

# Who is Emanuel Swedenborg?\*

The *Begin a New Life* process is based on teachings of the Bible as explained in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was born Emanuel Swedberg (or Svedberg) in Stockholm, Sweden, on January 29, 1688 (Julian calendar). He was the third of the nine children of Jesper Swedberg (1653-1735) and Sara Behm (1666-1696). At the age of eight he lost his mother. After the death of his only older brother ten days later, he became the oldest living son. In 1697 his father married Sara Bergia (1666-1720), who developed great affection for Emanuel and left him a significant inheritance. His father, a Lutheran clergyman, later became a celebrated and controversial bishop, whose diocese included the Swedish churches in Pennsylvania, USA, and London, England.

After studying at the University of Uppsala (1699-1709), Emanuel journeyed to England, Holland, France, and Germany (1710-1715) to study and work with leading scientists in western Europe. He immersed himself in physics, astronomy, mathematics, anatomy, physiology, economics, metallurgy, mineralogy, geology, and chemistry, among others. Upon his return he apprenticed as an engineer under the brilliant Swedish inventor Christopher Polhem (1661-1751). He gained favor with Sweden's King Charles XII (1682-1718), who gave him a salaried position as an overseer of Sweden's mining industry (1716-1747). Although Swedenborg was engaged, he never married.

After the death of Charles XII, Emanuel was ennobled by Queen Ulrika Eleonora (1688-1741), and his last name was changed to Swedenborg (or Svendenborg). This change in status gave him a seat in the Swedish House of Nobles, where he remained an active participant in the Swedish government throughout his life.

A member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, he devoted himself to scientific studies and philosophical reflections that culminated in a number of publications, most notably a comprehensive three-volume work on mineralogy (1734) that brought him recognition across Europe as a scientist and philosopher. After 1734 he redirected his research and publishing to a study of anatomy in search of the interface between the soul and body, making several significant discoveries in physiology.

From 1743 to 1745 he entered a transitional phase that resulted in a shift of his main focus from science and philosophy to theology. Throughout the rest of his life he maintained that this shift was brought about by Jesus Christ, who appeared to him, called him to a new mission, and opened his perception to a permanent dual consciousness of this life and the life after death.

He devoted the last decades of his life to studying Scripture and publishing eighteen theological titles that draw on the Bible, reasoning, and his own spiritual experiences. These works present a Christian theology with unique perspectives on the nature of God, the spiritual world, the Bible, the human mind, and the path to salvation.

Swedenborg died in London on March 29, 1772, at the age of eighty-four.

Since the time of his death, Swedenborg's writings have affected many people—both directly and indirectly. The universal theology put forth in his works has contributed to the advancement of religious thought throughout the world—from Christianity to Buddhism—and it has inspired many great persons, among whom are the following: Calvin Coolidge, Helen Keller, Dr. Carl Gustav Jung, Henry James Sr., William Butler Yeats, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jorge Luis Borges, Honoré de Balzac, Elizabeth Barret Browning, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle, Walter M. Horton, and Hiram Powers.

\*Biographical note from *True Christianity* by Emanuel Swedenborg, vol. 2, p. 465 (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2011). Additional information from Grant Schnarr and Mac Frazier. Reproduced here with permission of all contributing parties.