

UNCOVERING A CONSPIRACY TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM READING THE WRITINGS—PART THREE

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Conspiracy against the Writings? It may seem hardly likely. It may seem even paranoid. It is natural for us to be skeptical, particularly when it is said that something is coming from the spiritual world. The natural man is not at all convinced that there is a spiritual world. Would we believe that there is a conspiracy to undermine the institution of marriage? It is revealed in *Heaven and Hell* that there is a sphere exhaling from hell that is like “an unceasing endeavor to dissolve and violate marriages” (384).

How about a conspiracy against little children? There is evidence in the countries of the earth of a seemingly boundless obsession with child pornography. There are people who act from an ominous compulsion to prey upon children. If you suggested to a social scientist that this may be related to an influx from hell, you might lose credibility as a reasonable person. But the Writings do say that all who are in hell are wholly antagonistic to innocence. So far as anyone is innocent “they burn to do him mischief.” If they see little children “they are inflamed with a cruel desire to do them harm” (*Heaven and Hell* 283).

When the Lord was in the world, people conspired to kill Him. When the conspiracy was mentioned, it was dismissed. The denial is rendered in the *Living Bible*, “You’re out of your mind! Who’s trying to kill you?” (John 7:20). Or in the *Jerusalem Bible*, “You are mad! Who wants to kill you?” Well, there were indeed secret plots to kill Him. (See Matthew 26:4, Mark 3:6, John 8:37, 40.) And, as we will mention later on, there was another dimension of conspiracy.

Our subject is the New Church or specifically the new

revelation.

The church is portrayed as a woman clothed with the sun, and the doctrine is the woman's child. A dragon stood ready to devour the child and spewed out water to carry the woman away by a flood. The frustrated dragon was enraged and prepared war. (Revelation 12:4,15,17)

In connection with the story of the dragon we have the remarkable disclosure: "When these doctrines were written, the dragonists stood around me, and endeavored, with all their fury, to devour, that is, to extinguish them. This news it is permitted me to relate, because of a truth it so happened." (*Apocalypse Revealed* 543).

But the books were committed to paper, they were published, and they were sent to important people. Our first article quoted a remarkable disclosure from *Apocalypse Revealed*. There were influential people who persuaded as many as they could not to read the Writings. Here is the context:

"In the spiritual world I spoke with some English bishops concerning the small works published there at London in the year 1758."

They said they saw them and persuaded people not to read them.

"I asked, Why so? When yet there are there arcana concerning heaven and hell, and concerning the life after death, and more things most worthy of attention, which have been revealed by the Lord."

But they said, "What is this to us?" and they poured out disparagements against them just as they had done in the natural world. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 716).

Those who actually think they are doing God service

"The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (John 16:2). This saying goes far beyond the disciples to whom it was spoken (*Arcana Coelestia* 8902:12, *Apocalypse Explained* 315:20). It is interesting to consider that people who try to destroy something good and true may imagine

that they are doing the right thing.

Some people who tried to undermine belief in the Writings were actually ashamed when they were confronted. But some were not at all ashamed. One individual made determined misrepresentations to prevent people from reading *Heaven and Hell*. “When he was told that it is not my work, but the Lord’s, who wished to reveal the nature of heaven and hell, . . . he was not ashamed, but some others were that they had done so.” This passage from *Spiritual Experiences* uncovers further plots. “It was also disclosed in what manner other priests were employed to destroy that work, which also brought it to pass that it was utterly rejected, when yet those things are from the Lord out of heaven” (*Spiritual Experiences* 6101).

Looking at the books that directly “refute” the teachings of the New Church, one usually finds that they are written by earnest church leaders who warn the faithful of a series of harmful beliefs. One looks at books such as *Isms and Ologies* by Arnold Kellet, *Heresies Exposed* by William Irvine and *The Kingdom of the Cults* by Walter Martin. The books warn against atheism and sinister groups in a way with which one may readily sympathize. Swedenborg’s teachings unfortunately get on the list of things to be discredited. In the case of *Kingdom of the Cults*, New Church people sent letters to the publisher showing the flaws in the argument, and this worked, for we see that recent editions of this book no longer include Swedenborgianism as something to be warned against.

One historian says that John Wesley was at first favorably impressed with the Writings, but that he was persuaded by the assertion that Swedenborg was insane. Then, when six of his ministers embraced the new teachings, he became actively antagonistic and “there appeared in the *Armenian Magazine* in 1781, a series of stories purporting to be anecdotes of Swedenborg’s life which proved him to have been insane” (*The*

New Church In the New World, Block, page 64).

One can hardly blame people who are at first offended when they hear the claim of the Writings. Rev. Joseph Proud, a very distinguished Baptist preacher, was highly indignant in 1789 when a couple of new readers of the Writings met with one of his colleagues to talk about these new books. Proud went to the house, burst in, and said, "Have nothing to do with these men or their doctrines!" This story has a fascinating ending. Proud was led in a dramatic manner to look at the Writings with an open mind. And he eventually became one of the most eloquent proponents of the Heavenly Doctrines. (See the story in *New Church Life*, 1994 p. 128.)

There were men who attacked the Writings without even understanding what they said. A bishop in Sweden wrote a letter denigrating the Writings. Swedenborg mentioned this in a conversation in the spiritual world. "I know that a man of that eminence wrote something of the kind in a letter which was afterwards printed; but if he had then known what blasphemy it was he would certainly have torn the letter to pieces and thrown it into the fire" (*True Christian Religion* 137:12).

So, one of the participants in what some have called "the Gothenburg trial" would have been ashamed if he had realized what was involved. Let us have a look at a few other participants. Swedenborg called this trial "the most important and the most solemn that has been before any council during the last 1700 years" (*Swedenborg Epic*, p. 408).

But before we look at the participants we should mention the man who is possibly the most influential opponent of the Writings in the time of their publication. His review of a book of the Writings could be what got the "trial" going. His name was Johan Ernesti, and he is alluded to in *True Christian Religion* 137:8, being the man who lived "near Luther's tomb."

When Ernesti became professor of theology in Leipzig, he was placed in a position to put out a learned periodical. He called it

New Theological Library. (This magazine is referred to by Kant in his book, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*. The magazine always had on the cover a picture of a bear sucking its paw.)*

In reviewing *Arcana Coelestia* Ernesti wrote, “We do not fear that many people will read the work, or suffer themselves to be seduced by it” (See *New Church Life*, 1969, p.8). In 1763, Ernesti wrote dismissively about the *Four Doctrines*, making light of the saying that they were written by command of the Lord. He wrote, “We hesitate to detain our readers with any further extracts. It is to be deplored that a person, who in other respects is a learned man, should have gone so far astray and that he should plague himself and his readers with such fantastic ambiguities which also must be very expensive to himself (for he, of course, must print these books at his own expense, and they are all printed in a sumptuous manner).

Apocalypse Revealed was published in 1766, and Ernesti reviewed it at some length. He says that the Memorable Relations may be applauded by people who themselves “are having heavenly visions.” He says, “It is self-evident that there is much guess-work and abuse of similar synonyms and imagery in the Bible.” But Ernesti does summarize accurately, and this gave an idea to Dr. Rosen, a man who was very favorable to the Writings.

Rosen translated Ernesti’s review into Swedish, but he added favorable comments and then printed it in the *Clerical News* of Gothenburg. This was among the first elements that brought about the Gothenburg Trial.

Participants in this trial were men with their own agendas. One disgruntled minister may well have only acted to embarrass the Gothenburg consistory when on October 12, 1768, he requested that the consistory make known “how far the writings of Swedenborg are really objectionable.” Were these writings “innocent theological problems,” or were they so sinister that it

should be a considered a crime “to imbue others with the religious principles of Swedenborg” (*Documents II*: 284).

The matter was turned over to Dr. Gabriel Beyer, a consistory member who was known to have some familiarity with Swedenborg. Beyer did not hurry. Four months later he gave a favorable report and proposed the declaration that “this consistory does not deem itself justified in declaring the works of Assessor Swedenborg are to be classed among the number of prohibited books.”

Enter Dr. Olaf Ekebom. Here was a man who knew nothing about the Writings. But he was an enemy of Dr. Beyer, and he seized upon what he saw as an opportunity to do damage to Beyer. His speech to the consistory is truly remarkable. One can read some of it in Sigstedt’s *Swedenborg Epic* (p.389) or in full in Tafel’s *Documents* (p.287).

Ekebom confessed that he was not acquainted with Swedenborg’s religious system “nor shall I take any trouble to become acquainted with it.” But he suggested that the doctrines were “corrupting, heretical, injurious, and in the highest degree objectionable.” He suggested that Swedenborgianism is “diametrically opposed to God’s revealed Word.” He proposed that clergymen “be admonished in the most earnest manner to be on their guard against the theological writings published by Assessor Swedenborg.” He advised “steps and measures to prevent the spread of Swedenborgian doctrines.”

What interests me here is that these words of Ekebom were said by Swedenborg to be examples of “what is meant by the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth after the woman to drown her, when she was yet in the wilderness” (*Tafel’s Documents II* p.300).

We might say that Ekebom was playing a part in a great conspiracy, and he did not even realize it. Think about Pontius Pilate or about the soldiers who took part in the Lord’s

crucifixion. The centurion who participated in the crucifixion exclaimed later, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).

This brings us back to the conspiracy to kill the Lord. We have pointed out that people denied they were trying to kill Him. "Why do you seek to kill Me? The people answered and said, You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill you?" (John 7:20). "You seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you." "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth" (John 8:37, 40). As the Lord spoke to the people it was as if He also spoke to evil spirits. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him." (John 8:44).

The real conspiracy against the Lord was on the part of the hells.

To the last hour of His life in the world, the Lord was assaulted by the hells (*Arcana Coelestia* 1990). All of the hells attacked Him "employing the most malicious forms of guile" (*Arcana Coelestia* 1820). But He overcame them all from His love for the human race.

What News from Earth?

A drama at the end of two works of the Writings portrays the circumstance when there has been a revelation of arcana of surpassing excellence (*Conjugal Love* 532, *True Christian Religion* 846). We may relate this to the story of Revelation 12 about the woman pursued by the dragon. It is a story of "difficult reception and resistance to the doctrine" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 532). Both stories use the phrase "for a time and times and half a time."

Angels were told to write the arcana on a piece of paper and let it down upon the earth. In doing so the angels would see a marvel or "portent." As the paper descended it became darkened.

When angels directed it into gatherings of educated and learned representatives from the clergy and laity, a murmur arose, “What is this? Is it of any consequence? What does it matter if we know these things or not? Are they not creations of the brain?”

Some conspired to obliterate the writing, and some to trample it under their feet. How long would this be? “For a time and times and half a time.”

*Here is an image of Ernesti’s theological magazine. Why did it picture a bear sucking its paw? The Rev. Carl Th. Odhner speculates on this in *New Church Life* in the year 1912 on page 137.

