

PARADIGMS REVISITED
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Part Three

[In this concluding part, Bishop Acton continues his survey of six categories of finite limits to the sense of the letter of the Word, beginning with the category of the culture of the day.]

4. The culture of the day in which Revelation was given, which defines the meaning of ideas at the time

Revelation must be accommodated to the people who are the first readers. We are specifically told that the Old Testament was accommodated to the genius of the Jewish people.¹ In the same passage, it is indicated that the New Testament is accommodated in the same fashion. The reason given is that people were not ready to receive deeper truths because they would have profaned them. Nevertheless, it is added that the Lord on earth did disclose many interior things “but only for the wise.”² The Old Testament had to be couched in the circumstances of Jewish culture, which at first was given to a people just released from slavery.³ However, it changed over time. The first Christian converts were mainly from the lower class in the Roman Empire. But the first people to whom the New Testament was addressed were those who could read or listen to koine Greek. The Writings were first addressed to 18th century aristocratic Protestants. They also were addressed to others who could read Latin and who were mostly clergymen, philosophers, and other aristocratic males. Swedenborg himself was the son of a bishop and became an aristocrat. He was a part of that culture.

As I mentioned earlier, Moses adapted the Ancient Word to the

¹ See *Arcana Coelestia* 5220:5

² *Ibid.* section 6

³ See *Arcana Coelestia* 10453:3 cited above

Hebrew culture by stating that Noah sacrificed an animal on leaving the Ark. Many other examples of how the culture of the people is imbedded in the letter of Revelation exist. Laban and his sons pursued Rachel for stealing the household idols.⁴ The culture says that the household gods were in fact the deeds to the property. Given this knowledge, it is not surprising that she was pursued. The prophets of Saul's day were people who probably had epilepsy. So when Saul had a fit, he was numbered among the prophets.⁵ Laws relating to divorce and concubinage, as the Lord said, were given because of the hardness of the Jewish people's hearts.⁶ Polygamy was also an accepted practice in the Jewish culture. Without this accepted practice, the twelve sons of Jacob by both handmaids and two wives would not have been accepted into Revelation. All these things relate to the genius or culture of Jewish people. What form the Word might have taken if the Jews had not stubbornly insisted on being chosen is a matter for speculation. But it seems clear it would have been very different if given in a different culture.⁷

In the New Testament, we find many illustrations of the influence of culture upon Revelation. For example, Jesus decries the concept of "Corban."⁸ Corban was a way to defer giving. A person could dedicate his wealth to the Lord and then keep using it, thereby getting both continued use and credit for giving. The Lord condemns the Jewish practice as: "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." Repeatedly the Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was

⁴ See Gen. 31

⁵ See I Sam. 19:24

⁶ Matt. 20:8

⁷ See Arcana Coelestia 10396, 10430, 10612

⁸ Mark 7:11

said...but I say to you.”⁹ In this way, the Lord changes the accommodation of truth to a new culture. The famous saying, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's,”¹⁰ would make no sense apart from the culture. Rome ruled, and the penny had the image of Caesar on it. Also, there would have been no issue had not the Jews hated the necessity of paying tribute to their Roman conquerors. Of course, without the Roman practice of crucifixion the entire resurrection story would not have happened.

I turn now to the culture in which the Writings were given, the culture of 18th century aristocrats, clergymen, and other well-educated men, especially philosophers of the period. Swedenborg as a philosopher had given up his own experimentation and instead read extensively in the works of others. The Swedenborg Library's Swedenborgiana Collection includes a collection of Swedenborg's reference works which illustrates just how extensive was his reading in the works of others. Swedenborg seems to have used generally accepted ideas as illustrations of doctrinal points. For example, in the *Index Biblicus* Swedenborg notes that swallows hibernate in the ocean, a prevailing idea in the 18th century.¹¹ In his *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* and *Animal Kingdom* series, we see how broadly he quoted sources before his own development of ideas. I do not know whether it was believed that ivory came from the teeth of camels in the 18th century. I do know that Swedenborg states it is so.¹² Today, the only true sources of ivory are said to be “elephant and mammoth tusks.” “Narwhal tusks, hippopotamus teeth and

⁹ Matt 5

¹⁰ Mark 12:17

¹¹ See *Index Biblicus*, vol. 4, *Hirundo* (Latin for swallow) which states "... because swallows submerge in waters and in springtime reappear." Latin: quia Hirundo sepelitur in aquis et tempore veris resurgit, Jer. VII: 7 vide luetus.

¹² See *Apocalypse Explained* 1146:2.

walrus tusks are considered ivory-like materials.”¹³ Many have said this report was a slip of the pen, which would have been corrected if the work had been published, but it is written in the “fair” copy that would have been published. Of more importance is the statement that the child of a black or Moorish father by a white or European mother is black.¹⁴ I have been told that this piece of knowledge is attributable to Leibnitz. Whether this statement is true or not the fact remains that Swedenborg believed it, and so used it to illustrate the fact that the soul comes from the father, an essential doctrine concerning the Lord's birth and resurrection. Aristotle is the first to claim that the soul comes from the father, but Swedenborg in his *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, in the chapter on the chick in the egg, agrees.¹⁵ Another piece of knowledge from 18th century culture concerns venereal disease. It was not known just how it was acquired. *Conjugal Love* states this disease was a cause for separation from the bed, not divorce.¹⁶ Adultery is a cause for divorce.¹⁷ 18th century culture believed venereal disease could be caught by a married man without the act of adultery.

Both the meaning of words and the way a person lives have changed since the 18th century. Take the term “domestic” for example. An aristocratic lady of the 18th century was considered domestic. But she did not cook, she did not dust, she did not wash the clothes, and she did not raise her children as is the case today. She did manage the estate, and consult with her cook, housekeeper, and nanny. Those acts were her “domestic” offices.

¹³ See Amy Carlson, Museum Studies Program, San Francisco State University, in *Minerva Online*, Vol. 1/1 Spring/Summer 1998

¹⁴ See *Divine Providence* 277

¹⁵ See *True Christian Religion* 92. Also see Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, Book II Chapter 3. Swedenborg quotes this section in part in his note as published in *A Philosopher's Notebook* p. 173

¹⁶ See *Conjugal Love* 253

¹⁷ See *Conjugal Love* 255, 468-9

Further she did “such works as are done with the hands called knitting, embroidery, and by other names, and which serve for ornament and for the enhancement of her beauty.”¹⁸ From this background the index to the missing work on Marriage notes that, in general, women's intelligence deals with “economic” and domestic affairs.¹⁹ In a letter on the revision of the Swedish economy, Swedenborg uses the Swedish word that is equivalent to the Latin “domestic” as we use it today in speaking of foreign and domestic affairs.

In 18th century Sweden, the laws about divorce were different from ours today. If an innocent party divorced a person, that person could not remarry unless one of two events happened. The innocent party either remarried or died. We find nothing in the Writings to help us deal with a remarriage for the guilty party. It was illegal.

Paragraph 446 in *Conjugal Love* states that, “The love of the sex, from which is fornication, commences when a youth begins to think and act from his own understanding, and his speaking voice begins to become masculine.” In 18th century Sweden, puberty for men began about age 18.²⁰ How does this fact affect the way we educate young men? Do we appeal to the boy's thinking from himself at puberty or at age 18? Should we recognize that boys at age 12 are beginning to think and act from themselves?²¹

There is no specific mention in the Writings of homosexuality.

¹⁸ *Conjugal Love* 91

¹⁹ See Angelic Wisdom concerning Marriage, First Index, Sex, 274-278. My grandfather Alfred Acton in his reconstruction of the work translates economic as “housewifely” while the index uses the word economical.

²⁰ J. Money and H. Musaph, editors, *The Handbook of Sexology*, Vol. I, Elsevier Press. 1978, pp. 351-360. See also *On Generation* 290 that states women reach puberty at age 15 while men reach it later, which confirms the statistics.

²¹ In the work *On Generation* 290 Swedenborg writes that girls reach puberty at age 15 and boys a good bit later.

However, there is mention of "little-known evils which are too unspeakable to be named," and "criminal acts which are too villainous to be named."²² 18th century culture dealt with both these things in a very different fashion from our own culture. The French for example burned convicted sodomists alive. I asked Jonathan Rose when he was curator of Swedenborgiana to look up both onanism and sodomy as to what they meant in the 18th century. His three page reply shows that sodomy in Swedenborg's era meant all kinds of sexual acts which were "against nature" including homosexual acts, heterosexual oral or anal intercourse, and bestiality. He notes that "there is no mention of sodomy and no reference to homosexual acts anywhere in the Swedish law.... Neither is there any reference to heterosexual anal intercourse." He continues, "It is surprising that even the code of laws will not mention them, when one would think that such instances would have to be prosecuted on the basis of some definition of the crime and some indication of the penalty."²³ 18th century culture accepted the observation that masturbation led to insanity since insane people were seen doing this. Is this observation behind why the statement in paragraph 450 of *Conjugal Love* states that love of the sex cannot be totally restrained without harmful results including "mental illness" as well as "little-known evils," allowing young men to fornicate instead? Would we have the same reason for this application today?

It seems clear that the later part of *Conjugal Love* has been addressed to its first readers, 18th century aristocratic males. These men had the wherewithal to support a mistress, and their culture supported the practice. How these teachings apply to

²² See *Conjugal Love* 450, 459:5

²³ Letter from Jonathan Rose dated 1/14/93

Editor's Note: Swedenborg owned Schurig's *Gynecologia*, 1730, (Swedenborgiana, Swedenborg's own library) which details forbidden homosexual and bestial acts, with their penalties.

women is not stated.

There are also illustrations which are dated by the 18th century culture. For example, paragraph 515 of *True Christian Religion*, considering the subject of contrition, speaks of Tartary and also mentions that people in Pennsylvania would not be affected by the wrath of the king of Persia. The point of these and many other illustrations is that the 18th century genius is a part of the Writings which imposes on the doctrine finite limits containing fallacies—fallacies which if taken as realities produce falsities.

5. The limits of angels' knowledge

Time in the other world is measured by a change of state instead of the rotation of the earth.²⁴ But there are time limits there. The overall state of the other world changes with each new arrival. Because angels in a single society are in a similar state, they can all get up in the morning at about the same time, and so forth. Angels are also limited by their relation to this earth. They do not know the future. Swedenborg had various talks with angels about the future state of the church. In one such conversation they said that “they know not things to come, for the knowledge of things to come belongs to the Lord alone; but they know that the slavery and captivity in which the man of the church was formerly, has been taken away, and that now, from restored freedom, he can better perceive interior truths.”²⁵ The passage goes on to suggest that the New Church will grow with the Africans. Because angels of Swedenborg's day as well as today do not know the future, they cannot relate things that have not yet happened. For example they cannot talk about the then unnamed planet Pluto.²⁶ Also, for us to speculate, as some New Church people have, that inhabitants of the moon actually are

²⁴ See *True Christian Religion* 29 et al

²⁵ See *Last Judgment* 74.

²⁶ I realize we no longer recognize Pluto as a planet so try Neptune

people who arrived there in the future, perhaps even being people from earth, is futile. Angels are limited by existing time on this earth. Angels do have insights in terms of the present beyond our knowledge. One example of this kind of insight is found in Swedenborg's famous dice game. Angels could predict whether he would win or lose by the sphere around him which they could observe but we, on earth, could not. When his sphere appeared as a bright cloud he would win, but when it was dusky he would lose.²⁷ Because the Lord sees the consequences of the present perfectly, He knows the future perfectly and so can make prophecies. But His knowledge is not limited by time and space. It is infinite. Of course angels are not limited in terms of things beyond time and space. They have angelic wisdom far beyond our mortal wisdom, but that kind of wisdom transcends space and time. Angels have never experienced our 21st century concept of the equality of men and women in the work place. They cannot address this topic directly. The tremendous changes in communication in our time greatly affect thoughts as to the growth of the church in some specific geographical area as was indicated in the prophecy just mentioned about the church growing with the gentiles in Africa. To understand the true nature of Angelic Wisdom we need to put off the time-space fallacies used to illustrate their wisdom and see the timelessness therein.

6. The changed nature of the Lord in each form of Revelation. (The distinction between the terms Divine and the Infinite)

The purpose of all Divine Revelation is to bring about conjunction with the Lord. Conjunction with Him, in turn, completes the purpose of creation which is a heaven from the

²⁷ See *Arcana Coelestia* 6494

human race.²⁸ Such conjunction in its fullness exists when people can worship the Lord as a visible God.²⁹

To see the Lord as a visible God in the Old Testament, it is necessary to open that Word by means of representatives and significatives which show the internal sense or spiritual sense. All things of the Israelitish church were both representative and significative. Nevertheless, because the doctrine of representatives and significatives was unknown to the people of the Old Testament, the Lord was invisible to them. For this reason that church is called a representative church.³⁰

With the Advent, the Lord became visible in the person of Jesus Christ. All but two representatives of the Lord were abrogated, Baptism and the Holy Supper. The office of a priest also remained as a representative.³¹ But when the Christian Church introduced the idea of three persons in one God they made Him invisible. Jesus Christ is the only representative of the Lord in the New Testament. To see Him as such we must understand that the “symbols” or significatives of Him, for example that the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are just that, significatives, not actual persons who represent the Lord. There are representatives in the New Testament. For example Peter represents faith and the apostles as a group represent the Lord's church.³² But these are not representatives of the Lord. To see the Lord in the New Testament we need to use the doctrine of significatives to open the internal sense or spiritual sense.

In the New Church we see the Lord as the one God of heaven and earth who is Jesus Christ. We worship the Lord in His Divine Human. There are neither representatives nor significatives of the Lord in the Writings. But time/space appearances are

²⁸ See *Divine Providence* 27 and *Arcana Coelestia* 1062315

²⁹ See *True Christian Religion* 786

³⁰ See *True Christian Religion* 670

³¹ See *Arcana Coelestia* 3670

³² See *Arcana Coelestia* 8581, 9212:6

present in the Writings. These things make up the real appearances of heaven which are representatives of spiritual things.³³ To see the Lord in the Writings we need to make a right comparison of passages to unfold the doctrine of genuine truth which is on a par with the internal sense. This right comparison shows us the spiritual sense.

As we open the spiritual sense in all forms of Revelation, our Lord and Savior becomes visible to us. We see Him through His representatives in the Old Testament, as a man on earth in the New Testament, and in the fullness of His divine character, the revealed Divine Human, illustrated plainly in His Divine doctrine.

In this sense, the Lord has changed in the way He appears to people. His finite form has changed.

Obviously, the Infinite cannot change, but the presence of the Lord in finite things has changed. This change is not simply in how we view the Lord. It is a real change. But because it is a change in time and space, it is a fallacy of the senses. The Infinite does not change. In the Old Testament the Lord is present with people by representatives which also signify, for example, Moses. In the New Testament there are no people representing the Lord. There are people that represent other things, but Jesus Christ the Lord is His only representative on earth. He has abrogated all representatives except Baptism, the Holy Supper, and the office of the Priesthood. People such as Peter do represent certain spiritual things.

There are symbols or significatives in the New Testament, as opposed to representatives in the Old. Examples are Father, Son, Holy Spirit—they are terms. They stand for qualities or attributes of the Lord. They are symbols for those qualities. In the Writings there are no symbols and no representatives of the Lord. The Lord is with us by the correspondence of words to

³³ See *Arcana Coelestia* 3485

ideas, or that of human language in relation to spiritual language. There are spiritual representatives. There are things in the spiritual world that represent the loves that cause them, but the Lord is here in His Divine Human; His Human character is now visible. The word “Divine” is either an adjective which modifies a noun or it can be used substantively. As such, when used in relation to the Lord, it limits Him. It makes Him comprehensible to us. We cannot comprehend the infinite. It has no limits. Swedenborg in his work on *The Infinite or final Cause of Creation* observes that if we say anything about the Infinite, we have said too much. We cannot limit the infinite. But the Lord has limited Himself so that we may see Him and love Him. He put on the Human and made it Divine, or perfect. This finite perfect form is now visible to us in the Writings. *The Word Explained* (paragraph 5060) prophesies this fact as follows: “What further these words signify I am unable as yet to know, but something I can suspect. Things which are representative, such as the types of the Old Testament, ceased when God Messiah came; and things which are significative, such as the symbols [of the New Testament], will also cease when man is introduced into the kingdom of God Messiah. The types of the Old Testament were REPRESENTATIVE, while the symbols of the New Testament were SIGNIFICATIVE, these being then applied to man, that is, to the spiritual man, more interiorly and inmosty. Afterwards they also will cease, in consequence of the coming of the effigy whose image they are, etc., etc.” This passage written before the publication of the *Arcana Coelestia* is a prediction by Swedenborg of what will happen when the Lord makes His Second Coming. The Representatives of the Old Testament and the Significatives of the New Testament will vanish when the coming of the effigy whose image they are takes place, that is, when the Second Coming is accomplished by means of the Writings.

Conclusion

In this article I have endeavored to examine the sixth degree of truth Divine. This degree is written in “human language.” Enlightened individuals looking at this degree are able to glimpse the fifth degree. To achieve this glimpse they must look beyond the time and space limits imposed on this degree. They must see fallacies for what they are and not make them as accommodations of truth. To fail to do so is to turn fallacies into falsities. The time and space limits are a cloud that obscures truth. The glory in this cloud is both the internal sense opened by representatives and significatives, and the doctrine of genuine truth which is not limited by time and space. A right comparison of passages in both cases allows an enlightened individual to look beyond the glory into heaven itself at least to some small degree. We pray that the Lord will grant us such a vision.

Appendix

According to NewSearch there are 458 passages that use the word “fallacy” or “fallacies” or both. I have selected several of these passages to illustrate how the terms are used.

1. *Arcana Coelestia* 25: The Lord does not break fallacies, nor quench cupidities, but bends them to what is true and good.
2. *Arcana Coelestia* 735: [M]an is in the fallacies of the senses, and the fallacies of the senses are such that they cannot but enter, and are therefore also easily dispelled.
3. *Arcana Coelestia* 4341: The good itself which is to be conjoined with truth is not tempted, but the truth. And moreover truth is not tempted by good, but by falsities and evils, and also by fallacies and illusions and the affection of these, which adhere to truths in the natural. For when good flows in, which is effected by an internal way, or through the internal rational man, the ideas of the natural man, formed from the fallacies of the senses and the derivative illusions, cannot endure its approach, for they are in disagreement with it, and hence comes anxiety in the natural, and temptation.
4. *Arcana Coelestia* 5084: [2] As few know what the fallacies of the senses are, and few believe that they induce so great a shade on rational things, and most of all on the spiritual things of faith, even so as to extinguish them,

especially when the man is at the same time in the delight of the cupidities from the love of self and the love of the world, the subject may be illustrated by examples, showing first what are the fallacies of the senses which are merely natural, or in those things which are in nature, and then what are the fallacies of the senses in spiritual things. (1) It is a fallacy of merely natural sense, or that which is in nature, to believe that the sun revolves once each day around this earth, and also the sky with all the stars; (2) It is a fallacy of merely natural sense, or that which is in nature, that there is only a single atmosphere, and that this is merely successively purer from one portion to another, and that where it ceases there is a vacuum. When only the external sensuous of man is consulted, it apprehends no otherwise. (3) It is a fallacy of merely natural sense, that from the first creation there has been impressed on seeds a property of growing up into trees and flowers, and of reproducing themselves and that from this is the coming into existence and subsistence of all things. (4) It is a fallacy of merely natural sense that there are simple substances, which are monads and atoms (5) It is a fallacy of merely natural sense that all things are of nature and from nature, and that there indeed is something in purer or interior nature which is not apprehended; (6) It is a fallacy of sense that only the body lives, and that its life perishes when it dies. (7) It is a fallacy of sense that man cannot live after death any more than the beasts, because these also have a life similar in many respects to that of man, man being only a more perfect animal. (8) It is a fallacy thence derived that the very living part of man, which is called the soul, is merely something ethereal, or flamy, which is dissipated when the man dies; and that it resides in the heart, or in the brain, or in some part of this, and from thence rules the body as if this were a machine. (9) It is a fallacy of sense that light, and also heat, can come from no other source than the sun or elementary fire. That there is light in which is intelligence, and heat in which is heavenly love, and that all the angels are in this light and heat, the sensuous does not apprehend. (10) It is a fallacy of sense that man believes that he lives of himself, or that life has been imparted to him; for so it appears to the sensuous mind. (11) The sensuous man believes from fallacy that adulteries are allowable; for from the sensuous he concludes that marriages are instituted merely in behalf of order for the sake of the education of the offspring; and that so long as this order is not destroyed, it is immaterial from whom the offspring comes; and also that what is of marriage differs from lasciviousness merely in its being allowed; (12) It is a fallacy of sense that the Lord's kingdom, or heaven, resembles an earthly kingdom in respect that the joy and happiness there consist in one being greater than another, and hence having more glory than another; (13) It is a fallacy of sense that good works merit reward, and that to benefit anyone

for the sake of self is a good work. (14) It is also a fallacy of sense that man is saved by faith alone, and that faith can exist in one who has no charity, and also that it is the faith, and not the life, that remains after death.

5. *Arcana Coelestia* 6472: The Lord does not compel man to receive what flows in from Himself; but leads in freedom, and so far as man allows, through freedom leads to good. Thus the Lord leads man according to his delights, and also according to fallacies and the principles received there from; but gradually He leads him out from these; and this appears to the man as if it were from himself. Thus the Lord does not break these things, for this would be to do violence to freedom, which however must needs exist, in order that the man may be reformed.

6. *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 53. The Fallacies of the Senses, in which merely Natural and Sensual Men are, Merely natural and sensual men think and reason from the fallacies of the senses, There are fallacies of the senses in things natural, civil, moral, and spiritual, and there are many in each of them; but I wish to enumerate here some of the fallacies in spiritual things. Whoever thinks from the fallacies of the senses cannot understand: 1. That a man after death can appear as a man; and that he is able to enjoy his senses as before; thus that angels enjoy them. Such persons think: 2. That the soul is only a something vital, purely ethereal, of which no idea can be formed. 3. That it is the body alone that feels, sees, and hears. 4. That man is like an animal, with this difference only, that he can speak from thought. 5. That nature is all, and that it is the first from which all things are. 6. That man is introduced into thought and learns how to think by an influx of interior nature and its order. 7. That the Spiritual does not exist, and if it does, that it is a purer Natural. 8. That man cannot enjoy any happiness, if divested of the delights of the love of glory, honor, or gain. 9. That conscience is only a disease of the mind, originating from infirmity of the body, and from non-successes. 10. That the Divine Love of the Lord is the love of glory. 11. That there is no Providence, but that all things flow from self-prudence and self-intelligence. 12. That honours and riches are real blessings, which are bestowed by God; not to mention many other similar things. Fallacies of the senses in spiritual matters are of this character. From this it may appear, that heavenly things cannot be comprehended by those who are merely natural and sensual; those are merely natural and sensual, whose internal spiritual man is closed, and whose natural man only is open. and the fallacies of the senses are such that they cannot but enter, and are therefore also easily dispelled.