



## News from the SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION

### Get Your News from Heaven

In the spirit of a new year, we've launched a brand-new webcast series from the production team behind *Swedenborg & Life*.

*News from Heaven* is designed for people who want to better understand Swedenborg's thought in his own words. Each week, host Curtis Childs takes a brief section of one of Swedenborg's works and delves into the meaning behind it, highlighting key concepts and showing how even the most abstract ideas can be put to work in our daily lives.

In a special sneak-peek premiere on Christmas Eve, Curtis examined "[The Spiritual Wisdom of Angels](#)" from section 278 of Swedenborg's classic *Heaven and Hell*. The text—and the show—describes how allowing yourself to be led by the Lord can bring you to a state of inner peace.

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#### THANK YOU!

Thanks so much to everyone who supported us throughout the year—whether by joining as a member; giving in support of one of our programs; or just watching, reading, and commenting in one of our many forums.

If you're so inclined, it's not too late to get in on the giving action at [swedenborg.com/donate](http://swedenborg.com/donate). And if you want to know more about options for giving to the Foundation, please reach out to Tim Bilger, Director of Development, at 610-297-2107 or [tbilger@swedenborg.com](mailto:tbilger@swedenborg.com).

## Transcendents Web Series Launches

The Swedenborg Foundation is now hosting a brand-new web series on its YouTube channel: [Transcendents](#), a biweekly, interview-style video exploration of different approaches to faith.

Co-hosts Cory Bradford-Watts and Colin Amato were inspired to start the video project while in ministry training at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Motivated by the depth of religious backgrounds of others they crossed paths with at the school, they decided to turn on their cameras and start talking—talking to people with all different kinds of spiritual and life experiences. Now, a year later, they’re launching their first series of videos in partnership with us so others can witness the magic that happens when ideas of heart and mind are exchanged between diverse people in the midst of their personal evolutions.



## T R A N S C E N D I O T S

The first [Transcendents](#) episode aired Thursday, December 13, 2018. It featured [Rev. Dr. George F. Dole](#) and a discussion around science, spirituality, and his newest Swedenborg Foundation book [The Universe and I: Where Science & Spirituality Meet](#). New episodes followed every two weeks, covering everything from pop culture to what it’s like to be a minister.

To see any of the episodes from this series, go to [youtube.com/swedenborgfoundation](https://youtube.com/swedenborgfoundation), and hit the “subscribe” button to be notified when there are updates. •

### News from Heaven continued from the cover

Starting January 3, new episodes of the show were released at its regular time slot, Thursdays at 12:30 Eastern time.

To watch these or any of the hundreds of videos on our offTheLeftEye YouTube channel, go to [youtube.com/offthelefteye](https://youtube.com/offthelefteye). •

## New Release: Seven Days of Spiritual Evolution

We’re proud to announce that our newest publication, [Seven Days of Spiritual Evolution: The Genesis of Personal Transformation](#), is now available.

Starting from a place of both spiritual and scientific inquiry, E. Kent Rogers explores the Creation story as a path to our own spiritual rebirth. Using Swedenborg’s teachings as a foundation, he weaves in experience gained from his practice as a therapist, drawing insightful parallels between the different stages of our spiritual growth and the types of mental blocks that people can face on their journey of personal development.

For each “day,” Rogers describes the spiritual state we might find ourselves in, the challenges we face, and ways in which we can overcome those obstacles. He concludes each chapter with a series of exercises, a guided meditation, and a series of questions for discussion or contemplation. When these tools are taken in combination with the lessons throughout the chapters, the book offers workable methods for improving how we think and behave on a daily basis.

[Seven Days of Spiritual Evolution: The Genesis of Personal Transformation](#) is available now for \$15.95 in paperback, with e-book versions coming soon. If you’re interested in Bible interpretation, be sure to also check out E. Kent Rogers’s popular book [12 Miracles of Spiritual Growth: A Path of Healing from the Gospels](#).



You can order these books and many more Swedenborg-inspired titles from our online bookstore at [swedenborg.com/bookstore](https://swedenborg.com/bookstore) or by calling 610-430-3222 ext. 100. •

Seven Days of Spiritual Evolution: The Genesis of Personal Transformation  
E. KENT ROGERS  
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248 pages / \$15.95  
978-0-87785-703-7 / e-bk / \$7.99

## Staff Changes at the Swedenborg Foundation

This fall saw new arrivals, fond farewells, and a number of changes and shifts in responsibility to accommodate our growing and changing staff.



Gwen Williams

We were sad to say goodbye to **Brian Mann**, our membership and development coordinator, who has spent the past six years supporting the Foundation in innumerable ways. People who called in to our main office in West Chester looking for help will remember his patience and gracious spirit, as he went above and beyond to respond to questions and requests. At the end of 2018, he moved on to a new opportunity for a charitable organization in Delaware.

In November, we hired [Gwen Williams](#) for the role of development coordinator. She will be supporting our fundraising and membership operations, including working to respond to member and donor questions, managing our constituent database, and assisting with fundraising campaigns.

Gwen comes from a varied nonprofit background that includes art curation, financial support, and fundraising for organizations like the Welsh Valley Preservation Center, the Marion Stroud Fabric Workshop and Museum, and the Kula Kamala Foundation.

“It is with great excitement and joy that I begin my time here at the Swedenborg Foundation!” Gwen says. “I find a profound union of my personal interests in spiritual development and my professional skills in the role of development coordinator. I look forward to growing with you as a fellow learner and traveler.”

Meanwhile, people who call in to our business [office in West Chester](#) will hear a new voice on the phones: our administrative assistant **Regina Lee**, who has already begun helping callers with general questions and book orders.

### ONLINE TEAM CHANGES

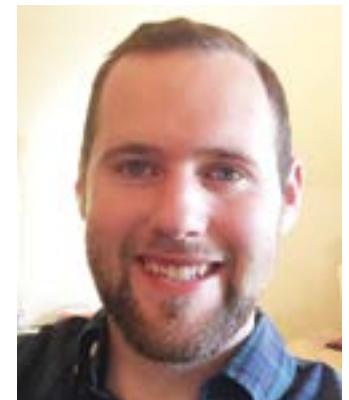
It’s been an amazing year for the offTheLeftEye YouTube channel. Early in 2018, we expanded into a new studio space—a move that included a

significant upgrade to our cameras and production equipment. Around the same time, we hired a new motion graphics designer, [Meng Zhang](#), to produce animated sequences for our weekly webcast *Swedenborg & Life*.

We’re very pleased to announce that as of the end of the year, our staff writer **Chelsea Odhner** took on the full-time role of production manager, managing show development and production for all of our video content.

In recognition of the increased staff responsibilities and the incredible work he’s done in developing the channel, **Curtis Childs**—familiar to many as the host of *Swedenborg & Life*—has been promoted to director of offTheLeftEye.

In addition to the offTheLeftEye YouTube channel, we get hundreds of comments and queries across all of our social media channels as well as private messages and e-mails. Responding to all of these questions is a team of moderators who not only help people navigate Swedenborg’s theology and work to diffuse negativity before it takes hold, but provide emotional support to people who are in need. In order to better support this growing online community, **Chris Dunn** has been hired for the newly created position of community manager.



Chris Dunn

If you follow us on the offTheLeftEye Facebook page, the Swedenborg Foundation Facebook page, the Watching & Reading Swedenborg Facebook discussion group, the Swedenborg Foundation Twitter account, or any of our other social media outlets, you know that keeping up with that content is a full-time job. In recognition of the hard work she already does in ensuring that all of our online content runs smoothly (not to mention keeping up the website, coordinating our mass e-mails, and making sure that everything links to each other), **Alexia Cole** has been promoted to online media manager.

And tying all of our efforts together, **Amy Acquarola** has been instrumental in marketing the wide array of products, events, and activities that we’ve been engaged in over the years. In recognition of her increased role in forming our marketing strategy, Amy has been promoted to marketing manager.

Many thanks to everyone on [staff](#) whose hard work and dedication have enabled us to come this far and aim even higher! •

## In Memory and In Honor

Over the past months we have received donations either in memory of or in honor of particular individuals, and the individuals in whose names the donations were given are listed below, in alphabetical order. Please note that each of the names is listed exactly as it was given to us and so may be a shortened or alternative version of the person's legal name. •

Robert & Marilyn Asplundh	Goldie Martin Mary Jane Mom	John R. Seekamp Alice B. Skinner
Helen Judith Bennett	Susan Nelsen	John & Helen Smailer
Virginia Branston	Gene & Collene Norwood	Carey N. Smith
Anthony Chapa	Karl Oldenburg	Henry Smith
Louis & Anita Dole	Nancy Person	Kathleen Sonnenberg
Alan & Teal Elder	Lisa Reddekopp	Emanuel Swedenborg
Bruce E. Elder	Chester J. Robertson	Susan Keene
Patricia Ann Frazier	Don Rose	Timberlake
Neil Hanrehan	Jonathan Rose	Rowland & Chara Trimble
Dorothea Harvey	Evie Rosenberg	Sarah van Laer
Marie Antoinette Hunter	Anton F. Ruch	Pelagia Volante
James F. Jungé	Zechariah Abraham	Nadia Williams
Mark Jungé	Scholes	Louise & Bill Woofenden
Bev Lang	Lydia Cutler Schrader & Dorothy Randall Cutler	Ruth E. Zuber
Howard Leach		
Robert D. Leas		
Aletha Loving		

## WE CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH!

Thanks to the remarkable generosity of our donors, both large and small, we reached a major milestone in fundraising in 2018—more than one million dollars raised throughout the year! We'd like to extend our special thanks to organizations like the Asplundh Foundation and the Iungerich Publication Fund of the [Swedenborgian Church of North America](#), as well as to some very generous donors. We're looking forward to putting all of these gifts to work in 2019 and beyond! •

## Swedenborg & Life Recap: How to Test a Spiritual Idea

By Josh Cole, Swedenborg.com Contributor

The following is a recap of a recent episode of our weekly webcast *Swedenborg & Life*. To watch this episode (or any other!), go to [youtube.com/offthellefteye](https://youtube.com/offthellefteye). You can also read recaps of other recent episodes at [swedenborg.com](https://swedenborg.com).

Studying spiritual things can be frustrating, because it seems like there's no way to determine what is true. How can you use the scientific method when you can't observe the afterlife? Hosts Curtis Childs and Jonathan Rose show us how to weigh the truth of a spiritual idea with a “mental microscope.”



First, let's take a look at the parts of a regular microscope. There's a tube connecting two lenses—the [objective lens](#) and the eyepiece lens—and there's a stage upon which you put the object you're observing. The objective lens is positioned close to the object, and the eyepiece lens is used to adjust the focus so you can better see the object on the stage.

What would be the spiritual counterpart to the microscope's objective lens, you ask? Well, it's all about love: Swedenborg tells us that the divine design of the universe is leading us toward a loving state, so anything that takes us away from love must not be true. Facts can be twisted to mislead people, but love can't be denied.

As for what it takes to bring something into focus (corresponding to the eyepiece lens), [we need to consider a spiritual idea's application](#). Historically, every scientific breakthrough has led to new inventions that help people. So, too, should a spiritual concept be something that is not only practical but also beneficial.

God created the universe so that usefulness could exist. ([Secrets of Heaven](#) §2916:3, 4)





And to determine if a given spiritual idea comes from love and can be useful, [we need to use rationality](#). This is the “tube” of our spiritual microscope, as it gives us the distance we need to get a good

perspective. So putting ideas on the “stage” of the microscope allows us to take a careful look at them.

No matter where we’re born or what traditions we’re born into, [the Lord makes sure that everyone has access to spiritual wisdom](#). But we’re also meant to put the things we’re taught under our spiritual microscope and see whether they square with both love and usefulness.

When people who are moved by truth for the sake of truth reach adulthood and can see things with their own understanding, they do not simply rest in the theological tenets of their church but **check them carefully against the Word** to see whether they are true. ([White Horse](#) §8)

[How do we check for this truth?](#) By approaching an idea not only from a perspective of higher love but also in such a way that we see how it affects others and the world—using both the love (objective) and application (eyepiece) lenses.



Does the idea under examination help you alone, or does it help others? Does it make you a more compassionate person? [Where does love come into it?](#)

Show writer [Chelsea Odhner joins us for “Emanuel’s Smorgasbord”](#)—a cooking show about how we refine our understanding of truth. Chelsea and Curtis use bread as an illustration of why Swedenborg says we shouldn’t be convinced of a truth so quickly: if the truth is revealed in some miraculous way and we’re instantly convinced of it, then there’s no reason to think about it further, and our minds get hard and crusty. But if we start with raw

flour (truth that hasn’t been processed yet) and then add water (reasons to believe an idea) and yeast (reasons to doubt an idea), that leads to a process of kneading (mulling over what’s true and what isn’t). With actual bread, the kneading process creates strands of gluten that hold the bread together as the yeast eats the sugars and releases carbon dioxide, which causes the dough to rise. This corresponds to a process of absorbing truth into ourselves and truly understanding every aspect of it. Bread made in this way is soft and absorbent enough to soak up oil—just as a person who has taken the time to process truth can soak up love.



This brings us back to the “tube” of our spiritual microscope: the power of positive rationality. Rationality is the process by which we knead the bread of truth, thinking things over. But that doesn’t mean that we decide what the truth is by thinking about it: instead, we have to receive that truth from divinity—in other words, from love itself and from a loving perspective on the world.

So it’s important not to reject a spiritual concept without having tried to find the love in it. [The path to truth is open-mindedness, even to world-views that are hard to swallow at first.](#)

[Hopefully, this spiritual microscope helps you understand and test spiritual claims. To use it:](#)

1. Take a spiritual idea from anywhere and put it on your stage. Stay open-minded!
2. Then, look through the love lens. Does the idea lead toward good?
3. Next, think it through using your rationality. Does the idea make sense? Is it logically consistent with the world you understand?
4. Finally, consider the applications. How will the idea work in life?

Equipped with answers to these questions, you’ll be just a little closer to real spiritual truth. •

## VIEWER COMMENTS

I actually did something similar about a year ago when trying to evaluate the beliefs I grew up with and it really opened my eyes up, and this show helped me to realise that I am on the right track. Instead of completely dismissing God and religion altogether (which I was very close to doing) I surrendered everything to God and prayed that he would lead me to the truth. About a week later I stumbled upon *Heaven and Hell* in a library and have never looked back. From there I started to question all the beliefs I grew up with that never felt right or made sense to me. Thank you all so much.

—Daffodil

FANTASTIC! What a great metaphor. Thinking about how we should look at everything through love, application, and rationality really illuminates Swedenborg's statement that where love is primary, doctrinal differences do not divide. Are these ideas leading to love? Are they bringing about good work in the world? Then no need to get upset! The bread illustration was also great, especially sopping up the oil (love).

—Nadine



## NCE Minute: The Three Pillars of Heaven: Understanding the Themes of *The Shorter Works of 1763*

The year 2019 will see the publication of the New Century Edition's second deluxe compendium of Swedenborg's shorter works. The first such volume was *The Shorter Works of 1758*; the forthcoming volume will contain the five short works Swedenborg originally published in 1763: [\*The Lord\*](#), [\*Sacred Scripture\*](#), [\*Life, Faith\*](#), and [\*Supplements\*](#), complete with preface, introduction, annotations, and indexes.

The first four of these books are concerned with vital topics, as Swedenborg's later summary of them in *Revelation Unveiled* shows:

There are four sets of teachings that are now in print—one on the Lord, the second on Sacred Scripture, the third on living by the commandments of the Decalogue, and the fourth on faith—which may establish the following: that the Word has now been opened and that it bears witness to the fact that the Lord alone is God of heaven and earth, that we are to live by his commandments, and that the faith of the present day needs to be dismissed. (*Revelation Unveiled* §668)

Why did Swedenborg choose to focus on these specific subjects? We can begin to understand the reason by looking at another passage, [\*Divine Providence\*](#) §259:3, which identifies “three essential principles of the church” as “belief in the divine nature of the Lord, belief in the holiness of the Word, and the [way of] life that we call ‘charity.’” So the Lord, Sacred Scripture, and the caring life are not just three topics chosen at random from the bulging warehouse of Christian theology; they are its “three essential principles.”

Then what about *Faith*, the last of the first four of our titles? In a sense, it's a negative version of the same argument that Swedenborg pursues in his book about life. We might even refer to the two books together as *Life/Faith*. Most Protestant doctrine holds that all we have to do to win an eternal life in heaven is to have faith. But Swedenborg insists that it's not enough to just believe, even if what we believe is true—even if it is the greatest of all truths. Our faith must be accompanied by the performance of

caring acts: “Believing in the Lord is not simply *thinking that he exists* but is also *doing what he says*” (*Life* §48, emphasis added). If we do not practice good, then “the evil we practice destroys the truth we believe” (*Life* §44). What Swedenborg has done with *Life* and *Faith* is like first writing a book about how to plant and care for a tree, and then writing a book about how to avoid falling into the errors tree-planters commonly make. His message is summed up in the first sentence of the closing chapter of *Faith*:

“

Taken together, these supplements are like a rousing and colorful scherzo played by a great violinist as an encore to a weighty and dramatic concerto in four movements.

”

given Swedenborg’s usual focus on inner meaning, that the biblical passages cited so exhaustively in these titles are meant to be understood literally. Even in *Sacred Scripture*, where his intent is to demonstrate the presence and use of spiritual meaning in the Bible, chapters 3–6 (§§27–69) insist on the fundamental importance of the literal meaning.

These four works are clearly addressed to readers who take the Bible seriously and who understand it literally. So despite the topical order in which they are commonly listed, we might well read *Sacred Scripture* first and regard *The Lord* and *Life* as carrying out the policy that it advocates—drawing the church’s teachings from the literal meaning of the Word (*Sacred Scripture* §53). And if you look back to the passage from *Revelation Unveiled* quoted previously, you’ll see that Swedenborg himself does that very thing: he starts his description of the themes of these works by saying, “The Word has now been opened and . . . bears witness to the fact that . . .”

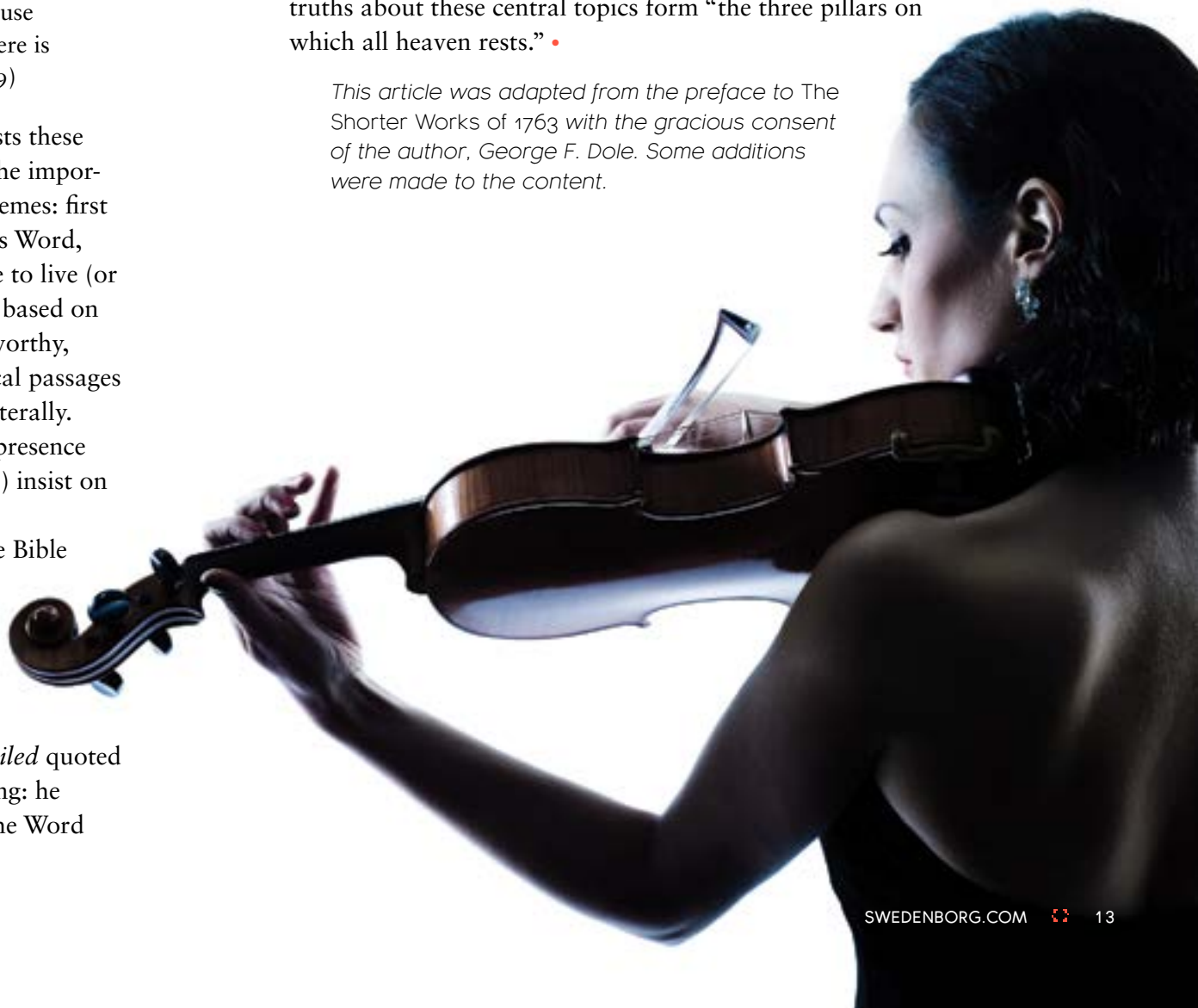
A faith divorced from caring is no faith at all, because caring is the life of faith, its soul, its essence; and where there is no faith because there is no caring, there is no church. (*Faith* §69)

Swedenborg always lists these four books in order of the importance of their various themes: first the Lord, then the Lord’s Word, and then the way we are to live (or not to live). All four are based on Scripture, but it is noteworthy,

What about the fifth and final book in *The Shorter Works of 1763*? It consists of two supplements to works from 1758: one that continues *Last Judgment* and another that continues *Heaven and Hell*. Taken together, these supplements are like a rousing and colorful scherzo played by a great violinist as an encore to a weighty and dramatic concerto in four movements. Yet the great themes of *The Lord*, *Sacred Scripture*, and *Life/Faith* are heard repeatedly in this encore. In *Supplements* §88, for example, Swedenborg criticizes a sect in the spiritual world for three errors that fall into now-familiar categories: holding a heretical view of the Lord, despising Sacred Scripture, and hating a life built on caring.

Truly, as Swedenborg says in that *Supplements* passage, the truths about these central topics form “the three pillars on which all heaven rests.” •

*This article was adapted from the preface to The Shorter Works of 1763 with the gracious consent of the author, George F. Dole. Some additions were made to the content.*





# From Our Blog: Where Does Swedenborg Fit in Today's Conversations about the Bible?

By James F. Lawrence

The Christian Bible remains to this day the most culturally influential book in the history of the world. Representing one-third of the earth's 7.7 billion people, Christianity is both the largest and, on a worldwide basis, the fastest-growing faith tradition. By far, the Judeo-Christian scriptures exist in more translations, editions, and printings, as well as in more people's upbringing and active spiritual imagination, than has any other text in the history of humanity. Whatever else can be said about the large landscape of interpretation of Judeo-Christian scriptures, it is certainly true that the Bible continues to function as a "tent of meeting": a gathering place where the large questions about meaning and purpose can be discussed.

A fascinating feature of the worldwide Bible conversation today is that there are comparatively more interpretive theories in play about the Christian Bible than there are for all other sacred text traditions. This is due in large part to the sheer size of Christianity, with its vast number of denominations. Ideas about how to read or interpret the Bible enjoy a riveting history reaching back to the early church, one that yet also continues to flourish in our own time. Should we take the Bible literally? Should we take it figuratively? Should we take it with a grain of salt, since it was written so long ago? And where does Swedenborg's distinctive approach to sacred scripture fit into this complex picture? Among those continuing to use the Bible proactively for spiritual living, three primary schools of interpretation dominate the scene today.

## ***Literalism***

First, there are those who interpret the Bible literally—that is, as the inerrant Word of God in its literal sense. Comprised mostly of evangelicals and fundamentalists, this group claims God, not humans, as the author of scripture. The people who scribed the books of the Bible were but physical agents for God's words to us. Furthermore, what God is saying in scripture is clearly given. The text delivers its full message in its plain words. Despite

the disparagement this approach has taken for some time now, this group remains surprisingly large and fairly constant in its numbers.

## ***Historical Criticism***

A second significant group of Christians interprets the Bible through careful linguistic and historical study. That is, they believe the Bible was written by human authors who were bound by their own special circumstances. God may have inspired these writers in an extraordinary way, but the text contains flaws and peculiarities that can be attributed to those Jews and Christians who wrote so long ago in a very different world. This second group holds that in order to understand the Bible's original meaning, it needs to be interpreted through close examination of its original languages and through historical analysis of the life and times of those who wrote the texts. What did the inspired text mean in its original context? Once this meaning has been to some extent recovered, we can then extrapolate further meanings that are pertinent to our own context. This approach began in Swedenborg's own time period and then expanded quite dynamically in the nineteenth century. It peaked among believing practitioners around 1990 and has waned some since then.

## ***Reader-Centered***

A third and quickly growing group believes that what the reader brings to the biblical encounter provides the best path of interpretation. Located especially in North America and Western Europe, a broad collective of scholars and clergy coming from most liberal mainline and some Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions regards the meaning of the text as living and in an ever-new open moment. Though there may be varying degrees of interest in what the author meant, how the reader reads the text is what is most important. These "reader-centered" interpretations employ numerous literary and ideological techniques for discovering how the text can speak anew in the contemporary moment in which it is read. Explorations of scripture as literature, as history with spiritual lessons, and as narrative stories that are speaking to us today are all valid methods of interpretation. This approach puts forth the possibility that the living text can speak *against* the original viewpoints of those who wrote it—you can "preach against the text." But even such a contrarian strategy as this one affirms the



Bible as the “tent of meeting,” where we continue our journey in the wilderness seeking wisdom and understanding. For group three, then, there isn’t any one single meaning of a text, but many possible meanings that might bring different sorts of folks in different sorts of settings closer to God and more meaningfully onto their spiritual path.

### *Where Is Swedenborg’s Way?*

Swedenborg fits snugly in none of these groups, though he does affirm some aspects of all three. He stands with the literalists in the radical position that God is the author of scripture in the sense that God worked through the human agents of the original texts in ways of which they were unaware. Swedenborg stands with group two in asserting that knowledge of the original languages can be very important for plumbing the full depths of the divine utterance in the text. He especially valued knowledge of Hebrew. And Swedenborg stands with group three in affirming that many simultaneously true meanings are possible—that the same passage can be understood as saying true things to different kinds of questions at once.

Swedenborg’s way, however, rests on a bold revelation about the Bible that none of the other groups share—namely, that sacred scripture is divinely designed with inner rooms, inner spaces, and inner meanings within the literal words and sentences. In fact, far from being a text tied to the historically bound thoughts of its authors, or fixed to the plain meaning of its literal sense, or limited by the ideas and spirituality of the creative contemporary reader, every verse of scripture in these inner rooms shares knowledge and information about God’s self and intimate relationship with humanity, about the spiritual history of humanity, and about the reader’s personal soul journey. No matter what the first arc of a text’s inner sense is about, each person’s genuine encounter with the Word evolves as the mind evolves spiritually through regeneration.

In heaven and in the world we find sequential arrangement and simultaneous arrangement. In sequential arrangement, one thing replaces and follows another, from the highest to the lowest. In simultaneous arrangement, though, one thing adjoins another, from the innermost to the outermost. The sequential arrangement is like a column with steps from top to bottom, while the simultaneous arrangement is like a composite object that forms a series of concentric circles [that radiate]

from its center to its outer surfaces. . . .

Now for the Word. What is heavenly, what is spiritual, and what is earthly emanate from the Lord sequentially, and they exist on the last level in a simultaneous arrangement. This means that now the heavenly and spiritual meanings of the Word are together within its earthly meaning. Once this is grasped, we can see how the earthly meaning of the Word, which is its literal meaning, is the foundation, container, and support of its spiritual and heavenly meanings, and how divine goodness and divine truth are present in their fullness, holiness, and power in the literal meaning of the Word. (*Sacred Scripture* §38)

The Bible continues to function as a “tent of meeting”: a gathering place where the large questions about meaning and purpose can be discussed.

Swedenborg’s way of reading the Bible wasn’t entirely new. He can be grouped loosely with an allegorical tradition that once flourished openly—and with support from orthodoxy—up until the Renaissance and Reformation, at which point it went underground into Christian kabbalist and Masonic movements. Many leading biblical interpreters explored inner levels of meaning within the literal text of the Bible. Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Jerome, the Venerable Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Erasmus, to name a few, believed that the Bible’s plain words contain hidden inner levels—levels that speak to the work of Jesus Christ, the moral and spiritual life of Christian faith, and the ultimate destiny of creation. But by the time Swedenborg produced his extraordinary exposition of [the inner meaning of scripture](#), that “inner sense tradition” had largely disappeared. Since Swedenborg’s day, it still has never made any kind of serious comeback and remains lost as an interpretation practice.

### *The Correspondences of Scripture*

As an accomplished explorer of the “Book of Nature,” Swedenborg loved instruments that extended sight. Both the telescope and microscope were in

beginning but enthralling phases of development during his early career, and Swedenborg himself even learned to grind lenses for making superior microscopes. When he began to experience a state of consciousness that put him, as he interpreted it, in a spiritual world that was as normal and stable as the physical world, he took his telescope and microscope with him.

Swedenborg reported being shown in the spiritual world how much of the Bible was written with inner levels of meaning through a dynamic not hitherto understood very well, which is that the spiritual and natural worlds are connected by “correspondences,” and that the Bible’s literal (or natural) text was but an outer manifestation of a vast spiritual realm that could be revealed if you learned how to read this correspondential language.

The Word was written in such a way that everything in it, down to the smallest particular, corresponds to something in heaven. As a consequence the Word has divine force. It unites heaven with earth, because when it is read on earth, angels in heaven feel moved at the holy content of the inner meaning. The correspondence of everything in the Word is what accomplishes this. ([Secrets of Heaven](#) §8615:3)

Just as is the case with the immense solar system or with the interior spaces of molecular life, however, you cannot see correspondential levels with the naked eye. You need special lenses. You need, in fact, a [spiritual microscope](#) and a spiritual telescope.

Swedenborg ground a spiritual microscope that he placed upon the text. Suddenly, a horse wasn’t just a powerful and beautiful animal capable of traveling great distances faster than any other beast; a horse was also the power of understanding by which one could traverse a measureless landscape of meaning.



A “day” in the creation story wasn’t a literal twenty-four-hour period of time, but was one of “so many consecutive stages in a person’s regeneration” ([Secrets of Heaven](#) §6). For eight years, Swedenborg placed a microscopic lens of correspondence upon Genesis and Exodus and revealed a universe of spiritual thought addressing all the great questions of why we are here, who God is, where humanity has been on its long journey, where God wants us to head, and how to live so that we can get there.

Swedenborg also found that the lens of correspondences could be ground so that it revealed telescopic vistas. The spiritual telescope could take in at once the whole text from Abraham and Sarah to the Holy City and see a quaternity of interlocking and mutually enriching stories in its intergalactic structure: the literal story of a specific historic people within which are stories of the Messiah, of the human race, and of the individual human soul. For twenty-seven years, Swedenborg worked to get a better grasp of all the spiritual understandings that can be interpreted from the sacred texts, and the Swedenborgian tradition has shaped a long history of working with biblical spirituality as a primary practice of the faith.

In recent years, with the sharp rise in spiritual practices, a renewed effort to make [Swedenborg’s approach to Bible study](#) accessible has led to helpful works such as Bruce Henderson’s [A New Key to the Bible: Unlock Its Inner Meaning and Open the Door to Your Spirit](#). People looking for a new way to make the Bible come alive for them may find such a work to be a real revelation in describing how closely aligned their inner life is with the inner meaning of that old ancient tome that is still the world’s most studied book. •

*This article is an abridged version of the one originally published on our website. To read the original or any other of our blog posts, go to [swedenborg.com/blog](http://swedenborg.com/blog).*

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