

“Eternity roll’d wide apart”: The Creation of the World and Man in William Blake’s *The [First] Book of Urizen* in Light of Emanuel Swedenborg’s *The Last Judgment*

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Abstract

Beginnings are usually regarded as either hard or energizing times that set our inner world in motion. However, there is a beginning that is more important for humanity than any other: the origin of human life and of the world. The knowledge of our origin and the mystery concerning the beginning of the world have been the most intriguing and most engaging issues since man became aware of their own physical and spiritual existence. For many centuries, it was the duty of religion to provide humanity with a teaching about their origin and the foundation of human dignity. However, the 18th and 19th centuries were critical in the treatment of the biblical creation stories in Europe. The debate between misinterpreted creation myth accounts and scientific theories led to a sharpening confrontation between religion and science, but it also divided the believers and resulted in the birth of new theories. Emanuel Swedenborg, an influential theologian of the period, wrote detailed commentaries and genuine tractates related to the topic that influenced the ideology and art of William Blake, a versatile and ingenious artist and thinker of the era, whose influence is still significant today. The aim of this study is to highlight the parallels and contrasts between Blake’s Genesis myth and Swedenborg’s teachings, mainly through the unusual pairing of *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Last Judgment*, to show the connection between Swedenborg’s unorthodox views and Blake’s ideas about the creation of man and the world.

Keywords: Blake, Swedenborg, Bible, Genesis, Urizen

Introduction

Emanuel Swedenborg's influence on the *oeuvre* and ideology of William Blake is proven fact among scholars of the period. Many of them—including Ágnes Péter—claim that Blake possibly did not have a greater or longer intellectual relationship with anybody else of his contemporaries than with Swedenborg (Péter, 2017, p. 40), and this spiritual, intellectual relationship, even though they had never met in person, had a very fruitful impact on Blake. The clearest, and perhaps the most fully explained work to date, in which there is an obvious critique of Swedenborg, but also a kind of recognition from Blake, is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), which has a clear reference to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (1758). However, it is not the only work on which Swedenborg's influence can be felt. The different periods of Blake's work can be distinguished in several ways, depending on the subject of the particular study, but in order to determine when and how much he was interested in Swedenborg, Paley's division might be the best. Paley defines four related periods, and claims that the second one ended in 1793, a year before the publication of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, which is in the centre of my study. According to Paley, Blake showed relatively no interest in Swedenborg in the third period after 1793 until 1800 (Paley, 1979, sec. I). I see two problems with this theory regarding the closure of the second period in 1793: the first is that we know from Bentley's research that Blake's notebook contained sketches for *The [First] Book of Urizen* during the period between 1790 and 1793 (Bentley, 2003, p. 142), the years when he worked on *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and other works in parallel with this particular one. For Blake, these years were undoubtedly spent partly on the study, interpretation and critique of Swedenborg's teachings and works. The other problem derives from these facts, namely that it seems more than unlikely that Blake, who was very much interested in the ideology and works of Swedenborg, and had already started his work on *The [First] Book of Urizen*, which was published only a year after 1793, would miss to incorporate Swedenborgian theology and thoughts into his Genesis myth. *The Last Judgment* could be a very important work for Blake, as it indicated 1757, the year of his birth, as the time when *the Last Judgment* had already come to pass (LJ, p. 87). In addition, this work contains very important theological teachings of Swedenborg, even Paley mentions it as a reference work in connection with Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Paley, 1979, SN 54). All things considered, a certain connection between *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Last Judgment* is highly probable.

For my study, I am going to use Copy A of *The [First] Book of Urizen* and the first English translation of *The Last Judgment*, published in 1788, to reveal parallel ideas and contrasts about the creation of the world and man between Swedenborg's teachings and Blake's

Genesis myth in his "Bible of Hell" (E, p. 44). To highlight these parallels and contrasts, I am going to focus on the pre-creation and the first creation of the Book of Genesis in the Holy Bible. Swedenborg also wrote long and elaborate tractates on the Biblical creation accounts, especially on the first story of which certain ideas and teachings are also in *The Last Judgment*. However, before the comparison of the texts and theological ideas could begin, I want to specify what dimension I intend to focus on in my study.

When the subject of our analysis is *The [First] Book of Urizen*, it is very important to decide what aspects we want to analyze and which are only present as background information that might be useful in our study. There are several researchable dimensions in this work, and despite their intertwining and interaction, their study might lead to different results and knowledge, which, although connected at the level of principles, may want to convey a specific message. In the light of the works on which my comparison is based, I intend to draw my attention to the religious dimension and I do not want to go into detail about the political, social, psychological and other dimensions, although their significance is unquestionable for a comprehensive understanding of Blake's work as a whole. In order to get a more comprehensive picture of the religious message of the two examined works, I first want to address the colourful religious background of Blake's work and the assumed authority behind Swedenborg's teachings to outline the theological views that influenced the conception of creation in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Last Judgment*.

The Background of Blake's and Swedenborg's Theory of Creation

When we undertake to unravel the multitude of ideas and religious doctrines and tendencies in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, the work of several renowned scholars is at our disposal, but Leslie Tannenbaum's *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art* proved to be an excellent starting point for my study. Due to the fact that Tannenbaum relies primarily on Bible-related influences and the tendencies that can be associated with them, he identifies some major ones in the 8th chapter of his book: Jewish faith, Gnostic sects, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Christianity, including Swedenborg's teachings, but he also mentions Boehme, Philo, and others. In addition, we know from Keith Schuchard and Davies (2004) that Blake, just like Swedenborg, was in close connection with the Moravians and knew their teachings very well (36-43; Regier, 2018, pp. 151-166). Blake, however, reinterpreted all the influences and sources, the most important of which is the Bible itself, and used each in his own way. His views on the Bible and his approach to biblical texts is in close connection with contemporary criticism and also with his image of God. Tannenbaum (1982) shows that, in Blake's view, the God of

the Old Testament is not merciful, He divides humanity, He is jealous, and that jealousy, “the desire for an exclusive position of power” (p. 215), is at the heart of the whole Book of Genesis. This God allows, but forbids, He wants justice over grace—as for Blake, mercy is represented by Jesus who is not one with the Old-Testament God—and expects obedience (Tannenbaum, 1982, pp. 207-211; KJV, Gen. 1:22).¹ Blake combines the image of Elohim, as God is called in the first creation story (Gen. 1-2:4a), and Yahweh (JHWH), as God is called in the second creation narrative account (Gen. 2:4b-23), in a single creation, the abstract creation of Urizen, which is a break from Eternity, and Los’s creation driven by pity (Tannenbaum, 1982, p. 206), to shape clod-of-clay Urizen into a distorted human image. By doing so, in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Justice triumphs over Mercy, because “Blake combines the Creation with the Fall, his vision of the heavenly debate inverts both the rabbinic and Christian sources” that regard the creation of man and of the world as “the victory of love and righteousness over the Torah (the Law)” (Tannenbaum, 1982, pp. 209-210; p. 210). As a result, Blake’s creation myth, when viewed solely from a religious perspective, is actually the story of the Fall, an inevitable consequence of Blake’s Old-Testament image of God. To lead people back to the right path, Blake reinterpreted the symbols of Christianity that had been, according to him, misinterpreted by orthodox Christians, and he did this to cease Satan’s influence among Christians and in the world (Péter, 2017, p. 271; Damrosch, 1980, p. 280), to free mankind from the poison of 18th-century Rationalism and Deism (Péter, 2017, p. 92). In my view, Blake sought a path to ancient Christianity, to spiritual freedom and the Gospel of love, to a personal and unique relationship between God and man without an institution. Unfortunately, in the century of radicalism, surrounded by Dissenters and opposed by prophets of science and conventionalism, his way led through the fires of spiritual, intellectual and political rebellion, where his “Mental Fight” (E, p. 95), as he writes in the Preface of *Milton*, could never cease.

Swedenborg, like Blake, saw himself as God’s chosen one whose duty was to proclaim the true teachings of God, including the time and real meaning of *the Last Judgment* (LJ, p. 87). It seems as if the thoughts of the radical French biblical scholar Antoine Fabre d’Olivet came to life in the person of Blake and Swedenborg. In his opinion, as Prickett (1986) put it, “the Pentateuch was written in a code to be interpreted only by initiates” (p. 125), and Blake, the artist, regarded himself as a prophet of God who could interpret that code, and Swedenborg, the theologian, claimed to have received an enlightening guidance and teachings directly from heaven (LJ, p. 142; AC no. 5). Swedenborg’s attitude

1 I consistently use the electronic version of the Authorized KJV Standard for all biblical references and quotations. <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>.

to the orthodox Christian doctrines and interpretations related to the creation accounts is unique: he agrees that the creation of the world and man is a divine act, but he understands it in a completely different way. As he writes in *Arcana Coelestia*, everything in the Bible can be understood according to their “internal sense” and “external sense” (AC no. 4), that is, according to their spiritual (or heavenly) meaning and to their literal sense. If we read the Bible literally, the first chapters of Genesis tell that the whole world, including man, was created by God, and we learn about a lost paradise due to the sin of the first man. Swedenborg explains in the same section of *Arcana Coelestia* that according to the ‘internal sense’, however, the creation accounts describe the “regeneration” or “the new creation of man”, which means that the creation is not a complete and one-time act, but a continuous work of God in man.

Blake approached this subject somewhat differently. Despite the fact that he borrowed many thoughts from Swedenborg and, by rethinking or criticizing them, incorporated them into his own theological system, his approach is based on the antagonism that he saw between the Old-Testament God, the Legislator and Punisher, and Jesus Christ, the Lord of Mercy and Love. For Blake, these two entities are not one divinity, and they are essentially opposites of each other. As the creation is attributed in Judeo-Christianity to the God of the Old Testament, whom Blake identified with the Law and the Law with cruelty and oppression (E, p. 618; Grimley Kuntz, 2000), the creation or materialization is also the account of a spiritual Fall done by a Demiurge, a “fragmented, imperfect being” (Tannenbaum, 1982, p. 210). Blake’s understanding of the creation accounts is rather an interpretation against the orthodox image of the Old-Testament God and all his actions, his laws in the first place, and he does not seem to deal with the distinction between literal or spiritual sense in *The [First] Book of Urizen*. As in the case of Swedenborg, there is a difference between the external and internal sense of the biblical creation stories, so does the Law have a literal and a fulfilled meaning (Matt. 5:17-20), but for Blake, there is no continuation between the Mosaic Law and the teachings of the Saviour, hence Yahweh is a subordinate, inferior entity compared to Jesus, and so are his laws and actions, including the creation of the world and man. In contrast with Swedenborg’s double understanding of the creation accounts, Blake’s approach is based mostly on the literal sense. He claims that it is the personified Reason alone, Urizen (Yahweh), deprived of Mercy, who is responsible for the imperfect Creation and the oppressive, absurd and abstract laws. If we look at Blake’s famous print, *The Ancient of Days* (Dan. 7:9), we can see Urizen measuring and overseeing the universe while imposing order on the world according to his own rules of scientific reason (Figure 1):

Figure 1



The Ancient of Days in Europe, a Prophecy, Copy B, Object 1 (Bentley 1, Erdman i, Keynes i), 1794. <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/europe.b?desclD=europe.b.illbk.01>.

This depiction of Urizen is rooted in Blake's negative, sometimes hostile attitude to contemporary Enlightenment with its scientific and philosophical theories, as well as to the orthodox law-giver God. Contrary to Swedenborg's interpretation, Blake's interpretation captures only the external or literal sense, and cannot regard Creation as part of the One True God's saving plan, therefore he reveals to us the image of man doomed to die in a terrible and miserable way, and oppressed by a god who is also bound by the chains of his own physical and moral laws, as it is depicted in *The [First] Book of Urizen* (Figure 2):

Figure 2



The [First] Book of Urizen, Copy A, Object 3 (Bentley 22, Erdman 22, Keynes 22). <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/urizen.a?desclD=urizen.a.illbk.03>

It follows from what has been discussed that Blake and Swedenborg apparently do not understand the Decalogue in the same way, thus their approach to the God of the Old Testament is different, consequently they disagree on the positive divine nature of the

biblical Creation. However, their views and theories meet at certain points. Both Blake and Swedenborg deny the orthodox dogma of the Holy Trinity and also the possibility of a Trinitarian Creation theory (E, p. 664; TCR no. 112; AC no. 6887; LJ, p. 103),² but they have different reasons for their belief that leads to this agreement. Blake claims that the god of the Old Testament is either an evil law-giver and subordinate to the real God, or might not even exist, because there is only one God, and He is Jesus Christ. Swedenborg, on the other hand, denies only the Trinity of persons, but not the positive divine character, or existence of Yahweh, since, for him, Christ is Yahweh, the One and Only God, in a visible human form (TCR no. 339, 647). Blake agrees with Swedenborg that Jesus is both human and divine in one person, that the Holy Spirit is God's spiritual power in man, and that man's physical appearance is the outward form of the "Spiritual Man" within (LJ, p. 38; E, p. 1; LJ, p. 43). If we compare Swedenborg's teachings with Blake's *The [First] Book of Urizen*, we can find a significant Swedenborgian influence in Blake's concept about man, and through the image and creation of man, about the creation of the world.

The Creation of the World and Man in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Last Judgment*

In my comparative analysis, I will proceed according to the biblical passages, and in parallel with the passages of the Book of Genesis, I will present Blake's work and Swedenborg's relevant thoughts and teachings written in *The Last Judgment*, supported by thoughts from *Arcana Coelestia*. I chose this method because the interpretations of the two thinkers and their relationship to each other's thoughts are difficult to understand without the biblical passages.

As it is written above, the passages that teach about the pre-creation period that comes before the seven days of creation is used for my analysis together with the first creation account. The description of the pre-creation period, which belongs to the Priestly source together with the seven-day creation account (Puskás, 2010, p. 47), starts at the very beginning of the Torah and shows God's preliminary creating acts that provide the necessary conditions for life and start the clock of history: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. // And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:1-2). First of all, we learn that there is a God, and this deity has the power and will to create. Since He creates the heaven and the earth *ex nihilo*, it is obvious that the material world has no precedent, the whole world is the production of this God. However, Puskás

2 For Trinitarian considerations related to Creation, see Puskás, 2010, pp. 103-106.

(2010) notes that “*creatio ex nihilo* claims something that has no exact equivalent in human experience. It is an assumption of an original aspect that is related to the onliness of God and therefore as incomprehensible as the existence of God itself” (p. 191).³ This passage does not tell much about God’s nature or intentions, but since the creation accounts are historical aetiologies (Puskás, 2010, p. 43), the holy writer’s knowledge, experience and beliefs of a positive God are implied in the creation accounts. It is unnecessary to mention that God is good, it is per se evident at the time the texts are written. Urizen, however, decides to create his world because he wants to stop the everlasting change and burnings that he sees in the Eternals, identified with irrational death. He did not see the change only in others, but also in himself, and to solidify what is changing, he had to conquer himself first to be able to create:

4. From the depths of dark solitude. From

The eternal abode in my holiness,

Hidden set apart in my stern counsels

Reserved for the days of futurity,

I have sought for a joy without pain,

For a solid without fluctuation

Why will you die O Eternals?

Why live in unquenchable burnings?

5. First I fought with the fire; consum’d

Inwards, into a deep world within:

A void immense, wild dark & deep,

Where nothing was: Natures wide womb. (BU 2:4-5)⁴

3 “A *creatio ex nihilo* olyasmit állít, aminek nincs pontos megfelelője az emberi tapasztalatban. Egy eredeti vonatkozásnak a tételezéséről van szó, amely Isten egyedülvalóságával függ össze, s ezért éppoly kevésbé felfogható, mint Isten léte maga.” (The English translation from Hungarian is the author’s.)

4 Following a common scholarly practice, when I quote from or refer to *The [First] Book of Urizen*, I will indicate the no. of the chapter(s) followed by the no. of the verse(s) similarly to the practice that we apply when we cite biblical books (e.g. BU 2:4-5). The quotations from this work will be taken from Erdman, D.V. (1988). *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Newly Rev. Ed.). Doubleday.

The cradle of life is born, which is rather the cradle of materialization and laws. Urizen's intentions might be good, but he places himself above others with his enormous power, which is an error. When we compare Gen 1:1 to *The [First] Book of Urizen*, we see that Urizen, unlike God, is not alone, he is only one of the Eternals, the other equal powers that inspire the prophetic poet to write down their "dark visions of torment" about Urizen (BU Preludium), his acts, his separation from his peers and Eternity, and his self-division. In the first chapter, the beginning of this negative separation is described as follows: "1. Lo, a shadow of horror is risen / In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific! / Self-closed, all-repelling: what Demon / Hath formed this abominable void / This soul-shudd'ring vacuum?—Some said / "It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted / Brooding secret, the dark power hid" (BU 1:1). Urizen turns inwards, and the other Eternals regard him as a Demon because of his abominable separation from the balance of powers and from holiness. Urizen sees their state as death, while the Eternals see his state as torment. In this self-closed state, the self-proclaimed god prepares himself for the act of creation. First, he lays down the foundations of Creation within himself, being the source of material creation, and this preparation includes the creation of the laws that govern the universe: "8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity: / Of pity, compassion, forgiveness. / Let each chuse one habitation: / His ancient infinite mansion: / One command, one joy, one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, one God, one Law" (BU 2:8). As Urizen is the Eternal of Reason, abstraction always comes before action. The mental foundations must precede the work of creation, and this abstraction includes the laws and also the purpose of existence. His laws are logical, but rigid, scientific, but inhuman, consequently unjust. Of course, these are not the laws of nature, but the laws according to he and his creatures should live. For Blake, they are laws of undesirable uniformity (Spalovszky, 2020, p. 49), which is oppression (E, p. 44). When he is over the inner fights and contemplations, the barren wasteland and the waters appear and become subdued, the elements are ruled by Demiurge-Urizen, and Heaven and Earth become separated. Urizen represses his internal conflicts into "A wide world of solid obstruction" (BU 2:5), and rises above the waves of supposed falsities and weaknesses within. This might be a parody of Swedenborg's teaching about the regeneration of man, his rebirth as a "spiritual Man" (LJ, p. 52), which, for Swedenborg, is the actual story of the biblical creation according to its spiritual sense (which is not the literal, but the spiritual meaning of the texts), discussed in detail in the first volume of *Arcana Coelestia* (AC no. 6-181). However, a relevant teaching appears in *The Last Judgment* as well when Swedenborg writes about the "Exteriors" and "Interiors of the Mind". If man focuses on heavenly things, then his "Interiors" are open and the spirit of man becomes healed and regenerated. If man focuses on earthly things and not the

heavenly things, sin appears and takes control of man's life, and man drifts farther away from Heaven:

in Proportion as the Interiors of the Mind are open, in the same Proportion Man looks towards Heaven, but in Proportion as the Interiors are shut and the Exteriors open, in the same Proportion he looks towards Hell; for the Interiors of Man are formed for the Reception of heavenly Things, and his Exteriors for the Reception of worldly Things, and they who receive the World and not at the same Time Heaven, receive Hell. (LJ, pp. 28-29)

For Swedenborg, creation is reformation in a spiritual way (LJ, pp. 6-7), which is based on man's right attitude and thinking. Blake's Urizen, however, attempts to regenerate alone, that is, to reform himself to be able to shape the new world according to his own laws. Unfortunately, he is closed in himself and cannot see the truth anymore, his search for answers is a purely rational journey within, his tools are limited to rationality, and he loses contact with Heaven (Eternity). A Swedenborgian regeneration cannot happen without Christ's regulations and government (LJ, p. 43, p. 104), and those who refuse to surrender to Him, and choose to follow their own laws, cannot be reformed until they do not give up to be being their own god. Urizen relies on reason alone, which allows him to create an imperfect, imbalanced world, which only proves that Urizen is not an omnipotent deity. For Blake, "God's omnipotence and his foreknowledge of the Fall cannot be reconciled" (Tannenbaum, 1982, p. 210), and his Urizen is the Old-Testament God. However, it is interesting that Swedenborg writes in *The Last Judgment* about the similarity of the human mind and Heaven that

The Form of Heaven is like the Form of the Human Mind, the Perfection whereof advances according to the Increase of Truth and Goodness, for thus Wisdom and Intelligence are promoted: The Reason why the Form of the Human Mind, which is heavenly Wisdom and Intelligence, is similar to the Form of Heaven, is because the Mind is the smallest Image of that Form . . . (LJ, pp. 16-17)

This passage advocates the positive heavenly nature of intelligence and wisdom. Urizen, the Eternal of Intelligence, however, is not a heavenly Lord, but a Satanic, Demonic creator. This antagonism is probably due to the contrast between Swedenborg's and Blake's Old-Testament image of God, and that image is closely connected to their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Blake thinks that the Old-Testament laws are oppressive human creations (Regier, 2018, p. 170), and Yahweh is not one with Jesus, the Only God, consequently Yahweh (Urizen) is not god and his laws are inferior to the teachings and example of

Jesus. He openly declares that “The laws of the Jews were (both ceremonial & real) the basest & most oppressive of human codes” (E, p. 618). Swedenborg, on the other hand, argues that the Law contains all things that belong to the love of God and other human beings (TCR no. 287). He claims that the Old-Testament God is one with Jesus (AC no. 15), hence He is good in nature, and His creation is a positive act of regeneration.

Another important aspect of creation that Gen 1:1 reveals is time. “In the beginning” testifies that before God’s creation, there was no time, it was born together with creation. In *Arcana Coelestia*, Swedenborg interprets Gen. 1:1-2 as the early childhood of man, when man is about to receive the mercy of the Lord, portrayed as “the Spirit of God” Who “moved upon the face of the waters”. In parallel with this interpretation, Swedenborg presents interesting thoughts about the beginnings in *The Last Judgment*. He saw the beginnings in three historical periods that are much more related to *the Last Judgment* than to the creation itself (LJ, pp. 87-90), because it places much greater emphasis on the recreation than on the beginnings. This is true of Heaven, the Church, and man, consequently the creation of the world is interesting to him in relation to them. He claims that there were three Last Judgments in history, and each Last Judgment was also a new beginning, a recreation. These beginnings, although they have a specific time in our history, are also new beginnings to Heaven and Earth. When a Last Judgment takes place, a new Earth and Heaven are created and the previous ones are abolished (LJ, pp. 139-140). Since Earth and Heaven are closely connected in Swedenborg’s theology, and this connection is realized through human existence (LJ, p. 13), the destiny of Heaven is linked to the destiny of mankind. When sin rises to an intolerable level, when the denial of God’s Word endangers the spiritual survival of mankind, a Last Judgment takes place: “. . . the way to Light and to Heaven is shut up, when the Knowledges of spiritual Things are dispersed by Idolatries, and when the Word is adulterated, lightly esteemed and taken away” (LJ, p. 135). It must be told, however, that Earth means the Church in the world, and Heaven means its pair for those who are no longer in bodily form (LJ, p. 2). The consequence of a Last Judgment is a new, recreated spiritual reality, and the reformation of Man is also a recreation, when the natural Man becomes spiritual (LJ, p. 7). Consequently, a Last Judgment is the end of a sinful state and the beginning of a new era, which is similar to God’s Creation, the end of the age of timeless existence, and the beginning of times. The Creation can therefore be interpreted in retrospect, it can be deduced from *the Last Judgment*: God’s Creation is the defining beginning that determines the content of *the Last Judgment*, since that judgment must weigh and measure all that creation has always been directed to, otherwise it would be an unfair, arbitrary punishment. Swedenborg’s Last Judgment comes when it is necessary due to sin, it is not a one-time and unrepeatable

occasion, and it contains reference to the creation of the world that took place at an indefinite time in history, but is also a definite moment in individual life, which is the beginning of man's spiritual recreation.

Blake attributes the beginning of times to the beginning of Urizen's abstractions, which is the actual beginning of Creation. This change, however, is similar to Swedenborg's spiritual regeneration that affects the whole human life, not only the spiritual, but also the corporeal. The following verses show that time was born with Urizen's abstract creation inside of him, but could be determined in some way with his existence as a creator:

2. Times on times he divided, & measur'd

Space by space in his ninefold darkness

Unseen, unknown! changes appeared

In his desolate mountains rifted furious

By the black winds of perturbation

3. For he strove in battles dire

In unseen conflictions with shapes

Bred from his forsaken wilderness

Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element

Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark revolving in silent activity:

Unseen in tormenting passions;

An activity unknown and horrible;

A self-contemplating shadow,

In enormous labours occupied. (BU 1:2-4)

When the abstract world is made, it is time for Urizen to materialize all abstractions. Due to his abstraction and self-apotheosis, "Eternity roll'd wide apart" (BU 3:3), and this

also includes the separation of rationality (Urizen) from imagination (Los) (BU 3:9). The abominable nature of this separation can be paralleled with Swedenborg's teaching in *The Last Judgment* about the unity of man's two faculties: will and understanding, where "the Will of Man is the very Esse of his Life" and "the Recipient of Love", and "the Understanding is the Existence of his Life" and "the Recipient of Faith" (LJ, p. 76). Swedenborg writes as follows: "How perverted a State they are in, whose Understanding and Will do not act in Unity" (LJ, p. 78). Those whose "Will of Good" and "Understanding of Truth" do not work in unity, cannot do what is right according to the Lord (LJ, pp. 78-79), thus the actions of man are not in accordance with the heavenly order. If this unity is broken, a perverted state is realized. Urizen separates himself from Los (BU 3:9, pp. 12-14), and the other Eternals see the consequences of this action: "10. But Urizen laid in a stony sleep / Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity // 11. The Eternals said: What is this? Death / Urizen is a clod of clay" (BU 3:10-14). "CLAY is the substance with which the creator works" (Damon, 2013, 88d-89a), and Urizen has transformed himself into this raw material of the world. Los has to act out of pity in a creative way, and shape the world from Urizen's body, that is, according to Urizen's abstract plans. The biblical Creator is also in the world, but at the same time outside of it. Prickett (1986) notes that "Nature and God are both separate and intimately connected" (p. 121). The regeneration of Urizen, which is rather a degeneration, begins, and it lasts for seven "Ages" (BU 4 [b]). This description parallels to the seven-day creation account in Gen 1:3-2:4, which is a central theme in Blake's theology of creation, and forms a significant part of both *The Book of Los* and *The [First] Book of Urizen*.

When we read the seven-day narrative in Genesis, we find an expanding, growing, progressing world in exuberant beauty, which due to God's unlimited creative power, becomes full of life. In Blake's cosmogony, however, it seems that "the creation of the material world was really a Fall caused by the contraction of the deity" (Larrissy, 1979, p. 165). Shrinkage is a negative tendency in Blake's creation myth, and this degeneration ends in spiritual death: "And now his eternal life / Like a dream was obliterated" (BU 5:3). It is clear from the description of the Creation that Blake does not speak about the material world. The biblical story of the seven-day creation is only a model to contrast with. Blake uses a similar pattern, but the changes in the story are in the opposite direction: the world is not expanding, but condensing into solidity through a process of ossification.

In the Bible, God creates by his word, and the description of the days always ends with the same line: "And the evening and the morning . . ." (Gen 1), which divides time into units. A similar division can be observed in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, although Blake takes great

care to extract the harmony of intellect and imagination from the process of creation, and presents a consistently negative description to the reader. The appearance of sulphur, for instance, is a sign of evil materialization, which is contrary to spiritual existence and progress (Damon, 2013, 390a-b): “And Urizen (so his eternal name) / His prolific delight obscurd more & more / In dark secrecy hiding in surgeing / Sulphureous fluid his phantasies” (BU 4:2). Blake used sulphur possibly because of its traditional connotation with hellfire (Damon, 2013, 390a-b). This association leaves no doubt concerning the evil nature of Urizen’s division from Eternity and the process of creation. The time periods end with recurring closing lines, only the number changes according to the actual “Age”: “And a first Age passed over, / And a state of dismal woe.” As much as Reason’s abstraction unfolds and materializes, taking the shape of his own fantasies, so does Imagination become more tired and closed within the universe of Reason. When the Old-Testament God is done with a phase of Creation, the holy writer always concludes that God saw that His creation was good, the opposite of which is true in Blake’s book with the negative confirmation of the process full of torment and “dismal woe”. The body parts and senses are bent to the will of Urizen, who from his embryo thoughts is smitten into a human shadow of his former glory. The infernal Creation lasts for seven Ages, not six, because the creation of the world is equal with the transformation of Urizen where a day of joy and holy rest is impossible. Los is the creator, and Urizen is the recreated. When Los is ready with the full creation process, standing exhausted by his tremendous labours, he is terrified to see what he has done:

1. In terror Los shrunk from his task:

His great hammer fell from his hand:

His fires beheld, and sickening,

Hid their strong limbs in smoke.

For with noises ruinous loud;

With hurtlings & clashings & groans

The Immortal endur’d his chains,

Tho’ bound in a deadly sleep. (BU 5:1)

Los’s power has diminished, he remains silent telling no prophecies. Reason and Imagination, however separated, are now bound together:

4. Shudd'ring, the Eternal Prophet smote

With a stroke, from his north to south region

The bellows & hammer are silent now

A nerveless silence, his prophetic voice

Siez'd; a cold solitude & dark void

The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd. (BU 5:4)

It seems obvious that Urizen's transformation is the opposite of Swedenborg's regeneration. However, there is a striking similarity that cannot be ignored: we see a single human regeneration/degeneration in the creation account of both Blake and Swedenborg. Although Blake's person is an exact character, the manifestation of Reason, and Swedenborg's person is not an exact person, but anybody who is regenerated or reformed, the process takes place in a spiritual and psychic dimension, and both interpretations of the biblical Creation are different from the orthodox interpretation of the Genesis creation narratives. This new interpretation must be attributed to Swedenborg, and it is obvious that Blake adopted, then adapted Swedenborg's thoughts to his own theological system. Swedenborg mentions in *The Last Judgment* that "Man is also created after the Form of Heaven as to his Mind, and the Form of Heaven is from the essential Divinity" (p. 41), and this is exactly what we see in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, except that the two faculties of the mind are separated from each other in Blake's work, thus it is a perverted form and Creation. When Swedenborg reinterpreted the orthodox teachings, he did not reject Creation as a myth, he rather used it as an explanation to show how God reforms the spirit of man. His teaching about man is also the teaching about the world and God. Consequently, if we truly want to understand Swedenborg's approach to Creation, we need to discuss his interpretation of the sixth day in the seven-day narrative, as it is the climax of God's Creation.

We can conclude from Gen 1:2 that God has always been present in the world from the very beginning of times: "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters". It means that there was no other existence before God, and the world is dependent on Him. This is equally true for man, the most important and the last one in the line of creations, full of dignity. This dignity and importance is underlined by the fact that Jesus incarnated for the salvation of mankind. For this reason, "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27). This point of view is important for both Blake and Swedenborg, because their

anthropology is inseparable from their Christology and cosmogony. They see Jesus as the One and Only God, who is a "Divine Humanity" (LJ, p. 10), that is, a human being who is equally God Himself (Phil. 2:6-8). A decade after the publication of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Blake interpreted this teaching in his poem Milton as follows: "But the Divine Humanity & Mercy gave us a Human / Form /Because we were combind in Freedom & holy / Brotherhood" (E, p. 131). This unique relationship between human body and heavenly spirit has a special significance in Swedenborg's theology. He claims that the human spirit is formed after the "Image of Heaven", while the human body is the "Image of the World" (LJ, pp. 28-29, AC no. 3628, 4523). Swedenborg explains that man is created in a way

"that in every Man there is an inmost or supreme Part, into which the Divine Principle of the Lord first or proximately flows, and from whence the Lord regulates and governs the other Interiors belonging to the spiritual and natural Man . . ." (LJ, p. 43)

This teaching implies that man is in direct contact with God and heaven in an ontological sense, since his soul is made in the heavenly image of God, on which Jesus has a direct influence. This spirit, however, has a direct connection with the outward form of man: the "Spiritual Man, which is within every one's natural Body, is equally in a Human Form as the natural Man", and "the natural Man derives it's Human Form from the Spiritual Man within it" (LJ, p. 38). Blake promulgates the same theory in *All Religions are One* (1788), when he states that

. . . the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius. which by the Ancients was call'd an Angel & Spirit & Demon. (E 1)

These thoughts have a great impact on *The [First] Book of Urizen* as well: when Urizen is transformed into the world, he assimilates with his own perverted thoughts, and his own shape is like his inner world. Blake calls the 'Divine Principle' the 'Poetic Genius', but his thoughts are identical to Swedenborg's doctrines. In addition, he uses the nouns "Angel", "Spirit" and "Demon" to describe the soul of man. If we compare these facts to the following passage from *The Last Judgment* about the creation of man, the parallel ideas are strikingly obvious: "... to create in the Image and Likeness of God, is to reposit in Man all Things of Divine Order from first to last, and thus as to the Interiors of his Mind to make him an Angel" (p. 35). In Swedenborg's theology, since every man's spirit is heavenly, the man's soul is an 'Angel', that is, the "spiritual Man": "the true Man is the spiritual Man, the natural part is just a Servant or Instrument" (LJ, p. 52), hence only the

'spiritual Man' can be the subject of Creation and judgment, which is a key doctrine in Swedenborg's theology. For Blake and Swedenborg, creation means that the individual endowed with dignity goes through all the phases of transformation, from the embryonic existence of faith, love, purity, and knowledge to the reformed man, that is, he returns to the beginnings, to the original state assigned to man in Creation (LJ, p. 34). For the restoration of the balance of powers, for regeneration, Urizen (Reason) should give up his claim for dominance over the other Eternals, but this does not happen in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, since Creation in this work is about the Fall. According to Swedenborg's theology, the sixth day of God's creation is the end of man's spiritual rebirth: ". . . by a new Creation of Man is meant his Reformation, inasmuch as he is made anew, that is, from natural he becomes spiritual; and hence it is, that a new Creature signifies a Reformed Man" (LJ, p. 7), whose faith and love, will and intellect are combined and form a unity, which makes man become God's image (AC no. 60-63), and this is the ultimate fulfillment of Creation.

Conclusion

To summarize the impact of Swedenborg's *The Last Judgment* on Blake's *The [First] Book of Urizen*, we can conclude that we can discover the parallels, contrasts and parodies of countless ideas and theological teachings in Blake's work. While Swedenborg's understanding of the Book of Genesis is according to two different senses, the literal and the divine meaning, Blake's work also has multiple dimensions and layers that provide us with different meanings. We can regard Blake's book as a psychological journey, a protest against state religion and institutionalism, a critique of the intertwining of political and religious powers, but it can be read as Blake's version of Creation in his "Bible of Hell" (E, p. 44), influenced by multiple contemporary religious and philosophical tendencies. Blake, like Swedenborg, wanted to find the ultimate truths about man and God, and he worked tirelessly throughout his life to explore the meaning and purpose of man's existence, which undoubtedly starts with Creation, be it spiritual or corporeal. However, for both Swedenborg and Blake, the Creation of man and the world is inseparable from other interconnected theological issues that form the basis of their conclusions. We cannot comprehend the message of their works and understand their conclusions unless we become familiar with those issues and realize that their concepts of Creation are only a result of interpretations of other complex Judeo-Christian doctrines. Not surprisingly, the impact of *The Last Judgment* on *The [First] Book of Urizen*, even if we focus on Creation, is most detectable when we compare and contrast Swedenborg's and Blake's teachings concerning the existence, nature and dignity of man, the complexity of human and divine

faculties, the importance of Jesus as “Divine Humanity”, love and mercy, the identity and nature of God, and the authority of biblical laws.

We all have our own beliefs about the beginning of human life and the world. Whether we accept the teachings of Swedenborg and Blake or not, we can certainly be enriched by knowing them, and we can realize that, in spite of all our attempts to this day, the beginning of existence can be brought closer to the truth only by the joint effort of science, art, and religion.

List of Abbreviations:

AC	Heavenly Secrets (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i>)
BU	<i>The [First] Book of Urizen</i> (Copy A)
E	Erdman, D.V. (1988). <i>The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake</i> (N. Rev. Ed.).
KJV	Authorized King James Version Standard (https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/)
LJ	<i>The Last Judgment</i>
TCR	True Christian Religion

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