

**PARADIGMS REVISITED**  
BY THE RT. REV. ALFRED ACTON II  
**Part Two**

[Bishop Acton began this article in the May 2007 issue (p. 168) by quoting the passage that describes the degrees of truth Divine descending from the Lord to people on earth (*Arcana Coelestia* 8443). Truth Divine of the sixth degree “is such as is with people, accommodated to their perception; thus it is the sense of the letter of the Word.” At the end of Part One, Bishop Acton listed six categories of finite limits on this sixth degree of truth. In Part Two, he discusses the first three of these categories. Ed.]

I turn now to a discussion of each of these categories of finite limits to Revelation which can be misunderstood since they contain fallacies, and which, if misunderstood, will become falsities.

**1. The mechanics in giving Revelation** (pen, paper, and printing)

Revelation in the Old Testament was written on scrolls. Individuals copied them. People who wanted a new book had to get it by hand-copying what was in the old book. The Text of the Old Testament was fixed by the Sopherim. Their work, under Ezra and Nehemiah, was to set the Scriptural text in order after the return from Babylon. This work lasted about 110 years, from Nehemiah to Simon the first, 410-300 B.C. The Sopherim were the authorized revisers of the Sacred text; and, their work being completed, the Masorites were the authorized custodians of it. Their work was to preserve it and prevent the loss or misplacement of a single letter or word.<sup>1</sup>

The Sopherim and the Masorites were very careful copyists.

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from: *The Companion Bible*, by E.W. Bullinger. Appendix number 30

They counted every letter in a chapter, every letter in a book, and every letter in the whole of their Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> When they got to the middle letter in a chapter, it was copied as a larger letter. The same was done in a book and also in the entire manuscript. The copyist then counted from the beginning and again from the end of the manuscript. If the count didn't come up right, he recounted. If it still was off, the manuscript was destroyed. For the manuscript to be used, all the letters had to meet a correct count.<sup>3</sup>

However, in their work there is good evidence that things probably were added or changed in the text of the Old Testament. Some of that evidence is based on the Dead Sea Scrolls where in some manuscripts there are different readings from the accepted version. Was that difference because of a mistaken copy that somebody buried or was it really because somebody slipped something new in later? We don't know, but there is a whole field of textual criticism now analyzing these kinds of things. The point is that texts vary and probably were altered over the years. Do such fallacies mar or enhance Divine truth? Were the additions providential, done to better describe the spiritual sense? I believe that is the case, but there is nothing said about this in the Writings.<sup>4</sup>

Copies of the New Testament also were made by hand until the invention of the printing press in 1436. These were made with care, but probably not with as much care as those done in the Old Testament by the Masorites. The New Testament like the Old

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew Old Testament differs from ours as to the order of the books. It is usually divided by Judaism into the categories of law: *Torah*; prophecy: *Neviim*; and writings: *Kethuvim* (history, poetry, wisdom books); as denoted by the acronym Tanakh. For Jews the term Old Testament is usually seen as pejorative.

<sup>3</sup> The Masorites were even more careful in their work, but I think I've said enough to give the general idea of how dedicated they were to preserving their manuscripts.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Word Explained* Swedenborg does question whether Moses could have written about his own death but seems to accept the idea that he did.

also has different manuscripts with different readings. So scholars of the 20th century claimed such things as that the phrase: “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever” was added by a monk while copying the text.<sup>5</sup> There are differences between different texts which seem to introduce errors or perhaps appropriate alterations in the original to make it better accommodated to new generations. Whatever the case may be, there are differences in different manuscripts. From the 16th century, when the received edition of the New Testament was established, there is mostly uniformity in later editions until the present. Of course with printing it is a lot easier to maintain such uniformity.

What do we know about the manuscripts of the Writings? First, let us look at the style Swedenborg used in writing the Writings. What he did first was to write an outline of whatever he wanted to work on. Next, he wrote out a draft filling in the outline. He would then index the first draft. Finally, he would write a “fair” copy of his manuscript that someone else could read. The fair copy was then sent to the printer. The printer, after typesetting a page, would throw the page away. No proof pages were sent to the author for corrections in those days.

To prevent some printer errors, Swedenborg tried to stay on the scene when he was seeing a work through the press. Eventually he would get a book back and could at least make changes in his own copy. We know that he made such changes because we have his own copy of *True Christian Religion* where he made such corrections. Scholars understand that there is room for errors in this process. To avoid some of these errors, translators need to begin their work by producing as good a Latin text as possible. With published works, translators at least have the printed first edition but, as noted, the printer did make mistakes.

We also have manuscripts that were never published. One of

<sup>5</sup> See note in *The Revised Standard Edition* on Matt. 6:13

them is the *Athanasian Creed*. The *Athanasian Creed*, as we now have it, was commissioned by a Mr. Nordenskjöld to be copied by another gentleman. Unfortunately, the original is now lost. What we have then is a copy of a lost manuscript. We also have some other things that this man copied for which the original manuscript does exist. We find he wasn't a very good copyist. So a scholar knows to be careful in basing any doctrine on the *Athanasian Creed*. To use it as the only basis for a doctrinal view is suspect. Past views concerning the dissipation of the resurrection body use this work for a proof passage.

All of the unpublished works are in Swedenborg's handwriting, written for his use only. They are not "fair" copies, with the exception of *Apocalypse Explained*, and they really are difficult to read. Most of these unpublished works are now in print. But how good a job was done in preparing the Latin editions of these unpublished texts? They exist in Swedenborg's handwriting. Reading this handwriting is not easy. It was done with a quill pen and ink, which adds to the problem. Manuscripts have ink blotches where a reader has to make an educated guess as to what is underneath the blotch. Obviously, there are issues about the manuscripts in terms of the quill pen and the printing process. These mechanics place the finite forms of the Writings in some question. In my view, good scholarship must try to undo any possible errors, not claim the Lord wanted them there as a fundamentalist of former Christianity might believe.

## **2. The language of Revelation** (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin)

Revelation is in language, and language has limits. We know that the language people speak limits their genius. For example, because the Germans all speak German they have a common genius.<sup>6</sup> Genius, like language which is a part of it, is embedded in the brain. It determines how we think. Picture a computer. It

<sup>6</sup> See *True Christian Religion* 813

has hardware that limits how it will compute. Hardware in the computer is analogous to the structure of the brain. We inherit the brain with its working limits. The computer also has software that again limits how the computer works. Without these limits the computer is useless. It must be limited or made finite to work in a finite world. Analogous to the computer's software is what environment gives us, our language, etc. Both heredity and environment contribute to our genius.<sup>7</sup> We think in language, and so the language we are using reflects our thought process. How we say things is part of the "software" side of our genius. Take for example a Japanese mother with her child. The child is about to put his hand on a hot stove. Does she yell out, "No!" She can't. She doesn't have a word for "no." I once was talking to a Japanese man about this, and he said it really makes them talk to their children.

One language can say things that another language can't. That is one of the reasons the Writings say Revelation is preserved in "dead" languages. But how dead is dead? Today, I'm told, you can buy a newspaper in Latin at the Vatican. The church has added new words to Latin to cope with our modern world's many developments. Latin in this sense is a growing language. You can go to Israel and read things in Hebrew; and you can go to Greece and read Greek. What is important in terms of a "dead" language is that there is a recognized period of usage during which words were well defined. A scholar using the period as a base can understand the meaning of the language with far more certainty than in understanding the meaning in a "living" language. So we can be more certain of what was meant at the time a particular Revelation was given.

But there are still real issues to debate for linguists studying

<sup>7</sup> Language is a function of environment, but see *Arcana Coelestia* 471, 2300 as regards inheritance.

Revelation. For example, the Old Testament is written in classical Hebrew. Classical Hebrew has no future tense, so how do you know if an issue being discussed is a present or a future thing? Well, it's implied, and usually clear by context. But you are saying something in a very different fashion with the future only implied. Hebrew, as the Writings point out, is the closest language to the celestial language of the Most Ancient Church.<sup>8</sup> It is a beautiful language, an affectional language, and so, proper for the Old Testament. But it is a language that cannot do certain things that other languages can do. Also, although written in classical Hebrew, there are some words in the Old Testament which have no reference in other material. Joseph's coat is called "many colored," but no one really knows what the word rendered "many colored" means. The Hebrew word has no reference elsewhere.

The case is somewhat different with the New Testament. It is written in koine Greek. Koine Greek is adapted from the earlier Attic Greek of classical times. It came late in the development of the Greek language when the armies of Alexander the Great spread it over the world. It is a simplified form of Greek that made it possible for conquered people in Asia Minor to understand their conquerors. It is a common or everyday language. It is not a hierarchical language. Today, many English-speaking people looking at the King James Version of the Bible do not understand what Swedenborg means when he says the New Testament is written in a "common" language.<sup>9</sup> For them, the Bible written in 16th century English is hierarchical—the same beautiful language of Shakespeare. Nevertheless, koine Greek is simplified Greek. It is straightforward, as adapted and spoken throughout Alexander's empire.

The Writings are written in what is called Neo-Latin, not

<sup>8</sup> See *Heaven and Hell* 237,260

<sup>9</sup> See *Sacred Scripture* 1, *Apocalypse Explained* 1065

classical Latin. Neo-Latin is closer to classical Latin than the middle Latin of earlier times that was a degenerate form of classical Latin. Scholars of Swedenborg's day all wrote in Neo-Latin and of course spoke it, as well. There are many, many manuscripts in Neo-Latin which are only now being studied as to their language. In fact, the New Church, which has been translating the Writings for a long time, is in the forefront of such studies. Neo-Latin was the Latin of the great philosophers of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Greek was the language of Plato and Aristotle as well as the pre-Socratic philosophers. German is quite like Greek. It is not surprising that both Germans and Greeks were much involved in philosophy. Latin, on the other hand, is the language of law, and much of the law, even today, still uses Latin phrases. Certainly the Latin language is a very precise kind of language, most suited to the nature of the precise doctrine of the Writings.

The point is that each form of Revelation as we have it speaks to the reader in quite different ways. Each language has its own finite limits which contain either accommodations or fallacies.

People who do not understand Hebrew, Greek, or Latin are further limited by the translator and the nature of the target language. For example, Abraham in the King James translation is asked to "tell the stars" in order to learn the number of his future progeny.<sup>10</sup> To "tell" here means to count—now an archaic meaning of the word and misleading to the reader. Many such examples could be given in all three forms of translation into English. Our language has changed. People are also limited by the translator's doctrinal background. For example the Latin preposition *in* followed by the ablative case can mean *in* or *on* in English depending upon the context. One theologian used this ambiguity to postulate that life on the moon is inside the moon. There are many other examples I could mention, but these few

<sup>10</sup> See Gen. 15:5

make the point. Readers of Revelation are limited by the work of the translator because of his or her knowledge of both the language being translated and the target language, not to mention his or her doctrinal understanding.

### 3. The mind of the Revelator (Concepts that can be understood by the author)

I turn now to the third category of finite limits to Revelation: The mind of the Revelator. Each form of Revelation has been given through a person. Swedenborg illustrates this fact in saying that what he wrote was written “*a Domino per me*” that is, “by the Lord by means of me.”<sup>11</sup> He, as well as other Revelators, had a real involvement, or “as of self” presence, in what he wrote. His mind was developed in such a way that he could understand what he wrote although the Divine truth within what he wrote surpasses any human intellect.

The Old Testament has an “as of self” involvement on the part of the authors. In some places in the prophets it is said the prophet’s pen was moved “automatically.” It seems that, at least with some of the prophets, their hands were moved without their being able to control the movement.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, we know that various minds had various influences in the formation of the Old Testament. For example, we find that Moses was seen in the other world. He was at that time in his own place. He spoke with Swedenborg. He said that he knew something about the New Testament but does not read it. Swedenborg told Moses some things written in his five books about certain people. He acknowledged them all, just as though they were present to him.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See *New Church Life* 1959 p. 90

<sup>12</sup> See *Word Explained* 1150, 7006. But just how uninvolved they were in this “automatic” writing is questionable. See *Spiritual Experiences* 446,557, 1533, 2270, and 4820. These passages compare how spirits were involved in Swedenborg’s writing and with other Revelators. See especially *Spiritual Experiences* 4820

<sup>13</sup> See *Spiritual Experiences* 6107

Moses is said to have had manuscripts from the Ancient Word that he both transcribed and edited. We know that the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis were copied. How well did he copy? We know that, at least in one instance, he did not really copy. Instead, when he dealt with Noah coming out of the ark, he altered the text. The people of the Ancient Church are said not to have made animal sacrifices.<sup>14</sup> Since this was the case it seems obvious that when Moses spoke of Noah making a sacrifice that it was not so. Moses seems to have modified the Ancient Word to meet the states of the Jewish Church. In fact, it is said that the Old Testament would have been different had it been given to a different nation.<sup>15</sup> There are other places where the author questions his own story. For example, in the Book of Joshua the sun is described as standing still. The author of the book questions this claim saying, “Is not this written in the Book of Jasher?”<sup>16</sup> Isaiah, in his Revelation, changes the concept of God that was extant with the Hebrew people. God becomes “the one God,” whereas, up to that point, He is the only one that you should worship *among many gods*. Micah undoes the earlier view of sacrifice. “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”<sup>17</sup>

We see that the mind of the Revelator changes the nature of the Revelation given through him, at least to some degree. This principle is also true in the New Testament. We find Matthew very concerned with approaching the Jewish mind, saying again and again, “This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet....” His mind sees things somewhat differently from Mark’s. Mark seems to be writing for a Roman audience.

<sup>14</sup> See *Arcana Coelestia* 2180

<sup>15</sup> See *Arcana Coelestia* 10453:3

<sup>16</sup> Joshua 10:13

<sup>17</sup> Micah 6:8

Luke seems to want to get the record straight. We find Luke saying, “O Theophilus,” as he begins his inspired Gospel, and then, in the Book of Acts, he once again addresses Theophilus. Luke wrote both books. One has a spiritual sense, one does not. He believed what he was writing was getting the record right in both his books. He apparently didn’t realize that what he wrote in Luke was Divine Revelation while what he wrote in the Book of Acts was not.

John is a man with a background in Greek philosophy, particularly the concept of the *logos*. He demonstrates his knowledge at the outset: “In the beginning was the Word,”<sup>18</sup> an obvious reference to the Greek concept of the *logos*. Throughout his book you can see how the philosophical mind of the Revelator affects what he says and how he says it. This fact does not detract from the spiritual sense, but it does show an “as of self” involvement on the part of the Revelator.

The Book of Revelation, written by John on the Isle of Patmos, was produced by someone very familiar with “apocalyptic” literature. Apocalyptic literature uses a code for the faithful. It is written at a time when the very life of the church is at stake. I think there is little doubt that John of Patmos believed that what he was writing predicted the fall of Rome. He seems to believe that the beast with seven heads is the city of seven hills, Rome, with the number 666 spelling out the name of the tyrant, Nero.<sup>19</sup> Today, to my knowledge, no biblical scholars believe the John of the fourth gospel and the John on Patmos were the same. Examining what each wrote indicates different minds involved in each book. Swedenborg, who wrote before scholars questioned these things, accepts one John and, for that matter, one Moses, which also is quite suspect in the minds of most

<sup>18</sup> John 1:1

<sup>19</sup> Some manuscripts say the number was 606 instead of 666. In the Hebrew numbering system 60 is the letter nun. Apocalyptic literature uses numbers to spell names. The beast Nero Caesar is spelled 606 while the name Neron Caesar is 666. See *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Abington Press, NY, Vol. XII p. 466 et al

current scholars.<sup>20</sup>

What about the mind of Swedenborg? He was a trained philosopher. Here is his own testimony as to why he was called from being a philosopher to a theologian: “I was once asked how from a philosopher I became a theologian; and I answered, In the same manner that fishermen were made disciples and apostles by the Lord; and that I also from early youth had been a spiritual fisherman. On hearing this, the inquirer asked, ‘What is a spiritual fisherman?’ I replied that a fisherman in the spiritual sense of the Word signifies a man who investigates and teaches natural truths, and afterwards spiritual truths rationally.”<sup>21</sup>

Swedenborg is an 18th century European, although prior to his call he had many insights well beyond his century. In his *Animal Kingdom* written in 1744 he states what new doctrines he developed in his search for the soul: “We may not however climb immediately from effect to principles, from the body to the soul, and from the material world to the immaterial. And therefore in order to this ascent, I have been obliged to as it were conceive from an ovum, form, and bring forth new doctrines which I term the doctrine of form, the doctrine of order and degrees and also of the society of co-ordinates, also the doctrine of representations and correspondences, and lastly the doctrine of modification. All these doctrines must first be laid down and explained, before I dare to mount or attempt that ladder which leads from earth to heaven.”<sup>22</sup>

I once published an article on the importance of Swedenborg’s pre-theological works.<sup>23</sup> In them we see how he defined terms

<sup>20</sup> As noted Swedenborg met Moses in the other world, reporting he had his five books which he says he wrote. If this was not true could Swedenborg’s mind have been so conditioned as to not be able to accept such an earthshaking thesis? Would his readers have accepted it?

<sup>21</sup> *Intercourse of the Soul and Body* 20

<sup>22</sup> *The Animal Kingdom* parts 4 and 5, “on Generation” n. 357. This summary is also found in the prologue to Vol. 1 page 10 where it is set forth as part of the plan for this series.

<sup>23</sup> *New Philosophy* 1965 p. 9, The Importance of the Pre-theological Works

and developed doctrines which later are carried over into the Writings. For example, in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* the chapter on the chick in the egg outlines how the soul builds the body. Swedenborg's own experiments plus his extensive research led him to see that before birth the brain operated in motion with the heart, and after birth the correspondence changed so that it operated with the now opened lungs. This insight coupled with his later observation that people in swoons appear on the outskirts of heaven is the basis for stating that spiritual life begins at birth.<sup>24</sup> In the *Principia*, Swedenborg states that life on other planets will not be the same as life here on earth. This idea makes it very easy for Swedenborg to receive knowledge of extraterrestrial life of a different nature than ours. He says he is not yet sure whether they "had been differently created, or furnished with a different body," but they say this is the case.<sup>25</sup> The terms "Representatives," "Significatives," and "Correspondences" are all defined prior to his call.

Also note the limits of his knowledge. Swedenborg could not write about heart transplants, or telephones, or cars. They did not exist. There clearly are limits on the mind of Swedenborg. He is a child of the 18th century, but he is not chained to it. His scientific insights are profound, and he is ready to reveal Divine truths which transcend his century. For example, the revelation given in *Conjugal Love* is replete with concepts which were beyond his contemporaries' beliefs. They were considered so heretical in Sweden that the book was banned. Nevertheless they are first addressed to the people of his age and their culture.

[To be concluded]

<sup>24</sup> See *Arcana Coelestia* 3887:2, *Divine Wisdom*. III, V, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 401 et al. but note *Arcana Coelestia* 3298 on the as of self just prior to birth. *Divine Love and Wisdom* 390:2, 407:2, *Divine Wisdom* XI 6a on swoons and *Heaven and Hell* 438 on appearing in heaven.

<sup>25</sup> See *Spiritual Experiences* 1670