

# The Swedenborgian Tree Gracing Maurice Nicoll's Garden of Esoterica

Shaped by G. I. Gurdjieff and then P. D. Ouspensky, the Fourth Way represents one of the most heralded and often misunderstood twentieth-century spiritual growth movements. Especially known as “The Work,” the Fourth Way involves intensely focused practices that are regarded as the “conscious labor” and “intentional suffering” necessary for breaking out of the mechanistic “sleepwalking” to which all are prone.

The British psychiatrist Maurice Nicoll (d. 1953) emerged as one of the movement’s few widely recognized second-wave teachers, and it was he who penned its most studied publishing legacy. He was known to have read Swedenborg with seriousness before and after working with both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, yet until this current study, no researcher has identified with specificity the depth and nature of the Swedenborgian strata in Nicoll’s psycho-spiritual formation.

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## Parallels in Life and Spirit

Maurice Nicoll’s (1884–1953) and Emanuel Swedenborg’s spiritual writings have numerous parallels. And as this and forthcoming essays will demonstrate, the similarities are neither coincidental nor merely attributable to Nicoll and Swedenborg’s shared interest in the esoteric. Nicoll studied Swedenborg extensively, as he himself stated to those close to him. Swedenborg’s influence, therefore, is direct.

It is not surprising that Nicoll was familiar with Swedenborg, as his father and grandfather were both Free Church of Scotland ministers. Each of them collected vast libraries of books—17,000 and 25,000 volumes, respectively. Having access to these books allowed their scion to set sail on the world’s esoteric seas early in life, and he sailed them until the end.

While circling the globe in his mind’s eye, the adventurous Nicoll collected seeds of truth the world over. This resulted in an eight-volume garden of esoterica with myriads of blossoms—revelators, mystics, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, and psychologists—rooted within a contextual soil of multifarious mythologies and religious traditions.<sup>[1]</sup> His ship’s log is quite clear, however; he visited both the well-known and obscure destinations of the theosophic travel brochure, but he pulled down the sails and dropped anchor in few ports. One dock he returned to time and again is Swedenborg’s theological works.

My research moors Nicoll to Swedenborg's dock in two principal stages. The first stage occurs amidst no fewer than thirteen other spiritual traditions. Perhaps because of this maelstrom, it appears that he did not find Swedenborg—nor any system of thought, for that matter—satisfactory. He continued his search far and wide until 1921 when at the age of thirty-seven he returned from a lecture by G. I. Gurdjieff's protégé, P. D. Ouspensky, and declared to his wife and fellow seeker, Catherine, "This is it."<sup>[2]</sup> The treasure had not been found, of course, but they had finally discovered their treasure map.<sup>[3]</sup>

After decades of searching, Nicoll christened his well-traveled ship the Fourth Way.<sup>[4]</sup> He and Catherine would be at its helm teaching Gurdjieff's fusion of Eastern and Western spiritualities for the rest of their lives.<sup>[5]</sup> A year before his death, Nicoll listed the mystical travels he had taken prior to meeting Ouspensky and Gurdjieff:

Now I had already studied at different times in the past the Gnostic literature, the Neo-Platonists, the Alchemists, some of the Indian Scriptures, the Hermetic writers, the Sufi literature, the Bible, the Chinese Mystics, the writings of Eckhart, Boehme, Blake, Swedenborg and others, and had been a pupil of Jung for some years.<sup>[6]</sup>

It is little wonder, then, why the Academy remains unaware of Swedenborg's influence upon Nicoll. Despite Nicoll's intense focus upon his systematic theology, Swedenborg is listed almost as an afterthought.

An intense one-year immersion (November 4, 1922–October 1923) at Gurdjieff's "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man" outside Paris, followed by a close friendship and mentoring with Ouspensky for an additional eight, led to the request that Nicoll assume the role of an independent Fourth Way teacher in 1931. Historical records demonstrate a second Swedenborgian stage that began prior to 1940. Now in his fifties, Nicoll's focus narrowed to four "indispensable" systems that were supplemental to the Fourth Way: the Bible, "all the volumes of Swedenborg," Hermeticism, and Platonism.<sup>[7]</sup> It was during this final stage that he composed his eight-volume esoteric garden, which consisted of four titles.<sup>[8]</sup> Swedenborg's influence is apparent through all of them but most especially in his exegetical works *The New Man* and *The Mark*.

The parallels between Nicoll and Swedenborg do not stop with their writings. Their lives demonstrate uncanny similarities. Both were sons of domineering ministerial fathers; were afflicted with a stutter; began as scientists, found the paradigm wanting, and became rational mystics; experienced the horrors of war; immersed themselves in new fields of study; were insiders with their country's leadership; traveled Western Europe on academic research trips; published anonymously or used a pseudonym; lived in London for long periods; studied and recorded their dreams; began as Protestants; kept diaries; had numerous siblings; lost their mothers as children; were the apple of their step-mother's eye; were wealthy; were pragmatic despite being polymathic; played instruments; wrote poetry; drank alcohol in moderation; and by all accounts were downright convivial and pleasant gentlemen.<sup>[9]</sup> Unfortunately, though, they were also similar in another fundamental manner. Despite being two of the most rational writers about the irrational process of transforming the heart, they remain relatively unknown.<sup>[10]</sup> Swedenborg has rallied of late;<sup>[11]</sup> but Nicoll remains unrecognized, despite his

studies with such renowned figures as Jung, Ouspensky, and Gurdjieff and despite his being one of the most well-informed and astute explorers of the psychic seas. Like Swedenborg before him, Nicoll does not fit neatly into previously existing star charts. As with the hypothesized dark matter of astrophysics, their influence remains a relatively unseen element in the contemporary esoteric universe.

## A New Church Garden

After his worldwide journey, Nicoll returned home and planted his global collection of esoteric seeds within the rich soil of the heart-logic for which he was celebrated.<sup>[12]</sup> His extensive spiritual garden grew thick and lush, but its most dominant feature is the glimmering foliage and lush fruit on the heaven-bound tree towering at its center. The thesis guiding this research postulates that the systematic theology of our favorite Scandinavian scientist-seer is the underground stream of wisdom feeding the deep roots of both this Hyperion-like tree and its surrounding hermeneutical garden.<sup>[13]</sup>

The fruit of Nicoll's allegorical garden was initially private, for Fourth Way eyes and ears only. This circumstance stemmed from Gurdjieff's belief that his system would not be efficacious in the hands of the desperate, merely curious, or academic-minded—that it would, in fact, do them harm. Only when faced with imminent death did Gurdjieff accept the risk of sharing his system more broadly. Like the Word's representative style and, some would argue, the sheer volume of Swedenborg's theological corpus, various characteristics, such as the purposefully convoluted storyline of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, the broad distribution of Work principles throughout a variety of volumes, and the overall indecipherability of the ideas without having access to the oral tradition held by Fourth Way teachers, protected the Work's wisdom from those who might profane it. As did other Fourth Way teachers of his era, Nicoll either agreed with Gurdjieff or was following his lead out of respect for the man to whom he attributes his change of being.<sup>[14]</sup>

Beginning in 1949, the year of Gurdjieff's death, the market was flooded by a backlog of Fourth Way publications that would become esoteric classics of the twentieth century. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) led the way.<sup>[15]</sup> This was immediately followed by Gurdjieff's magnum opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950), which, if the Fourth Way could be said to have a sacred scripture, would be considered just that. Regardless, the literary scholar Martin Seymour-Smith deems it one of the hundred most influential books of all time.<sup>[16]</sup>

Throughout the 50s, however, Nicoll's titles predominated the scene. His "simple and clear explanations in easily comprehensible language," as one Swedenborgian describes them, are well-suited for a general audience.<sup>[17]</sup> In fact, Swedenborgians familiar with Nicoll's works consistently cite this characteristic as the principal justification for their use.<sup>[18]</sup>

In addition to being drawn to Nicoll's effortless writing style, Swedenborgians are likely attracted to Nicoll for another of his characteristics. Unlike his fellow Fourth Way teachers, Nicoll is openly Christ-centric, a feature that is most prominent in his first publication, *The New Man: An Interpretation of Some Parables and Miracles of Christ* (1950). Despite never once

mentioning Swedenborg by name, its focus upon the Lord makes its exegesis Nicoll's most hermeneutically Swedenborgian. These "new" explanations of the meaning of Christ's life are not as new as Nicoll's non-Swedenborgian readers may believe, but they may explain why it appears that many Swedenborgians are drawn to the Fourth Way through Nicoll instead of through either Ouspensky or Gurdjieff.<sup>[19]</sup> Such was the case with Urbana College professor and long-time editor of *The Messenger*, Rev. Dr. Bjorn Johannson, who may have been the first Swedenborgian to publicly recognize the Fourth Way by means of Nicoll's use of Swedenborg in *The New Man*. Johannson immediately recognized that Nicoll appears to have been using the Writings' systematic theology generally and the science of correspondences specifically.<sup>[20]</sup> What he and others have not mentioned, however, is that Nicoll used the Writings in a manner few Swedenborgian officials have dared.

As anyone familiar with *Searle's Index of Swedenborg's Scripture Quotations* can attest, only 55 of its 321 pages (17%) are Gospel references.<sup>[21]</sup> It is a curiosity of Swedenborgianism that the least obvious Christ-centric storylines of the Scriptures are used so disproportionately to expound a new Christianity. Perhaps it is self-evident to some why this is so, but it could be argued that this approach may have led to an unspoken thirst to have Swedenborg's hermeneutical methodology applied to the Gospels more fully. Nicoll certainly quenches our thirst with the living water of the Gospel-focused *The New Man* and its sequel, the posthumously published *The Mark*(1954). They are easily Nicoll's most obviously Swedenborgian works.

Swedenborgians' discovery of Nicoll's esoteric works led to their making basic inquiries and casual theories for more than half a century. Initial forays, however, were fairly inconclusive and led to more questions than answers. Likely due to the fact that biographical materials on Fourth Way teachers had not yet surfaced at the time, Swedenborgians were flying blind for almost a decade (e.g., Nicoll's assistant and official biographer, Beryl Pogson, did not publish *Maurice Nicoll: A Portrait* until 1961). They could see the influence, but they were unable to prove it, much less explain Nicoll's surreptitiousness. The goal of this research, therefore, is to both share the quest of organizing what research does exist and uncover additional details pointing toward connections so that the truth about this often misunderstood and 'secret' Swedenborgian comes to light.

Nicoll is mysteriously elusive in *written* works, only mentioning Swedenborg's name in passing; and this is what is most consistently noted in Swedenborgian reception history of his allegoresis. Accounts often begin with the sense of exuberant excitement so often accompanying the discovery of Swedenborg's poetic hermeneutic—the counterintuitively labeled "science of correspondences"—but the ideal of angelic forbearance and assumption of positive intent are as elusive as they are rare, so an indignant perturbation demanding credit to Swedenborg often followed.<sup>[22]</sup>

What seems less familiar, then, is the broader context of Nicoll's relationship with Swedenborg's works. Consider the reliable account that when Nicoll retrieved and initialed the tome *Divine Love and Wisdom* from his library for an adherent running out the door to defend Britannia in Her Majesty's Royal Navy, the seaman records that although he "finds it easy to reach saturation with that author, Dr. Nicoll was wont to quote from him frequently."<sup>[23]</sup>

Regular verbal recognition with his students but almost no textual referencing, however, is as perplexing as it is uncharacteristic of Nicoll's garden of esoterica. His referencing style generally takes after the gardens of his British heritage by sourcing outside spiritualities to the point where for some tastes it could be considered overcrowded, à la the revelators, mystics, et al., noted earlier.

It is safe to conclude, therefore, that "quote from him frequently" refers to his private lectures and responses during the Socratic discussions that are so characteristic of Fourth Way group meetings. Nicoll's "frequent" naming of Swedenborg certainly did not occur in text. The mere sixteen mentions of his name throughout Nicoll's corpus find thirteen of them in one work alone, *Living Time*, his oldest and most philosophical work.[24] Neither did he circumvent the name Swedenborg by using the titles of the Writings themselves. Such references are even rarer. Only one, *Arcana Coelestia*, is listed—along with its publisher, the Swedenborg Society, located in his hometown of London—and that, too, in *Living Time* (in the bibliography, to be precise).[25]

While it was clearly not Nicoll's intent to carelessly plagiarize Swedenborg or seek to present his forebear's heavenly doctrines as his own, it is obvious to this researcher that Nicoll's hermeneutic, psychology, and regenerative process, among others, originate directly or have parallels to the extreme in Swedenborg's doctrines. It is to what degree they do so that remains unresolved.

External pressure is unlikely to have dissuaded Nicoll from written acknowledgment of this extreme Swedenborgian influence. All indications are that he was more than comfortable with whatever concerns would arise. Ouspensky's reluctant order that Nicoll go off and teach the Fourth Way system in 1931 left him answering to no one but his conscience.[26] Neither did Nicoll need be concerned with the opinions of the establishment's elite, be it the medical, ecclesiastical, or governmental wing. He had played that game and played it well, while he and Jung campaigned tirelessly for psychiatry's acceptance as a legitimate field of Western medicine. In that effort, both kept their interests in certain esoteric subjects—especially astrology—private. However, having left Jung at the end of 1921, Nicoll gradually faded from public scrutiny. It appears that he and Jung's relationship, though one of respect, faded as well. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Jung briefly acknowledges Nicoll in his work entitled *Psychological Types, or the Psychology of Individuation* (1923),[27] and Nicoll concludes his enthusiastically supportive summary of that work with his own glowing remark, "Those who take the view that this richly-stored book—which is without parallel—is irrelevant to practical work or is not 'scientific' cannot have perceived the main problem that confronts the psychological sprouting that shot up so suddenly during this century."<sup>[28]</sup> Two years after moving on from Jung, Nicoll demonstrated how syncretic his thinking was and would always remain.

In addition, Nicoll demonstrated an ever-present ease with being his own man, and when necessary, with being a maverick. As indicated by the book review, above, he never burned his bridges or demonstrated rebelliousness for rebellion's sake. Instead, he stoically chose what he thought wisest for both himself and the rest of humanity, especially as it related to his marriage, family, students, and country. Nicoll is the embodiment of Swedenborg's harmony through indefinite variety, never confusing harmony with sameness or variety with replicas of

himself.[29]

Whether the research journey ahead will resolve Nicoll's mysterious decision to use Swedenborg anonymously remains to be seen. For now, though, it is secondary to determining the degree of influence Swedenborg's works had, whether he was named or not. To date, very few are aware of the influence at all.

### Translating Swedenborgianese

Nicoll certainly comprehended Swedenborg's hermeneutical methodology with a depth that few achieve or even have the talent to express. He understands it is not algorithmic, but sacredly correspondential. So, too, he recognizes that Scriptures are not always, or only, about historical events. He clearly sees how they address psychological and spiritually cosmic phenomena. He perceives that parabolic language is not describing creation; instead, it is inherent within it. It is Logos, not merely symbolic, but a dynamic infrastructure the nexus of the human mind not only yearns for but, in fact, demands. It is the ideal behind Jung's concept of individuation, the Fourth Way's journey to real "I," and Swedenborg's regenerative process to acquiring angelic consciousness. Each tradition is in fact teaching how to become conscious within this truth, that is, that all exists because of and within the reality of a loving Logos.

A thorough comprehension of the four levels of Swedenborg's hermeneutical methodology is demonstrated by Nicoll with his recognition that the Logos is not mere anthropomorphic projection, but inherent within the levels of Scripture. In fact, its nature protects against the very possibility of human projection because its mysterious storylines are not directed from without, but from the divine human within. It is in this manner that it not only correlates with every level of creation, but serves as the medium for those seeking to transform their experience of it—those with the "ears to hear and eyes to see." These representative stories allow finite, time-bound beings like us to experience what can only be described as miraculous, that is, the endlessly loving personality within the horizons of the literal Word. When the external fallacies of the natural world are left in their proper context and the Logos sets the relationship between the natural and spiritual mind in order (enlightenment), an even more miraculous transition occurs: we enter a spiritual-natural consciousness that is not very different from that of the earliest people, where this endlessly loving personality is not only seen within the Word, but behind the conceptual horizons of this world into creation itself. Nicoll has little to say about the latter, but his exegetical works are valuable to Swedenborgians with respect to the former. He is not only knowledgeable about Swedenborg's hermeneutic and the multifarious levels of meaning in Scripture, but he understands the imagery's role as a nexus in the human mind for those miraculous shifts in consciousness allowing for the direct experience of the Divine. Nicoll did not study Swedenborg simply for academic ideas but also to experience one of his most reiterated doctrines—that of *metanoia*, which has the resulting mindset called the Kingdom of Heaven.[30] Paired with his wide breadth of esoteric studies, as well as with his grandfather's, his father's, and Ouspensky's passion for biblical translations, Nicoll journeyed into the depths of Scripture.[31] It is exhilarating to be pulled into his mystical wake when reading his findings in the four-fold Word.

The deepest of Swedenborg's leveled hermeneutic is the most obscure to our ordinary comprehension. It reveals the truth about the loving personality behind creation. It is the most arcane and thickly veiled because that which yearns to connect with our creator is so deeply shrouded within ourselves. It is not because the Divine does not want to be found. The opposite is the case, but only as we intentionally unravel the levels of our own being will the correlating consciousness be able to handle that from which it comes. This process is not random. While there is a general pattern that every individual, every culture, and all of humanity will travel, the journeys are unique unto themselves. The penultimate level of Scripture describes the collective voyage humanity has been on in this unravelling process. It describes the cosmic interplay between every personality on earth as it interacts with those who once were there but now exist solely in the dynamism of the spiritual world. Above those two levels and just beneath the shallowest is the truth about our personal regeneration in this hyper-dynamic interplay, and the storylines' literal imagery carries those three to the surface where everyone begins—the natural mind. In this, Nicoll sees that Swedenborg's monotheism is not limited to the concept of an infinite and eternal God but that it also refers to the interconnected oneness of all who have lived, are living, or will live in relation to it.

Those who have an affection for truth rivaling that of Nicoll seek far and wide for wisdom literature that not only explains the most fundamental principles of reality but that also fills the often unconscious void of the human heart. It is telling that few know that the intellectual and emotional satisfaction they seek is contained in history's best-selling book. Just as important as the storylines themselves then, one could say, is the need for precise and accessible language describing its internal meanings. Here Nicoll not only shines intellectually but, perhaps more importantly, he also warms the heart affectionally. It is the fact that Nicoll's being is expressed in his writing that makes his works so rare.<sup>[32]</sup> Perhaps for this reason, as the Fourth Way scholar Bob Hunter states (and unknowingly in a most Swedenborgian manner), Nicoll was revered not only for what he said to his students but also for the feeling from which he said it. The heart of the man (and the matter) beams through on every page. No wonder it appears, to an ever-increasing degree, that contemporary Swedenborgians supplement the Writings with Nicoll's works, either directly or through their use in the Swedenborgian-Nicollian synthesis of Peter Rhodes's books.

Another reason Swedenborgians likely turn to Nicoll's monographs is that they are by and large, though by no means always, in harmony with Swedenborg's systematic theology. It appears that after two centuries of intellectualized Swedenborgianese, adherents of the New Jerusalem's many organizations are starving for a more heartfelt presentation of Swedenborg's teachings from heaven. This need not indicate a turning away from the Writings, as one might fear, but just as likely, that Swedenborgianism has completed the requisite stages of growth new religious movements must endure before the latent motivations of their origins surface. Just as sincere individuals for much of their lives appear to be focused upon its externals, the quality of the will remaining in the subconscious either affectionately rises toward the light to emotionally unite with it or passionately descends in its attacks to falsely twist it to its selfish desires. That is, after all, the nature of ruling loves. As Nicoll's first mentor noted, "Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."<sup>[33]</sup> Be it good or evil, Swedenborgianism may be in the process of making a discrete jump into a stage where that which has been driving organizational and institutional paradigms beneath the surface is being

seen more clearly. If this is the case, Swedenborgians may now be able to come to terms with the unconscious motivations driving them and their forebears all along.

All can profit from contemplating almost unchanged Mr. Hunter's description of Nicoll's unique relationship to the regenerative process:

Maurice Nicoll's special contribution to the Fourth Way is that his teaching, by leavening the method transmitted by P. D. Ouspensky, helps people to value the Work. Where Ouspensky presented truth precisely, Nicoll in a more relaxed manner showed how to see the good of it. For truth has meaning only when it is made part of one's understanding; that is, when it combines with the good, which includes its reason and "end." Emphasizing Good's precedence over Truth, Nicoll maintained that if we were good we would not need truth.<sup>[34]</sup>

Perhaps this unity of head-logic with heart-logic explains Nicoll's ability to "see and hear" the internal senses in pericopes that even Swedenborg left unaddressed, especially those of the Gospels.

A wide variety of examples could be given, but Nicoll's exegesis of the Marriage at Cana in chapter three of *The New Man* is his most impressive. It is his crowning achievement. Whereas Swedenborg references the parable a mere nine times to establish the dual nature of Jesus's mind, represented by the shift in Mary's moniker from "Mother" to "Woman," Nicoll not only explains Jesus's first miracle in its entirety, but he focuses on the deepest sense itself—the very details of Jesus's glorification.<sup>[35]</sup> In doing so, Nicoll demonstrates an enlightened understanding of no fewer than three of Swedenborg's five principal doctrines—regeneration, Sacred Scripture, and the Lord—thereby interrelating the human mind, the Word, and the Lord into a holistic correspondential experience of what Jesus the Christ experienced, while showing its parallel within ourselves. It is as insightful as it is daring—the "Arkenstone" of a chapter in the treasure chest of Nicoll's oeuvre. The following sample will whet the appetite:

Three levels in Jesus are thus depicted. The lowest is represented by the "servants"—who obey the "Mother", the middle by the "Mother", the highest by the new level or state of Jesus where the "Mother" obeys. Let us conceive these three states as three horizontal lines drawn one above the other in parallel. The middle line will then represent the intermediary between the highest and the lowest lines. In other words, some definite order of levels is indicated—highest, middle and lowest. This state, attained by Jesus and marking the beginning of his power of teaching, is defined by the general setting of the psychological portrait in terms of a *marriage*—that is, some inner union, totally different from the Mother-Son union—and its consequences, the turning of water into wine.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Modern Wars of Jehovah

Neither system could be considered apocalyptic, but Gurdjieff and Swedenborg both contextualize their teachings in the grandest of consequences, the very survival of the human

race. It is impossible to read their works without a sense of Joseph Campbell's "Call to Adventure" and ensuing "Hero's Journey." Fueling the intensity is their belief that a relatively small, even anonymous, group of dedicated adherents can change the course of history. Swedenborg believed that even on his own he could serve as the instrument.[37]

However, narcissists beware! Joining a Swedenborgian church or Fourth Way group for ego satisfaction may appear to provide a sense of elitism in spades, but make no mistake, the secrets of heaven may or may not lead to natural or spiritual fame and fortune. Neither is promoted nor denied, for whatever the result, it is relevant only to the degree that it affects one's ability to serve the universal purpose, either in the Swedenborgian sense of a "heaven from the human race"[38] or in the Fourth Way sense of successfully serving as vehicles by which Endlessness can know, or be conscious of, itself.[39] In both systems, survival is not guaranteed.[40]

Perhaps for this reason, neither Swedenborgian nor Fourth Way organizations to date have used their institutional structures to organize and direct charitable services in the traditional sense.[41] Each focused on developing their own movement and adherents as psycho-spiritual agents of change. Each teaches that everyone begins in an ego condition that is not only "missing the mark" but that will continue to do so however saintly a life of non-profit service. Instead, ego transformation occurs within existing societal paradigms where one's motivations are challenged in the context of real world consequence. As ethically admirable as traditional non-profit service may be, neither paradigm (nor modern history) gives credence to modern societies' ability to function solely on a non-profit model, at least in this world. Everyone prior to regeneration is simply too spiritually "upside down" per Swedenborg and in a state of unacknowledged psychological sleep per Gurdjieff.[42] Turning the spirit right-side up or, as Gurdjieff states, "awakening so one can die and thus be reborn"[43] is not only a journey some refuse but, one could argue, a series of stages that necessitate a mediate paradigm of socio-economic *trickery* so that our selfish will provides useful goods and services for others despite it being against its nature to do so.[44]

Nicoll and Swedenborg were intimately familiar with this grand spiritual context and the earthly consequences of both their own and prior eras. They may be viewed primarily as intellectuals, but ivory tower, idealistic recluses they were not. Each man engaged with the civic and moral accommodations of this world in light of the conditions of the next. In fact, the grand spiritual context guided their efforts. They accepted that this world was neither heaven's nor hell's but instead consisted of battlefields in the broader context of the modern Wars of Jehovah. They voluntarily defended what they believed was good and true on the economic, political, cultural, and literal battlefields.

Their intimate familiarity with the respective rulers, generals, and thought leaders of their time humanized current affairs so that despite the otherworldly focus of much of their writings, the context with which they took earthly events was one such that those events were the cumulative result of individual decisions.

Raised among the likes of Churchill and the lords of England, Nicoll witnessed the machinations of leadership at his father's dinner parties. One can only imagine his thoughts as he treated the unfathomable wounds of Churchill's Gallipoli disaster in the Dardanelles, and then again in the

psycho-pathological hospitals he ardently campaigned for in London after the war.<sup>[45]</sup> As “the leading neurologist in London” according to some,<sup>[46]</sup> he saw the frailties behind the elite’s public personae, especially those returning from the war.

Swedenborg, too, was well-adapted to the ways of the world. As a young man, he witnessed the harsh realities of war, even using his genius to serve the nation after his introduction to the King of Sweden by Polhem. Charles XII immediately put Swedenborg to work during the endless battles of the Great Northern War. This was long before Swedenborg’s spiritual awakening, but unlike many traditional interpretations of the New Testament, even thereafter Swedenborg’s Christianity allowed for such contributions. Like the Fourth Way, his new Christianity is not pacifistic. His Writings demand zealous defense of what is good and true, so long as all means of finding peaceful resolution have been exhausted. They also demand the immediate cessation of such defense once the threat is over. The broad context is that the wise never use truth to attack, but instead always defend its principles of love. Both Swedenborg’s and Nicoll’s systems take conflict in stride, as it is an inevitability. Spirituality is not about avoiding such tensions but about determining one’s character by means of them.

This doctrinal defense of what is wise and loving does not require a vast army. The modern Wars of Jehovah occur on spiritual and natural levels simultaneously. Consequently, Fourth Way and Swedenborgian cosmologies allow for the states of mind of relatively few human beings to have cosmic effects, with both wise expressions of love and false justifications of evil turning the wheel of time from beyond its bounds.

## Nicoll and the Gospels

Gurdjieff spoke of an “inner circle,” or “masters of wisdom”—a private group of enlightened teachers who observe the inevitable ebb and flow of humanity’s spiritual consciousness. Like Swedenborg’s more transcendent description of the Lord’s divine providence, when necessary, these masters share the secret teachings of bygone ages to preserve the freedom and rationality requisite for civilization. Enlightened teachers pass these teachings on to others, who in turn pass them on further down the line, and so on—just as Gurdjieff passed them on to Ouspensky, and they both passed them on to Nicoll. Each person in the chain is responsible for the preservation of the system while accommodating it to the demands of the age. One does not get the sense that the masters, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, or Nicoll saw themselves as revelators as did Swedenborg and others (e.g., Mohammed). The inner circle is not called upon by the Absolute to reveal a new wisdom, but more so, to protect and share a timeless wisdom that has been passed down through the ages. Gurdjieff did not speak of his Fourth Way as an edict from on high, but as an accommodation to the modern psyche from less than complete sources.<sup>[47]</sup> One is never entirely sure whether Gurdjieff’s tales of travels through the Near and Far East or secret rendezvous with esoteric schools took place in the manner he describes, but regardless of where his teachings originated, he never spoke of himself as a revelator in the usual sense of the term.

According to Swedenborg, the relationship between the mindsets of the universal and specific churches determines the underlying spiritual state of humanity. This dynamic has been present since the beginning. Though he shares a plethora of characteristics of those in the specific

churches of the past, Swedenborg provides no clues for what to look for during his time or thereafter. In fact, he teaches that it is impossible to know who is in which state of mind, despite their organizational affiliation or their ability to parrot what is good and true. Everyone must do their best to acquire, retain, and bring into effect genuine truth by teaching, sharing, and, most importantly, expressing its essence through the form and activity of their lives. In this way, the spiritual love and wisdom represented by the heart and lungs in human anatomy are pumped throughout the Universal Human and keep it alive.

Decades of studying the world's traditions allowed Nicoll to use what he deemed wisest for the grand purpose served by the individual and the group. Unlike Swedenborgianism, the Fourth Way and even Nicoll's Christ-centric application thereof remain vague about God. The focus instead is upon humanity's relationship and responsibilities to Endlessness, the most important of which is to facilitate its awareness of itself by becoming conscious in our real selves. The Fourth Way for Nicoll is undoubtedly the core body of knowledge guiding the individual's and the group's regenerative journeys, but unlike any Fourth Way teacher then or now, he clothes that body most often in the New Testaments' imagery. He may have left his Presbyterian upbringing, but despite his broad sailing of the esoteric seas, the Christian Scriptures remain paramount.

Therefore, it is likely that Nicoll is a Christ-centric Fourth Way teacher, not in spite of, but primarily because of Swedenborgianism. In contradistinction to Gurdjieff's statement that students were not ready for the Gospels, both before and after being approved as a Fourth Way teacher, as Pogson records, Nicoll led his students primarily by means of the Gospels. As early as 1926, she noted his "renewed study of the New Testament and of Plato . . . from which it is apparent that [Nicoll] was already thinking on the lines of his later interpretations. For instance, he stressed the importance of distinguishing between what Christ said to the disciples and what He said to the multitude. This was the beginning of selecting the esoteric teaching that was within the exoteric presentation of Christianity."<sup>[48]</sup> Gurdjieff had emphatically declared that the Fourth Way was esoteric Christianity, but for reasons that remain unclear (perhaps he believed it was necessary for his students coming from a predominantly Christian heritage to first be "shocked" out of their mechanical associations with it before reintroducing them to Man Number Eight,<sup>[49]</sup> Jesus the Christ). Whatever the case, unlike Nicoll, it does not appear he did so to any great effect.<sup>[50]</sup> Consequently, despite Nicoll's Christian heritage, without his in-depth and immersive study of Swedenborg's new Christianity, he likely would have followed the pattern of all other Fourth Way teachers. He would not have taught any semblance of a new Christianity, much less the many aspects of Swedenborg's new heaven.

If the Fourth Way is Nicoll's skeletal structure, then Swedenborgianism is his spiritual heart and lungs. To a great extent, Swedenborgianism consists of the heavenly doctrines that make Nicoll's esoteric teachings so spiritually nourishing. Most see only the emblazoned Hermetic symbology on the stole hanging from Nicoll's shoulders, not to mention his fashionable shoes of Platonic dualism, but when one knows what to look for, it becomes apparent that he wears his heart on the sleeve of his doctrinal robe. In fact, this masterful display of intertextuality is likely the cause of his anonymity in Fourth Way, Swedenborgian, Jungian, and Western Esoteric studies. He is too Christian for most Fourth Way adherents, too Fourth Way for most Swedenborgians, not Jungian enough for Jungians, and too multi-varied for Western Esoteric categories.

## Unlearn What Has Been Learned

Nicoll understood early in life that his privileged upbringing among the authorities of his day was not to be trusted unconditionally. Despite it being to his advantage, he was never one for the status quo. He consistently questioned all areas of officialdom. For example, he was instrumental in updating the medical paradigm of the West—first during World War I, by treating shell shock as a psychological condition rather than a moral failing in World War I; and second by establishing with Jung, et al., psychoanalysis as a legitimate field of medicine. Nicoll also critiqued the British military’s execution of the Great War, returning from the front with a composition under each arm—one for the medical field (*Dream Psychology*, 1917) and a “fictional” work for the government (*In Mesopotamia*, 1917). Finally, despite his grandfather’s and father’s ecclesiastical service, he spent more than half his life teaching anything but the doctrines of Christian officialdom. With this, however, he rarely attacked directly, choosing instead to simply ignore more traditional Christian views.

A conservative moderation is the sense one gets about Nicoll after reviewing his archives in the reading rooms of Yale and Edinburgh, or tracing his footsteps through London. Yet, like Swedenborg, many of Nicoll’s life decisions were rather extreme. Like his Swedish mentor, he was actually the definition of the word *radical*, meaning “relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something.”[51] He incessantly focused on the heart of the matter. However, unlike many revolutionaries through the ages, his life was not one of embattled conflict. He was a radical thinker without a radical personality or lifestyle. In this, Nicoll is worthy of our time and consideration.

Everyone faces this difficult dynamic. How much faith should be put in the opinions of prevailing authorities? Some answer with blind allegiance while others justify rebellious blindness. Nicoll, on the other hand, was not one for short-sighted extremes, focusing instead on the end game; accounts in his hand or others indicate that his gaze from the helm was always on the horizon.

Life’s tumultuous oceans and gusts of opinions send many spiritual seekers off course. Nicoll avoided this fate, but this was not by chance. True, he sailed far and wide, but there is never the sense that he is lost. Instead, tracking his journey is reminiscent of naturalists of the past who monitored matriarchs of elephant herds. They, too, despite inexplicable shifts in direction, never seemed to be off course. The most direct route to a waterhole was not always taken, and herds of the same ilk had an uncanny ability to find each other, even over vast distances. No one knew how. The reality is, both Nicoll and elephant matriarchs were privy to information of which those without the ears to hear are generally not aware.[52]

In addition to using the maps he received from others and his own reasoned analysis, Nicoll guided his vessel with an acute intuitive perception, which allowed him to tack his ship through the headwinds of traditionalism and then popular opinion while avoiding an embattled state of mind. It is not yet known when exactly he set out on the esoteric seas, but after daring to question the meaning of a New Testament parable while attending the Aldenham Grammar School, he received a premonition that likely had him raise the sails.

When I heard the New Testament I could not understand what the parables meant, and no one seemed to know or care what they meant. But once, in the Greek New Testament class on Sundays, taken by the Head Master, I dared to ask, in spite of my stammering, what some parable meant. The answer was so confused that I actually experienced my first moment of consciousness—that is, I suddenly realized that *no one knew anything*. . . . From that moment I began to think for myself or rather knew that I could . . . I remember so clearly the class room, the high windows constructed so that we could not see out of them, the desks, the platform on which the Head Master sat, his scholarly, thin face, his nervous habits of twitching his mouth and jerking his hands—and suddenly this inner revelation of *knowing that he knew nothing*—nothing, that is, about anything that really mattered. This was my first liberation from the power of external life.[53]

Not only did Nicoll put great faith in these internal perceptions for the benefit of his own life, but just as readily, he did so for the lives of others. Unlike most, however, who “see right through you,” he was sought out by many. In fact, it could be argued that this was his greatest strength, a conclusion supported by the endless stream of psychological clients and Fourth Way students that came to his door. This is exemplified by the following account of the worldly Mr. Fulford Bush upon meeting his would-be mentor:

I first met Doctor Nicoll in the beginning of 1926 on my return from China. . . . My first impression in that to me momentous call was of a man’s presence, that indefinable quality one so rarely encounters and which is unmistakable. I do not think I am easily impressed. I have met many remarkable men. . . . They all had presence, a certain inner poise, a dignity born of self-command achieved by recognition of a purposed way to some definite objective, the power of detachment enabling them to view your problem objectively. But the man I met in Harley Street had . . . this quality in a more remarkable degree. Of middle height, a classically shaped head, clear-cut features, light blue eyes that **see right through you with understanding kindliness, making any attempt at evasion or deception futile**, hands capable and artistic, a voice of which the diapason holds infinite range of expression; that is an attempt to give some idea of the man—Maurice Nicoll—of whom the passing twenty-two years have served to intensify the impression formed at that first interview (emphasis mine).[54]

Such praise of Nicoll’s character is not unique; it is the norm. In a year and a half of in-depth research, a negative account has yet to surface. A longtime student of Nicoll’s assistant turned Fourth Way teacher, Beryl Pogson, could not recall even one.[55]

Like Swedenborg, Nicoll’s “understanding kindliness” was the key to both his untarnished reputation and his ability to lead a radical life with peace of mind. He did not swing from one amplitude of the pendulum to another, each equally defensive of a polarizing extreme, but removed himself from its swings.[56] His compassion was born of a hard earned wisdom instead of from the all too common formal niceness surrounding religious traditions. Nicoll was never fond of such platitudes. He sensed the fallen nature of the human spirit hid just beneath their smiles. “You smile—bravely—you all know that brave smile—and it is all lies,” he once quipped.[57]

Witnessing the inhumanity of the Christian nations of Europe no doubt reinforced Nicoll's abhorrence of traditional paradigms. Like Gurdjieff, he set sail as a "seeker of truth," not simply as one on an academic exercise.<sup>[58]</sup> Year after year he opened volumes filled with the mysterious imagery so characteristic of Gnosticism, alchemy, Hinduism, and, not to mention, Blake and Böhme. He even climbed aboard Jung's dreamlike vessel, hoping that it would lead to the secret ports of the unconscious; and though it did influence him to the end of his life—after a decade as Jung's lieutenant, as diary entries in 1919 and 1921 denote—at heart he was not entirely convinced.<sup>[59]</sup>

Here Nicoll's life again paralleled Swedenborg's. At the age of thirty-seven, there was no indication that his prayers would be answered. He had just served his nation in World War I, while Swedenborg at this age served his beloved Sweden as Assessor of the Royal College of Mines. They performed their duties honorably. In Fourth Way terminology, they were "Good Householders" (see note 44, below). At this point in both their lives, little indicated the spiritual awakenings ahead. It appears at this stage that they were in the process of unlearning what they had learned, most especially the traditional Christianity of their upbringing.

Those who empathize with these conditions that beset Nicoll's spiritual journey are encouraged to follow this research in discovering how Jung's, Ouspensky's, and Gurdjieff's most affable maverick creates a garden of esoterica. Swedenborg's journey is fairly well-documented, and it is being updated as we speak. What remains mysterious to this day, though, is Nicoll's odyssey centuries later. The works that were "for his students' eyes only" are now available to all. As he noted in person, one of his favorite and "indispensable" harbors was Swedenborgianism. The thesis for my research is that Nicoll was so familiar with its waters, he went ashore, built a home, and planted a beautiful garden. His heartfelt nurturing and brilliant enlightenment fostered a wide variety of esoteric flora and fauna, much of which is emblematic of the new Christianity. Its brilliant flowers, wholesome fruits, and even transcendent mushrooms thrive in the emotionally rich soil, but the tallest tree at the center of the garden is almost certainly Swedenborg's Writings.

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## Notes

[1] Nicoll refers to figures as diverse as Anaxagoras to Whitehead, locations from America to Tibet, and traditions from alchemy to Zoroastrianism.

[2] Samuel Copley, *Portrait of a Vertical Man: An Appreciation of Doctor Maurice Nicoll and His Work* (Utrecht, Netherlands: Eureka Editions, 1989), 18.

[3] The Nicolls' marriage was founded upon having the same purpose in life. As recorded later by his assistant Beryl Pogson in the chapter on his marriage, she notes, "In their first conversation they discovered that they both had the same end in life. Mrs. Nicoll remembered vividly that morning when, pacing angrily up and down, she told him that she wanted to find the peace which passeth all understanding. 'Why do they write about it if it is not there?' she said. 'I must find it.' These words epitomize her attitude to life which combined impatient questioning of what was lacking and the energy in seeking for it. From that day they began to dine together nearly every evening" (Beryl Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll: A Portrait* [London: Vincent Stuart, 1961], 67–68).

[4] To distinguish his system from the three traditional ways of the prior spiritual era, Gurdjieff called it the Fourth Way. According to Gurdjieff, traditional paradigms focus exclusively on the mastery of the body, the emotions, or the intellect and are labeled "the way of the fakir," "the way of the monk," and "the way of the yogi," respectively. His system, however, is presented as a new and "fourth" way, accommodated to the modern psyche and its cultural conditions, in which practitioners must master the body, the emotions, and the intellect simultaneously. Furthermore, instead of retreating from society and day-to-day life as traditional ways often demand, Fourth Way adherents not only remain within society but refrain from speaking even casually about their practice. Adherents sometimes refer to this system simply as "the Work," due to its foundational principle that enlightened consciousness does not just happen, as does the state of waking sleep from which they seek to escape, but requires internal effort, focused attention, and true awareness of consciousness in the present moment. See Sophia Wellbeloved, "ways/Fourth Way," "Work, the," and "work, to" in *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts* (Psychology Press, 2003).

[5] Gurdjieff's Fourth Way never prohibited women from teaching or leading groups. In fact, he encouraged it. Mrs. Nicoll, Mrs. Ouspensky, and Miss Pogson, for example, are renowned for teaching and leadership. A member of Mrs. Nicoll's London group provides insight into the warmth of her meetings: "She gave the Work formulations in a more direct way than anyone I've heard since" (Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 251). So, too, facing imminent death, Gurdjieff asked his student of thirty years, Jeanne de Salzmann, to teach the Work, even leaving to her discretion whether or not to publish the manuscript that became *Views from the Real World*.

[6] Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, 5 vols. (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1996), 1539–40.

[7] Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 140.

[8] Nicoll's four titles, making up eight volumes of published esoterica, in order of composition are 1) *Living Time and the Integration of the Life* (London: Vincent Stuart, 1952); 2) *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, 5 vols. (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1996); 3) *The New Man: An Interpretation of Some Parables and Miracles of Christ* (London: Stuart and Richards, 1950); 4) *The Mark*, (London: Vincent Stuart, 1954, posthumous).

[9] Perhaps their greatest similarity lies in the descriptions made by their students: "When [Swedenborg] gazed upon me with his smiling blue eyes . . . it was as if truth itself was speaking from them" ('Cuno's Experience,' Document no. 256, in R L Tafel, *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, vol. II:1 [London: Swedenborg Society, 1877], 445); "Sometimes, the words of Dr. Nicoll seemed to explode in my heart and head as if I had been waiting all my life to hear these ideas" (David Scott Blackhall, "A Glimpse of Other Worlds," in *This House Had Windows*, 1st ed. [London: Max Parrish, 1961], 149). Some noteworthy differences are the following: Swedenborg claimed to be a revelator but Nicoll did not. Swedenborg did not teach reincarnation, but Nicoll taught an Ouspenskian theory of recurrence to the very end of his life. Swedenborg never married, whereas Nicoll married and had one daughter.

[10] An exception to the trend is the discovery of Dr. John Willmett's recent PhD dissertation of 2017 at the University of Edinburgh, "Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study of the Psychological Basis of 'Esoteric Christianity' as Described in Nicoll's Writings."

[11] Second only to perhaps the Convention's move to the ecumenical Graduate Theological Union in 2001, the *Swedenborg and the Arts International Conference* of June 2017 at Bryn Athyn College may be viewed by historians in the future as the most significant shift in the exchange between the Academy and Swedenborgians since the turn of the nineteenth century. Many of the world's venerable Swedenborgian organizations, such as The Swedenborg Society, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, the Swedenborg Foundation, the Swedenborg Scientific Association, Glencairn Museum, and Bryn Athyn College, united in common cause to sponsor the gathering of leading scholars in the history of art, architecture, literature, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies, Western Esotericism, and Swedenborgianism. More than forty specialists, the likes of internationally renowned Wouter Hanegraaff and Massimo Introvigne, from renowned institutions like the University of Amsterdam, Princeton University, and Northwestern University, shared insights on the intellectual and artistic reception history of Swedenborg's second-sightings. After a century of relative anonymity, here at the turn of the twenty-first, the tireless efforts of innumerable people have brought the too often isolated streams of Swedenborgian scholarship together. Many deserve acknowledgment, but here we must pause to pay tribute to one who has preceded us to the purpose of such efforts, which is open awareness with the Lord's love in the spiritual world. By organizing this conference, making its sessions available online at <https://swedenborg.org/resources/swedenborg-and-the-arts-international-conference/>, and finalizing a detailed biography on Swedenborg, Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan (1942–2017) to her very last continued her professional efforts begun forty-three years prior. Just as she studied Swedenborgian figures of the past, future scholars will undoubtedly share her life as an example to inspire all seekers of truth.

[12] Nicoll's mental genius is incontrovertible, as the judgment of his three principal teachers—none of whom suffered fools—attests. What sets Nicoll apart as an enlightened teacher is that his mental acuity served as a mere backdrop to the consistent accounts of his jovial and warm personality, or, in Swedenborgianese, his unerring focus upon the goodness of truth rather than upon truth for its own sake. According to Swedenborg, “the divine design is that goodness and truth are to be united, not separated. They are to be one thing, not two” (*True Christianity*, vol. 1, Translated by Jonathan S. Rose [West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2017], §398:3).

[13] The discovery in 2006 of Hyperion, the tallest known living tree in the world, demonstrates that heaven-bound wisdom literature may not always be found as early as one would expect.

[14] “[Nicoll] never saw [Gurdjieff] again, but all that he had learnt from him was built in to his character and he acknowledged him as the source of his change of being” (Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 92).

[15] “*In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* [is] a book that, since its publication in 1949, just after Ouspensky’s death, has been read by millions” (Martin Seymour-Smith, *The 100 Most Influential Books Ever Written: The History of Thought from Ancient Times to Today* [Kensington: Citadel, 1997], 448). This was also the book that introduced the Swedenborgian lecturer and teacher Peter Rhodes to the Fourth Way.

[16] “The doctrine is the most convincing fusion of Eastern and Western thought that has yet been seen. It makes Blavatskyism or Transcendental Meditation look simpleminded or even exploitative; but, just as Kepler acknowledged in the popular astrology of his day a “pearl in a heap of dung,” so “The Work” grants something precious at the heart of those and other more popular movements. Elements of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity (especially Eastern Orthodox), the Kabbalah, Sufism, Pythagorianism, and other religions and systems are present in the doctrine” (Seymour-Smith, *100 Most Influential Books Ever Written*, 448).

[17] Gordon Jacobs, “Maurice Nicoll and Swedenborg - Part II of II,” *New Church Magazine*(October–December 1956): 79.

[18] With respect to the elephant in the room, namely, Swedenborgianese: “It is a natural wish that we could somehow remove the obstacles or brush aside whatever seems to cloud the truths—to somehow polish up the luster until others will see in [the Writings] the same brilliance that we do. This has sometimes been reflected in wishes to adapt or translate works of the Writings into a “more acceptable” form—one which will then be clearer and more modern or more convincing. This has been suggested as taking the form of shorter paragraphs, more modern terminology or a simpler style. It has also involved suggestions that difficult sections or problem passages be deleted or modified, that the memorable relations be omitted or the powerful ideas be paraphrased in a more acceptable context. Perhaps we can even note some of the collateral literature which does restate the ideas of the Writings or, in some cases (C. S. Lewis or Maurice Nicoll) sets forth the ideas of the Writings but without the albatross of an eighteenth century mystic to hamper them.” Leon Rhodes, “Use of Nicoll as Accommodation,” *New Church Life*(1976): 241–42.

[19] For example, Peter Rhodes's extensive lecture series in the late 80's led to the publication of his first work, *AIM: Edited Selections from the Lecture Series Nicoll and Swedenborg - New Will* (Bryn Athyn, PA: General Church Press, 1991). Special thanks are extended to the late Mrs. Ruth Zuber, who transcribed and helped edit the tapes leading to the first of Rhodes's three works. See also Peter Rhodes, *Nicoll and Swedenborg*, 46 Tapes (Bryn Athyn, PA, 1987–89), newchurchaudio.org.

[20] Bjorn Johannson, "Book Review: The New Man: An Interpretation of Some Parables and Miracles of Christ," *New Church Magazine* (June 14, 1952).

[21] The total pages in the second English edition of *Searle's Index* of 1954 are 321. As crude as the number of pages of references may be, the statistics are still as noteworthy as they are tentative. See Arthur Hodson Searle, *General Index to Swedenborg's Scripture Quotations*, 2nd ed. (London: Swedenborg Society, 1954).

[22] See William Ross Woofenden, "Letters to the Editor: Maurice Nicoll," *New Church Life*(1991): 174; Gordon Jacobs, "Maurice Nicoll and Swedenborg - Part I of II," *New Church Magazine* (July–September 1956): 58–62; and Jacobs, "Maurice Nicoll and Swedenborg - Part II of II," 79–83.

[23] Copley, *Portrait of a Vertical Man*, 52.

[24] Nicoll, *Living Time*, 42, 44, 78, 117, 178, 192, 201, 216, 221. The history of the text that would become *Living Time* makes its published contents all the more mysterious. As noted by Bob Hunter, "Vincent Stuart brought out Nicoll's classic, *Living Time*, in 1952. It had been written 23 years earlier, when publication of ideas relating to the Work system was banned" ("Combining Good and Truth, Now: An Homage to Dr. Maurice Nicoll," *Gurdjieff International Review* III [2] [April 2000], <http://www.gurdjieff.org/hunter1.htm>, p. 3). What Hunter and others do not observe is that Swedenborg's name is absent from what remains of the drafts from 1929–35, whereas the version in 1952 names him thirteen times. See the privately held Maurice Nicoll, "Manuscripts Primarily on Time and Eternity" (Utrecht, Netherlands: Eureka Editions, 1929).

[25] There are at least two instances where Nicoll is obviously referring to Swedenborg's writings, but he purposefully avoids naming them, choosing instead to use the phrases "old-age tradition" or "an older system." The first is found in his most Swedenborgian work, *The New Man*. In the first few lines of its opening chapter, "The Language of Parables," Nicoll states, "All sacred writings contain an outer and an inner meaning. Behind the literal words lies another range of meaning, another form of knowledge. According to an **old-age tradition**, [humanity] once was in touch with this inner knowledge and inner meaning" (1; emphasis mine). Furthermore, as James F. Lawrence insightfully observed, William Worcester's *Lessons in Correspondences* (1892) was a Swedenborgian classic renamed *The Language of Parable: A Key to the Bible* (c. 1918). It was already in at least its seventh printing when Nicoll composed *The New Man*. The second instance is found in the fifth volume of his remarkable *Psychological Commentaries*, where he writes, "You cannot control the sensual, Natural [Person] in you save by means of the developed, non-sensual, Spiritual [Person]. The middle division, which is the Rational or reasoning division, stands between the Natural or Outer

and the Spiritual or Inner, and can connect them. As I said before, I am using these terms taken from **an older system** on purpose, in place of the Work terms, Moving (or Mechanical), Emotional and Intellectual” (1701; emphasis mine).

[26] “Thus it was that in September 1931, ten years after his first meeting with Ouspensky, Nicoll was to his surprise authorized to teach the Work himself. ‘Better go away’, said Ouspensky reluctantly, adding after a long pause, ‘Go away—and teach the System.’ This necessitated complete independence from the main group, and the assembly of a nucleus of his own” (John H. Reyner, *Ouspensky: The Unsung Genius* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981], 87). See chapter 13 in full for complete context.

[27] Jung thanks Nicoll in a footnote, where he states, “The magic cauldron of the Celtic mythology is further evidence of the vigorous pagan root that contributed to the vessel symbolism. . . . It has even been suggested that the name Brons, one of the figures of the Grail legend, is really a development of this Bran. Alfred Nutt considers that Bran, lord of the cauldron, and Brons, are steps in the transformation of the Celtic Peredur Saga into the quest of the Holy Grail. It would seem, therefore, that the Grail motives already existed in Celtic mythology. **I am indebted to Dr Maurice Nicoll, of London, for the above allusions**” (Carl Jung, *Psychological Types, or the Psychology of Individuation* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1923], 288; emphasis mine). It is also noteworthy that Jung cites Swedenborg later in this work as an example of Heraclitus’s concept of Enantiodromia, wherein “everything that exists goes over into its opposite” (541), offering such examples as Saul’s conversion to Christianity, Nietzsche’s deification then loathing of Wagner, and “the transformation of Swedenborg from scholar into seer” (542).

[28] Maurice Nicoll, “Book Review: Psychological Types,” *The Journal of Neurology and Psychopathology* IV, no. 16 (February 1924): 376–81.

[29] “The subjects themselves, or angels, must exist in a countlessly great diversity of forms, a variety that is arranged by kinds and species, both by individual [angels] and individual habitations, similar in all ways, likewise at every level. Only from variety is there a harmony of the kind where all believe that they are as if a one. From this, or from the beauty of harmony, comes happiness, in countless variety, and this to eternity. These things were said in a gathering of innumerable souls, spirits and angels, and I heard no one dissenting. 1747, 15 December” (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, Translated by Durban Odhner [Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1998], §348).

[30] See both the entry METANOIA in Maurice Nicoll, *Index to the Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* (Washington, DC: The Society, 1987) and especially part four, THE IDEA OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, of the chapter in *The Mark* entitled METANOIA.

[31] Nicoll’s grandfather had at least one hundred different editions of the Greek New Testament with which his son, Sir William, was also familiar; see Thomas Herbert Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 7. Ouspensky, too, referenced a wide variety of Bible translations, as noted by Nicoll in the following: “Dr Nicoll

referred in his diary to Ouspensky's method of working on the New Testament in the preparation of his chapter on 'Christianity and the New Testament'. 'O. has the New Testament in German, French, Russian and English, and when he is speaking of a verse he looks at the translation in each of them and in the Greek version. He has a number of dictionaries in his room'" (Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 95). As Pogson notes, "This method of working on the New Testament was later used also by Dr Nicoll himself. When studying the Gospels he would have beside him the Authorized Version, the Revised Version, Monsignor Knox's translation from the Vulgate, Moffatt's, and later to his collection were added the Standard Revised Version and the Gospels from the Aramaic. He would compare the translations" (95–96).

[32] "Sometimes, the words of Dr. Nicoll seemed to explode in my heart and head as if I had been waiting all my life to hear these ideas" (Blackhall, "A Glimpse of Other Worlds," 149).

[33] Accessed August 21, 2018, <http://www.virtuesforlife.com/5-carl-jung-quotes-on-self-awareness-for-an-authentic-life/>.

[34] Bob Hunter, "Combining Good and Truth, Now: An Homage to Dr. Maurice Nicoll," *Gurdjieff International Review* III (2) (April 2000), <http://www.gurdjieff.org/hunter1.htm>.

[35] It should be noted that as enlightened as Nicoll's use of the Writings obviously is, I do not see his expositions to be on par with the Writings' authority. Nicoll was not called as a revelator, nor did he ever claim to be such. I do not, nor would he want anyone to, read his teachings as revelation, with the broad and authoritative meaning that that label carries.

[36] Maurice Nicoll, *The New Man: An Interpretation of Some Parables and Miracles of Christ* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1984), 32.

[37] What Swedenborg experienced in 1744 was transformative to say the least. After an already long and productive life, at the age of fifty-six, when most yearn for the ease of retirement, perhaps to putz around in the garden, he spent a day in late-July contemplating the enigmatic book of Revelation's woman and dragon. Four months earlier, the Lord had come to him in a visionary dream, and he was already seeing dead friends and family in the spiritual world, so both his wish that day ("that I might be an instrument to slay the dragon") and his dream that night (where he first fails but then succeeds in killing a "great beast") illustrate Swedenborg's state of mind as being used by the Lord for the grandest of purposes. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams: The Extraordinary Record of the Transformation of a Scientist Into a Seer*, Translated by James John Garth Wilkinson (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1986), July 29–30, entry 227.

[38] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence*, Translated by George F. Dole (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010), §323.

[39] Seymour Ginsburg, *Gurdjieff Unveiled: An Overview and Introduction to Gurdjieff's Teaching, for the Beginning Student, for the Inquiring Seeker, and for the Simply Curious* (Lighthouse Editions, 2005), 10.

[40] As if anticipating his reader's proclivity to manipulate the secrets of heaven for worldly and selfish advantage, at the outset of the Writings, Swedenborg warns, "People's desire to rely on sensory evidence or secular knowledge when investigating religious mysteries caused the fall of the earliest church, and specifically of the generation that inherited it. . . . But more than that, it causes the fall of every church, because it breeds not only falsities but also wickedness in life. . . . The more we rely on sensory evidence in order to gain wisdom, the more we blind ourselves, to the point that we stop believing in anything, even the existence of a spiritual dimension or of eternal life" (*Secrets of Heaven*, 2 vols., Translated by Lisa Hyatt Cooper [West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008–12], §§127, 128). The assumption here is that using sacred knowledge for natural gain carries similar consequences as relying on the perspectives of the natural mind in determining spiritual truth.

[41] The General Church of the New Jerusalem's focus upon New Church education would be the most obvious exception.

[42] Swedenborg explains that, "When a person is being regenerated he must be turned upside down, and that when he has been turned upside down he is positioned with his head in heaven, whereas before being turned upside down he was positioned with his head in hell" (*Arcana Caelestia: Principally a Revelation of the Inner or Spiritual Meaning of Genesis and Exodus*, 12 vols., Translated by John Elliott [London: Swedenborg Society, 1983], §8995:4). Gurdjieff concurs when teaching, "The chief feature of modern man's being is that he is asleep. He is born asleep, lives asleep and dies asleep" (See Sophia Wellbeloved, "sleep" in *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts* [Psychology Press, 2003]).

[43] P. D. Ouspensky records Gurdjieff citing a mysterious book of aphorisms that he states "has never been published and probably never will be published" and from which he quotes, "A man may be born, but in order to be born he must first die, and in order to die he must first awake" (P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*, 1st ed. [New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1949], 224).

[44] It is difficult to conclude that the Fourth Way and Swedenborg's writings are overly optimistic about people's motivations for meeting the socio-economic challenges of natural life. The Fourth Way even uses one's ability to meet its difficulties as a standard before allowing introduction to its internal path. Coming into some semblance of harmony with natural life is the individual's first "spiritual" battlefield in the Work. The manipulation of religion throughout history led to some matter-of-fact statements by its teachers. Here Nicoll shares a few relevant to this topic: "In the Fourth Way, along which this Work begins to lead us, people are supposed, at the start, to be reasonably educated, reasonably responsible, and capable of dealing reasonably with life. It is not for 'tramps'—such as those who will not work—or 'lunatics' such as enthusiasts who wish to reform the world. It is not for silly people seeking the elixir of perpetual youth, nor is it for psychopaths. The Fourth Way starts from the level of Good Householder" (Nicoll, *Commentaries*, 1719–20). This echoed his earlier more poetic statement, "Man at the level he is on, as an unawakened creature, an unfinished experiment, is called *earth*. These are the two levels, the higher and the lower, and some very great differences exist between them, as great as the differences between a seed and a flower" (Nicoll, *New Man*, 84). Swedenborg also contextualizes the regenerative journey within the demands of natural life. Not only is humanity

by its very nature free to resist the flow of providence toward a heavenly mindset, but even those who welcome the journey, “Some (the great majority, these days) arrive only at the first stage, some only at the second, some at the third, fourth, or fifth, very few at the sixth, and almost no one at the seventh” (Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, §13). The teachings that only those in the fifth state are motivated from genuine faith and the sixth from altruistic love make it only realistic to conclude that the great majority (at least when Swedenborg wrote this in 1749) must be motivated by mediate good for, quite literally, goodness sake.

[45] As the oily sea burned in front of Nicoll on approach to Gallipoli’s Suvla Bay, a telegram to his parents exemplifies the light-hearted nature of which he was so admired. He notes, “I have one book, Jane Eyre. I brought it by mistake and am annoyed as I dislike it. Out here Jane Eyre would have learned a lesson to suffer fools gladly, not only gladly but rapturously” (Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 34–35). See also Maurice Nicoll, “The Need for Psycho-Pathological Hospitals,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 83 (January 1918): 1007–13.

[46] Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 105.

[47] One foundational difference between Swedenborg’s writings and Nicoll’s synthesis of the Fourth Way as learned from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky is the authority of the Gospels. For Swedenborg, the four storylines about the Christ are divinely complete and perfect in every detail. However, Gurdjieff, and then Nicoll, teach that the Gospels are more like wisdom literature than they are the Word in a Swedenborgian sense. Gurdjieff notes, “I am often asked questions in connection with the various texts, parables, and so on, from the Gospels. In my opinion the time has not yet come for us to speak about the Gospels. This requires more knowledge. But from time to time we will take certain Gospel texts as points of departure for our discussions. This will teach you to treat them in the right way, and, above all, to realize that in the texts known to us, **the most essential points are usually missing**” (Nicoll, *Commentaries*, 350; emphasis mine).

[48] Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 107.

[49] The psychological paradigms of Swedenborg and Gurdjieff contain many similarities. Of all the characteristics of a theology (psychology, cosmology, soteriology, hermeneutic, etc.), here they are most complementary. Without this similitude, Swedenborgians would likely find little use for the Fourth Way. Gurdjieff, like Swedenborg, explains that there are two general faculties that allow for a sense of being and for concepts of knowledge (à la will and intellect). Gurdjieff also teaches, like Swedenborg, that there are different levels of the mind. He shares seven levels. Everyone is born, however, with one of the lower three entirely dominant—either Moving Centre (Level One), Emotional Centre (Level Two), or Intellectual Centre (Level Three). The momentum to remain in what one mechanically gravitates toward is so powerful that the result is the state described by Gurdjieff as waking sleep. From the waking state, the goal is to become a balanced person, whereby one becomes simultaneously conscious of all three levels. As remarkable as this state of being undoubtedly is, it is not yet a spiritual-natural consciousness in a Swedenborgian sense. It is the ordering of the natural mind so that the ever-present spiritual states yearning to come into effect can finally be received. True spiritual Work begins at this point. All else is preliminary. When a higher level (above the lower three) is born, develops, and

finally becomes mature (à la the Christ story), it will begin to “speak with authority” in contradistinction to the false perspectives of the isolated natural mind. Our rebirth is to our spirit while yet living in a natural body. The characteristics of Levels Four through Seven denote the stages of this spiritual-natural rebirth. Level Four is reached when one is able to sustain awareness above the lower three for a time. Level Five is when Levels One through Four are united consistently. Level Six is when an even more sustained unity is experienced. And finally, Level Seven is when consciousness of Levels One through Four is permanent. See Sophia Wellbeloved, “Man” in *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts* (Psychology Press, 2003); also, see Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 71–74. Whereas Swedenborg’s teachings on Jesus the Christ leave no doubt as to his inherent historicity and divinity, Gurdjieff’s Christology is far less clear. He does call Jesus “the Christ” and even refers to him as “Man Number Eight,” which is clearly beyond anything a person can achieve. See Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 326. Yet, contrary to this elevated status, Gurdjieff contextualizes Jesus in an ancient history that hinged on the success or failure of ritualized repetitive public dramas guided by the elusive Masters of Wisdom and their schools (of which the historical evidence is not clear, though references to Egypt, Babylon, and the Essenes are stressed). Therefore, Gurdjieff teaches that Jesus was not born inherently different from anyone as to soul-spirit-body but that he took upon himself the training to play the “role” of the Christ (à la the missing eighteen years of the Gospel accounts). Jesus then was a historical entity who chose to voluntarily enact the “role,” which included the gathering of students he trained to play the complementary “roles” and “types” necessary to teach and represent the regenerative journey through the mind that humanity had forgotten. It was this that demonstrated a “resplendent Love” (G. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything: Ten Books, in Three Series, of which this is the First Series* [Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1993], 702) for humanity, making Jesus the Christ and “Son of God,” though again, not in the traditionally Swedenborgian meaning of those titles.

[50] Gurdjieff was not only raised Christian, but despite in vogue claims to the contrary, he remained such to the end of his life. Granted, he redefined what it meant to be Christian, but his teachings are always Christ-centric in essence if not in form. His use of various non-Christian traditions was not necessarily to lead his students of a predominantly Christ-centric heritage away from Christ, but like Swedenborg, it was to redefine how and what it meant to be Christian. He needed his students to unlearn what they had learned before they could be taught anew. He puts it most succinctly early on at Fontainebleau, “The Institute can help one to be able to be a Christian. Simple! That is all!” (G. I. Gurdjieff, *Views From the Real World: Early Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York and Chicago as Recollected by His Pupils* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973], 152).

[51] *Oxford Dictionaries / English*, s.v. “radical (adj.),” accessed March 10, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/radical>.

[52] In 1984, the riddle was solved when an acoustic specialist studying the sound frequencies of killer whales felt her ears popping when visiting elephants at a zoo. Katharine B. Payne, William R. Langbauer, and Elizabeth M. Thomas, “Infrasonic Calls of the Asian Elephant (*Elephas Maximus*)”, *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 18, no. 4 (February 1986): 297–301.

[53] Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 10.

[54] Ibid., 105–06.

[55] “In all the 57 years I have been connected with the Work I have never heard anyone speak ill of Dr. Nicoll, quite the reverse” (Beryl Ball to Jeffrey Adams, “Nicoll’s Reputation,” February 25, 2017).

[56] Both the Fourth Way’s and Nicoll’s wisdom shine through in his explanation of how Gurdjieff’s “law of the pendulum” releases one from the radical extremes of its mental swings. We might contrast its means of overcoming hostility with those of traditional Christianity: “One can be plagued by a sudden attack of violent thinking and feeling. When this occurs one is obviously identified with an extreme position of the Pendulum. What, then, is the opposite that one must summon into the consciousness to balance matters if one wishes to work on this unpleasant state? To call up the conventional opposite—that is, to picture oneself filled with gentleness and tolerance, as one remembers one was, say, yesterday, is not likely to prove the *effective* opposite that will give release. The effort may simply aggravate the state. Where is the effective opposite to be found? The answer is that it will be found in what you do not include in your feeling of yourself. . . . The opposite is often curious and not at all what one would suppose. . . . Therefore it is only when I behold in myself what has roused my violence in another person that the storm vanishes—as by magic. The opposites here are between what I am conscious of in *another* and what I am conscious of in *myself*” (Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries*, 1566).

[57] Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries*, 255.

[58] See James Moore, *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of A Myth, A Biography* (Longmead: Element Books, 1991).

[59] In Nicoll’s journal entry of June 18, 1919, he writes, “I will meet with Fate. I seek to go to it. I ask only to know the way” (Maurice Nicoll, “Maurice Nicoll Archive (in Preparation)” [University of Edinburgh Library: Special Collections in Centre for Research Collections, 2018]). Then on August 9, 1921, he writes in a Prayer to Hermes, “Teach me— instruct me— shew me the Path, so that I may know certainly—help my great ignorance, illumine my darkness? I have asked a question” (Pogson, *Maurice Nicoll*, 70).