

# E-READ

## The General Conference of the New Church **Articles and Letters**

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## **Law, Prophets, and Psalms Part Four (1)** *by John Elliott*

**“Everyone in my own country is eagerly awaiting my return, .... If people persecute me in other lands, that does me no harm.”**

At the end of the third article under the above title I promised, in response to a request from an E-Reader, to focus in the present article on **Arcana Coelestia** (AC), the long work written and published by Emanuel Swedenborg which I have been referring to and quoting from. I’ve been asked to do this in the hope that because of my involvement over many years in the production of a new Latin edition of AC, and a new translation into English, I may have some interesting observations to make. But before I attempt to satisfy this hope, let me speak about Swedenborg’s call to write that very long work, and indeed the shorter ones too which he subsequently penned and sent out into

the world.

Readers may remember that my theme in the third article I wrote had to do mainly with the Old-Testament prophets. And perhaps readers also remember that I quoted, from SOED (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary), the following statement regarding a prophet:

**One who speaks for God or for any deity, as the inspired revealer or interpreter of his will; loosely, one who claims to have this function; an inspired or quasi-inspired teacher.**

A little further on from this quotation from SOED I emphasised that truly-inspired prophets were people who had been called or chosen to 'speak for God'. He called them, and they responded to His call. But the circumstances and the manner in which they received their call varied from person to person. Samuel, for example, received his call in the quiet hours of the night, sometime during his boyhood years when he was living and serving in and around the Tabernacle at Shiloh. But Isaiah's happened in adult life and during the daytime, on a certain occasion in Jerusalem when he was in Solomon's temple while sacrificial worship was taking place. With his ears, Samuel heard the Lord calling out to him and subsequently speaking to him, whereas Isaiah, with his eyes and in a vision, beheld Him 'sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.'

It was during two years he was away from his home in Stockholm that Emanuel Swedenborg received his call 'to speak for God'. In July 1743, when he was 55 years old, he travelled to Holland, to see through the press his **Regnum Animale**, a work which until quite recently has been known in the English translation of it as **The Animal Kingdom** but which nowadays bears the more satisfactory title **The Soul's Domain**. Biographies - such as **The Swedenborg Epic** by Cyriel Odhner Sigstedt, first published in 1952, and **Swedenborg's Secret** by Lars Bergqvist, in 2005 - deal fully with the circumstances and nature of his call from the Lord Jesus Christ during those two years, and I leave E-Readers to consult these printed books or 'go on the net' for more about that deeply personal, life-changing experience of Emanuel Swedenborg. However I do need to say that by the time he had left Holland, travelled to London, and then arrived back home in Stockholm in the summer of 1745 he had abandoned his study of and writing about scientific, anatomical, philosophical, and other subjects. Indeed he had left Holland, and his printers and publishers in Amsterdam, without ever completing the task he had gone there to perform. We could say that, as a result of his call by the Lord, his mind was no longer focused on the kingdom or domain of the soul but on the Kingdom of God.

But let me at this point quote from a letter Swedenborg wrote - in August 1769, when he was once again in London - to an Anglican clergyman he was already in contact with, named Thomas Hartley. Swedenborg's letter, dated 5 August, was in almost immediate response to one Hartley had written to him only three days earlier, in which he - Hartley - expresses concern about the unfavourable, if not hostile, criticisms his Swedish friend was receiving from certain quarters in Europe.

But as we can see in the quotation from the letter immediately below, Swedenborg replies that when compared with the nature of his call from the Lord, and the task he has been performing for Him ever since, such criticisms cease to be of any importance:

**Everyone in my own country is eagerly awaiting my return, .... If people persecute me in other lands, that does me no harm. But considerations such as these I take**

to be of little importance, relatively speaking, for what exceeds them in importance is the fact that I have been called by the Lord Himself to a sacred duty. Of His great goodness He presented Himself in Person to me His servant before my very eyes, in the year 1743, and at that time He opened my sight for me to see into the spiritual world and has allowed me to converse with spirits and angels, which has continued until this day. From that time I began to publish in print the various arcana that I have seen and that have been revealed to me, such as those concerning heaven and hell, people's state after death, true Divine worship, the spiritual sense of the Word, besides other most valuable matters that contribute to salvation and wisdom. I have frequently journeyed from my own country to foreign parts, for no other reason than a desire to be of service and to disclose the arcana that have been entrusted to me. Moreover I have wealth in sufficient quantity, and I neither seek nor desire more.

What Swedenborg said about himself in this letter to Hartley is in substance very similar to what he stated in **True Christian Religion** (TCR) published in 1771, not long before he left this world. Early on in paragraph 779 of that work he described himself as someone 'who can not only receive intellectually the teachings of [the new] church, but also publish them in print.' And in his final sentence of that paragraph he declared:

**I assert that from the first day of my calling I have not received any instruction concerning the teachings of that church from any angel, but only from the Lord, while I was reading the Word.**

In the letter to Hartley Swedenborg referred to himself as a *servant*, and when TCR appeared in print two years later the title page included words which in English mean *by Emanuel Swedenborg, servant of the Lord Jesus Christ*. There was surely no more appropriate term he could have used than *servant*. After all, He who is our Lord and Master has described Himself as one who came not to be served but to serve; and Christ-like people, in whatever kind of profession or type of employment may be theirs, are His servants too.

Of course other names are used in reference to what Emanuel Swedenborg became after his spiritual eyes had been opened and he began to write books about the Lord, His Word, Christian belief and way of life, and other theological and religious subjects. We read or hear of his being a theologian, philosopher, mystic, visionary, and so on; and very recently I was made aware of his being called a prophet when I noticed the title of a book published in May 2012 - **The Swedish Prophet**. (This book is in fact a translation of *El profeta del norte* by Jose Antonio Anton Pacheto, a Spanish academic and author.) But whatever any inspired prophets may be called they are all servants of the One who called them to 'a sacred duty'?

To judge from what Swedenborg said about himself in his letter to Hartley, and also in TCR, there were two distinct functions he performed as the Lord's servant. The first of these lay in reporting to people on earth things he had seen and heard in the spiritual world after his spiritual eyes and ears had been opened. Biblical prophets, including the author of the Book of Revelation, were no less the Lord's servants who reported what they saw and heard, and in that respect Swedenborg too may be thought of as a prophet. But his second function was to read the Word and in doing so to perceive in his intellect or power of understanding its inner levels of meaning. In this respect he differed from the biblical prophets. They were told exactly what to say and to do. The very words they were to utter and very actions to perform were dictated to them, and we today see those words and actions in the literal sense or meaning of Sacred Scripture. Swedenborg saw the same as we do, but with a mind enlightened by the Lord he was led to behold the spiritual sense or meaning within the literal and write about it. Which brings me to my promise to speak about the Latin text and English translation of **Arcana Coelestia** (AC).

To be continued in Part Four (2) coming next week...