

LONDON 1758 · COMPLETE IN MODERN ENGLISH

Earths in the Universe

*Swedenborg's Conversations
with the Spirits of Other Planets*



MERCURY · JUPITER · MARS · SATURN · VENUS · THE MOON

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Earths in the Universe

*Swedenborg's Conversations with the Spirits of Other
Planets (1758)*

Emanuel Swedenborg on the inhabitants of Mercury,
Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, the Moon and the Earths in the
starry heaven. Complete in modern English

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vocantur Planetae, et de Telluribus in Coelo Astrifero* (London, 1758). Rendered
into modern English from images of the pages of the English edition of 1787
(London).

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FOREWORD

Is anyone living on the other planets? In the middle of the eighteenth century many educated Europeans would have answered yes. The French writer Fontenelle had written popular conversations about it, and the Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens a whole book, *Cosmotheoros*. But in 1758 a book appeared in London that spoke in an entirely different voice. Its author does not argue or guess. He calmly relates that he himself has spoken with the spirits of Mercury, Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus and the Moon — and with spirits from five Earths around distant stars — and that from them he has learned what the inhabitants of these worlds look like, how they live, what they eat, how they dress, how they govern themselves and how they worship God. The book was published in Latin without the author's name. Its author was Emanuel Swedenborg.

Who was Swedenborg? Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was born in Stockholm, the son of the Lutheran clergyman Jesper Swedberg, who later became Bishop of Skara; in 1719 the family was ennobled under the name Swedenborg. The young Emanuel studied at Uppsala, travelled for years in England, Holland, France and Germany, and came home an enthusiastic engineer and natural scientist. For almost thirty years he served as an assessor of the Swedish Board of Mines, responsible for mines and the production of metals. He published the first Swedish scientific journal, wrote on metallurgy, astronomy and physics, and later turned to anatomy and studied the brain; some of his ideas about the role of the cerebral cortex were well ahead of his time. He was a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and sat in the House of Nobles of the Swedish parliament.

The turning point. Around 1743–1745 Swedenborg passed through a deep spiritual crisis. He wrote down his dreams and visions, and in 1745 in London, as

he later recounted, his spiritual sight was "opened". After this he resigned from the Board of Mines and devoted the remaining twenty-five years of his life to spiritual writings. The chief of them is the eight-volume *Arcana Coelestia* ("Heavenly Secrets", 1749–1756), in which he explains verse by verse the inner meaning of Genesis and Exodus. In 1758 in London he published several books, among them *Heaven and Hell* and this one, *Earths in the Universe*. It largely gathers together the accounts of the spirits of other planets that had already been printed at the ends of chapters in the *Arcana Coelestia*.

What the book tells. Swedenborg begins with an introduction on why there are many Earths and why they are inhabited. Then, one after another, he describes the spirits of Mercury, who correspond to memory and gather knowledge throughout the universe; the kind and honest people of Jupiter, whose faces cannot lie; the inhabitants of Mars, who live without rulers; the humble people of Saturn, who see their ring as something whitish, like snow; the two kinds of people on Venus, and the small spirits of the Moon with voices like thunder. In a separate chapter he explains why the Lord was willing to be born on our Earth. In the second half of the book he tells of a journey in the spirit to five Earths in the starry heaven — with temples of living trees, peoples of shepherds, families without kings, and brides chosen by the face.

How to read it today. This is not a book of astronomy, and it should not be read as a report on the physical nature of other planets. It is a spiritual testimony — one of the best-known books of mystical literature — in which every visible thing has a spiritual meaning; Swedenborg calls these "correspondences". He himself stresses that he speaks with spirits rather than travelling in the body, and that in the spiritual world distances are changes of "state". The book was written before the discovery of Uranus (1781) and Neptune (1846), so it mentions only the planets known at the time. Today we know that Jupiter and Saturn are gas giants without a solid surface, that Venus is about 465 °C at the surface and that the Moon has no air; life beyond the Earth has not yet been found. Yet Swedenborg's conviction that every star is a sun with planets of its own has been

confirmed: since 1995 thousands of planets have been discovered around other stars.

His influence. Swedenborg's books were read and debated all over Europe. In 1766 Immanuel Kant wrote a sharply critical work about him, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*; the poet and artist William Blake both admired him and quarrelled with him; Honoré de Balzac wove his ideas into the novel *Séraphîta*; and Helen Keller, in *My Religion*, told how much Swedenborg's writings had given her. In 1787 his followers' New Church began meeting in London — the same year in which the English translation of this book appeared.

Our edition. This is a complete text, sentence by sentence, rendered into modern English from the pages of the English edition of 1787 and checked against them; nothing has been left out or summarised. The old translation's capitalised nouns and archaic forms have given way to present-day English, while Swedenborg's own terms — spirits and angels, the Lord, the Grand Man, correspondences, good and truth — have been kept. Swedenborg's paragraph numbers (1.–178.) are retained, since they are his own division of the text. At the foot of his pages Swedenborg often refers to paragraph numbers in the *Arcana Coelestia*; we have left out these numbers but kept the content of his notes — they begin with the word "Swedenborg". A few notes are those of the 1787 English translator, as they say; all the other notes are ours: they explain words, persons and ideas, and where we now know otherwise, they say briefly what we know today. For convenience we have numbered Swedenborg's chapters as fourteen parts and added short subheadings in the text. At the end of the book each part has a commentary — "In plain words" and "What science says".

THE EARTHS IN THE UNIVERSE

Conversations with the spirits of other Earths

1. Since, by the Divine mercy of the Lord, the interior things that belong to my spirit have been opened to me, and I have thereby been granted to speak not only with spirits and angels who are near our Earth but also with those who are near other Earths; and since I had a desire to know whether other Earths exist, what they are like, and what kind of people live on them, it has been granted me by the Lord to speak and converse with spirits and angels from other Earths — with some for a day, with some for a week, and with some for months — and to be instructed by them about the Earths from which they came and near which they lived, about the lives, customs and worship of their inhabitants, and about various other things worth noting.

And since in this way it has been granted me to become acquainted with such things, I am permitted to describe them according to what I have heard and seen. It should be noted that all spirits and angels come from the human race;¹ that they stay near their own Earths;² that they know what goes on there; and that a person can be taught by them if his interiors are opened far enough for him to speak and converse with them. For a human being is in essence a spirit,³ and as to his interiors is together with spirits;⁴ so whoever has his interiors opened by the Lord

1. Swedenborg, from his *Arcana Coelestia*: there are no spirits or angels except those who were once of the human race.

2. Swedenborg: the spirits of every Earth stay near their own Earth, because they come from its inhabitants and share their character and temper; and they are of service to those inhabitants.

3. Swedenborg: the soul that lives after death is a person's spirit; it is the real person within him, and in the other life it appears in a perfect human form.

4. Swedenborg: even while living in the world, a person is, as to his interiors, that is, as to his spirit or soul, in the midst of spirits and angels whose nature matches his own.

can speak with them as one person with another.⁵ This privilege has now been granted me daily for twelve years.⁶

Why there must be many inhabited Earths

2. That there are many Earths with people on them, and from them spirits and angels, is very well known in the other life. For there everyone who desires it from a love of truth, and for the sake of its use, is allowed to speak with the spirits of other Earths, and so to be confirmed in the plurality of worlds,⁷ and to learn that the human race lives not on one Earth only but on countless Earths; and further, to learn the particular character, way of life and divine worship of the inhabitants of each Earth.

3. I have sometimes spoken about this with the spirits of our Earth, and the outcome of our conversation was that any person of broad understanding can conclude from many considerations that there are many Earths and that people live on them. For reason suggests that such great masses as the planets, some of which far exceed this Earth in size, are not empty bodies created only to be carried around the sun and to shine with their scanty light for the benefit of one Earth, but that their use must be greater and more distinguished. Whoever believes, as everyone ought to believe, that God created the universe for no other end than that the human race, and through it heaven, might come into being — for the human race is the seed-bed of heaven — must also believe that wherever there is an Earth, there are people living on it. That the planets visible to our eyes, lying as they do within the bounds of this solar system, are Earths can be seen from the fact that they are bodies of earthy matter: they reflect the light of the sun, and when seen through telescopes they do not appear as stars sparkling with their own flame but as Earths mottled with dark patches. The same can be seen from the fact

5. Swedenborg: a person is able to speak with spirits and angels, and the ancients on our Earth often spoke with them; but today it is dangerous to do so unless one is in true faith and led by the Lord.

6. Swedenborg's spiritual experiences began in 1744–1745; this book first appeared in Latin in London in 1758.

7. The idea of many inhabited worlds was popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; it was defended, for example, by Fontenelle (1686) and Christiaan Huygens (1698).

that, like our Earth, they travel around the sun along the path of the zodiac, and so have their years and their seasons — spring, summer, autumn and winter; and that, likewise, they turn on their own axes, and so have their days and the times of day — morning, noon, evening and night. Moreover, some of them have moons, called satellites, which circle their central globes as the Moon circles our Earth; and the planet Saturn, being the farthest from the sun,⁸ also has a great luminous belt, which gives that Earth much light, though reflected light.⁹ How can any reasonable person who knows these things claim that such bodies are empty and uninhabited?

4. Moreover, in my conversations with spirits I have sometimes remarked that it is very credible that there are more Earths in the universe than one, since the starry heaven is so immense and its stars so innumerable, each of which, in its own place or its own world, is a sun like ours, though of differing size. Anyone who reflects is led to conclude that so immense a whole must be a means to some end, the final end of creation; and that end is the kingdom of heaven, in which the Divine may dwell with angels and people. For the visible universe, or the heaven shining with stars so innumerable, which are so many suns, is only a means for Earths to exist, and people on them, from whom a heavenly kingdom can be formed.¹⁰ From this every reasonable person must conclude that so immense a means, designed for so great an end, was not made for the human race of a single Earth and for the heaven drawn from it alone. For what would that be to the Divine, which is infinite, and to which thousands, even tens of thousands, of Earths, all full of inhabitants, would be small and hardly anything at all!

5. Moreover, the angelic heaven is so immense that it corresponds to each and every thing in a human being — myriads corresponding to every member and organ, to all the inner organs, and to the particular affections of each; and I have

8. In 1758 Saturn was the most distant known planet; Uranus was discovered by William Herschel in 1781, and Neptune in 1846.

9. Today we know that Saturn's rings are made of countless pieces of ice and rock, and that Saturn itself is a gas giant with no solid surface.

10. Today we know thousands of planets orbiting other stars; the first around a sun-like star was found in 1995, and more than five thousand have been confirmed since.