Sommers, *The Siblys of London: A Family on the Esoteric Fringes of Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

throw so much dirt of abuse, reproach, and falsehood at them and their sentiments?  
(emphasis in original).<sup>289</sup>

A Friend sarcastically and systematically dismantles Veritatis' dialogue, ridiculing it for harsh language, a lack of impartiality and accuracy, as well as for a profusion of false epithets attributed to Swedenborg and his followers. He identifies every false claim Veritatis makes and counters it with corrected information, focusing specifically on Swedenborg's interpretation of the resurrection, the afterlife, the Millennium, and the Holy Trinity, as well as his science of correspondences and spiritual sense of the word. In regards to Swedenborg's science of correspondences and spiritual sense of the word, A Friend rests solely on his own authority as a religious figure to counter Veritatis' claims, arguing that "I not only take upon me to assert, thus publicly, but I am ready to prove, that the whole Word of God is written according to, and in the divine science of correspondences, and contains a spiritual sense and meaning in every verse and sentence."<sup>290</sup> A Friend points out that without a knowledge of the spiritual sense of the word, Veritatis is destined to misunderstand, and therefore pervert, Swedenborg's doctrines. After correcting the falsehoods of *A Dialogue*, A Friend rewrites the narrative Veritatis had spun to present Swedenborg and New Church parishioners in a revised light: "We have not received cunningly devised fables, nor the wild reveries of a madman, but the eternal truths, subjects, and doctrines of Divine Revelation. And we shrink not from *defending* them against *all* opposers,

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<sup>289</sup> A Friend to the Injured, and a Defender of Truth, *A Letter to Amicus Veritatis* (Colchester: Swinborne and Walter et al, 1815), 4-5, The Swedenborg Society, <http://swedenborg.libertyasp.co.uk>.

<sup>290</sup> A Friend, *A Letter*, 14.

who enter the lists as serious, judicious Christians, and who write in the Christian temper and spirit” (emphasis in original).<sup>291</sup>

Manoah Sibly’s *A Brief, Calm, and Dispassionate Defence of the New Church against the Foul and Calumnious Attack of an Anonymous Writer, Calling Himself, Amicus Veritatis* offers a subtler reproach to Amicus Veritatis. Sibly’s thoughtful response contrasts Veritatis’ sarcastic and coarsely written attack, and in doing so, intentionally throws the pious and thoughtful nature of Swedenborgians into sharp relief. Sibly writes:

It is not my design to answer every particular sentiment, which you have been pleased to utter; many of them are totally untrue; there is much misrepresentation, whether ignorantly or otherwise it is not for me to say; I shall only therefore make a few observations in a calm and dispassionate manner, upon the principal subjects which you have endeavored calumniously to expose; to wade through the whole would be perfect loss of time.<sup>292</sup>

Sibly reprimands Veritatis for spreading false information and counters his accusations of Swedenborg’s purported insanity with a reference to a publication from 1791 that answered all of Wesley’s charges. Sibly then offers corrections to the Swedenborgian New Church stance on doctrinal subjects such as the crucifixion, repentance, atonement, the resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Holy Trinity. “Your last declaration making Swedenborg say, that God was crucified,” Sibly writes for example, “I must beg leave pointedly to contradict, as he has never written such a sentence.”<sup>293</sup> Sibly also spends a number of pages refuting Veritatis’ claims regarding the Holy Trinity, arguing:

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<sup>291</sup> A Friend, *A Letter*, 18.

<sup>292</sup> Manoah Sibly, *A Brief, Calm, and Dispassionate Defence of the New Church against the Foul and Calumnious Attack of an Anonymous Writer, Calling Himself, Amicus Veritatis* (London: Edward Hodson, 1815), 3-4, The Swedenborg Society, <http://swedenborg.libertyasp.co.uk>.

<sup>293</sup> Sibly, *A Brief, Calm*, 4.

That God is existent only in one person, is undoubtedly the doctrine of Baron Swedenborg; and I should hope that would you review the subject in your cooler moments of reflection, that you will see its harmony and consistency with the sacred volume, as well as with sound reason, illuminated by that oracle of divine truth. The grand point, on which the New Christian Church differs from the Old, is, that, whereas, you say, Jesus Christ is Jehovan, that is, according to His divine nature, one of the persons in the Godhead; we say, He is the only Jehovah, the only Lord and God of heaven, and in whom all the divine trinity is concentrated, placing full confidence in the assertion of the Apostle Paul, that in Him, dwelt, and dwelleth, all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.<sup>294</sup>

In emphasizing reason and scriptural consistency, Sibly identifies the pillars upon which the New Church defended against doctrinal attacks. In pursuit of reason and truth, Sibly quotes numerous Biblical passages that support the Swedenborgian New Church interpretation of the Holy Trinity, both to prove the basis of the interpretation itself and New Church adherence to Scripture:

“[t]hus the doctrine of the New Christian Church, respecting the unity of the person of Jehovah God, stands immoveably (sic) fixed on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, at least as to the Father and the Son.”<sup>295</sup> Sibly’s twelve-page response to Veritatis ends with a moderately toned, patronizing admonishment:

And now, sir, I take my leave of you, most earnestly beseeching my Lord and Saviour, if it can be done, without detriment to your eternal condition, to enlighten your mind, that you may be enabled to discern the fallacious principles which you have been supporting your attack on the doctrines of the New Christian church, founded upon the divine truth of the most holy Word; whose doctrines will stand the most severe test of that authority; nor do her ministers and defenders desire to abide by any other decision.<sup>296</sup>

Thirty-four years after Wesley’s initial attack on Swedenborg it is evident that the Swedenborgian New Church continued to defend their doctrinal stance on Biblical interpretation,

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<sup>294</sup> Sibly, *A Brief, Calm*, 4-5.

<sup>295</sup> Sibly, *A Brief, Calm*, 6.

<sup>296</sup> Sibly, *A Brief, Calm*, 12.

the method with which they arrived at this interpretation, and the source base of their knowledge and doctrinal beliefs. New Church advocates persisted in arguing that, contrary to the negative voices which decried Swedenborg's divine knowledge as blasphemous and irrational, their approach to interpreting Christian Scripture was rational, consistent with the Bible, and a salve to logical inconsistencies. Seemingly absent was a broader discussion about the source base of Swedenborg's divine revelations. While defenders of the New Church were willing to engage in discussion of Swedenborg's sanity, Swedenborg's trips out of body, travels to other planets, and conversations with angels and God was conspicuously absent. This tension manifested itself in various argumentative stances both for and against New Church growth yet remained a major stumbling block to gaining widespread respect and acceptance within the larger religious community.

## *Part II: The Unitarian Response*

In 1791, English theologian and philosopher Dr. Joseph Priestley published a 75-page treatise entitled *Letters to the Members of the New Jerusalem Church, formed by Baron Swedenborg* in which he quoted both from Swedenborg's writings and the Bible to conclude that Swedenborgian doctrine was not divinely inspired writing.<sup>297</sup> Priestley methodically expanded

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<sup>297</sup> Joseph Priestley was a well-known English separatist credited with numerous scientific discoveries, who founded Unitarianism in England, and became an outspoken supporter of the French Revolution. This support, however, led to public suspicion and Priestley was forced to flee after a mob destroyed his home in Birmingham in 1791. Priestley addressed this tragedy in his *Letters to the Members of the New Jerusalem Church* since the final version of his letters were destroyed and he had to revert to editing a previous copy. Priestley wrote: "the zealots of the church of England, when I had no suspicion of any outrage of the kind, demolished my house, library, apparatus, and every thing that they could lay hold of belonging to me, and would, I now believe, have destroyed myself if they had got me in their power...Being in London presently after this, and having nothing else to do, having no laboratory to work in, and incapable of being wholly idle ; besides writing *An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham*, which will appear in due time, I employed myself in transcribing these Letters, and recomposing, as well as I could, the parts of which I had no copy" (x-xi).

on the main shortcomings he found in Swedenborg's works, arguing that there was no rational basis from which to believe Swedenborg was truly in communication with God. All the while, he chastised those who too easily accepted Swedenborg's writings as truth, stating that "[t]o many persons it will appear not a little extraordinary, that a scheme of religion so visionary, and so destitute of all rational evidence, as that of Baron Swedenborg, should be so firmly believed by such numbers of persons of unquestionable good sense, and the most upright intentions; and some may be disposed to say that Christianity itself might have had no better an origin."<sup>298</sup> In rationalizing his claim against Swedenborg, Priestley argues that Swedenborg never provided evidence in the form of a miracle proving that God truly intervened in his life: "Now I do not find that your pretended prophet, an excellent and good man as I willingly allow him to have been, ever wrought a miracle, or foretold any future event, as a proof of his extraordinary pretensions."<sup>299</sup> Priestley also acknowledges that the novelty and strength of Swedenborg's claims require even stronger evidence to substantiate them, stating:

The system exhibited in the preceding Letter must be acknowledged to be new, and very extraordinary, differing materially from the faith of every other denomination of christians, and therefore the evidence of its truth ought to be proportionably strong. For, in all cases, the more extraordinary any relation appears, the stronger is the evidence that we require for it. I shall therefore take the liberty to ask, on what authority you receive Mr. Swedenborg as a prophet, or one who had communication with God in the invisible world.<sup>300</sup>

In terms of doctrinal disputes, Priestley, a Unitarian, agreed that the concept of the Trinity was false, stating "[w]e view with equal horror the doctrine of the trinity, consisting of

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<sup>298</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Members of the New Jerusalem Church, Formed by Baron Swedenborg* (Birmingham: J. Thompson, 1791): xviii, Google Books, [play.google.com](https://play.google.com/books).

<sup>299</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 11.

<sup>300</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 8.

three persons in one God, as equally absurd and blasphemous.”<sup>301</sup> However, he took issue with Swedenborg’s redefining stance. Priestley argued that the Bible did not substantiate Swedenborg’s argument that Jesus Christ was God in human form, and that it was wrong to conflate Jesus Christ with God, asking readers: “What, then, is it that you can advance in support of your favourite doctrine, that Jesus Christ and God the Father are the same person, in opposition to the constant and uniform language of the scriptures?”<sup>302</sup> Priestley went so far as to argue that if readers ignored the false Swedenborgian reasoning which conflated God and Jesus, then New Church ideology was nothing more than Unitarianism in sheep’s clothing: “We who are properly Unitarians, acknowledging the sole divinity of God the Father, and the simple humanity of Christ, make no such apologies as these...confident that truth stands in no need of such a shelter as that to which you have recourse...With a change of your phraseology, and very little in your ideas, you are as proper Unitarians, as we who are usually called Socinians.”<sup>303</sup>

Priestley also took aim at Swedenborg’s interpretation of the Millennium and judgment, once again arguing that Biblical Scripture did not substantiate Swedenborg’s claim that the Millennium took place in 1757:

Another of the conspicuous doctrines of your new church relates to the second coming of Christ and a future judgment... “When the disciples were viewing Jesus ascending to heaven, the angels who stood by said to them, Acts. i. 11, Ye men of Galilee, why look ye up to heaven. This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, Shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. What can be more evident from this, than that as the ascent of Jesus was personal and visible, his return will be the same, personal and visible, not figurative or emblematical only, meaning not himself, but his doctrines.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 2.

<sup>302</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 24.

<sup>303</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 29-30.

<sup>304</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 39-40.

Priestley states that Swedenborg's lack of evidence is a considerable weakness to his claims and that there has been no measurable difference to mankind since the supposed Second Coming in 1757: "[b]ut that any change was made in the nature of men at the first coming of Christ, or that any farther (sic) change has been made in man since what you call his second coming, is an arbitrary supposition of Mr. Swedenborg's, for which he produces no evidence whatever."<sup>305</sup> It is this same argument regarding a lack of evidence that drives Priestley to undermine Swedenborg's claims to the spiritual sense of the word, God's substance, and divine influx. "As to any spiritual sense of the scriptures," Priestley writes, "it cannot be attended to till there be some evidence of the reality of such a sense of them. If you say that I am incapable of perceiving this sense of the scriptures, you must allow that you have no means of convincing me, or any others who are in the same situation with me..."<sup>306</sup> Priestley also voices concern regarding the subjective nature of words, querying the fact that if literal definitions are not always consistently agreed upon, then how would the Bible ever communicate consistent meaning within hidden spiritual definitions while preventing religious frauds from coming up with their own interpretations: "[d]ifferent persons interpret even the literal sense differently. What, then, will be the case if, besides this literal sense, there be another concealed one, with respect to which every person will, of course, think himself at liberty to form his own conjectures?"<sup>307</sup> This question indicates Priestley's fears regarding the integral relationship between Biblical and social cohesion, suggesting an inherent danger to society if everyone lived according to her or his own

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<sup>305</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 14.

<sup>306</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 17.

<sup>307</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 57.



interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Priestley suggests that lack of a cohesive belief structure would result in social chaos.

The Unitarian response to Swedenborgianism also demonstrated a preoccupation with scientific principles. In analyzing Swedenborg's descriptions of God's divine being and the nature of God's influx onto humanity, Priestley calls into question Swedenborg's understanding of basic scientific principles. "Much of the confusion that is apparent in Mr. Swedenborg's conceptions," Priestley writes, "has arisen from his inattention to the first principles of metaphysics, particularly in not distinguishing substance from property."<sup>308</sup> As an example, Priestley argues that Swedenborg's conception of God does not adhere to current understandings of science: "...I do not perceive the consistency of your own ideas with respect to God. You say, he consists of nothing but the properties of wisdom, love, and life. But what relation have any of these to form?"<sup>309</sup> In proffering this question, Priestley strengthens his objections to Swedenborg's religious system. Not only does Priestley object to a lack of evidence and unsubstantiated reasoning, but he questions Swedenborg's scientific knowledge and undermines New Church claims to Biblical coherency, ultimately concluding that Swedenborg's revelations must be the result of dreams, imagination, or borrowed ideas from ancient philosophers such as Plato.<sup>310</sup> By weakening the credibility of Swedenborg's claims, Priestley undermines the two pillars the New Church rests upon: that of adherence to the Bible and a strong appeal to reason. Priestley drives this point home:

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<sup>308</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 44.

<sup>309</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 51.

<sup>310</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 54.

I MUST now, and I can do no more, appeal to your reason, whether the religion which you have adopted on the authority of one man, be either rational or scriptural. You well know that a faith not founded on evidence (of which our own reason is the only judge) is nothing but delusion, whatever be the source of it, whether men impose upon themselves, or be imposed upon by others. When we receive truths on the authority of revelation, we must first judge by our own reason whether the revelation be real or pretended, unless it be revealed to us in particular, that another person has had a revelation; and this you will hardly pretend to be your case with respect to Mr. Swedenborg (emphasis in original).<sup>311</sup>

In his analysis of Swedenborg's theology, Priestley delivers a damning assessment of New Church religious thought, highlighting irrationalities and Biblical inconsistencies in order to cast serious doubt on the legitimacy of Swedenborg's claims. Priestley's assessment was quickly answered in 1791 by English Swedenborgian minister Joseph Proud (1745-1826) in *A Candid and Impartial Reply to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's Letters*, and in January of the following year by London-based printer and founding English Swedenborgian, Robert Hindmarsh. Hindmarsh's response took the form of a 252 page book entitled *Letters to Dr. Priestley Containing Proofs of the Sole, Supreme and Exclusive Divinity of Jesus Christ Whom the Scriptures Declare to be the Only God of Heaven and Earth; Likewise of the Divine Mission of Emanuel Swedenborg: Being a Defence of The New Church Signified by the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse*.

Hindmarsh was thorough in his methodical dismantling of Priestley's claims against Swedenborg, addressing each by reversing the charges against the New Church and demonstrating how Swedenborgian theology was both rational and consistent with Holy Scripture. Regarding miracles, Hindmarsh argues that there were many apostles who never performed miracles:

As to the insinuation that the pretensions of Baron Swedenborg are no better than those of Mahomet, merely because he did not support them by miracles, if it proves anything, it

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<sup>311</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the Members*, 59-60.

proves too much; for on this ground you will find yourself put to the necessity of denying the divine mission of many of the prophets...What miracle...did Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah...perform, in order to convince the people, that they were the true messengers of Jehovah?"<sup>312</sup>

Hindmarsh goes on to argue that there are a number of different ways that divine inspiration may be proved, and that miracles cannot always be trusted as proof of divinity since magic and enchantments might create the false appearance of a miracle.<sup>313</sup> Hindmarsh also tightens his argument by referring to Swedenborg's writings directly, arguing that Swedenborg himself foresaw this potential counterargument and looked down on miracles as disempowering: "miracles carry compulsion with them, and take away a man's free-will in spiritual matters."<sup>314</sup>

In addition to addressing miracles, Hindmarsh also made strides to prove that Swedenborg's writings were from God: "I shall now inform you," Hindmarsh writes, "on what authority the members of the New Church receive the testimony of Baron Swedenborg, and acknowledge him as divinely inspired."<sup>315</sup> In demonstrating this authority, Hindmarsh offered Swedenborg's visions of the spirit world, arguing that the apostles in the Bible gave similar descriptions, which thereby legitimize Swedenborg's religious experiences:

Now, I say, in support of the memorable relations which Baron Swedenborg has given relative to his intercourse with the spiritual world, there is *a great deal of concurrent evidence*, and that too of the very best sort; which, if you are desirous of seeing it in preference to the evidence of truth resulting from rational arguments, I will now lay before you...the holy Scriptures...That such things...do really appear in the heavens...is clearly evident from similar things being seen and described by John in the Apocalypse, and also by the prophets in the Word of the Old Testament (emphasis in original).<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Robert Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley Containing Proofs of the Sole, Supreme and Exclusive Divinity of Jesus Christ*, 2nd Ed (London: T. Goyder, 1822): 5, Rpt. by (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2005), [www.kessinger.net](http://www.kessinger.net).

<sup>313</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 17.

<sup>314</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 31.

<sup>315</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 31.

<sup>316</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 19.

After listing examples of otherworldly visions from the Bible, Hindmarsh argues that apostles were not asked to provide corresponding evidence that their visions were divinely inspired.

Hindmarsh then accuses Priestley of repudiating Scripture: “[s]uch is the concurrent testimony of the Holy Scriptures, relative to the appearances in another life. Now, as the memorable relations of Baron Swedenborg are precisely of the same sort...it would appear, that a plain and downright opposition to the one, strongly implicates a secret denial of the other.”<sup>317</sup>

Hindmarsh addresses Priestley’s doctrinal concerns as well. Regarding the spiritual sense of words, Hindmarsh’s first counterargument is to reason that Priestley’s eyes are simply closed:

Were a blind man obstinately to deny the existence of the sun’s light, until he had some evidence of its reality, would you not pity him, and with a smile say, ‘Why, what evidence of the *light* can you have, while you are totally immersed in *darkness*?...Get the eyes of your spirit or understanding opened, and then you will have ocular demonstration of the actual existence of spiritual light; this being as obvious to the sight of a spiritual or intellectual eye, as natural light is to a bodily eye...you may obtain such a perception...by applying in sincerity of heart to the one only true God Jesus Christ, and by keeping his commandments. It is he alone that can open the eyes of the blind (emphasis in original).’<sup>318</sup>

In a later section of his work titled “Of the Holy Scripture and the Science of Correspondences”

Hindmarsh strengthens his counterargument by first acknowledging Priestley’s concern

regarding the seemingly subjective nature of the spiritual sense of the word, and secondly

reminding him that Swedenborg’s science of correspondences provides the key to interpretation:

“You seem to think it is a mere *arbitrary* meaning put upon words, without any *certain rule* to determine their signification...Perhaps you have yet to be informed, that the *science of*

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<sup>317</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 21.

<sup>318</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 45.

*correspondences* is now discovered, which is the only true key that can unlock the cabinet of the literal sense of scripture, within which are contained the jewels of its spiritual and celestial sense” (emphasis in original).<sup>319</sup> Hindmarsh catapults from this argument into supporting evidence that proves the divinity of Jesus. “All the arguments you have urged against the divinity of Jesus Christ,” Hindmarsh proselytizes, “are no other than false reasonings from the mere *appearances* of things in the literal sense of the Word; and consequently that your whole system is built on the fallacy of the senses” (emphasis in original).<sup>320</sup> In analyzing the divinity of Jesus Christ, Hindmarsh provides numerous Biblical passages to counteract statements made by Priestley regarding pronoun use and name assignment, disproving Priestley’s claim that different names and plural pronouns were not used in the Bible to refer to one singular person.<sup>321</sup> Hindmarsh transitioned from logical arguments about the relationship between plurality and singularity to addressing Priestley’s analysis of the New Church interpretation of the Trinity. Hindmarsh first quotes several passages from the Bible that reference the concept of a Trinity in order to disprove Dr. Priestley’s claim that the Trinity is not substantiated by text in the Old or New Testaments. He then argues that if the Trinity exists, the disagreement must necessarily be about *how* to interpret textual references to it: “The actual existence of a trinity being thus established, it only remains to be considered in what sense we are to understand it, whether as a trinity of distinct persons in the Godhead, or as a trinity of essentials in one divine person.”<sup>322</sup> Hindmarsh reasserts Swedenborg’s claim that the divine essentials consist of “soul, body, and

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<sup>319</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 173.

<sup>320</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 49.

<sup>321</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 56-62.

<sup>322</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 120.

operation” before explaining that the New Church’s interpretation of the Holy Trinity is not only consistent with Christian Scripture, but also rational when one considers the essentials of humanity: “From the above observations it is plain, that a trinity, consisting of three essentials; is necessary to the full constitution of every single man; for were we to suppose any one of the essentials to be wanting in that case man would not be man, in the proper sense of the word.”<sup>323</sup> Hindmarsh then rejects Priestley’s assertion that the New Church is essentially aligned with Unitarians, arguing that there is a clear difference between the Unitarian rejection of the Trinity, and the Swedenborgian New Church Biblical interpretation of the Trinity: “while we assert the unity of God, we also maintain a divine trinity, not of persons...but of three essentials in one person.”<sup>324</sup>

Hindmarsh calls on the spiritual sense of the word to clarify the New Church’s stance on the Millennium, repeating the doctrine which dictates that the Lord’s Second Coming is simply the revelation that the spiritual sense of the word will bring truth to man.<sup>325</sup> Hindmarsh also offers a rebuttal to Priestley’s charge that New Church members take Swedenborg’s claims as divinely inspired without rational proof. To this charge Hindmarsh argues that it is the Bible, not Swedenborg, they examine for proof and that there is evidence within the Holy Scriptures to substantiate Swedenborg’s claims. According to Hindmarsh, “although we set a very high value on [Swedenborg’s] declarations, yet we do not receive them *merely as such*, independent of proper evidence, but as satisfactory illustrations of the true Scripture doctrine of the Lord’s

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<sup>323</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 121-122.

<sup>324</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 124.

<sup>325</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 195.

second advent, the last judgment, and the resurrection” (emphasis in original).<sup>326</sup> Hindmarsh supports this claim with rationality, arguing that God is in his divine, gloried form, not physical form, and could not be seen by anyone whose spiritual eyes were not open even if he were to return to Earth.<sup>327</sup> Hindmarsh also reinterprets a number of Biblical passages presented by Priestley to demonstrate how the spiritual sense of the word reveals their true meaning, and how they do not actually contradict the New Church interpretation of the Millennium as Priestley originally thought.<sup>328</sup> Hindmarsh then counters Priestley’s charge that no discernible changes exist to prove that the Millennium began in 1757. To this claim, Hindmarsh offers as evidence the Enlightenment-driven freedoms bestowed upon man in the previous decades: “a most extraordinary change has manifestly taken place, since the year 1757, throughout every nation in christendom, particularly in regard to the liberty of thinking about religious and civil concerns.”<sup>329</sup> Lastly, Hindmarsh would be remiss not to rescue Swedenborg’s name from false accusations and undignified allegations regarding his proclaimed source of knowledge. In response to the charge that Swedenborg’s writings are purely a jumble of borrowed ideas from Plato, dreams, and imagination, Hindmarsh reminds Priestley of the parallels between Swedenborg’s visions and the Bible:

As to your objection, that Swedenborg had no real new ideas communicated to him, because he describes the things of the spiritual world by similar objects in the natural, this will apply equally as well to the Scriptures themselves, as to his writings...even when God himself delivers a new revelation, he does it by expressions, which...are found to be no other than what you call combinations of old ideas. If therefore the circumstance of Swedenborg’s describing the things of the spiritual world by natural forms, be a sufficient

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<sup>326</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 196.

<sup>327</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 196.

<sup>328</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 197-199.

<sup>329</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 199-200.

reason for rejecting his testimony, it is no less a reason for rejecting the Scriptures also, these being written exactly in the same manner.<sup>330</sup>

By aligning Swedenborg 's doctrines with Scripture, Hindmarsh tightens the relationship between Swedenborg's theology and the Bible, linking betrayal of one to betrayal of the other. In reinstating reason and Biblical coherency to Swedenborg's religious system, Hindmarsh can advocate that it is rational to reinterpret the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg's science of correspondences and remain tied to the foundation of Christianity by adhering to the Holy Scriptures. Hindmarsh ends his reproach with a reference to a pillar of the New Church, the pursuit of truth:

If what has been advanced in the present *Defence of the New Church*, be neither consistent with Scripture nor reason, it will and ought to fall to the ground, as a work of imagination, and a delusion of the mind. But if...it should appear to be supported by the authority of both, then you, Sir...for the sake of truth, must feel yourself interested, in no small degree, in the decision of questions, which from their very nature, involve consequences of the utmost importance...Truth, genuine, unadulterated truth, is, I hope, with each of us the object of pursuit.<sup>331</sup>

In examining this debate between Unitarian doctrinal beliefs and that of Swedenborgians, it is evident that beyond a disagreement over scriptural semantics, adherence to the Bible remained a central concern. This exchange also demonstrates that Swedenborgians were taken seriously enough to warrant attacks and doctrinal reprimands from religious figureheads and outspoken social thinkers, and illustrates how the conviction, network, and resources of the New Church were strong enough to attempt to ward off these attacks with counterarguments and written publications.

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<sup>330</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 246.

<sup>331</sup> Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 251-252.



### *Part III: The Jesuit Response*

The New Church faced a scathing attack right around the turn of the nineteenth century from a work entitled *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, written by French Jesuit and expatriate abbot, Augustin Barruel.<sup>332</sup> *Memoirs* posited that the French Revolution was the result of a widespread conspiracy driven by secret societies to dismantle existing ruling social structures. Barruel identifies freemasons, "illumines," certain "philosophes," and secret societies in general as the cause of revolutionary impulses that resulted in the upending of social, religious, and political systems.<sup>333</sup> These secret societies that Barruel found problematic included: Sophisters, Rosicrucians, Knights, Templars, Cabal, Illuminees, and Theosophs, all of which Barruel claimed were related to Freemasons: "[t]here was not one of these new masonic Sects that did not revive some ancient system of impiety or rebellion. But the worst of the whole clan was a sort of *Illuminees* calling themselves *Theosophs*" (emphasis in original).<sup>334</sup> Here, Barruel not only implicates Swedenborg in this destructive revolutionary impulse, but he also blames Swedenborgian theology for driving the growth of the Theosophs:

All the *Theosophical Illuminees* of this age in England, France, Sweden, or Germany, have drawn their principles from the *Baron Emmanuel* (sic) *Swedenborg*. This name, to be sure, does not seem to denote the founder of a Sect, Swedenborg became one, perhaps, without dreaming of any such thing, and through one of those extraordinary incidents which Providence in an age of impiety permits to humble the pride of our Sophisters (emphasis in original).<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* was originally written and published in French between 1797 and 1798, translated into English in 1799, and reprinted in London and New York. During this time, Barruel had fled to England to avoid the violence of the French Revolution.

<sup>333</sup> Augustin de Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism Written in French by the Abbe Barruel, and Translated into English by the Hon. Robert Clifford, F.R.S. & A.S.* (New York: Kollock, 1799), iv, viii, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>334</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 81.

<sup>335</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 81-82.

In order to dismantle the apparent power resonating from Swedenborg's doctrines and driving the subsequent growth of the Swedenborgian New Church, Barruel begins a systematic discrediting of Swedenborg and his theology. Barruel first attacks the validity of Swedenborg's mental state, referencing Wesley, by claiming that Swedenborg was deranged: "[a]fter having passed the greater part of his life in the most incongruous pursuits, as a Poet, a Philosopher, a Metaphysician, a Mineralogist, a Sailor, a Divine, and an Astronomer, he was attacked by one of those violent fevers which leave the organs of the human frame in a very deranged state. His meditations or rather reveries, took the form of those speculations to which he had formerly been addicted..."<sup>336</sup> In a footnote to the statement about mental derangement, Barruel gives credence to this claim by writing: "I do not see that any of his adepts have mentioned this illness: but indeed I am not surprized (sic) at it. I quote it on the authority of a Physician, who learned it from several other Physicians of London."<sup>337</sup> Barruel continues to mock Swedenborg, focusing on portraying him as a religious imposter and berating his writings on the heavens, spirits, and conjugal love. "It requires exceeding great patience to wade through all these works," Barruel writes, "and when one has studied them, it is difficult to form an idea of their author. In this Theosophical Illuminee some will behold a man in a constant delirium; others will trace the Sophister and Infidel; while others again will take him for an imposter and hypocrite."<sup>338</sup> After quoting from a number of Swedenborg's works, Barruel summarizes the whole as "delirium."<sup>339</sup> He then highlights Swedenborg's professed relationship to God and angels, exaggerating the

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<sup>336</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 82.

<sup>337</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 82.

<sup>338</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 83.

<sup>339</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 83.

ridiculousness of Swedenborg's claims: "From this delirium let us proceed to the impostor. The whole life and writings of Swedenborg depose against him. To begin with his writings, it is always God or an angel that speaks. Every thing that he tells us he has seen in heaven himself, and he is at liberty to go there as often as he pleases. He has spirits at his command; and they reveal to him the most secret transactions."<sup>340</sup>

In addition to presenting Swedenborg's sources of spiritual insight as outlandish, Barruel also counters a few well-known anecdotes often utilized by Swedenborgians as examples of miracles that prove the validity of Swedenborg's claims. For example, in response to the story that Swedenborg communicated with the dead brother of Princess Ulrica, then Queen of Sweden, and provided her information that only the deceased could have known, Barruel writes that a letter with this pertinent information had actually been intercepted by "two senators, who profited of this occasion to give [Princess Ulrica] the above lesson through the medium of Swedenborg."<sup>341</sup> Barruel also provides a rational explanation for an anecdote which credits Swedenborg with knowing the location of a deceased husband's receipt in order to prevent his widowed wife from being swindled, stating that "[h]e could very easily give the information to be sure, for he had found the receipt in a book which had been returned him by the Count."<sup>342</sup> After discrediting these hypothetical miracles, Barruel addresses the Christian piety frequently attributed to Swedenborg as evidence of his spiritual wisdom:

Never did any man speak more of the love of God and of the love of his neighbors; never did any person more frequently quote the Prophets and the Scriptures; or affect more respect for Christ and more zeal for Christianity; never did any one better assume the

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<sup>340</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 83-84.

<sup>341</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 84.

<sup>342</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 85.

character and tone of a sincere, religious, and upright man: Nevertheless, I must say, never did any man show more duplicity and impiety; never did any one conceal the most resolute design of annihilating Christianity and every Religion, under the mask of zeal, more completely than he did. Let all his followers protest against this assertion; to expose the *two systems* of their master will amply suffice to justify the imputation. I say *two systems*, because as Swedenborg always had *two senses* the one *internal* and *allegorical*, the other *external* or *literal*, to explain and overthrow the Scriptures; so he has also *two systems*, the one apparent for fools and dupes; the other secret and hidden, and reserved for the adepts; the one tending only in appearance to reform Christianity on the reveries of Deism; the other leading to all the Impiety of Atheism, Spinozism, Fanaticism, and Materialism. I lament with my readers, that such is the nature of our revolutions, that to know and unfold their causes it is necessary to study manifold Sects, and wade through disgusting systems (emphasis in original).<sup>343</sup>

Swedenborg, Barruel argues, is simply another religious infidel in disguise who fakes piety in order to gain support for the overthrow of Christianity and other ruling power structures.

In this attack, Barruel vacillates between ridiculing Swedenborg's religious claims with mocking commentary, and legitimizing Swedenborg's theology by warning readers of the very real social dangers that they pose. For example, Barruel summarizes Swedenborg's stance on the literal and apparent, invisible and spiritual worlds, the Holy Trinity, and divine influx before patronizing Swedenborg by arguing that he simply does not understand the Bible: "This poor being who so grossly mistakes himself when he believes himself to be thinking or acting of himself, has also fallen into a multitude of other religious errors, because he does not rightly understand the sacred scriptures."<sup>344</sup> Barruel also ridicules Swedenborg's interpretation of the Millennium, sarcastically summarizing it with the following:

After having expounded all the mysteries of Christianity according to his spiritual and allegorical sense, that is to say, after having substituted his doctrines to those of the Gospel, Swedenborg informs them, that the day will come when the whole of his doctrine shall be received in this world. This happy day will be that one which the *New Jerusalem*

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<sup>343</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 85.

<sup>344</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 87.

shall be re-established on earth...It will be the golden age of true Christianity (emphasis in original).<sup>345</sup>

And yet, a page later, Barruel implicates Swedenborg's religious system in the revolutionary pulse of the time period, arguing that Swedenborg's theology is pure evidence of a destructive conspiracy designed to destroy Christianity and dangerous enough to overthrow current power structures: "[m]y readers may easily observe, that such tools in the hands of the adepts must suffice to eradicate true Christianity from the minds of their dupes, and to make their New Jerusalem a plea for those revolutions which, in order to recall ancient times, are, in the name of God and of his prophets, to overthrow all the altars and thrones existing under the present Jerusalem, that is to say, under the present churches and governments."<sup>346</sup> Barruel provides his most damning assessment of Swedenborg when he demonstrates how Swedenborg's theology eliminates the higher strata of society from its vision and therefore purports to destructive, revolutionary designs:

And indeed if we do but cast our eyes on those that are most admired by the Sect, we shall find all the grand principles of the revolutionary Equality and Liberty, and those Jacobinical declamations against the Great, the Noble, and the Rich, and against all governments. We shall find, for example, that their *Religion*, or their new Jerusalem, *cannot be welcomed by the Great, because the Great are born transgressors of its first precept*. Neither can it be approved by the Nobles, because *when mortals aspired at nobility, they became proud and wicked*. Still less can it be admired by those who do not delight in the confusion of ranks, because *the pride of ranks produced inhumanity and even ferocity*; and even long before the revolution we shall see the adepts inculcating that grand principle of anarchy and revolution, that *the law is the expression of the general will*, and thus preparing the people to disregard every law that had been made heretofore, either by their sovereigns, their parliaments, or their senates; encouraging them to sound the alarm, to overthrow them all, and to substitute the decrees and capricious conceits of the populace in their stead (emphasis in original).<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 88-89.

<sup>346</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 89.

<sup>347</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 94.

Here, Barruel highlights Swedenborg as against religion and civil society, stating that “[h]ere then it appears, that Swedenborg’s views coincide with those of the occult lodges, aiming at the overthrow of every religious and civil law, and at the downfall of every throne.”<sup>348</sup> Finally, Barruel claims that it is Swedenborg’s scientific bent which reveals him as in league with other secret, conspiratorial organizations like the Freemasons. Specifically, Barruel accuses Swedenborg of being an atheist and a materialist, evidence for which is found in the materialism of Swedenborg’s doctrines that focus primarily on the importance of matter, and the sun.<sup>349</sup>

Barruel’s attack on Swedenborg also attempts to dismantle the manner in which Swedenborg interprets the Bible for his own purposes, fearing that this interpretation of Christianity will upend social, moral, or ethical values through revolutionary impulses. Barruel strongly implicates Swedenborgian doctrine in the revolutionary movement of the time period, arguing that Swedenborg’s interpretation of Christianity segregates the upper echelon of society and therefore promotes the toppling of traditional power structures. This outcome Barruel sees as irrevocably damaging to the world as well as the inevitable result of devotion to Swedenborg’s doctrines:

[Swedenborg’s followers] still continued to think themselves the followers of Christ, though they were only the Spectators of Swedenborg’s reveries. He evidently is the declared enemy of the principal mysteries of revelation, particularly of the Trinity, and of the Redemption of mankind by the Son of God dying on a cross for the salvation of sinners; he nevertheless talks a great deal about revelation; he assumes a devout tone, and with his *allegorical* and *spiritual sense* would appear rather to reform than to destroy all; and his followers do not perceive that with his allegorical sense he is only repeating the

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<sup>348</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 95.

<sup>349</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 92-93.

arguments of the Sophisters against revealed religion, in order to renew all the follies and impieties of the Persians, Magi, and Materialists (emphasis in original).<sup>350</sup>

As a Jesuit who functioned within a church hierarchy based on election, it is not surprising that Barruel's manner of engaging with Swedenborg's religious system is simply to undercut his legitimacy as a figure of divine authority. Swedenborg's democratic, Millennial vision for society and the fact that his science of correspondences promised humanity the key to true Biblical reinterpretation seemingly threatened both the moral foundations of society, as well as the place and power of the Catholic Church in social and political hierarchies.

The New Church did not take kindly to Abbe Barruel's assessment of Swedenborg and his spiritual doctrines. That same year, John Clowes responded with a treatise printed in Manchester and London, titled *Letters to a Member of Parliament on the character and writings of Baron Swedenborg containing a full and compleat (sic) refutation of all the Abbé Barruel's calumnies against the honourable author, by J. Clowes*. In 1800, an extract of this treatise was reprinted in Philadelphia under the title *Remarks on the assertions of the author of the Memoirs of Jacobinism respecting the character of Emanuel Swedenborg and the tendency of his writings*. In the advertisement preceding this reprint, the authors summarize the purpose of the work, claiming that their motive is purely vindication from falsehoods: "The following pages, being chiefly extracted from a publication in England...are offered to the public on the present occasion, from no other motive, than what is dictated by the requirements of Truth and Charity,

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<sup>350</sup> Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating*, 93.

to vindicate an innocent and useful character from misrepresentation and unjust reproach.”<sup>351</sup>

Clowes began his response to Barruel by refuting accusations regarding Swedenborg’s character and mental state. Clowes then quoted from a number of respectable men who were positive character references for Swedenborg, including Thomas Hartley and publisher of *Arcana Coelestia*, Mr. John Lewis. Far from fitting the mold of a sect founder, in his response Clowes points out that not only was Swedenborg considered humble and pious, but he had no aspirations for religious leadership, both publishing his first works anonymously and out of his own pocket as well as declining any subsequent compensation by requesting that profit from sales be used to aid the spread of the Christian gospel.<sup>352</sup> Clowes also addresses the accusations regarding Swedenborg’s mental state, acknowledging that Swedenborg did survive a violent fever about twenty years before his death, but insists that insinuations the fever led to permanent delusion are unjust. The controversy regarding Swedenborg’s mental state, Clowes argues, would be put to rest had Barruel been thorough in his research and read Thomas Hartley’s letter to the translator of *True Christian Religion*, extracts of which Clowes quotes in his own discourse:

That so highly a gifted messenger from the Lord...should meet with the reproach of being beside himself, will be so far from appearing strange to such as are acquainted with the scriptures, that they would expect it...such a character is sacred, and to go about to defeat the success of such labour, is nothing less than a degree of profanation, and the like conduct in any of the clergy, whether proceeding from envy, jealousy, or any partial regard to their own particular credit or interest, is still more blameable. The unchristian spirit of calumny and detraction here mentioned, leads me to observe in this place, that some have taken pains to represent our author as mad, in order to discredit his character and writings...But there is not the least occasion for a particular answer to so malignant a

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<sup>351</sup> John Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions of the author of the Memoirs of Jacobinism respecting the character of Emanuel Swedenborg and the tendency of his writings* (Philadelphia: John Ormrod, 1800), 4, Rpt. by (Gale ECCO Print Editions, 2010), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale.com.

<sup>352</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 7.



charge, as it receives its full confutation from the consistency and wisdom of his numerous publications since that time...<sup>353</sup>

Clowes also acknowledges how religious and social prejudice has prevented readers from honestly considering the truth of Swedenborg's claims, quoting here from Dr. William Hurd's

*History of the Religion of all Nations:*

It has been said indeed by some, and received implicitly without further examination by others, that Baron Swedenborg, after receiving the above extraordinary commission, was mad, and became totally deprived of his rational senses: But this information is *such a palpable contradiction to truth, and such an insult to common sense, being overruled by every page of our author's writings, as well as by every act of his life after that period*, that we should have thought it altogether unworthy our notice, were we not aware that it operates powerfully with many even at this day, to prejudice them against a character which otherwise they would revere, and against writings from which they would otherwise receive the most welcome instruction, whilst in the mean time they can give no reasonable account of that prejudice...(emphasis in original).<sup>354</sup>

After reminding readers that Barruel's accusation of derangement does not account for the writings and spiritual communication Swedenborg carried out prior to his fever, Clowes responds to Barruel's assessment of Swedenborg's descriptions of the spiritual world. Clowes argues that Barruel relies heavily on sarcasm, ridicule, and declamation of character to make his claims, and that objections to Swedenborg's specific visions of God and angels can be made to Biblical prophets as well:

There is not one of those discoveries, therefore, recorded in the sacred volume, which is not liable to the same objections as those made to Swedenborg...Abbe Barruel rests his attempt to invalidate the evidence of our honourable author's supernatural communications and prove him mad. He does not adduce even a single instance, in which the testimony of Swedenborg contradicts that of the inspired writers, with respect to what he saw and heard in the other world; he only declaims and ridicules...<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 9-10.

<sup>354</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 11.

<sup>355</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 14.

Having addressed Barruel's character attack on Swedenborg, Clowes moves on to defending and restoring credibility to Swedenborg's religious insights and doctrines. Instead of taking a theological approach, however, Clowes simply writes that Barruel did not examine Swedenborg's work with diligence, arguing that "it will be impossible for any one to form any idea of the order, the dignity, the wisdom, the harmony, the consistency, the sanctity, the edifying importance of the spiritual discoveries made to Emanuel Swedenborg, from reading only what the Abbe Barruel is pleased to relate on the subject."<sup>356</sup> Clowes identifies Swedenborg's close adherence to Christian Scripture as a boon to his religious authority, and Swedenborg's earthly description of the heavens and afterlife as a "continuation of *human joy*," quoting passages from Scripture which suggest human joy extends into the divine realms (emphasis in original).<sup>357</sup> In particular, Clowes takes offense to Barruel's claim that Swedenborg was an imposter, an accusation which both insinuates that Swedenborg's experiences were bogus, and ridicules the sources of Swedenborg's spiritual insight. In responding to this claim, Clowes points out that an accusation of this magnitude merits substantive proof, which Barruel fails to provide:

One would naturally suppose that a charge of this very black dye, which affects not only the *literary* and *rational*, but also the *moral* character of our honourable author, which impeaches him both as a *man* and as a christian, and strips him bare of every virtue, which consequently holds him forth to universal contempt and abhorrence, as a monster of iniquity, so much the more detestable than others, as his talents were more distinguished — would have been supported by something which had the semblance of proof, and which, if it did not fully substantiate the accusation, would at least have given it an air of probability (emphasis in original).<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 15.

<sup>357</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 17.

<sup>358</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 19.

Clowes disproves the anecdotes suggesting Swedenborg faked miracles by quoting from more credible individuals such as Queen Ulrica herself and another Abbe who had close connections to an academic.<sup>359</sup> “But it is easier in all cases to *make* assertions,” Clowes writes, “than to *prove* them, and prejudice never fails to find an interest in deciding on things and characters *in the gross...*” (emphasis in original).<sup>360</sup> Clowes ends his counter defense of Swedenborg with a eulogy by Mr. Sandel, Swedenborg’s previous superintendent of the Mines.<sup>361</sup> In summarizing his defense, Clowes reinforces Swedenborg’s Christian piety, calls into question Barruel’s knowledge of Swedenborg, and reminds readers that, devoid of facts, Barruel’s attack on Swedenborg holds no merit:

Such are the *selected particulars* from the eulogy of the Swedish orator, respecting the *life* and *writings* of Mr. Swedenborg, which whilst they prove him to have taken the lead amongst the philosophers of the age in which he lived, demonstrate further...that *his life was unimpeachable*, and that he did not excel others more by the vigour of his genius...than by *his strict attention to evangelical principles, and to all the duties necessary to form the man and the christian...* And what now must the world think of the Abbe Barruel’s assertion that the *Whole Life and writings of Swedenborg depose against him?*...Did [Barruel] possess better sources of information, or did Swedenborg conceal his true character from every one (sic) else, even from his own friends and countrymen, and only unvail (sic) himself to the Abbe Barruel?...It is no wonder that we look in vain for any appeal to facts in the Abbe Barruel’s works, in support of his abominable charge of imposture in regard to the *life* of our author...Swedenborg was the VERY REVERSE, and has taught the VERY REVERSE, of what the learned Abbe is pleased to impute to him (emphasis in original).<sup>362</sup>

Instead of focusing on disproving the accusation that Swedenborg was implicated in a grand effort by secret societies to topple social, ecclesiastical, and monarchical powers, Clowes

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<sup>359</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 21.

<sup>360</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 22.

<sup>361</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 23-34.

<sup>362</sup> Clowes, *Remarks on the assertions*, 34-37.

discredited Barruel by upending claims about Swedenborg with positive anecdotes and reference letters, as well as emphasizing Barruel's lack of evidence. While Clowes briefly addresses Swedenborg's spiritual sources of information by paralleling his experience with those of other Biblical prophets, in general, the weight of Clowes defense rests on depicting Swedenborg as a pious Christian who was unjustly attacked by Barruel's unsubstantiated, prejudiced claims. In skirting around a debate of Swedenborg's merits as a mouthpiece of divine knowledge, Clowes' *Remarks on the assertions* speaks to a deeper tension that existed within the Swedenborgian community. As Grasso notes in *Skepticism and American Faith*, New Church proponents routinely avoided discussing the source of Swedenborg's spiritual revelations, focusing instead on Swedenborg's close adherence to Christian Scripture and religious piety and the potential of his science of correspondences to clarify Biblical irrationalities. "The seer's admirers were publicly careful to stress the rationality of the new doctrines rather than their supernatural source, Swedenborg's visits to heaven and hell and his conversations with the angels, devils, and spirits he met in the spirit world," Grasso writes, noting the following: "Advocates recognized that the seer's visions were often "stumbling blocks" for outsiders."<sup>363</sup> Analyzing the public exchange between Barruel and Clowes speaks not only to a spreading awareness of Swedenborg, but also to the manner in which Swedenborgian proponents downplayed the more outlandish sources of his divine revelations, choosing instead to emphasize Swedenborg's close relationship to Christianity in an effort to promote his religious system.

#### *Part IV: The Deist Response*

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<sup>363</sup> Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 134.

While Clowes avoided a deeper discussion of Swedenborg's theology, the public debate in 1801 between John Hargrove, Denis Driscoll, and Elihu Palmer examined specific doctrinal claims in order to springboard into a broader argument about the role of reason in relation to religion. The role of reason in this debate was explored in the last chapter, however, it is also pertinent to look at how arguments about the applicability of reason to religious belief informed a more thorough analysis of Swedenborg's doctrines. While other Protestant religions resisted Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible because the implications of accepting revised Scripture upset a longstanding foundation of social values, Denis Driscoll and other Deists took issue with Swedenborg's form of reasoning. The Deists picked apart Swedenborg's and Hargrove's claims to reason by pointing out aspects of Swedenborg's doctrines that were contradictory or irrational. In particular, Driscoll and Palmer protested any form of rational claims made in support of Swedenborg's doctrines based on the spiritual sense of the word, miracles, or correspondences. In the third edition of the *Temple of Truth*, Hargrove quotes from the previous week's edition of the *Temple of Reason* in which Driscoll poked holes in Swedenborg's spiritual sense of the word, arguing that in promoting this form of interpretation, Swedenborg strew more discord into an already disharmonious sea of religious voices. Driscoll writes:

Thus is the *word of God* twisted, turned and tortured, by various sects and commentators; each and every one like Mr. Hargrove, pretending to have discovered the *true* sense and meaning; but until all those sects and interpreters are *agreed* on the *true* sense of *divine revelation*, we are of opinion every rational and wise man should *stick* to the *Bible of the Creation*, and worship *one* God in spirit and in truth; and this is what we call natural religion, or deism (emphasis in original).<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> John Hargrove, "A Calm and Candid Examination of the Rationality of Mr. Driscoll's Theology," *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 33, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

To answer Driscoll, Hargrove stated that, contrary to irrationality, Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible reminds readers that it is foolish and unreasonable to assume God's form of communication to man should be easily knowable: "How is it consonant with sound *philosophy* or right *reason*, to believe or affirm, that God can communicate himself to his rational creatures, in the *clearest* and most *unequivocal* manner? Is not this to assert that *Infinity* can communicate itself *clearly* and *unequivocally* to *finite* beings?" (emphasis in original).<sup>365</sup> With Driscoll advocating for religious and social coherence through strict adherence to the Bible, Hargrove's counter response was to focus on the spiritual state of man, urging humanity not to equate themselves with the divinity and infinity of God.

The Deists, not surprisingly, also spoke out against the Swedenborgian New Church's stance on miracles. Hargrove notes the Deistical claims before countering:

Mr. Palmer ventured to assert that miracles have never been wrought but in the most ignorant and barbarous ages and places, and only before those who were incapable to examine the true nature and connection of *cause* and *effect*; or draw a just conclusion from any given premises. Under the second general view he remarked, that miracles were contrary to the general experience of all *enlightened* ages and nations, and consequently had their origin only in the ignorance, credulity and superstition, of *former* ages (emphasis in original).<sup>366</sup>

To rebuke these statements, Hargrove reminds readers that the rise of Christianity occurred during a period of glory for the world, not ignorance and barbarism, which therefore gives credence to the claims of miracles during that age:

It happened very providentially for the honor of the Christian religion, that it did not take its rise in the dark illiterate ages of the world; or in a barbarous nation; but at a *time* when, and *place* where all the arts and sciences, were at their meridian height and

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<sup>365</sup> From: Hargrove, "A Calm and Candid Examination," 34.

<sup>366</sup> John Hargrove, "Palmer versus Revealed Religion," *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 65, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.)

splendor...Neither was it the ignorant and illiterate *only* whose former strong and hostile prejudices against Christianity were removed, and their minds reconciled to its rational and heavenly precepts...(emphasis in original).<sup>367</sup>

Hargrove goes on to demonstrate the ironic stance of the Deists who require miracles to believe in God's interaction with mankind, yet would be blinded by preconceptions to an actual miracle should one occur: "If the very men who now require a miracle, were to *see* one, they would undoubtedly attribute it to nature; for a negation universally prevails among the *mere deists*, respecting any *influx* from the *spiritual* into the *natural* world; and therefore all such *influx* and *operations* would be esteemed mere phantasms and illusions..." (emphasis in original).<sup>368</sup>

Finally, Driscoll and his Deistical society were outspoken against Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, resisting the implication that correspondences between celestial and terrestrial realms drove true interpretations of nature and the Bible. They were also outspoken in aligning Swedenborg with other counterculture thinkers such as Franz Mesmer. Driscoll writes: "Mr. H. tells his readers, that...the nature and meaning of this sign cannot be known...except by some knowledge of the doctrine of correspondencies. — This shuffling and cant about recondite sense, doctrine of correspondencies, &c. Reminds us of the jargon of doctor Mesmer...and other quacks and imposters, who figured away in their time in Europe."<sup>369</sup> In response, Hargrove quoted a number of examples from the *Temple of Truth* and the Bible where he had demonstrated how Swedenborg's correspondences successfully clarified Biblical meaning. For example, Hargrove writes:

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<sup>367</sup> Hargrove, "Palmer versus Revealed Religion," 66.

<sup>368</sup> Hargrove, "Palmer versus Revealed Religion," 67-68.

<sup>369</sup> John Hargrove, "More Extracts from the Temple of Reason," *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 145. Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.)

Our Lord give us another instance of the nature of correspondency in the IX. cap. And 43 v. of St. Marks gospel, where he says if thine eye offend thee *pluck it out*. Who cannot see, that resting in the mere letter of Scripture here, without having recourse to its spiritual sense, by means of this doctrine of correspondence, would be productive of consequences the most absurd, and fatal to those who would aim at obedience to this commandment (emphasis in original).<sup>370</sup>

Utilizing rationality against the Swedenborgian New Church, members of the Deistical societies in New York and Philadelphia protested Swedenborg's theology on the grounds that it did not uphold its claims to rationality. Swedenborgians fought back by providing examples of scriptural passages that did not make sense if read literally, thereby justifying their approach to Biblical translation with Swedenborg's science of correspondences. In their formal opposition, however, Deists inadvertently give substance to Swedenborg's claims. By finding Swedenborg's doctrines to be as contrary to reason as the doctrinal tenets of Baptists, Methodists, and Unitarians, Deists therefore place and inadvertently validate Swedenborgians as existing within the enthusiastic religious vein of other evangelical denominations.

#### *Part V: The Anglican Response*

Interestingly, the only record of Anglican interaction with the Swedenborgian New Church from this period is a positive defense of Swedenborg. Written in 1795 by John Clowes, Anglican priest and early supporter and translator of Swedenborg's writings, this work was titled *A Letter of Exhortation and Admonition to All Such as Cordially Receive the Testimony of that Divinely Illuminated and Highly-Commissioned Messenger and Teacher of Truth, Emanuel Swedenborg*, and was sent from Robert Carter to Francis Bailey in Philadelphia to reprint and circulate. In *A letter of Exhortation and Admonition*, Clowes first acknowledges the current state

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<sup>370</sup> Hargrove, "More Extracts," 146.



of the Christian church, arguing that Swedenborg's Millennium has begun: "Lamentable hath been the perversion and destruction of the great truths of godliness, whereby the church is now reduced to that miserable state of which the Lord spake (sic) when he said, '*They shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down*'" (emphasis in original).<sup>371</sup>

Clowes mentions the New Church vision of the Holy Trinity, and then praises those Swedenborgian believers who have been blessed with the ability to see past the literal meaning of Biblical words to the hidden truth within: "ye are admitted also to see the glories of the holy word: ye are taught to look through the literal sense thereof into its spiritual contents, wherein it is truly the word of God, and is God; the veil of the letter is now rent in twain, and it is permitted to the Children of the new dispensation to penetrate through it into the holy of holies which lay heretofore concealed behind it."<sup>372</sup> Clowes also praises the Swedenborgian dispensation of knowledge, commending believers for their acceptance of the spiritual world before offering a few words of warning to those who have received and accepted New Church theology as truth: "[b]e not surprised at the opposition which will arise...against the new manifestations of the holy child Jesus," Clowes preached, "...let not this either affect or discourage you; for thus it was always done in days of old, when the Lord was pleased to make any new discoveries of his holy truth...The traditions and opinions of men cannot alter the nature of truth, and therefore seek only the truth."<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> John Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation and Admonition to All Such as Cordially Receive the Testimony of that Divinely Illuminated and Highly-Commissioned Messenger and Teacher of Truth, Emanuel Swedenborg* (Philadelphia, 1795): 8, Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>372</sup> Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation*, 10.

<sup>373</sup> Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation*, 12.

Clowes also warns against religious prejudice, urging believers of Swedenborg's doctrines to guard against and pray for any who might exhibit prejudice against the New Church or oppose these doctrinal truths:

Take heed however to yourselves lest the prejudices and contradictions of unbelievers should betray you into uncharitableness towards them, or the spirit of perverse disputing, which engendereth (sic) strife...whensoever therefore ye meet with any such opposers, endeavour rather to cover and exuse (sic) their prejudices by your charity, praying for them in the words of your blessed Lord.<sup>374</sup>

Clowes offers three additional admonishments to New Church believers. The first is to apply the spiritual lessons learned from Swedenborg to life, not simply read about them.<sup>375</sup> The second is to love and respect all those who live Godly lives, and not give into feelings of pride or haughty arrogance: “[I]et me admonish you, in the spirit of brotherly charity, to take heed how ye give into a *sectarian* spirit, either by despising former dispensations of heavenly truth, or by thinking lightly of those who are serving God under such dispensations, and have not been called to see by the same light which ye yourselves have been favored” (emphasis in original).<sup>376</sup> Lastly, Clowes asks Swedenborgian believers to continually repent, actively participate in the regeneration process, and fully experience the Lord's spiritual resurrection.<sup>377</sup>

#### *Part VI: Society and the Bible, Upsetting a Moral Foundation*

In widening the scope of the ecclesiastic Swedenborgian debates, it is helpful to consider criticisms of Swedenborg's theology focused entirely on the relationship between Scripture and social stability. As noted previously, Swedenborgians were frequently accused of reshaping

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<sup>374</sup> Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation*, 13.

<sup>375</sup> Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation*, 13-14.

<sup>376</sup> Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation*, 14-15.

<sup>377</sup> Clowes, *A Letter of Exhortation*, 16.

Biblical Scripture to fit their own doctrines and often bore the brunt of disgruntled Christians who claimed Swedenborgian theology upset religious authority, Biblical stability, and the moral and ethical foundations of society. There are several articles published between the 1790s and the 1810s which demonstrate how these concerns manifested in written attacks aimed at the New Church.

For example, in 1798, J.H. Prince published *A Letter to the Reverend Joseph Proud, Minister of the New Jerusalem Temple, Cross Street, Hatton Garden* in London with the following subtitle: “Wherein his Opinions are candidly examined — brought to the Touchstone of The Scriptures, and shewn (sic) to be totally repugnant to, and *subversive of Christianity*.”<sup>378</sup> In *A Letter to the Reverend Joseph Proud*, Prince identifies Christianity as a necessary foundation of society, and aims his ire at Swedenborgianism for upsetting that foundation. He writes: “if it be admitted that Christianity itself is of use to curb men’s vices, and to make them useful members of society, any doctrine which tends to overthrow this system, which strikes at its root, and gives a fatal blow to the very foundation of it, must be considered as inimical to the happiness of the human race.”<sup>379</sup> Prince prefaces his letter with the oft repeated pursuit of truth: “TRUTH is my aim, and God is my witness, that I am not actuated by any other desire than to propagate that, and to refute ERROR” (emphasis in original), before arguing that it is false beliefs which contribute to the spread of moral evils and depraved men.<sup>380</sup> Prince argues that the

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<sup>378</sup> Although not a lot is known about John Henry Prince, he was an Englishman and the author of three additional works at the time his letter to Proud was published, including *A Defence of the People denominated Methodists*, *The Christian’s Duty to God and the Constitution*, and *Original Letters and Essays, on a Variety of Subjects, Moral and Entertaining*.

<sup>379</sup> J.H. Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend Joseph Proud, Minister of the New Jerusalem Temple, Cross Street, Hatton Garden* (London: Chapman, 1798): 3, Pacific School of Religion. Grace.gtu.edu.

<sup>380</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 2-3.

apparent popularity of the Swedenborgian New Church in London is cause for concern because of the manner in which they treat Biblical doctrine. Admitting to having attended service, Prince acknowledges he approves of the manner in which sermons were given, but not the treatment of Christian doctrine.<sup>381</sup> “If we are Christians,” Prince writes, “let us act as such, by believing in the *whole of the Bible*. — If we are Deists, let us be consistent, and deny every part of it to be *an inspiration from God*” (emphasis in original).<sup>382</sup> Prince, unnerved by the fact that Swedenborgians play fast and loose with Biblical interpretation, argues exasperatedly that the New Church eludes religious labeling:

You think proper to deny the authenticity of a great part of the Scriptures, and in so doing take away the power of convicting you. — It is more difficult to cope with such an opponent as you than any other; because all religious characters besides yourself, and those of your fraternity, admit that truth of every part of The Bible, and that the evidence adduced from thence is conclusive. As to Deists, we have nothing to do but to bring Reason to bear against them; but you are a motly (sic) mixture of Deists and Christians, you are...A Deistical Christian — I would you were all Deist or all Christian, and then I should know with what arguments to ply you...<sup>383</sup>

After identifying Swedenborgianism as a hodge-podge mix of Christian and Deist principles, Prince takes issue with a number of New Church doctrines regarding the resurrection, the soul, Christ’s body, the Last Judgment and Second Coming, as well as the New Church’s utilization of Swedenborg’s spiritual sense of the word. To counter the New Church’s interpretation of these doctrines, Prince quotes Biblical passages that contradict their stance. In particular, Prince seems concerned that undermining specific Biblical doctrines will result in the overthrow of Christianity, since some elements of the Bible, whether contrary to scientific principles or not,

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<sup>381</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 5.

<sup>382</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 6.

<sup>383</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 6-7.

are included as proof of Christ's divinity and meant to be read literally. For example, Prince writes, "the Jews asked Christ to give them a sign to signify the truth of his mission; the sign [was Christ's resurrection]...if he did not, (as you assert), then he failed in giving that proof...Thus you see what consequences *your* opinion draws after it" (emphasis in original).<sup>384</sup> A page earlier Prince asks: "If the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection can be overthrown, then is Christianity a Fable[?]"<sup>385</sup> In asking this question, Prince explicitly voices the concerns raised by others regarding the potentially damaging implications of Swedenborg's theology.

Prince also accuses the New Church of cherry-picking select books from the Bible to support their theology, all the while rejecting those which do not, claiming that in doing so, Swedenborgians restructure the Bible to fit their subjective claims and wrongly elevate Swedenborg's spiritual revelations to the level of God's:

You accomodate (sic) every passage of Scripture which you wish to turn to your own advantage — but sensible that there are many passages which you cannot with all your sophistry deny the force of, nor explain to your own benefit, you go a shorter way to work, and call in question, nay, absolutely deny, the authenticity of those books of Scripture wherein they are contained; and for this or some reason *you reject about a third part of the Bible*...in the old Testament; and *all the new Testament, except the 4 Evangelists and the Revelations*...Your putting so great a stress on the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, as to lay the same injunction...to cultivate an acquaintance with his writings, as you do to read the Word of God (emphasis in original).<sup>386</sup>

Prince attempts to dismantle the aspects of New Church doctrine he takes issue with by arguing that the parts of the New Testament and the Old Testament which the New Church rejects "contain the most pointed proof against your doctrines," which, he surmises, must mean that the

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<sup>384</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 13.

<sup>385</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 11.

<sup>386</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 8-9.

New Church is rejecting them simply to maintain consistency with their own theology: “and therefore your policy in rejecting them must be obvious to every one (sic).”<sup>387</sup> While Prince questions the New Church’s religious affiliation, noting that they straddle the line between Christianity and Deism, he also acknowledges them as a religious institution by attending services. However, the underlying theme of Prince’s written “attack” on the New Church is one which examines the relationship between social stability, religion, and power. In this revolutionary age, Prince’s complaints about the New Church’s interpretation of the Bible point to concerns about stability. If Christianity is a foundation of society, Prince essentially asks, how will society be impacted if people accept changes to this foundation? And, who should have the power to control, revise, reshape, or reinterpret the Christian Bible? The implication of handing off this control to new voices, Prince suggests, is danger and damage to society.

The following year, Baltimore publisher Samuel Sower printed a set of letters addressed to Rev. Hargrove and written by an author who went by the initials “P.H.” The publication was titled *An Investigation of the Doctrine of Baron Swedenborg, or, of the Church called New Jerusalem, in Two Letters, Addressed to the Rev. Mr. H — By an inhabitant of Baltimore County* and was prefaced as a follow-up conversation to one which occurred between the author and Rev. Hargrove regarding the doctrines of Swedenborg:

If you recollect, I told you, that the constructions and explanations Baron Swedenborg throws upon scripture texts, were in general repugnant and contrary to my understanding. And as you had recommended that I should peruse his works impartially, that by so doing it might appear otherwise to me. But I assure you that I do that with the works of all

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<sup>387</sup> Prince, *A Letter to the Reverend*, 10.

authors that comes to my hand...it nevertheless is the same as I have said before; and not only this, I find that he grossly contradicts himself also...<sup>388</sup>

P.H. takes issue with how Swedenborg's application of the spiritual sense of the word changes the interpretation of Biblical passages, listing several sarcastic, allegorical examples to demonstrate the ridiculousness of Swedenborg's purported relationship to semantics. P.H. describes a scenario in which a king writes a request to a specific nation to send him a certain quantity of "fruit trees...peas and beans...coffers...[and] sheep."<sup>389</sup> However, when the ambassadors arrive with the aforementioned goods, they are reprimanded by servants who rebuke them for misunderstanding the king's instructions, exclaiming: "[how could you] have misconstrued the kings (sic) writings in so gross a manner? Why could you not have understood, that the king had meant by young fruit trees, boys and girls? And by peas and beans, diamonds and pearls? And what do you understand by the words coffers? ...it is money that these signify...And as for them four-legged things there...could not you have understood, that by the word sheep is meant ostriches?" At the end of the allegorical tale, the ambassadors are imprisoned for misunderstanding the King's writings, while the nation is thrown into chaos as people scramble to interpret the true meaning of the King's orders. Social disagreement abounds regarding linguistics until someone breaks into the King's residence in disguise and returns to the nation in possession of the true definitions.<sup>390</sup> P.H.'s allegorical tale ends with an ambassador asking why the King had not simply stated what he meant in the first place: "if the king had

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<sup>388</sup> P.H., *An Investigation of the Doctrine of Baron Swedenborg, or, of the Church called New Jerusalem, in Two Letters, Addressed to the Rev. Mr. H — By an inhabitant of Baltimore County* (Baltimore: Sower, 1799), 3. Early American Imprints, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>389</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 4.

<sup>390</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 7-8.

named the real things, instead of the signifying ones, then those mistakes might have been avoided.”<sup>391</sup> P.H.’s allegory is an apt description of the social confusion many feared would be the result of Swedenborg’s doctrines being widely accepted.

The allegory also voices concerns about God’s relationship to his people, asking, what purpose would there be for God to hide his true messages to mankind? P.H. struggles to comprehend Swedenborg’s science of correspondences and its relationship to genuine and apparent truths, he asks:

How can a thing or a subject that is circumstantially related to be true and false at the same time? A thing which in itself is false or untrue, though it may have the appearance of truth, can never, with propriety be termed truth...What reasonable man would suppose that God would have dealt (sic) thus with mankind? And yet, according to Swedenborg (who some will have to be a founder of a church!) God must have dealt (sic) thus tragically with us!<sup>392</sup>

P.H. uses the same reasoning to undermine the New Church’s interpretation of the Holy Trinity, both citing examples from the Bible that contradict the interpretation and stating that there’s no evidence to support the claim that one person signifies the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. P.H. argues that we do not call humans by their three essentials, and it doesn’t make sense to do so with God either: “Is it customary among any class of man, the simple not excepted, or even consistent with reason, that a person is called by the different names of his essentials, as soul, body and operation?”<sup>393</sup> P.H. also offers Bible-based evidence and logic-based inquiries to undermine the New Church’s interpretation of the Millennium and judgment, arguing that there is no physical evidence for either: “we dont (sic) feel the effects of it here as yet, notwithstanding

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<sup>391</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 6.

<sup>392</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 10-11.

<sup>393</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 14.



his doctrine of correspondencies.”<sup>394</sup> After taking issue with a few additional doctrines regarding hell, freewill, predestination, and atonement, P.H. summarizes his frustration with

Swedenborgian theology:

What could God have meant by having the words, atonement, propitiation, advocate &c. so often sat down or mentioned in the scriptures if it is a fatal error? Does it not shew as if God had on purpose introduced it for to produce that error in the minds of man, that he might have an occasion to accuse them of a fault? And, had we not better have no word of God at all than such a one, the meaning of which puzzles man’s mind, and serves only as a snare and fling, to throw and catch man in a fault?<sup>395</sup>

The undertone of P.H.’s letters, besides the oft repeated sentiment of disgust, is one of fear. In asking so many times what purpose God could have to hide his true meanings, P.H. alludes to the fact that acceptance of Swedenborg’s doctrines would mean Protestant Christians lose their personal relationship to the Bible. For, if meanings are hidden and spiritual to terrestrial correspondences are not easily understood, what is the point of reading the Bible for oneself? Would there be a point, P.H. inquires, of maintaining the Bible as a source of authority at all?

P.H. expands on these sentiments in a second letter, in which he resolutely argues that Swedenborg does not deserve credibility for claiming that his theology adheres to the Bible, since he selectively reshaped the Bible for his own ends:

But what signifies it to quote Scripture Texts, where the whole scriptures are perverted, and the most material part thereof roundly rejected? For he, B. Swedenborg at once keeks, as one may say, out of the Bible, for to make room for his own finesse, not only the acts of the Apostles, but likewise all their Epistles: besides other books that did not answer his own purpose. The book of the Revelation, however, seemed to have been pretty well adapted to his views, because it is mistical (sic) that he might make it still more so.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 18.

<sup>395</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 24.

<sup>396</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 26.

Of course, rejecting sections of the Bible would mean a radical reconsideration of the Christian foundation upon which societies were built. Upsetting this status quo is unthinkable and leads P.H. to articulate what he sees at the logical conundrum central to Swedenborgian theology: “[a]ccording to B.S. God must have, I think, dealt (sic) rather unfair with mankind; in that, he has given them a written instrument that they should guide themselves by, the meaning of which he had concealed from them.”<sup>397</sup> In pointing out this fallacy, P.H. identifies the inherent instability of the Swedenborgian interpretation of the Bible and highlights a logical conundrum which runs counter to the New Church’s appeal to man’s reason.

A culminating document capturing the extent of the New Church’s theological defenses and frustration with ecclesiastic pushback is Robert Hindmarsh’s 1814 publication of *A Seal upon the Lips of Unitarians, Trinitarians, and all others who refuse to acknowledge the Sole, Supreme, and Exclusive Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: Containing Illustrations of one hundred and forty-four passages in the four Evangelists and the Apocalypse, in proof that Jesus Christ is the Supreme and only God of Heaven and Earth. To which is prefixed the interview extraordinary: or a dialogue between the author and the following distinguished characters, as representative of the Christian church, so called, viz. Athanasius, Arius, Socinus, and Dr. Priestly*. Published in Manchester, England, *A Seal Upon the Lips* is a 592 page monograph which features both a dialogue ending with Athanasius, Arius, Socinus, and Dr. Priestley conceding to Hindmarsh that he may seal their lips with proof of the sole and supreme nature of God’s being, as well as a lengthy list of scriptural passages as proof of Jesus Christ’s

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<sup>397</sup> P.H., *An Investigation*, 3-4.

sole divinity. Hindmarsh states he offers in support of his argument “a multitude of appropriate collateral quotations from the Old Testament, *one hundred and forty-four* direct evidences and proofs...taken from the four Gospels and the Apocalypse, these being the only *divine books* belonging to the New Testament.”<sup>398</sup> After alerting readers to the dangers of Unitarian and Trinitarian thought, Hindmarsh offers a plethora of passages from Scripture which support the New Church’s stance on Christ’s sole, supreme, and divine essence, summarizing his argument with the following:

This great Object, so worthy of eternal and unceasing regard, is no other than the Divine Man Jesus Christ, besides whom there never did exist, nor ever can exist, either in heaven or on earth, any other Lord, any other God, any other Saviour, nor consequently any other Father, Friend, and Protector of the human race. Under the fullest conviction, that the doctrine, which we have been endeavouring (sic) to set forth, is the genuine, undoubted sense of the Holy Scriptures from beginning to end...the true acknowledgment and worship of Jesus Christ alone as the same Lord Jehovah, but *now incarnate in a Divinely-Human Form*, is the only sure safe-guard and protection against calamities of every description, to nations, societies, and individuals (emphasis in original).<sup>399</sup>

Hindmarsh reminds readers of the dangers inherent to misunderstanding Christian Scripture before, in contrast to other anti-Christian sentiment, leaving readers with a note of hope: “We now close this work, resting it for authority, and for support, solely upon the Word of divine truth; against the genuine sense of which, as here laid down, the Atheist, the Deist, the Materialist or Naturalist, the Tri-personalist also, as well as the Duallist (sic), and the Unitarian Theist, may in various ways contend, but shall yet never-never prevail.”<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Robert Hindmarsh, *A Seal upon the Lips of Unitarians, Trinitarians, and all others who refuse to acknowledge the Sole, Supreme, and Exclusive Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Manchester: F. Davis, 1814), 44, HathiTrust.org.

<sup>399</sup> Hindmarsh, *A Seal upon the Lips*, 583-584.

<sup>400</sup> Hindmarsh, *A Seal upon the Lips*, 585.

As testament to the transatlantic exchange of Swedenborg material, Hindmarsh's *A Seal Upon the Lips* was republished in Philadelphia in 1815 and answered in the same city a year later by Catherine Charleton's *A Bridle for the Ass, A Rod for the Fool's Back Containing an Answer to a Book Entitled A Seal Upon the Lips*. Full of references to specific Biblical passages in support of her claims, *A Bridle for the Ass* chastises Hindmarsh and lists evidence to invalidate Swedenborg as a source of divine revelation, continually reminding readers that Swedenborg and his followers do not deserve religious credibility in comparison to Jesus Christ. Charleton writes: "As to this writer's testimony, that "the four Gospels, and the Apocalypse are the only divine books of the New Testament," it is a testimony of E.S.; and it hath nothing to do with the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus."<sup>401</sup> Apprehensive, Charleton argues that Swedenborg's doctrines attempt to invalidate God's authority and, in doing so, upset the foundation of society: "E.S. has found out a new method of getting rid of what is obnoxious to his system; for not satisfied with breaking scriptures...he has undertaken to cut down and kill the testimony of "thousand thousands;" ...But, as it is written, Take away the foundations, and what can the righteous do?"<sup>402</sup> Throughout her argument, Charleton strongly protests Swedenborg's Biblical selectivity. She notes that the only books Swedenborg considered divine are conveniently in line with his theology and therefore suspect: "Is it to be wondered at, after reading the rhapsody which I have noted down from this writer's book, that both the master, viz. E.S. and his scholar refuse and object to the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of the

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<sup>401</sup> Catherine Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass, A Rod for the Fool's Back: Containing an Answer to a Book Entitled A Seal Upon the Lips* (Philadelphia: W.M. Fry, 1816), 6, America's Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com.

<sup>402</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 5.

ambassadors for Christ, “as not being of divine authority?” They know *in their heart* that the following emphatic doctrine suits not their scheme...” (emphasis in original).<sup>403</sup> After quoting from Acts 8:27-39 and Psalm lxxxix.19, Charleton objects to any Swedenborgian New Church reinterpretation of the Holy Trinity or new image of God, arguing that they have no authority for such restructuring or reinterpretation:

Then by what authority have these men taken the liberty of attempting to root out “the man Christ Jesus;” and of setting up an imaginary phantom in his place, by a name not known in “The Book,” from the one end thereof to the other end thereof, to wit, “A Divine Humanity.” Their idol is neither God nor Man: but an ignis fatuus [Latin for wisp], that sprung up in, and proceeded from, the fantastical mind of Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>404</sup>

Charleton continually reminds readers that Swedenborg has blasphemously reshaped the Bible for his own purposes: “...even that which he calleth “The whole Word,” he has most shamefully corrupted, torn scriptures from their constituent parts, and most “deceitfully handled it.”<sup>405</sup>

Charleton lists which books from the Old and New Testaments have been excluded from the Swedenborgian New Church including “The book of Ruth,” “The book of Esther,” “The book of Job,” “The Proverbs of Solomon,” and “the Acts of the Apostles,” claiming that those with access to the Bible will not be fooled by this new attempt to reshape divine prophecy: “But such a dressed-up dish of doctrine as this to feed “Unitarians and Trinitarians” with, who now have “The Book” in their own hands, is charging them with the want of common sense; and, at the same time, discloses the writer’s want of the common honesty of a lawyer, who, by reason of it being in the hands of others, dares not mutilate the common law of the land in such a barefaced

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<sup>403</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 11.

<sup>404</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 12.

<sup>405</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 13.

manner.”<sup>406</sup> Charleton also rebukes Hindmarsh for his brazenness, blatantly asking why as a mere man, he, or Swedenborg have the power to revise the Bible: “From whence hast thou the authority to point out to us what is, or what is not, “the canon of the sacred scriptures?”<sup>407</sup>

In anticipation of counter arguments, Charleton acknowledges that some individuals might point out the inherent difficulty of Bible study and seek a clarifying translation key such as one the New Jerusalem Church offers. In response, Charleton reminds readers that looking to other men, especially ones who attempt to upset the foundation of Christianity, is a mistake:

Some might answer by a question; to wit, “Why were not these things wrote plainer, so that we might as easily understand them as any other book?” To this I also answer by a question, Why do you let men as ignorant of these things as yourselves deceive you? Are you not like the Israelites of old?...Why do you submit to their teachings, in the which they deny “the man Christ Jesus,” by whom alone these things can be understood, according to the nature and fitness of things, and support them in uttering their jargon, and dreadful blasphemy respecting the temptation of Jesus?<sup>408</sup>

Echoing John Burk’s accusation twelve years earlier that Hargrove’s relationship to Scripture was akin to that of soft wax, Charleton ends her diatribe by listing the ways in which Hindmarsh and other Swedenborgian advocates upset the divinity of the Holy Bible: “It is rather curious to observe the twistings, windings, wreathings, and warpings which “the crooked serpent” must have taken, previous to the production of a vast multitude of new coined words and phrases to overthrow the testimony...”<sup>409</sup> In this quote, Charleton specifically references New Church revisions to the Book of Paul, but it is clear she believes Swedenborgians have twisted and warped other areas of the Bible as well. Charleton’s scathing response to Hindmarsh’s *A Seal*

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<sup>406</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 14.

<sup>407</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 18.

<sup>408</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 81-82.

<sup>409</sup> Charleton, *A Bridle for the Ass*, 99.

*Upon the Lips* is a culminating example of the type of pushback the New Church faced in Early America. In reminding readers that New Church doctrines originated from a simple man, Charleton strips Swedenborg of his link to divine knowledge, both delegitimizing his claims and salvaging the Bible from certain destruction at the hands of the Swedenborgian New Church.

As the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church approached 1817, they pushed toward religious acceptance by formalizing their own community and holding the first New Church General Convention. Swedenborgian material was still being churned out in the U.S., including two notable publications that same year: Margaret Hiller's *Religion and Philosophy United or, An attempt to shew that philosophical principles form the foundation of the New Jerusalem Church* in Boston, and an anonymous publication entitled *A Glass, from "The Book;" Historical Fact, and Ocular Demonstration showing the Mysteries of the late Emanuel Swedenborg*, by "A Believer in One God and Father of All" in Philadelphia. It is clear, however, that the religious debates revolving around Swedenborg focalize on Biblical stability as a main preoccupation, providing insight into the types of ecclesiastical resistance Swedenborgians faced. Many critics simply balked at the implications of Swedenborg's new theology, vehemently arguing against any new religious system that made editorial changes to the Bible that could potentially upset the moral foundation of society. Opponents also focused on specific Swedenborgian doctrines at odds with the status quo, fixating particularly on the Swedenborgian interpretation of the Holy Trinity, the Millennium and pending Judgment, as well as Swedenborg's science of correspondences. On the other hand, proponents of Swedenborgian theology countered these attacks with arguments about religious prejudice, the importance of close reading and study to avoid false claims, and the role of reason in adherence to Christian Scripture. In this

confrontational theological space, Swedenborg proponents advocated for a cohesive religious system that was both consistent with Enlightenment rationalism and provided new Bible interpretations that aligned with science, reason, and revelation. While advocates of Swedenborg's doctrines were seemingly drawn to the rational theology that acted like a balm for Biblical inconsistencies in light of contemporary knowledge and reason, the rationalism present in Swedenborg's writings was often overshadowed by rumors of his mental instability and the dubious sources of his knowledge base. A dual intellectual reaction to Swedenborg found both English and American opponents engaging logically with Swedenborg's religious system to prove it was false, while also claiming that Swedenborg was insane. Swedenborgians were frequently pitted against religious groups such as Deists, Unitarians, Jesuits, and Methodists, while Swedenborg himself was often compared to prophets such as Muhammad and Joanna Southcott, and to mystics such as Franz Mesmer and Jacob Boehme. During this period of formalization, Swedenborgians often eluded labeling. At times, their undefined religious identity both frustrated critics and limited congregational growth. However, while New Church members continued to feverishly defend their right to religious freedom in print, their desire for recognition was aided by the voices of opposition that inadvertently validated their religious system through formal ecclesiastical criticism.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> For a great example of a New Church document published simply to promote Swedenborgianism, but not to counter any specific attack see: *A Compendious View and Brief Defence of the Peculiar and Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church* (Baltimore: Sower, 1798), Early American Imprints, [infoweb.newsbank.com](http://infoweb.newsbank.com).



## CONCLUSION

### SWEDENBORG APPROPRIATED

Marking the end of their era as an emergent religious organization, the first New Jerusalem Church General Convention was held at the new Swedenborgian Temple in Philadelphia on May 15th, 1817. Maguerite Block notes that the call for a General Convention was sent out “for the purpose of consulting upon the general concerns of the Church” and that “the attendance was small, with only about twenty present from outside of Philadelphia.”<sup>411</sup> Even with low physical attendance, however, Block states that “[r]eports were given by representatives of the various societies, so that a fair picture of the state of the Church just thirty-three years after the coming of James Glen can be obtained.”<sup>412</sup> The totals read as follows: “Baltimore...60-70 members / Philadelphia...60 / New York City...45 / Cincinnati...45 / Boston...20 / Steubenville, O...20 / Lebanon, O...20 / Wheeling and West Liberty...15 to 20 / Danby, N.Y...14 / Spencer, N.Y...11 / Platikill, N.Y...10 / Brownsville, Pa...10 / Bedford, Pa...8 / Abingdon, Va...7 / Charleston, S.C...5 or 6 / Lancaster, PA...a few / Madison Town, Ind...several.”<sup>413</sup> Block summarizes the significance of these numbers: “Thus it will be seen that the New Church now has seventeen societies or churches with a total membership of approximately three hundred and sixty, and spread over nine states. Besides these members of societies there were many scattered “receivers” on the plantations of the South, the farms of New England, and the frontier

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<sup>411</sup> Maguerite Block, *The New Church in the New World* (New York: Swedenborg Publishing Association, 1984), 170.

<sup>412</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 170.

<sup>413</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 170.

settlements of the Middle West, as well as interested readers and hearers in many places.”<sup>414</sup>

Thirty-three years after James Glen, Swedenborgians in America were increasing in numbers. Attendance totals from the first General Convention provide insight into the demographics of Swedenborgians, suggesting that those attracted to Swedenborg’s theology were less entrenched in the formal social and religious structures of New England or the Deep South and instead were drawn to cosmopolitan, democratic coastal port cities. These Swedenborgians would have been exposed to differing voices, cultures, and religions, and perhaps as a result of this exposure, found in Swedenborg’s theology a comprehensive religious system that reconciled divides. It is clear that these first Swedenborgians contributed to the religious discourse of Early America by making a concerted effort to formalize, publishing Swedenborg’s works and New Church literature, and engaging in religious debates with clergy members and parishioners of other Christian churches.

Far from a footnote in a sea of religious voices, Swedenborgians strove to make their voices heard, contributing doctrinal opinions and theological debates to the rhetoric and cacophony of religious pluralism in Early America. Swedenborgians impacted public discourse at a time when both the New Jerusalem Church and the United States were formalizing new identities. Swedenborg’s doctrines offered citizens a new way to interpret the Bible born out of Enlightenment ideals, and in doing so, forced those who encountered their doctrines to decide what their moral foundations were. As Christian tradition met revolutionary ideals, American citizens were faced with a new religious vision in the form of Swedenborgian theology: some

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<sup>414</sup> Block, *The New Church*, 171.

seized it; many did not. Some saw Swedenborg's doctrines as a solution to long-standing theological and social controversies; many did not. A contributor to the *Newburyport Herald* of Massachusetts in February of 1816 spoke to Swedenborgian's desire to unify the rampant religious controversies prevalent in Protestant Christianity:

The theological controversies of the age have induced the followers of Baron Swedenborg to offer to the Christian world his wonderful solution of the person and subsistence of God. In short, it is this, "*That the sole and exclusive divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ,*" is a fundamental doctrine of Christian faith. This is to take away all the difficulty of these persons in worship...The doctrine has determined to profit from the new method of correspondence, periodical publications, and intercourse, and they invite communication. They think their doctrine much more simple...and that it may very easily accompany the belief that the whole divinity is not adored exclusively of the person of Jesus Christ. It may at least deserve the attention of the controversialists of the present times, as a simplification of some opinions which have been offered (emphasis in original).<sup>415</sup>

While the promise of simplification may have held strong appeal in a new country rife with religiously and politically diverse voices, those who did engage Swedenborg's doctrines often found them exceedingly complex to comprehend. While Swedenborg offered a science of correspondences to clarify all Biblical incoherencies, to some, these correspondences remained unclear and frequently faced accusations of subjectivity. Swedenborg's interpretation of the literal and spiritual definition of scriptural words (thrown into relief by his science of correspondences) proved hard for readers to swallow as well, and New Church members were often accused of simply shaping the Bible to fit their own religious bent. Swedenborg's interpretive key produced controversial revisions to Christian doctrines that elicited strong

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<sup>415</sup> "The Theological Controversies," *Newburyport Herald* XIX.89 (6 February 1816), 4. America's Historical Newspapers, [iw.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com).

pushback from other ecclesiastical institutions, meriting particular resistance from Methodists, Deists, Unitarians, and Jesuits.

The most controversial Swedenborgian doctrine was the New Church interpretation of the Holy Trinity. Swedenborg argued that Jesus Christ was the one and only divine being, simply existing in his human form when he walked on Earth. To account for the mention of a Trinity in the Bible, Swedenborgians argued that the science of correspondences revealed the true spiritual sense of the words “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” to mean three divine essential principles — that of divine love, divine wisdom, and divine proceeding powers — which corresponded to the soul, body, and mental operation in man. This interpretation further supported the corresponding macrocosm/microcosm parallels which Swedenborgians claimed existed between the celestial, spiritual, and terrestrial realms. The New Church reading of the Trinity received vehement pushback from various religious institutions. While Unitarians protested the fact that Swedenborgians conflated God and Jesus Christ and promoted a false Trinity of essential principles, Trinitarians and Methodists argued that it was blasphemous to reinterpret the Bible’s clear language regarding the existence of a Holy Trinity, as Deists scoffed at Swedenborg’s spiritual sense and science of correspondences, arguing that Swedenborgians were simply trying to twist the word of God with spiritual hokum. Each religious organization referenced the Bible to support their claims, making linguistic, rational, and science-based arguments in defense of their stance.

The Swedenborgian interpretation of the Millennium suffered a similar fate. Swedenborg argued that his visions and communications with God and celestial beings revealed to him that the Millennium had begun in 1757. As well, he argued that Biblical references to God’s wrathful

judgment and destruction could be clarified by interpreting the spiritual sense of the word to reveal to their true meanings, which was the destruction of the old Christian Church and the rise of the New Jerusalem Church. The New Church also rejected the idea of God returning to Earth in the flesh. Instead, they argued that any reference to his return should be interpreted to mean a spiritual return, as God's divine influxes of love, wisdom, and proceeding powers would permeate to the terrestrial realm and help to purify the Earth for the millennial era and growth of God's true church. With general objections to Swedenborg's claims regarding the recondite spiritual meaning hidden within scriptural text, opponents unsurprisingly rejected Swedenborg's Millennial arguments as well. Not only did Swedenborg's interpretation of the Millennium depend on seemingly subjective reinterpretations of Holy Scripture, but it also delegitimized every existing Christian institution except for the New Jerusalem Church. Arguments against this Millennial reading ranged from close analysis of Biblical passages to counter Swedenborg's specific millennial claims, to rational arguments that pointed out that there was no hard evidence of any millennial-driven changes in the current state of the world.

A closer examination of James Glen's correspondences, however, provides a different perspective of society, as Glen described in great detail a spiritually infused, millennial view of the world in the late 1700s that illuminated the lens through which many Swedenborgians chose to see the world. Analysis of Glen's letters reveal the specific doctrinal concerns of Swedenborgians during their inaugural era as a religious organization and the manner in which these concerns shaped a specific Swedenborgian vision of the world. Glen's enthusiasm for Swedenborg's doctrines also demonstrates a mindset uniquely shaped by Enlightenment ideals,

hinting at future application of these ideals to the acceptance and dissemination of Swedenborg's theology.

This dissemination is further examined in an analysis of the general American response to Swedenborg's writings. It is apparent that Swedenborg's theology appealed to some Americans because his doctrines closely aligned with Scripture, were being preached by genuine Christian ministers, and exuded an overwhelmingly positive tone and hopeful rhetoric. In addition, it is impossible to ignore the Enlightenment ideals driving Swedenborg's theology. Early American Swedenborgians advocated for analyzing, reading, and studying Swedenborg's material in order to avoid quick prejudice and uninformed opinions when assessing the validity of his claims. In addition, Swedenborg's science of correspondences laid the groundwork for attracting Early Americans driven by Enlightenment ideals, and for inspiring citizens to interpret Swedenborg's doctrines through the lens of Enlightenment reason. Early proponents of Swedenborg's theology argued that his correspondences reconciled reason and revelation by providing a logical reinterpretation of the Bible that eliminated inconsistencies and irrationalities.

The identification and utilization of Enlightenment rationalism within Swedenborg's religious system is perhaps most evident in the writings of Rev. John Hargrove, first ordained New Church minister in America. In the effusion of New Church material he produced, Hargrove promoted a Swedenborgian Biblical hermeneutic — an interpretive key — that clarified how to reinterpret meaning in the Bible through the lens of Swedenborg's science of correspondences. As Hargrove navigated the difficulties of social and economic life while building and promoting a fledgling, socially persecuted religious organization, he remained devoutly loyal to Swedenborg's doctrines and the New Jerusalem Church. Finding divinity

within the expression of reason, Hargrove's undying faith and optimism in Swedenborg's theology is a testament to the strength and ability of Swedenborg's religious system to blend reason and revelation into a coherent theology that offered to unite science and religion and end religious controversy.

Far from ending religious controversy, however, Swedenborg's writings further fueled an already ignited flame of transatlantic doctrinal debates between England and Early America. In analyzing the theologians and social thinkers who publicly engaged with Swedenborg's religious system, central concerns emerge regarding the social ramifications and religious impacts of Swedenborg's theology. Critics of Swedenborg accused him of mental instability, finding his outlandish descriptions of travels to other planets and conversations with God to be evidence of insanity and a zealous imagination. Underlying these accusations, however, were real fears about the implications of Swedenborg's religious claims. If there were indeed hidden meanings to be revealed in the Bible, and if man's doctrinal interpretations were wrong, then the current foundation of Christianity must crumble as believers reassessed their relationship to a God who was not forthcoming in his communications to man. Proponents of Swedenborg decried accusations of Swedenborg's insanity, pointing to the years of scientific and religious output from Swedenborg, personal anecdotes from reputable members of society, and Swedenborg's own social standing as evidence of his soundness of mind. Proponents also argued against religious prejudice and in favor of rationality, routinely highlighting religious doctrines that could be clarified with Swedenborg's science of correspondences as well as passages from the Bible that would suddenly adhere to the laws of science when interpreted through this lens. Underlying the discourse of Swedenborgian advocates was a sincere desire to seek out a

universal truth that adhered to both Enlightenment thought and Christian Scripture in an effort to heal religious and social divides.

In analyzing the Early American response to Swedenborg, it is apparent that opponents and proponents responded to the content of his religious system through the prism of Enlightenment rationalism. Written discourse about Swedenborg spanned the spectrum from outraged denunciation to full spiritual acceptance and evangelical dissemination. Yet, both denial and acceptance of Swedenborg's doctrines were voiced through the lens of rationalism. Swedenborg's theology was presented as a rational solution to Biblical inconsistencies and the rise of a form of Christianity that could adhere to the laws of science. It was also presented as the irrational ramblings of an overly enthusiastic lunatic who had succumbed to a raging fever and developed an outrageous system of Biblical interpretation that, if accepted, would overthrow 1800 years of institutionalized Christianity. The tension between the principles of reason and religion did not necessarily diminish as time marched toward the middle of the nineteenth century, but it did shift away from Swedenborg's doctrines as a catalyst. Even as the theological storms raged on, Swedenborgians continued to emphasize the necessity of a theology that could uphold truth in the face of Biblical Scripture *and* reason; they offered Swedenborg's doctrines as a salve to the fracturing that widened as Americans faced the social and political impacts of religious pluralism.

This desire to reconcile reason and revelation, as well as the New Church's campaign for institutional respect and religious legitimacy, is lost in the majority of historical studies that analyze Early America and 19th century religion in the United States. These studies tend to gloss over Swedenborg and the growth of the New Jerusalem Church, yielding instead to scholarship



that appropriates Swedenborg into the spiritualizing pulse of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As noted in the introduction, Swedenborg and his doctrines have often been implicated in the flurry of supernatural and metaphysical preoccupations that proliferated in nineteenth-century America, as historians continue to find the roots of Spiritualism, Transcendentalism, seances, and medium channeling in Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences and his own conversations with celestial beings. However, the supernaturalism of Swedenborgian doctrine was not the focus of Early Americans. This appropriation of Swedenborg into metaphysical, cultural, and spiritual movements occurred not only later in the nineteenth century, but in contrast to the early desires of founding New Church members who aimed for respect as a mainstream, formalized Christian institution.<sup>416</sup> In leaping over the first few decades of Swedenborg's dissemination in America, historians have done a disservice to the earnest voices who engaged with Swedenborg's writings in the pursuit of religious truth and reconciliation with Enlightenment ideals. In recovering these voices, I aim to shed light on their convictions: their faith in Swedenborg's doctrines, their promotion of science, rationality, and education, their undying positivity, and their profound desire to heal social divides through Biblical exegesis. The last words of this dissertation I yield to them:

You cannot be more useful in life, than as a medium of diffusing knowledge, by the dispersion of proper books...Besides those who read the Theology and other writings of E. Swedenborg, as a means of Salvation, many others will be induced to read them from a Spirit of curiosity; these must not be disregarded...I defy any well inform'd (sic) honest man, to think lightly of the teachings of the Baron, after he has given them a serious and

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<sup>416</sup> Many early New Church members aimed to shift attention away from the source of Swedenborg's divine wisdom, as Christopher Grasso notes in *Skepticism and American Faith*: "...in America, early advocates did not hide Swedenborg's supernaturalism, they just did not emphasize it...Later in life [John] Hargrove would be the president of a New Church Convention that voted down a proposal to publish an abridgement of Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* with just the "abstract truths" and excluding the accounts of the seer's "heavenly and spiritual communications" (534).

impartial perusal... We make a prodigious fuss about a new *civil* constitution and the administration under it... but how low and transitory are they all when compar'd (sic) with the regeneration of the internal man, his intercourse with Spirits and Angels, his elevation to enjoy the influences of the Divine love and wisdom of the Lord; to contemplate on, and as it were possess a heavenly world, and become a citizen of the universe where his Lord and *Savior* presides: This is the true dignity of human nature, and to it there is a *new* and living way now opening, giving health to the mind, strength to the body, and an effulgence (sic) and beautitude (sic) to the whole man (emphasis in original).<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> “Extract of a letter, from a respectable member of the New Jerusalem Church, to one of the Editors. Washington Co. (V.) 7th July, 1801,” *The Temple of Truth: or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner & Hanna, 1801): 15-16, Rpt. by Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Sahalie Hashim is a PhD candidate in Humanities – History of Ideas at The University of Texas at Dallas. Sahalie’s research and teaching fields include American Intellectual History, American Literature, The History of Western Esotericism, American Spiritualism, The History of Science, The History of Religion, and The European and American Enlightenments. She is currently employed as a Lecturer for the Arts and Humanities department at The University of Texas at Dallas.

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **SAHALIE SAECKER HASHIM**

#### **EDUCATION**

PhD in Humanities – History of Ideas, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, May 2020

- Dissertation: *Swedenborg in the Early American Republic: Popular and Intellectual Responses to the Doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg, 1784 – 1817*

MFA in Creative Writing- Fiction, Bilingual (Spanish/English), University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX, May 2011

- Thesis: *Swimming In Static*. Novel. ProQuest/UMI, May 2011

BA in English Languages and Literatures, Minor in Spanish, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA, May 2007

#### **ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT / COURSES TAUGHT**

University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX

Lecturer I, Department of Arts and Humanities, January 2020 – May 2020

- Introductory Creative Writing

Instructor of Record, Department of Arts and Humanities, August 2012 – August 2017

- History 1301 - U.S. History Survey to Civil War
- Rhetoric 1302 - Rhetoric and Composition

El Paso Community College, El Paso, TX

Adjunct English Instructor, Department of Arts and Communications, August 2010 – August 2012

- Expository English Composition
- Basic English Composition

University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX

Instructor of Record, Department of Creative Writing, August 2009 – May 2011

- Introduction to Creative Writing

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

##### **PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP**

“I spent four days arguing about the USWNT Nike Commercial. Here’s why that’s problematic.” *Medium.com*, August 2019

##### **LITERARY JOURNALS (CREATIVE NONFICTION)**

“The Physics of Family,” *Chrysalis*, Spring 2012

#### LITERARY JOURNALS (POETRY)

“Tangled,” *Blue Moon*, Spring 2005

#### MAGAZINES (NONFICTION)

“Best Practices C-40.” Environmental Education Article. *Superconsciousness Magazine*, July 2008

“Harry Potter: A Ten-Year Lesson.” Literary Article. *Superconsciousness Magazine*, November 2007

#### ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS

“Drought 2005: Diving in Without a Net” WA State Department of Ecology. *EcoLink*. July 2005

### PRESENTATIONS

#### CONFERENCES

Sixth Biennial Graduate Translation Conference

Translation: “La Zona Cero” by Anton Arrufat, The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 26 – 28 May 2017

The Coastal Plains Graduate Liberal Arts Conference

Paper: “The Fourth Dimension in *The Spoils of Poynton*,” University of Houston, Houston, TX, 10 – 11 April 2015

Fifteenth Annual International Graduate Student Conference on Transatlantic History

Paper: “The Pernicious, Poisonous Doctrines of Him so Eminently Adorned: Early American Responses to the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg,” The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX, 19 – 20 September 2014

Research and Writing (RAW) Graduate Symposium

Paper: “Time Travel Tourism,” University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 21 – 22 March 2014

Third Annual Texas Tech University History Graduate Student Conference

Paper: “The Resurrection of Christian Cabala: Emanuel Swedenborg,” Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, 7 – 8 February 2014

Atlanta Graduate Student Conference in U.S. History

Paper: “TV and Education: Gateway to Cultural Elitism in 1950s America,” Emory University, Atlanta, GA, 15 – 16 November 2013

Research and Writing (RAW) Graduate Symposium

Paper: “*Dallas Morning News*: Subtle Champion of White Superiority,” University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 22 – 23 March 2013

Association of Writers & Writing Programs. Booth: *Rio Grande Review*, Colorado Convention Center- Denver, 7 – 10 April 2010

#### READINGS

“Un Beso Del Infierno,” Reading featuring Dr. José De Piérola, MFA Program in Creative Writing, University of Texas at El Paso, 24 March 2011

#### LECTURES

“How to be an Effective Teacher and a Graduate Student,” Teaching Colloquium, University of Texas at El Paso, 8 April 2011

#### RADIO

"Dishonest Mailman Reading Series" KTEP 88.5 radio show with Jeff Sirkin, Ph.D., El Paso, Texas, 19 September 2008

## **HONORS/AWARDS**

- Laura Bassi Scholarship Winter 2019 Runner Up, Partial Fee Waiver 25%, Editing Press, Toronto, Canada, December 2019
- PhD Research Grant – \$500, PhD Research Small Grants Program, Office of Vice President for Research, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 2016
- Dorothy and Herman Abrams Dissertation Research Travel Award – \$1000, Arts and Humanities Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 2016
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, 2015
- Teaching Assistantship, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 2012 – 2017
- Graduate Student Scholarship, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 2012 – 2017
- Outstanding Thesis of the Year, Creative Writing Department- Nominated for UTEP's 2012 Outstanding Thesis award, University of Texas at El Paso, May 2012
- Nomination- College of Liberal Arts Graduate Student Marshal Award, University of Texas at El Paso, May 2011
- Marc and Pam Bernat Scholarship, Academic Merit, University of Texas at El Paso, 2010 – 2011
- Teaching Assistantship, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX, 2008 – 2011
- Whitman College Diversity Scholarship, 2003 – 2007
- Academic Distinction, Whitman College, Fall 2003, 2004, Spring 2005, 2007
- Scholar Athlete, Whitman College, Fall 2004

## **ACADEMIC SERVICE**

- Library Advisory Committee Member- McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, Spring 2017
- Graduate Student Member, Academic Search Committee- Watson Chair in Historical Studies, Arts and Humanities Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, Fall 2016 – Spring 2017
- Administrative Assistant, U.S. Publicity, Department of Creative Writing, University of Texas at El Paso, September 2010 – May 2011
- Advising, Honors Credit- Bruce De La Paz, Introduction to CRW, Fall 2010
  - “Cubic Universe: World of Sin and Virtue” Creative writing and art project on the seven deadly sins and virtues with critical analyses
- Advising, Honors Credit- Rain Arredondo, Introduction to CRW, Fall 2010
  - “New Beginning” Fictional short story with critical analysis
- Writing Tutor, University Writing Center, University of Texas at El Paso, September 2008 – May 2009
- Administrative Assistant, Dishonest Mailman Reading Series, Department of Creative Writing, University of Texas at El Paso, September 2008 – May 2009
- Grader, English 1312, Department of English and Composition, University of Texas at El

- Paso, September 2008 – May 2009
- Secretary / Bilingual Creative Writing Student Organization (*BCWSO*), MFA Program in Creative Writing, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX, Fall 2008, Spring 2009
- Member / Library Advisory Committee, Whitman College, Walla, Walla, WA, 2005 – 2006 Academic School year

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

- Invited Speaker / “New Arts and Humanities TA Orientation,” UT-Dallas, Richardson, Texas. 26 August, 2016
- Invited Speaker / “Rhetoric TA Orientation,” UT-Dallas, Richardson, Texas. 19 August, 2014
- Co-Organizer / *Rio Grande Review* Issue 35 Release Party and Reading, El Paso, Texas. 8 May, 2010
- Co-Organizer / *Rio Grande Review* Issue 34 Release Party and Reading, El Paso, Texas. 5 February, 2010
- Speaker / “Women In Literature,” Women’s Resource Center, UTEP, El Paso, Texas. February 2010
- Volunteer / Judge for Literary Contest, Coronado High School, El Paso, Texas, November 2009
- Opening Speaker / Dishonest Mailman Reading Series Event, El Paso, Texas, November 2008
- Volunteer / Reader for *Rio Grande Review*, MFA Program in Creative Writing, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX, August 2008 – May 2009
- Volunteer Visitor / Odd Fellows Retirement Home, Walla Walla, WA, 2003 – 2004 Academic School Year

## **EDITING EXPERIENCE**

- Editorial Assistant, *Superconsciousness Magazine*, Yelm, WA, May 2007 – May 2012
- Editor, *Rio Grande Review*, Literary Journal, El Paso, Texas, Fall 2009 – Spring 2010

## **LANGUAGES**

- Spanish, conversational