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Scope

“Global Perspectives on Japan” focuses on developing a global perspective on the study of Japan and Asia. The journal promotes innovative, interdisciplinary, inter-regional and transnational approaches to Japanese Studies.

The journal aims to be a venue for scholarship in E.M.E.A. region with a special focus on Turkey and neighboring regions. It especially encourages scholars from the Middle East, Balkans, Central Asia and the Mediterranean but also welcomes scholars from other parts of the world.

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D.T. Suzuki on Swedenborg: An Introduction

Federica Sgarbi*

Doshisha University, Ritsumeikan University

Introduction

D.T. Suzuki was a great admirer of Swedenborg's theological thought and worked tirelessly to propagate its values in his own country, at the time suffering from a severe spiritual crisis. Such a dissemination effort was performed both through the translation into Japanese of several of Swedenborg's key mystical works, and through two of his writings aimed at outlining the life of the Swedish author, who was almost unknown in Japan at the beginning of the 20th century: *Swedenborg* (『スエデンボルグ』, 1913) and *Swedenborg (his view of Heaven and the "Other-Power")* (『スエデンボルグ (その天界と他力観)』, 1924).

Suzuki, however, emphasized the importance of Swedenborg's entire work, not only the theological one, defining him as "a scientific and religious genius". The value of the Swedish scholar's scientific writings and discoveries, which characterized the first half of his life, was indeed recognized officially; Swedenborg was a member of the Paris Academy of Sciences, as well as of that of St. Petersburg. His career as a scholar and inventor was dazzling, leading him to work also in the service of the Swedish crown.

Nevertheless, he suddenly abandoned this career following a profound spiritual crisis that led him to conduct a secluded life devoted solely to his mystical writings.

* Federica Sgarbi teaches Asian philosophy and Western philosophy at Dōshisha University and is a visiting researcher in philosophy at Ritsumeikan University (Japan).

Although the phases of Swedenborg's life may appear quite different, they were linked by a specific and enduring research topic.

Swedenborg's Education

Born Swedberg -his surname was later changed- in 1688 in Stockholm, he was the third son of the influential bishop of Skara, Jesper Swedberg (1653-1735). In 1699, he joined the University of Uppsala, where he completed his studies in philosophy in 1709.¹

As was customary for the young offspring of the wealthy families of his time, he went abroad to widen his acquired knowledge. He first travelled to England, a recognized center of culture and a great maritime power, where he studied the observation techniques of the royal astronomer John Flamsteed (1646-1719), mingling with the intellectual circles of luminaries such as Isaac Newton (1643-1727) and Edmund Halley (1656-1742). He also devoted himself to geology, botany, zoology and mechanical sciences, cultivating them later in Amsterdam and Paris.

Upon his return to Sweden, more than five years later, he was hired as an assistant to the Swedish inventor Christopher Polhem (1661-1751); such a position earned him an official presentation to the court. Impressed by the young scientist's intellect, the Swedish king Charles XII (1682-1718) had him employed as an assessor at the Bureau of Mines. This assignment was significant and prestigious in consideration of the vital role played by mineral resources in the Swedish economy, and provided the scientist with countless opportunities for scientific research, which he exploited thoroughly. After the death of Charles XII in 1718, his sister Ulrika Eleonora (1688-1741) ascended to the throne. She ennobled the Swedberg family, changing their name to Swedenborg in 1719; consequently, the young scientist obtained the right to vote in The House of Nobility, which he exercised for most of his life. In 1723, Swedenborg obtained further positions in the Bureau of Mines, which he held until 1747, with some prolonged leave for study abroad.

1 Jun Honna, "Japan and the Responsibility to Protect: Coping with Human Security Diplomacy," *The Pacific Review* 25, no. 1 (2012): 109.

A Scientific Approach to Body and Soul

In the years immediately following his return to Sweden, Swedenborg channeled most of his intellectual energy into scientific and technical research. In 1716, he published –unusually in Swedish– the first issue of a scientific journal titled *Daedalus Hyperboreus*. Although the journal was intended to highlight Polhem’s achievements, it also included the publication of several of Swedenborg’s projects and inventions. Subsequently, he started writing more speculative books on chemistry and physics, and the first work on algebra in the Swedish language.

Swedenborg’s first major publication was *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia* (Philosophical and Metallurgical Works), printed in three folio volumes in 1734. The second and third volumes concerned iron, copper and brass processing and stood out for their technical information on metallurgy. The first volume entitled *Principia Rerum Naturalium* (Basic Principles of Nature) laid the philosophical groundwork for Swedenborg’s subsequent investigation into the nature of the soul. *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia* was written in Latin and published abroad, with the intention to gain international dissemination. Between 1720 and 1730, Swedenborg distinguished himself among Sweden’s most highly regarded scientists, becoming a member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences.²

In the late 1730s, his scientific interests turned towards human physiology, focusing on questions about speculative psychology. The two volumes of *Oeconomie Regni Animalis* (The Economy of the Animal Kingdom) were published respectively in 1740 and 1741. The first focused on the heart and blood; the second dealt with the brain, the nervous system, and the soul with the underlying intent of identifying a connection between the spiritual and physical world. The text, based on the works of contemporary scientists and philosophers, maintained the existence of a spiritual fluid, present in all living creatures, fed by a divine source.

Subsequently, Swedenborg began to work on *Regnum Animalis Anatomice, Physice Et Philosophice Perlustratum, Nunc Primum* (The Animal Kingdom Inspected Anatomically, Physically and Philosophically for the First Time) which dealt, in greater depth, with anatomy.

² Wilkinson 1996, 59-60.

Other writings were barely drafted when interrupted by a sudden and profound change in the scientist's life.

A Mystical Approach to the Body and Soul

In his diaries, Swedenborg claimed to have had mystical experiences in the form of visions as a child. Unfortunately, there is little information about his childhood; his father's voluminous memoirs mention him once only to note his birth and the meaning of his name: Emanuel, "God with us". However, they provide a clear idea of the bishop's strong personality, solid religious choices and the mysticism of his beliefs and mental constructs, which enriched objects and even everyday events with an otherworldly meaning. It was precisely following the death of his father (1743) that Swedenborg's spiritual crisis began.³

During 1743 and throughout 1744, he underwent profound mystical experiences, recorded in his diary. Initially, many of them revolved around a sense of spiritual unworthiness and the need of purifying from sin. The first -a vision- happened in April 1745, near Easter, in a state of full vigil; from that point onward, Swedenborg began to report experiences of contact with the spiritual world regularly.

Following this event, he began to write an exploration of the Bible, reinterpreted in the light of the new understanding gained during his visionary episodes.

The spiritual crisis and repeated mystical experiences led Swedenborg to resign as a public official and devote himself exclusively to theological writing. His interest in the connection between the spiritual and physical world continued, as did his research on the subject; however. The scientific approach of his investigations was replaced by a mystical one.

Swedenborg's first theological work was *Arcana Coelestia Quae in Scriptura Sacra, seu Verbo Domini Sunt, Detecta* (Revelation of the Celestial Mysteries Contained in the Word of the Lord, Starting from the Book of Genesis), a detailed, verse by verse, analysis of the inner meaning of the Bible, beginning with Genesis and then moving through Exodus.

3 White 1878, 46

The premise of Swedenborg's study was the symbolic code of the Old Testament, which could be understood only through an interpretation of the literal text.

*From the mere letter of the Word of the Old Testament no one would ever discern the fact that this part of the Word contains deep secrets of heaven [...]. Yet the truth is that everywhere in that Word there are internal things which never appear at all in the external things except a very few which the Lord revealed and explained to the Apostles [...].*⁴

Interspersed between the commentary chapters were the presentations of principles that would become critical aspects of Swedenborg's theology. The most important were the 'correspondences' between the physical and the spiritual world and between the soul and body.

Swedenborg published *Arcana Coelestia* in 1749, except for the eighth and final volume, published in 1756. He chose to publish the book in London to avoid Sweden's strict anti-heresy laws and because of the English city's open and lively intellectual climate, essential for diffusing an entirely new approach to reading the Scripture.

Although Swedenborg initially intended to apply this exegesis to the entire Bible, that endeavor was never completed. In fact, in 1758, he returned to London with new titles to publish: *De Coelo et Eius Mirabilibus et de inferno, ex Auditibus et Visis* (Heaven and its Wonders and Hell: According to What has been Heard and Seen), describing the afterlife and the life of its inhabitants; *De Equo albo de quo in Apocalypsi* (The White Horse Mentioned in the Book of Revelation), about the inner meaning of the Bible; *De Telluribus in Mundo Nostro Solari, Quae Vocantur Planetae, et de Telluribus in Coelo Astrifero, deque Illarum Incolis, Tum de Spiritibus et Angelis Ibi; Ex Auditibus et Visis* (The Lands in the Starry Sky, their Inhabitants, their Spirits and Angels, According to What has been Heard and Seen), dedicated to the forms of life on other planets; *De Ultimo Judicio* (The Last Judgment); and *De Nova Hierosolyma et eius doctrina coelesti* (The New Jerusalem and its Celestial Doctrine). The last two books were based on a fundamental aspect of Swedenborg's theology: the symbolic meaning of the Scripture. In *De Ultimo Judicio*, the 'last judgment'

⁴ Wilkinson 1996, 59-60.

was interpreted not as a prophetic event in the history of humanity, but as a spiritual phase in its evolution, while in *De Nova Hierosolyma*, Jerusalem symbolized the new church and its general principles.

Except for *De Ultimo Judicio*, the contents of the five volumes he published in 1758 were taken from the *Arcana Coelestia*, sometimes with very few revisions.⁵

De Coelo et Eius Mirabilibus et de Inferno included, in fact, an entire chapter dedicated to “correspondences”:

People today do not know what “correspondence” is. There are many reasons for this ignorance, the primary one being that we have moved away from heaven because of our love for ourselves and for the world. You see, people who love themselves and the world above all focus on nothing but earthly matters because these provide gratification to their more outward senses and pleasure to their moods. They do not attend to spiritual matters because these offer gratification to their deeper senses and pleasure to their minds. So, they set such matters aside, saying that they are too lofty to think about.

The early people behaved differently. For them, knowledge about correspondences was the pearl of all knowledge. By means of it, they gained intelligence and wisdom, and by means of it those who were of the church had a communication with heaven. Knowledge about correspondences is in fact angelic knowledge.

The earliest ones, who were heavenly people, did their thinking from correspondence like angels, so they could even talk with angels. Further, the Lord was quite often visible to them, and taught them. Nowadays, though, this knowledge has been so completely lost that people do not know what correspondence is.

Now, without some grasp of what correspondence is, nothing can be known in clear light about the spiritual world or about its inflow into the natural world, nothing at all about what the spiritual is relative to the natural, nothing in clear light about the human spirit that is called “the soul” and how it affects the body inward, nothing about our state after death. Because of all this, I need to define it and explain what it is like. This will also pave the way for matters

5 Swedenborg 1749 (2009), 1.

that are to follow.

First, I need to state what correspondence is. The whole natural world is responsive to the spiritual world —the natural world not just in general, but in detail. So, whatever arises in the natural world out of the spiritual one is called “something that corresponds.” It needs to be realized that the natural world arises from and is sustained in being by the spiritual world, exactly the way an effect relates to its efficient cause.

By “the natural world,” I mean all that extended reality that is under our sun and that receives its light and warmth from it. All the things that are sustained in being from that source belong to that world. The spiritual world, in contrast, is heaven, and to that world belong all the things that are in the heavens.

Since a human being is a heaven and a world in least form in the image of the greatest, there is a spiritual world and a natural world within each of us. The deeper elements, which belong to our minds and relate to our intelligence and volition, constitute our spiritual world, while the outer elements, which belong to our bodies and relate to our senses and actions, constitute our natural world. Anything that occurs in our natural world (that is, in our bodies and their senses and actions) because of our spiritual world (that is, because of our minds and their intelligence and volition) is called something that corresponds.⁶

In the last years of his life, Swedenborg published several more important theological works: *De Cultu et Amore Dei* (Divine Love and Wisdom) (1763), *De Divina Providentia* (Divine Providence) (1764), *Apocalypsis Revelata, in Qua Deteguntur Arcana Quae Ibi Praedicta Sunt, et Hactenus Recondita Latuerunt* (The Reveled Apocalypse, Revealing the Secrets that were Foretold there and which have Remained Hidden Until Now) (1766) and *Delitiae Sapientiae de Amore Conjugiali; Post Quas Sequuntur Voluptates Insaniae de Amore Scortatorio* (The Pleasure of the Wisdom of Conjugal Love, Followed by the Insane Pleasure of Promiscuous Love) (1768). Although published separately, *De Cultu et Amore Dei* and *De Divina Providentia* focused on investigating the divine essence, developing two distinct aspects. The first dealt with the nature

⁶ It was initially published anonymously and with only a few sales. Separating the elements of the work into smaller volumes may have been an attempt to make the content more accessible.

of God, described as love and wisdom and the source of every form of life, recalling Swedenborg's earlier works. *De Divina Providentia*, instead, focused on the theme of free will and the nature of evil and suffering, describing the spiritual laws that govern the world.

In *Apocalypsis Revelata* Swedenborg resumed his discussion on the symbolical meaning of the Bible, including memorable occurrences (*memorabilia*) or descriptions of encounters with otherworldly creatures, usually illustrating specific theological contents.

De Amore Conjugiali, instead, dealt with love in all its aspects, focusing on the principle of complementarity between the sexes.

In 1771, Swedenborg, now in advanced age, published his latest work, *Vera Christiana Religio* (The True Christian Religion), a detailed and systematic discussion of his theological view. In the following year, 1772, he died in a London boarding house, where he conducted a life of seclusion to the end, devoted solely to the writing of his works.

Swedenborg, Buddha of the North

Suzuki discovered the mysticism of Swedenborg during a period of profound spiritual crisis in Japan,⁷ caused by widespread materialism, at the root of which is the significant weakening of religious and spiritual values and its connected belief and faith systems.

In his quest for effective ideas to answer this crisis, Suzuki moved to the United States, the stage of lively philosophical-religious debate also influenced by eastern concepts.⁸ The Open Court Publishing House played a major role in facilitating that debate. Suzuki worked there for a long time under the guidance of the scholar Paul Carus (1852-1919), author of *Religion of Science* of 1893 and *The Gospel of Buddha* of 1894. Suzuki's devotion to Carus' scientific religion, possibly cultivated before he visited America, was followed by an interest in theosophy that Suzuki maintained and developed.⁹

On his return to Japan, he translated four works by Swedenborg into Japanese: in 1910 (天界と地獄) (Heaven and Its Marvels and Hell According

7 Swedenborg 1758 (2000), 134-135.

8 Yoshinaga 2009, 123.

9 Ibid., 129-130.

to What We Have Heard and Seen), in 1914 (新エルサレムとその教説) (The new Jerusalem and its Celestial Doctrine) and (神知と神愛) (Divine Love and Wisdom) and, in 1915, (神慮論) (Divine Providence). Also, in 1910, he participated in the International Congress dedicated to Swedenborg, held in London, as vice president. Suzuki dedicated two further studies to the Swedish mystic: the first, published in 1913, is titled スエデンボルグ (Swedenborg); the second, 「スエデンボルグ(その天界と他力観)」 [Swedenborg (His View of Heaven and “Other-Power”)], was published in 1924.

The first work was written to introduce Swedenborg and his mystical thought, at the time almost unknown in Japan.¹⁰ The second, to promote a more in-depth knowledge of the Swedish author’s philosophical and religious theory, focusing on its similarities with Buddhism, a prevalent aspect of Suzuki’s research.

These two works convey Suzuki’s great admiration for the Swedish author’s work and the way he led his life. The Japanese scholar emphasized their value and highlighted the impact of Swedenborg’s spiritual crisis, resulting in the transition from a scientific to a mystical approach to his investigations into the theme of the soul. This crisis represented a strong point of contact with the experience of Buddhist practitioners, such as Suzuki himself.

Suedenborugu

The book of 1913 was a detailed reconstruction of Swedenborg’s life, career, and works. In the preface, Suzuki enumerated the reasons for his interest in the mystic writer:

Emanuel Swedenborg [...] is a very interesting subject for investigation from a number of angles.

First of all, Swedenborg said that he traveled in heaven and hell and witnessed in detail the actual state of people after death. His statements are quite sincere [...] seem to accord well with the truth [...]

In this world of ours, there seems to be a spiritual realm separate from that

¹⁰ Ibid., 105-06.

*of five senses; and when we enter a certain psychological state, we apparently can communicate with that realm. Even if we think that circumstances of this other realm have no moral connection whatsoever to the mundane world there is plenty that is of interest to science and philosophy. This is a second reason to examine Swedenborg. Swedenborg's theological doctrines greatly resemble those of Buddhism. [...] This is the third reason that we should study Swedenborg.*¹¹

The first reason for Suzuki's interest in Swedenborg laid in his exploration of the post-mortem dimension, presented with sincerity and sober moderation and perceivable as likely. The second was the Swedish scholar's assumption of a spiritual dimension –parallel to the sensory one– perceptible only when in a specific psychological state. The third reason was the similarity of Swedenborg's theological doctrine to Buddhism.

Furthermore, the following elements should be considered:

*The fact that scientific and religious genius marvelously combined to produce a person of such unfathomable depth makes not only good material from the viewpoint of psychological research; but because he was a man of great vitality and distinction who had escaped the taint of worldliness, his life also serves as a model for the individual, teaching numerous lessons. There are no drastic changes in the course of his biography, so there is nothing that especially dazzles us. But his eighty-four years of life were completely devoted to science and religion, his everyday existence filled with infinite wonders. He was a man of spirit; and now, in the twentieth century, we are moved by the force of his personality. If only for this reason, we should know about his life.*¹²

When the foundations of Japanese spirituality were shaken by unrestrained materialism, Suzuki became fascinated with Swedenborg, who had distinguished himself for his way of life and values against the spreading materialism of his time. The Swedish author's vision and personality reinforced Suzuki's confidence in a possible solution to the spiritual crisis significantly affecting the Japanese philosopher and, like him, a generation of

11 With the exception of a translation into Japanese, published in 1910, of *De Coelo et Eius Mirabilibus et de inferno*.

12 Suzuki 1913, (1996), 5-6.

young people with strong social, cultural, and spiritual awareness.

Suzuki also highlighted Swedenborg's "scientific and religious genius", highlighting the Swedish author's life's two different and distinct phases: the first as a talented scientist and devoted court servant, and the second as a mystic, conducting a solitary life dedicated to recording his mystical experiences.

The first part of the text outlined Swedenborg's academic career and commitments up to 1744. Suzuki described his scientific interests and contributions, carefully examining the works and subjects explored in the Swedish scholar's research. Such analysis focused on a topic of great interest to Suzuki, the relationship between body and soul, which was the constant object of investigation in the two stages of Swedenborg's life:

*However, from what I have seen, there is not a huge, unbreachable gap between Swedenborg's so called worldly career and his spiritual career, since his earlier thoughts and sentiments show a continuity with his spiritual life. Of course, there occurred a revolution in his writing, ideas, concepts, and arguments. Nevertheless, there were aspects of the past that remained in the background. To investigate the traces of this connection, we can look at what Swedenborg wrote in *The Animal Kingdom*, and see where his ideas were leading.¹³*

Below, Suzuki introduced the following passage from Swedenborg's work:

I intend to examine, physically and philosophically, the whole Anatomy of the Body; of all its Viscera, Abdominal and Thoracic; of the Genital Members of both sexes; and of the Organs of the Five Senses. Likewise, the Anatomy of all parts of the Cerebrum, Cerebellum, Medulla Oblongata, and Medulla Spinalis.

Afterwards, the cortical substance of the two brains; and the fibre; and the causes of the forces and motion of the whole organism: Diseases, moreover; those of the head particularly, or which proceed by defluxion from the Cerebrum.

I purpose afterwards to give an introduction to Rational Psychology, consisting of certain new doctrines, through the assistance of which we may be conducted, from the material organism of the Body to a knowledge of the Soul,

¹³ Ibid., 6-7.

which is immaterial: these are, the Doctrine of Forms; the Doctrine of Orders and Degrees; also, the Doctrine of Series and Society; the Doctrine of Influx; the Doctrine of Correspondence and Representation: lastly, the Doctrine of Modification.

From these doctrines I come to the Rational Psychology itself; which will comprise the subjects of action; of external and internal sense; of imagination and memory; also, of the affections of the animus. Of the intellect, that is, of thought and of the will; and of the affections of the rational mind: also, of instinct.

Lastly, of the Soul; and of its state in the Body, its intercourse, affection, and immorality; and of its state when the body dies. The work to conclude with a Concordance of System.

From this summary or plan, the reader may see, that the end I propose to myself in the work, is a knowledge of the soul; since this knowledge will constitute the crown of my studies [...] In order, therefore, to follow up the investigation, and to solve the difficulty, I have chosen to approach by the analytic way; and I think I am the first who was taken this course professedly [...]

In olden time, before any racer could merit the crown, he was commanded to run seven times round the goal, which also I have determined here to do [...].

Thus, I hope, that by bending my course inwards continually, I shall open all the doors that lead to the soul and enter directly within: by the divine permission.¹⁴

Followed by Suzuki's comment on Swedenborg's words:

Thus, we can see that there was not a complete division between the spiritual life of Swedenborg's later years and the intellectual life of his earlier years. In 1744, when he turned 56, he had an unprecedented spiritual experience and embarked on a new life. It is not that this life had no connection to the past. In one sense, it should be viewed as nothing more than an extension of that previous life. Granted, his so-called "contemplation of Divine" may have differed from what he had anticipated; but that is inconsequential from the

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

perspective of his entire life's development.

Swedenborg tried looking into the life of the Divine from intellectual and analytical angles. At first, he made a careful study of chemistry, physics, and engineering; continuing from there, he entered into biological and anatomical research. At this point, using all of his theoretical genius, he tried to penetrate the mystery of the Divine, but he was not fully satisfied. As a result of meditation and esoteric practice, his mind's eye gradually grew clearer, and he apparently gained the wondrous ability to enter and leave the realm of the Divine at will.¹⁵

Suzuki's words set great importance on the interest and research on the soul, which Swedenborg relentlessly pursued in both stages of his life, identifying in his "contact" with "the realm of the Divine" the authentic and unique experience that had divided the Swedish mystic's life into a "before and after". This experience had such great importance for Suzuki on account of its similarity with the Buddhist *satori*.

In his observations, the Japanese scholar also emphasized the different criteria applied to the investigation of the soul. Initially, the "intellectual and analytical" one, typical of the scientific phase, produced in-depth studies in chemistry, physics, mechanics and, subsequently, anatomy and biology. Such an approach was replaced by that of the "mind's eye" during Swedenborg's mystical phase, which occurred after the "meditations and esoteric practices".

Years later, these two approaches would become the subject of a comprehensive analysis in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*: in this book, Suzuki concluded that these criteria, defined respectively as "intellectual" and "intuitive", resulted from the respective cultures of origin, namely the western and the eastern ones. Their different research results precisely were caused by the different tools used: intellect and intuition. The first, typical of investigations into evident and scientifically measurable truths, and the second, specific to the spiritual dimension, Swedenborg had managed to apply them both to a research field dear to Suzuki: the soul. Through his investigation, he achieved extensive philosophical-religious knowledge, as seen in the reference to "esoteric meditations and practices", in many ways

¹⁵ Swedenborg 1744 (2012), 79.

similar to the Buddhist tradition.

In the text, his mention of esotericism (密教 Mikkyō) concerning the mystical phase of Swedenborg's life related to a traditional knowledge the Swedish author applied in his investigations. However, it also referred to theosophy, a field of interest diffused in the United States when Suzuki had worked and lived there, to which he had devoted himself. Such orientation was disconnected from religious worship and aimed to explore the spiritual experience and the connections of the soul to the workings of the Divine: precisely the purpose of the newly formed Theosophical Society, established in New York in 1875. Among the numerous followers of theosophy was Beatrice Erskin Lane (1878-1939), Suzuki's wife. Both continued to cultivate this discipline in Japan through meetings and conferences involving various intellectual and academic personalities, within actual lodges.

The second phase of Swedenborg's life coincided with the second part of Suzuki's text. While describing the core of the Swedish author's mystical thought, Suzuki also outlined with greater precision the analogies to Buddhism he had identified. The first similarity existed in Swedenborg's life path, which the Japanese scholar defines as "similar to a Buddhist", emphasizing its culmination, or rather the transition from the "proprium" to the Divine, from "self-power" to the "Other-power":

Swedenborg's theological doctrines greatly resemble those of Buddhism. He taught that, having discarded the proprium, one must act in accordance with the workings of the Divine, that true salvation is the harmonious unification of belief and action, and that the Divine manifests itself as wisdom and love.

Not depending on his own efforts or intellect, he would become an instrument of God's revelation [...] it is similar to a Buddhist who believes in self-power turning around and becoming a believer in Other-power. Belief in Other-power seems easy, but its austerities are no different from those by relying on self-power.

Those who spend their lives in religious practice know this fact from personal experience.¹⁶

Discarding the "proprium", the "Self-power" and acting in accordance "with

16 Suzuki 1913, 20-21.

the workings of the Divine” were key points of Swedenborg’s vision, similar to the Buddhist school of thought and familiar to Japanese culture. This process was deemed an element of interest by Suzuki, as a philosopher and religious scholar, and a valid point of reference in his quest for answers to the critical spiritual situation of his home country.

Another similarity with Buddhism was the assumption of “providence”, a divine intervention that provided and was never accidental in its concessions:

[Swedenborg] taught that [...] there is not a single thing in the world left to chance, and one can witness the revelation of divine wisdom and divine love even in the stroke of a pen, for it is deeply imbued with divine providence. These sorts of issues attract the interest of religious scholars, and especially Buddhists.

Next, Swedenborg explains the reason there is evil and falsehood in the world. This section resembles the Buddhist teaching of expedient means. That is, it is divine providence that allows evil and falsehood to strut about temporarily in order that they may be overcome by good and truth. This is not to say that providence does not manifest itself in both good and evil people. Divine providence is continually inviting people to enter heaven. People are free to respond to this and do good and are also free not to respond and do evil. Evil use of this freedom results from attachment to the self (proprium). Each person has the predisposition and capacity to be saved; and not being saved, or falling from grace, come from not saving oneself. The road of salvation entails recognizing various evils as sins against divine providence and shunning them. Therefore, doing an evil act again and again after recognizing it as evil is an offence against providence. It is not enough to say that you have committed an evil; you must perceive its greater religious significance and avoid it to the best of your ability while tending only toward good. This is the quickest route to salvation. Salvation comes gradually; it is not immediately actualized through the direct grace of God, for this is contrary to divine providence. By faith alone salvation is impossible; we must acknowledge that not until charity and love are added is the fruit of salvation born. Passing through a lifetime committing sins, even if you say on your deathbed, “I beg you, God, save me” this will not in one stroke wash clean the stain of the previous years. From the start, it is crucial to have a penitent heart and, recognizing one’s sins, to accumulate

*good deeds as befit love and wisdom. In this way, a peaceful death is attained.*¹⁷

No significant comments followed, and no other references to Buddhism were made in the text. On the other hand, as mentioned before, (スエデンボルグ) (Swedenborg) was merely an introduction to the Swedish author's figure and works.

Suzuki would develop these analogies, eleven years later, in his other work dedicated to the Swedish mystic: スエデンボルグ “その天界と他力観” (Swedenborg's View of Heaven and “Other-Power”). As stated in the title, the study aimed to investigate Swedenborg's conception of the divine realm and “Other-Power”, which he had extensively investigated, and which Suzuki had identified as a similarity to Buddhism. Not surprisingly, the text contained references to the “correspondences” present in various works of the Swedish mystic and intentionally cited by Suzuki in the conclusion of his work of 1913:

*In order to understand correctly Swedenborg's vision of the spiritual world, we need to know about his doctrine of representation, correspondences, degrees, and influx [...]. Swedenborg teaches that human life is love and that this love is no different from God. Therefore, God is human life, and people are the recipients of this life. Also, there is a distinction in the Divine between Esse (being) and Existere (form). These are two, yet they are one. Love is being, wisdom is form, and love depends on wisdom as wisdom depends on love. The Divine is a combination of these. The Divine manifests itself in the spiritual world as a sun, whose heat is love and whose light is wisdom. The sun of our world depends on this spiritual sun. Receiving its living heat and living light, the natural sun gives rise to all creation and makes it flourish. The purpose of the creation of the universe is to return all things to their origin in the Lord of creation, or the Divine, and thus establish a correspondence and conjunction between them.*¹⁸

Conclusions

Swedenborg's theological thought embraced numerous elements deemed relevant by Suzuki, as a Buddhist philosopher and scholar in religious studies

¹⁷ Suzuki 1913, (2005), 6, 24-25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6, 34-35.

searching for a valid reference point for the spiritual crisis of his country: first of all, an awareness of the consequences of the actions of individuals' earthly life in the post-mortem. Secondly, the presupposition of the existence of a spiritual dimension and, therefore, a non-materialistic approach in evident contrast to the materialism of Japan during his time. Thirdly, the Swedish mystic's paradigmatic assumptions embraced a series of spiritual presuppositions similar to those of Buddhism and, consequently, close and dear to the culture of the Japanese people.

Hence, Swedenborg lent himself to becoming a reference point to promote a new spiritual and religious awakening in the country. Furthermore, his theological system was based on consolidated foundations, but renewed by an innovative approach: they appeared modern and captivating because from the West and suitable to the Japanese cultural scene of the time, revived by the opening of borders after centuries of seclusion. In addition, Swedenborg's view had a double value, scientific and religious, and was developed following two different approaches: first, the intellectual and, subsequently, the intuitive one. However, such strong points were crowned by his spiritual awakening experience, as the Swedish mystic had embraced in practice –although not in the definition– the illumination evoked and invoked by Buddhism.

The reasons listed perfectly motivated the name “Buddha of the North” coined by Suzuki for Swedenborg. In this writer's opinion, they also accomplished the purpose of the present article, which, starting from an outline of the Swedish mystic's figure and contributions, aimed to present his most stimulating and inspiring characteristics in the Japanese philosopher's view.

Elsewhere, an in-depth philosophical investigation will be presented to explain the analogies between the two ideological systems identified by Suzuki, with a specific reference to the “Other-Power” quoted in the Preface of *Swedenborg*. A “power” that constituted the core of his second text, in which he recalls the esotericism mentioned in this article.

This work aimed to provide a reasoned review of the elements necessary to understand Suzuki's interest, philosophical and otherwise, in Swedenborg, the subject of his research and investigation for almost twenty years.

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