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A Swedenborgian Bible

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Turkey & Grecia saw my instrfuments of
music, they arose
They seizd the harp: the flute: the
mellow horn of Jerusalems joy
They sounded thanksgiving in my courts
(79.48-50)

Places that were divided by the fall are
connected in Eternity:

Thames poured his waters into my
basons and baths:
Medway mingled with Kishon:
Thames recievd the heavenly Jordan
(79.34-35)

By means of these parallel images, Blake is able to dramatize in the middle section of the lament the humanization and restoration of the universal society of nations, events which remind us of the grand vision of regeneration which takes place at the end of the prophecy.

Clearly then, the profusion of parallel lines in Jerusalem's lament suggests an affinity with the Lamentations and highlights Blake's rejection of eighteenth-century metrical patterns, the manifestations, he believed, of "the modern bondage of Rhyming" (*Jerusalem* 3). Whether or not Jerusalem's lament is the result of his knowledge of Lowth's ideas or simply his deep familiarity with the Bible and belief that the "Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art" (Laocoon, E 273), it is clear that the subject matter, structure, and cadences of the Lamentations of Jeremiah are present in Blake's version of lament. As Roston explains in his study of the impact of the Bible on the romantic movement, "the Bible, including the Old Testament, was the noblest and most inspired literature in the world, and the spirit of Hebrew prophecy permeated not merely Blake's verse but even his daily life" (160). Blake was able to transmute his understanding of biblical poetry into the uniquely Blakean thematic, imagistic, structural, and rhetorical features of his prophecy. And this, combined with his rejection of eighteenth-century aesthetics and his search for alternative poetics, enabled him to effect in

Jerusalem's lament the prophetic resonances of Hebrew poetry and the "sublime of the Bible" (*Milton* 1).

¹ See for example Morton Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1983); Murray Roston, *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism* (Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1965); Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962).

² See Anne Mellor, *Blake's Human Form Divine* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974); David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime* (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1972); Paley, *The Continuing City* (1983) and *Energy and the Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970); Roston, *Prophet and Poet* (1965); Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976).

³ David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed., with a Commentary by Harold Bloom (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1982). *Jerusalem* and *Milton* are cited by plate and line number. All unetched works and Bloom's Commentary are cited as E, followed by the page number.

⁴ Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 2 vols. (Latin ed. 1753; English trans. 1787; Germany: Georg Olms Verlag, Hildersheim, 1969). All subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵ Roston 21.

⁶ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, rev. ed. (Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1988) 127.

⁷ V. A. DeLuca, "A Wall of Words: The Sublime as Text," *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, ed. Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 231-34.

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Among the articles of faith of the New Jerusalem Church was that "the Books of the Word are all those which have the internal Sense" as defined by Emanuel Swedenborg.¹ The list of exclusions from the Swedenborgian Bible is formidable: Thirty-two books, about a fourth of the bulk of the Protestant canon, including Job, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Acts, and all the New Testament Epistles.

Presumably the followers of the New Jerusalem Church, such as William Blake, his friend John Flaxman, the New Church printer Robert Hindmarsh, and Blake's friend C. A. Tulk acted on the basis of the Swedenborgian canon. We know that Blake did, for in his *Jerusalem* (1804-?20) the Divine Lord builds a tomb for the dead Albion ornamented "with emblems & written verse, Spiritual Verse, order'd & measur'd" (48.6-7) which contains exactly the canon of the Bible established by Swedenborg and endorsed by Blake and others at the 1789 New Church meeting.

Since the canon of the New Church Bible is so different from that of all other Protestants, one might have expected Robert Hindmarsh, the Society's printer, to print a Bible for their use. However, the only Bible text for Swedenborgians recorded in the standard bibliography of the Bible in English is for Genesis only, and it did not appear until 1912.²

However, there *was* a Swedenborgian Bible issued in Blake's time, and it was available just when he was issuing his *Milton* and working on his *Jerusalem*. It is a bibliographically curious work entitled

THE
WORD OF GOD:
BEING
DIVINE TRUTH ITSELF,
PROCEEDING FROM
The Lord's Divine Love;
AND CONTAINING

.....

DIVINE WISDOM AND DIVINE LIFE, / AS REVEALED TO MAN IN THE / OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS, / AND RECEIVED AND / ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE NEW CHURCH, / SIGNIFIED BY / *THE NEW JERUSALEM*, / IN THE REVELATIONS. / = / LONDON: / PRINTED, FOR THE SOCIETY OF IMMANUELITES, / OR THE WORSHIPPERS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AS THE ONLY GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, / BY GEORGE HAZARD, BEECH-STREET, BARBICAN. // 1809.³

A section on "The Books of the Word" explains that "The Books of the Word are all they which have the internal Sense," and it lists the Books of the Word exactly as in the 1789 meeting, with cross-references to Swedenborg's

Arcana Coelestia No. 10325 and *Heavenly Doctrine* No. 266.

However, only a small fragment of the work was actually printed by George Hazard whose name appears on the title page. A note to "The Books of the Word" explains:

N.B. The Title page, with the contents of this leaf—a page of the end of JUDGES—end of II. KINGS—beginning of PSALMS—end of PSALMS—and at the end of ST. JOHN only, were *Printed by GEORGE HAZARD, Beech-street, Barbican, 1809.* But the BIBLE itself was PRINTED FOR GEORGE EYRE AND ANDREW STRAHAN, PRINTERS TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY, 1806.

The passages printed by Hazard were bridges to replace gatherings removed when those parts of the Bible which "have not the internal Sense" were removed. The work is therefore the Bible as printed for Eyre & Strahan in 1806 as abridged by George Hazard in 1809 and 1813 to make it conform to the Swedenborgian canon of the New Jerusalem Church.

It seems likely that those deeply interested in Swedenborg, such as William Blake and John Flaxman, would have known of such a publication and might even have consulted or purchased it. At any rate, this Bible as abridged by George Hazard in 1809 and 1813, demonstrates that the Swedenborgian conception of the true Bible was actually printed twenty-some years after it was publicly affirmed at the meeting to establish the New Jerusalem Church in 1789.

¹ *Minutes of a General Conference of the Members of the New Church Signified by the New Jerusalem in the Revelation* (London, 1789) 1. The articles were signed by W. and C. Blake, almost certainly the engraver and his wife.

² T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible 1525-1961*, rev. A. S. Herbert (1968) #2176.

³ The only copy of which I have record is in the Glasgow University Library. Volume 2 is dated 1813.

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