

“The Book Of eternal brass”: The Bible and the Laws in William Blake’s *The [First] Book of Urizen* and Emanuel Swedenborg’s *The Last Judgment*

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Introduction

William Blake was an artist and thinker whose character was as controversial as it was misunderstandable, even in his own time, let alone after his death. His works reflect a philosophical and theological system that is very different from what we are used to in connection with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, more precisely, from our usual assumptions about the periods of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The universe he created out of contemporary and earlier philosophical systems, the influence of religious movements like the Moravians and theologians like Emanuel Swedenborg or thinkers like Johann Kaspar Lavater, together with his own personal faith and idiosyncratic interpretations, might seem to be chaotic: a form of disorder, at least for the first encounter. However, this apparent disorder is not a chaos, but the result of a new way of seeing the world, which is grounded in a unique understanding of the relationship between language and thinking. Blake believed that language is creation, but word and thought cannot be fully reconciled, and forcing them into a universal system is probably impossible (Regier 147-50). The links are there, but the relationship between word and thought cannot be demonstrated in a didactical, self-evident or axiomatic way. In his famous letter to Rev^d Dr Trusler, Blake defines his own attitude towards explicitness and obscurity, highlighting his interest in what is in exact or mysterious:

You say that you want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act. (702)

Blake attempted to write his own prophetic books in accordance with this theory, in the same manner as biblical books had been created. He was familiar with the Fragment hypothesis of Alexander Geddes, a Catholic priest who died in 1802, and the famous work of the eighteenth-century Anglican bishop Robert Lowth, *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1754). Both of these influenced Blake’s own approach

to the Bible, its moral laws and its sacredness.¹ Among many texts and illustrations, one of the best examples in which Blake's complex thinking about the Bible can be observed is *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794), Blake's own Book of Genesis.² Among the many possible influences in this illuminated work, in the present paper I intend to focus on the teaching of Emanuel Swedenborg, one of the most important writers in Blake's search for his own path, focusing on his views on the Law and the Bible as developed in his work *The Last Judgment*. Although one of the primary aims of this work of Swedenborg is to show that mankind does not suffer the Last Judgment as preached by the priests of the established Church of Rome or by the pastors of the Protestant Churches, and to reveal a secret that Swedenborg, according to his own testimony, witnessed the Last Judgment in 1757, which was the third of the Last Judgments in the history of mankind, this work contains an enormous number of interesting ideas and theological teachings that can be found in Blake's works in their original or reinterpreted form (*The Last Judgment* 86-90). Sometimes we encounter Swedenborg's thoughts in a parodied form in certain works of Blake as in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, depending on what period they were conceived in Blake's art. Comparing *The [First] Book of Urizen* with *The Last Judgment* will hopefully be an interesting and informative contribution to Blake studies, precisely because this pairing is unusual, also exciting, since a comparison with *Arcana Coelestia*, due to a detailed treatise on Genesis, seems more logical and much more promising at first. Although a close examination of *Arcana Coelestia* proves useful in many respects, the comparison with *The Last Judgment* is unique, especially when the focus is on biblical laws and the Scripture.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was an eighteenth-century scientist, a prolific writer and theologian, son of a Lutheran bishop, who had a considerable effect on Blake's religious thinking. As Ágnes Péter concludes based on Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism* (2000), Blake's intellectual relationship with Swedenborg lasted longer than with any other quasi contemporary religious thinker (Péter 40). Both Swedenborg and Blake regarded themselves as prophets of the Lord, chosen for a special purpose of God: Swedenborg believed himself to be the chosen one to proclaim the Last Judgment and the true teachings of the Lord (*The Last Judgment* 83), while Blake thought that it was his mission to reinterpret the symbols of Christianity (which had been misinterpreted by orthodox Christians), and by doing so, to end Satan's influence (Péter 271; Damrosch 280). Both had connections with the Moravian Church and both were influenced, to some degree, by Moravian teachings and practices (Davies and Keith Schuchard 36-43;

1 According to the Fragment hypothesis of Geddes, the Pentateuch is made up of fragmentary sections partly of Mosaic origin that were put together in Solomon's time. This theory could encourage Blake to write illuminated books the way the Bible was made up, in other words, to put fragments together, sometimes in different order. This is best seen in *The [First] Book of Urizen*. In Lowth's *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, the Bible is described as poetry, and this idea had a great influence on Blake, which could be one of the main impulses that encouraged him to write his own prophetic books (see Kamusikiri pars. 1-3).

2 Following a common scholarly practice, when I quote from or refer to *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania*, 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. "The [First] Book of Urizen" 1.1).

Regier 151-66). While Blake's relationship with these teachings was via his mother, a member of the Moravian Church, Swedenborg was in direct and personal contact with the Fetter Lane congregation in London (Péter 26). It is obvious that Swedenborg knew the Moravian doctrines very well, and he certainly profited by his own experiences with the Moravian Brothers when he wrote his great theological works, later available for Blake in English translation. In recent scholarship, Blake's connections with the Moravians have been intensely scrutinized; however, his engagement with Swedenborg's writing, while acknowledged, is rarely studied in depth.

Without listing all of Swedenborg's works that could possibly influence Blake, including his great opus *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-1756), and those that Blake even annotated with great attention, it appears to be evident that *The Last Judgment* (1758) also left its mark on Blake's theological thinking. Morton D. Paley provided probably the most thorough account of the relationship between Swedenborg and Blake, based on textual and ideological connections as well as historical evidence, such as Blake's participation in the Swedenborgians' General Conference held on 13-17 April, 1789, where Blake and his wife both signed the Conference's Minute Book ("A New Heaven Is Begun" sec. II). Paley does not mention *The Last Judgment* as one of the texts influencing Blake's *The [First] Book of Urizen*; however, he mentions it as a reference work for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. He divides Blake's interest in Swedenborg into four periods, claiming that between 1793 and 1800, when the *The [First] Book of Urizen* was published, "there is little to indicate interest in Swedenborg on Blake's part" ("A New Heaven Is Begun" sec. I). Completed in 1793, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, has a clear and polemical reference to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (1758), and this marks the end-point of Blake's fervent interest in Swedenborg, in Paley's view. Bentley, however, notes that Blake included early sketches for *The [First] Book of Urizen* in a notebook that contained images from the period between 1790 and 1793 (142). The completion of this illuminated book required immense work on Blake's part, both in composing the lines and illustrating the plates, and the completion of the first version by 1794 was possible only because the preliminary work had started well before its publication and had been going on somewhat parallel to the work on *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Therefore, I would argue that Blake's second period of engagement with Swedenborg did not end sharply in 1793, as proposed by Paley, but could last until at least 1794 or even 1795, the year when Copy B of *The [First] Book of Urizen* was printed and *The Book of Los*, Blake's second creation story was finished.

Blake returned to his work on *The [First] Book of Urizen* around 1818 at the latest, the year when Copy G, the last remaining copy was printed. This coincides in time with what Paley described as the fourth period of his engagement with Swedenborg, starting around 1800, when Blake returned to some earlier arguments, but his attitude towards Swedenborg's writing show signs of ambivalence ("A New Heaven Is Begun" sec. I). In *The Last Judgment*, Swedenborg declared that the most important date of their times, the year of the Last Judgment, was 1757 (87). This was the year when Blake was born. It is more than unlikely that Blake, who showed such a high degree of interest in Swedenborg's theology, would fail to take note of this coincidence, or to interpret this particular work in depth. It would seem equally improbable that, having finished *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he would forget about Swedenborg

for seven years. Even if the influence worked in subtler ways, we may assume that it never quite stopped, and as I wish to demonstrate in this paper, a careful analysis of *The [First] Book of Urizen* might reveal deep connections with *The Last Judgment*. In this comparative study, I want to illuminate the parallels and contrasts between the two works in such closely related issues as the interpretation and acceptance of Old-Testament laws, the interpretation of the relationship between God and man, the unity and holiness of the Scripture, the interpretation and role of the person of Christ, and the importance of the relationship between faith and love. The central issue will be the interpretation of biblical laws and the Bible in the light of the two works.

Blake and Swedenborg on Faith, Love and the Biblical Law

For Swedenborg, unlike for most other Protestants of the time, *sola fide* was apparently not enough for salvation. As he wrote in *The Last Judgment*, “the doctrinal Notions concerning Faith alone destroy Charity” (66). He later added that “Worship from the Good of Charity is true Worship, but when proceeding from the Truth of Faith without the Good of Charity, it is merely an external Act” (68). In *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*³ (1763), he also claims that “the Whole of Charity and Faith is in Works” (605), which clearly does not follow the principle of “faith alone” but is consistent with the pre-Reformation teachings and the line from the Bible: “Even so Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (*Authorized King James Version*, James 2.17). Swedenborg’s passage was annotated by Blake in 1788 with the following remark: “The Whole of the New Church is in the Active Life & not in Ceremonies at all” (605), which proves that Blake shared Swedenborg’s view about the importance of actions as opposed to mere faith and religious rituals. Swedenborg valued “charity” as the most important virtue together with faith. For him, even faith had to be filled with love to develop into a real faith, not to remain a mere application of doctrines. He professed that “Faith separate from Charity is no Faith” (*The Last Judgment* 66). Charity, then, is not merely affection or emotional love, it is rather consciously wanting the good of others and doing what leads to salvation by being useful and devoted. As Swedenborg declared in *The Last Judgment*: “to love our Neighbour is to do what is good, just, and upright in all our Dealings and Concerns” (73). By “our Neighbour” he meant the Lord, every man, our society, country, the Church and “in an universal Sense the Kingdom of the Lord” (73).

Blake’s concept of love is not the same. Although he agrees that love and faith should be seen in actions, he also thinks that love comes from Jesus, as Jesus is the Lord and the Lord is but infinite love and forgiveness. He stated in his annotations to Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* that “if a thing loves it is infinite” (604). For Blake, love is a divine quality in all living entities, and also in man,

3 The full title of this work is *The Wisdom of Angels, concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*. I will use a shorter title, as it is commonly accepted. The quotations from this work will be taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, Doubleday, 1988, and will be cited in the text by the number of the page on which they appear.

which contradicts Swedenborg's distinction between human love and divine love. Swedenborg argues that divine love must not be self-love, and therefore it should be distinct from the love of all other beings that have no trace of divine essence in them (*Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* no. 49). This disagreement between the two authors must be rooted in their differing conceptions of man and God, which means a difference mainly in how they see Jesus Christ, as he is the most central, the most defining figure in both Swedenborg's and Blake's theology. It should be noted, however, that similarly to Swedenborg, Blake is also against extreme self-love. He thinks that by the rise of an exclusive form of self-love, we would witness the rise of evil (Baine and Baine 568-71). However, this is certainly not attributable to God being loved by another infinite entity, or by Himself, as Swedenborg has it.

If we want to understand Blake's conception of Jesus, we may rely on Ágnes Péter's well-founded tripartite division. She distinguishes three phases in how Blake viewed Jesus: in the first phase, we see Jesus as a rebel who revolts against the binding laws of the Old-Testament God, the second is about a Jesus who mixes his rebellious character with suffering, and the last phase is represented by the ultimate Jesus figure, who becomes "the archetypal form of symbol creation, the subject and object of the aesthetic approach, through whom the universal meaning is revealed in concrete reality" (Péter 284, my translation).⁴ Since *The [First] Book of Urizen* was created in the first phase, we need to focus on the rebellious Jesus who turns against the Law, and we need to interpret the book bearing in mind that at that time Blake had not reached his final interpretation of Jesus yet. However, it is also important and informative to see how Blake described Jesus in the 1790s. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake refers to Jesus as the one and true God: "is not God One? & is not he visible in Jesus Christ?" He also holds Jesus to be the greatest and most exemplary man who should be loved accordingly: "if Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree" (43).

As Jesus is both God and "the greatest man" for Blake, he is a perfect unity of divinity and humanity in one person. He is the perfect "human form divine" ("The Divine Image" 12-13)—an idea adapted from Swedenborg's original "Divine Humanity of the Lord". According to *The Last Judgment*, this is "a Form of Divine Order" in man (9-10), since, for Swedenborg, everything that is divine is human in form (*Heaven and Hell* no. 78). However, Blake's focus and that of Swedenborg are a bit different, in spite of their striking similarities at first reading. On the one hand, Blake agrees with Lavater, whose views on this issue are in line with Swedenborg's, that God is a person, not an abstraction, and that it is only possible to believe in a god like Jesus, because other gods do not exist. To support this point, we may compare Blake's 1788 annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (below) with Lavater's original lines:

He, who adores an impersonal God, has none; and, without guide or rudder,
launches on an immense abyss that first absorbs his powers, and next himself.

⁴ "a szimbólumalkotás archetipikus formája, az esztétikai szemlélet alanya és tárgya, s rajta keresztül feltárul az univerzális jelentés a konkrét valóságban" (Péter 284).

Most superlatively beautiful & Most affectionatly Holy & pure would to God
that all men would consider it. (596)

On the other hand, while Swedenborg emphasizes that man can become similar to God as His image, Blake claims that God *is* Man, which is a far more radical proposition. In his annotations to George Berkeley's *Siris* (1744), Blake wrote that "Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him What Jesus came to Remove was the Heathen or Platonic Philosophy which blinds the Eye of Imagination The Real Man" (664). This might be connected to another annotation to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, according to which "human nature is the image of God" (597). As we can see, it is the nature of man that is the image of God, but the true man is imagination for Blake. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he concludes that "men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast" (38), and the greatest of men, the perfect man is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is equally divine, the Messiah, the God of love and forgiveness, and a rebel against all things that bind human souls and deprive humankind from their freedom. Consequently, if man wants to become divine or similar to God, he should become like Jesus: all imagination. This is only possible by the "Poetic Genius," Blake's version of the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, which, however, means something other than the orthodox Holy Spirit. In *All Religions are One* (1788), Blake's conviction is clearly stated: "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" (1).

As Blake's Jesus is a rebel against the Law that restricts human freedom, he rebels against the Commandments and also against the Old-Testament God, best characterized in Blake by Urizen, the God of Reason, the protagonist of *The [First] Book of Urizen*. According to Blake, Jesus—being the perfect Imagination—formulated a specific program by rebelling against the Ten Commandments that focus on punishment and fear, instead of love and forgiveness. The guiding principle of Jesus's teachings is forgiveness with love, not accusation. The prohibitions of the Old Testament are replaced with the power of the imagination, as the Poetic Genius spreads across the world through the redeeming, liberating love of Christ. The two stone tablets are overwritten with the two pillars of Christ's teaching, first given in the Old Testament and renewed in the New: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Lk 10.10).

This teaching of love is based on the Book of Deuteronomy of the Old Testament, on a passage of fundamental significance for Jews as well as Christians: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD. / And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6.4-5).⁵

⁵ In some other translations the "one Lord" appears as the "only Lord" or "only one Lord," see the New Living Translation, Contemporary English Version, God's Word Translation. The Hebrew text contains the word which means "one" or "single" (*A Hebrew-English Bible* <https://www.mechonmamre.org/p/pt/pt0506.htm#4>).

For a Jewish person, the first line (Deut. 6.4) is both a creed and an expression of Jewish identity. It is about faith in the One and Only God and the special relationship between God and His people, which presupposes faith and love for God, but also carries a conviction of God's care and love for His children. This means that there is no real contrast between love and the Commandments, because to love the Lord presupposes the observance of the Law, not because it is obligatory, but because it is the path of the righteous whom God loves. The apparently sharp contrast between the teaching of Jesus and the Ten Commandments maybe resolved in another sense if we consider the declaration of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5.17-19.)

The problem for Blake possibly lies in the emphasis on fulfillment, not on observance, and this prevents him from resolving the contradiction. Jesus is more than a mere mediator of the Law or the mouthpiece of God, because He is the Messiah who teaches with power and divine authority. He declares Himself to be one with the Father (John 10.30, 17.21, 5.18). If they are one, then the teachings and example of Jesus are the ultimate truth to follow. Christ has the right even to overwrite what has already been written, and to change what nobody else had the right to change before. Since for Blake He is also the perfect man, filled with the same Poetic Genius that flows through mankind through Him and by Him, man might also be authorized to do the same. By doing so, he would only follow Jesus, the One God, who has shown that merely keeping the rules does not make anybody a better person, and that only love can change the heart of men (Grimley Kuntz 428). Blake's Jesus is imbued with the Poetic Genius, rising from his emotions, not from the intellect. This does not mean the lack of rationality, it is rather the Blakean path to reach a balance of the human faculties. As Thompson explains, Blake's "Poetic Genius" is the divine spirit in humanity that is "expressed in the affections and not in the understanding," without which "man could never transcend his own nature" (131).

In Blake, Jesus is an acting change, not a passive fixedness, which makes him similar to Swedenborg's understanding of love as action. As it was discussed earlier, Swedenborg associates charity with good and right actions (*The Last Judgment* 68, 73). When Jesus acts according to the true spirit of the Law, which is an open deviation from the hitherto unfulfilled, but accepted interpretation of the Mosaic Law, he gives an example of the practice of divine love. Jesus is the most perfect realizer of love, as he is the author of love himself, that is, God himself, and at the same time, the

whole human race. Jesus has authority over the Law, in both Blake and Swedenborg. Swedenborg's understanding of charity is closely connected to the doctrines of "the Ancient Church" that existed, according to him, at the time when Jesus came to the world to redeem mankind (*The Last Judgment* 89-90). But Swedenborg also saw a direct connection between the Decalogue and love, and acknowledged a certain continuity between the two Testaments. According to his final work, *True Christian Religion* (1771), the Decalogue contains all things that relate to love towards God, and towards our Neighbour:

It is acknowledged, that the Decalogue in the Word is called the Law, by Way of Eminence, because it containeth the Sum and Substance of whatever regardeth Man; wherefore that Law was written on two Tablets, one of which treateth of God, and the other of Man. It is also acknowledged, that all Things belonging to Doctrine, and Life have Relation to Love towards God, and Love towards our Neighbour; and all Things belonging to such Love are contained in the Decalogue. (no. 287)

Blake does not share this view and repeatedly challenges the supreme and unchangeable authority of the Ten Commandments.

While Swedenborg explains the meaning of the Commandments in their different senses in depth, Blake often seems to mock the ancient Law. As Alexander Regier concludes, "Blake suggests that the eternal laws of God' are human constructions made under false pretences" (170). Thus, a few years after the composition of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, in his annotations to Bishop Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (a pamphlet attacking Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*) Blake writes: "The laws of the Jews were (both ceremonial & real) the basest & most oppressive of human codes. & being like all other codes given under pretence of divine command were what Christ pronounced them The Abomination that maketh desolate. i. e. State Religion which is the Source of all Cruelty" (618). Although Blake disagrees with Thomas Paine in many questions, it seems that he wants to defend him against Watson ("To Defend the Bible in This Year 1798 Would Cost a Man His Life" 32). The fact that Blake mentions "State Religion" here is a very important point, as the Bishop is a symbol of the Church of England and its influence, which is not only religious, but also political. Blake, just like Paine, advocates renewal, and sees the Church as an institution of old errors and corrupted Christianity based on wealth and political power, which can also be seen in the connection of the established Church and the state in Blake's time ("To Defend the Bible in This Year 1798 Would Cost a Man His Life" 38). This Church is the child and keeper of the biblical laws, which Blake identifies with oppression, and the state is the creator of the social and political laws that regulate and govern man's life in the society. The close intertwining of the two provokes resentment in Blake, but it is clear that the main source of his problems is the Old-Testament Law, which is faithfully reflected in the annotation above. However, the same aversion to the Mosaic Law is already present in Blake's *Songs of Experience* (1794), where "Thou shall not" is inscribed over the door of a forbidding chapel, in the poem "The Garden of Love" (see Grimley Kuntz 427). Here, Blake connects his resentment over the loss of joy

and freedom, to the presence of possibly Anglican priests “in black gowns,” “walking their rounds” in the garden. His antinomian feelings are against total prohibition and intimidation (“binding with briars, my joys & desires”). The “tomb-stones,” which now occupy the place of the once blooming flowers, might even allude to the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Grimley Kuntz 427). Clearly, Blake contrasts the wisdom of “Thou shall not” with the teaching of “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbour as thyself.”

Blake believed that the imperfect commandments conveyed by Moses should be fulfilled by the Saviour, who is not represented by the established Church or the priests dressed in black. In *The Last Judgment*, Swedenborg also takes the position that man has been finally freed from the oppression of the Church: “the Servitude and Captivity in which the Man of the Church has heretofore been, is removed, and that now, by Virtue of the Freedom which is restored, he is better enabled to perceive interior Truths” (153-54). The God of Moses for Blake is not the Lord of Love, He is rather the God of Punishment and Restrictions. “Thou shalt not” teaches man what shouldn’t be done, in other words, it shows how to avoid punishment or perdition, instilling fear into the human heart. In contrast, Jesus’s command is a call to do good and to rejoice. While both the Decalogue and Jesus teach about man’s proper relationship to God and to his Neighbour, the mere difference between the positive and negative formulations was probably sufficient for Blake to choose a side. After all, he regarded the use of words as inherently creative, and considered “Negation” a “Spectre” that can bind the human spirit to abstract rationality (“Milton a Poem in 2 Books” 142). This rationality, the “Spectre,” acts like a god, and is responsible for creating laws that try to destroy Imagination and deprives man of freedom. As Blake clearly explains in *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion* in 1804:

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated
From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio
Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames Laws & Moralities
To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars. (229)

It is well known that Blake attributes the Ten Commandments to the God of the Old Testament, and that God for him was Urizen, the Demiurge of reason, rules and limitations, the opposite of the Jesus who “acted from impulse: not from rules” (“The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” 43). This antagonism separates “the god of abstract law, the god of jealousy and the natural world” from the God of Mercy (Tannenbaum 206). Swedenborg also sees God in Jesus Christ only, but for him, the two gods of the Testaments are one in Jesus. About the First Commandment, he states that “All who acknowledge and worship any other God but the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is Jehovah God Himself in an human Form, offend against this First Commandment” (*True Christian Religion* no. 296). Blake’s problem with the Swedenborgian view might have been that he saw a rupture between the old law and the path of Christ. Aspiring for freedom and mercy, and to make his own righteousness “exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matt. 5.20), he joins Jesus as a disciple and brother on the mountain, the place of the renewed, or rather fulfilled Mosaic Law of Mount Sinai.

Blake values Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament, just like Swedenborg (see *The Last Judgment* 80), but rebels against the rigid authority of the written Law (Grimley Kuntz 429). He refuses to rely on the continuity of the two Testaments and stubbornly emphasizes the contradictions, consequently he in turn opposes the orthodox Christian teachings on the Ten Commandments, as well as Swedenborg's relevant explanations and commentary. A few years after the publication of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, in those years when—as far as we know—he temporarily did not care much about Swedenborg's theology, he clearly states in his annotations to *An Apology for the Bible* (1797) that “The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins & has No Moral Precepts . . .” (619). He banishes all moral rules into the age of the ancient philosophers, naming also Nero as one of them, which casts a shadow over the authority and positive nature of the Law, deliberately making all the rules a common but questionable playground for the wise and the insane. Blake makes his own decision without any further remorse in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and this opinion is one that he sticks to: he openly declares that “no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments” (43), and only by breaking the Commandments can one truly follow the Lord and be saved, since he is convinced that Jesus Himself turned against the God of the Old Testament and His Laws. Blake urges his readers to do the same, and he contrasts the Law with his own explanation and interpretation, relying on examples that are actions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blake starts his critique with the supposed violation of the Fourth Commandment by Jesus, from which more counter-examples will follow: “. . . now hear how he has given his sanction to the law of ten commandments: did he not mock the sabbath, and so mock the sabbaths God?” (“The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” 43). To mock God has always been considered blasphemy, which is a deadly sin, except that the mocked god is not the real God. For Blake, the “sabbaths God” is Urizen, the Old-Testament God, the Author of the Commandments, and the sabbath is a symbol representing all rules given to the people of YHWH (Grimley Kuntz 430). Sabbath is the Lord's day for the Jews, which is Sunday for the great majority of Christians, the most important day of the week based on a very strong commandment (Ex. 31.15-17). This rule was so strong in the old days that those who broke it were threatened with death, and it is a sacred, also Divine institution even today. But Jesus declares about Himself that he is greater than the sabbath and all of us are greater than the rule: “And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: / Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Mark 2.27-28). The Law is for the salvation of man, and not man for the observance of the Law, therefore the spirit of the Law and the mercy of the Lord are more important than the written Law itself. However, according to the orthodox doctrines, the Commandments are divine teachings that do not seek the misery, suffering and slavery of man but they try to elevate the soul and body to restore the true image of God in man. If we look at Jesus's actions from this angle, He never violated any rule or commandment according to their spirit, just according to their letter. It is possible that Blake, as we read it in “The Garden of Love,” could see too much suffering and prohibition and hear too much of the sacrifice of Christ in the institutionalized Christian Church of England at the time. Instead of the Christ crucified, he wanted to focus on the Christ resurrected from

the dead; instead of the grief over our loss, he emphasizes the joy of redemption. Nonetheless, as we take a closer and deeper look at Blake's early prophecies, it is visible that his antithetical attitude is not limited to contrasting the two images of God that determine his understanding of the Law, but it characterizes his approach to the Scriptures as a whole. Therefore, I conclude this section of my paper by highlighting the fundamental differences between Blake's and Swedenborg's views on the two Testaments.

To better understand Blake's and Swedenborg's approach to the Testaments, it is worth turning to theological categories. I am going to rely on Massimo Grilli's four models: the Typological/Allegorical Model, the Promise-Fulfillment Model, the Salvation History Model, and the Antithetical Model (Grilli ch. 1-4), which is the most important one when it comes to Blake's theological thinking. These approaches were not formulated as clearly in Blake's and Swedenborg's time, but some of them are very well detectable in teachings and writings even as early as the first century AD. The Typological/Allegorical Model is a model of continuity, just like the Promise-Fulfillment and the Salvation History Model. It focuses on types and antitypes, allegories, Old-Testament prophecies that are not expressed in words together with their fulfillments in the New Testaments (see e.g. Num. 14:29-30. and 1 Cor. 10:5). The Promise-Fulfillment Model is very similar to the Typological/Allegorical one, but here the two Testaments have a much closer connection, since their relationship is not allegorical anymore; there is rather a deliberate attempt to prove that the Old Testament is the promise and the New Testament is the fulfillment. The antitheses from the Sermon on the Mount are good examples of this model (Matt. 5:21-48). The Salvation History Model best expresses the continuity between the two Testaments without ignoring the breakpoints. This is a relatively new model and is probably in the sharpest contrast with the Antithetical Model. It is intended to show that God's redemptive plan had been there for all believers since the very beginning of time, and the freedom from all discrimination of origin has become fulfilled in the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 10.12). God is active, His plan is constant, and the Mosaic Law is now fulfilled by Jesus, as it has reached its eternal purpose in the ultimate and eternal covenant brought by Him (Lohfink 66-67).

The Antithetical Model differs from the other three, since it is the only one that separates the Testaments from each other and perceives a fundamental discontinuity between them. Followers of this model hold that the two Testaments cannot be treated as a whole. Moreover, the two are seen as essentially contradicting each other because the covenant brought about by Christ nullifies or abolishes the former one. Grilli mentions Luther as a person who emphasized that the teaching of the Old Testament is the Law, which is for him the degradation of mercy, and the teaching of the New Testament is the mercy and forgiveness of sins by Christ (Grillich. 1, sec. 2.2). Luther's approach is very close to the thinking of Blake and stands only a bit further from the theology of Swedenborg, which might seem strange considering that Swedenborg's father was a Lutheran bishop. Both Blake and Swedenborg agree that Jesus is the One and Only Lord, but they treat the Bible differently. Swedenborg writes the following in *The Last Judgment*:

. . . whereas every Expression therein signifies Something spiritual, therefore not a single Word can be omitted, without the Series of Things in the internal Sense suffering a Change thereby; . . . The Case is similar in regard to the Books of the Old Testament, wherein every Circumstance recorded, and every Word, contain an internal or spiritual Sense; wherefore neither can any Word be taken away from them, without injuring the internal Sense: Hence it is, that by the Divine Providence of the Lord those Books have been preserved entire even to a Tittle, ever since the Time they were written, which was effected by the Care of several of the Learned, who have numbered every minute Particular therein; this was provided by the Lord on Account of the Sanctity in every Point, Letter, Word, and Thing therein contained. (82-83)

Swedenborg understands by the spiritual or internal sense that which is not understood according to the letter. His position is clear about the sacredness of the Scriptures and the importance of the two Testaments:

None can know what all the Things contained in the Revelation signify and involve, unless he is acquainted with the internal or spiritual Sense of the Word; for whatsoever is there mentioned, is written in a Style similar to the Prophetic Parts of the Old Testament, wherein every Word signifies Something spiritual, which does not appear in the Sense of the Letter. (80)

The real meaning is hidden between the lines, and that is what not only Swedenborg, but Blake is after.

Swedenborg posits a certain continuity between the Testaments, and this also applies to the power and validity of the fulfilled Mosaic Law. His approach is probably closer to the Salvation History Model if we look at God's overall message across the Bible, and he follows the Promise-Fulfillment Model in thinking that the Gospel of Jesus fulfilled the old prophecies and also the Law. Blake's approach, on the other hand, is antithetic. As we shall see in the following section, Blake's archetype of the Old-Testament God is Demiurge-Urizen, a fearful, limiting, and strict god who embodies the triumph of reason over the instincts and emotions, a figure worthy of mockery and pity at the same time. This character is confronted by the Jesus of the New Testament, the merciful God, the Logos, who is the true God incarnate for both Blake and Swedenborg. Although in *All Religions are One* Blake accepts that the "Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius" (1) and respects the prophets of the Old Testament, he contrasts their words with the teachings of the New Testament rather than contemplating their fulfillment. It follows that, for him, the Bible is both a book of ossified laws and of salvation at the same time. It is inspired by the Poetic Genius or Divine inspiration flowing through man according to the limitations of each particular holy writer, and it is possible that it is these limitations that Blake actually criticizes when he describes the Bible as imperfect.

The Laws and the Bible in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Last Judgment*

When Swedenborg states that “the Lord is the Word, inasmuch as he is Divine Truth” (*The Last Judgment* 50), he underlines the sacredness, the divine origin and nature of the Word. He also writes that in case “the Letter of the Word, is not enlightened by the genuine Doctrine of the Church, [it] misleads the Mind into various Conceits, and gives Rise to Ignorance, Heresies, and Errors” (22-23). Of course, the “genuine Doctrine” must be formed by those who are illuminated by the Lord, “those who are in spiritual Light” (79). The “Church” here means the congregation of people who possess true spiritual wisdom and knowledge (2). Blake, however, illustrates Urizen’s Bible, the “books formd of metals” as rigid books of knowledge (“The [First] Book of Urizen” 2.6). The bright “Book Of eternal brass” that contains the Law represents durability (2.6) and the fixedness of the Letter. This book is placed on a rock that might be the symbol of authority and institutionalization as well as a reference to Mount Sinai, the mountain where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

Such a description leaves no doubt that solidity and the lack of change play a significant role in this particular approach to the Holy Scripture. Blake’s description is strong, but also negative, which conveys his opinion about the orthodox Judeo-Christian attitude to the Bible. Brass is shiny, but it is a deception: the true value it represents is not there, the material itself is questionable. Brass is a symbolic metal in Blake’s universe. As S. Foster Damon claims, it usually symbolizes social organization, but “in the hands of Urizen, brass is the metal of tyranny” (Damon 58b). The “Book Of eternal brass” is a handbook for the arbitrary organization of society, and the code of Urizen’s governing laws. The truth and guidance it should contain are mere parodies of divine and social wisdom as the book and its contents are productions of the solipsistic Urizen, the Old-Testament God whom Blake consistently refuses to adore. Instead, he seems to join Fuzon, the son of Urizen, a fiery rebel who resembles both Moses and Jesus to a certain extent. Fuzon leads the people out of Urizen’s Egypt in *The Book of Ahania* (1795), the Exodus in Blake’s “Bible of Hell” (“The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” 44); he goes into battle against Urizen’s tyranny and laws (“The Book of Ahania” 1-2). From another perspective, Fuzon can be seen as Satan who revolts against God to become like Him (Isa. 14.13-14), and in this case he leads the angels, the spiritual sons of Urizen out of Urizen’s heaven from where they are in exile for good. As Urizen is regarded as a false god, the Satanic interpretation of Fuzon could represent the orthodox evil as a positive spiritual force. In a “Bible of Hell” it is a possibility that is worth consideration. Whichever interpretation we take, it is clear that similarly to the opposition between the two Testaments or to the antagonism between YHWH and Jesus Christ, there is an irreconcilable tension between the laws of Urizen and the liberty of Fuzon, and the focus of the debate is on the Ten Commandments.

For a discussion of the laws in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, it is necessary to see first how and why these laws came to be. The following passage is probably the best starting point for the study of their origin:

From the depths of dark solitude. From
 The eternal abode in my holiness,
 Hidden set apart in my stern counsels
 Reserv'd 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? (2.4)

Urizen's intention is presented here as the pursuit of what is good; it is a plan for the creation of permanence and security against chaos and death. Ironically, life for Blake is exactly the opposite of permanence, stability and regulations: it is change, imagination, variability, and free will, thus the intention of Urizen is evil, his story of Creation is the story of the Fall. The Old-Testament God's as well as Urizen's "work in Genesis is an anti-creation" (Tannenbaum 224). It is probable that Blake borrowed the idea of variety as a qualitative condition of existence from Swedenborg. The following lines from *The Last Judgment* are telling: "Every Form also consist of Variety; a Form which does not consist of Variety, is not a Form, inasmuch as it hath no Quality, nor any Changes of State; the Quality of every Form arises from the relative Disposition of various Things within it . . ." (17-18). The keywords are "Variety" and "Quality," and the latter depends on the former: there is no quality without variety, which is in line with Blake's idea. The "unquenchable burnings" of the Eternals symbolize the constant change that is energy, life, and imagination.

The shape-shifting, changeable Form is a divine attribute, and also the source of spirituality in human existence, as man is the image of God: "As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius" ("All Religions are One" 1). The Holy Spirit in man creates infinitely various spiritual forms that are manifest in the physical body. Swedenborg explains this idea as follows:

The Reason why such an infinite Variety prevails in all and every Thing of Creation, is because they all derive their Origin from the Divine Principle, which is Infinite: hence it is, that a Kind of Image of Infinity is every-where manifested, to the End that all Things may be viewed by the Divine Being as his own Work, and at the same Time that all Things may have Respect to Him, as the Supreme Cause. (*The Last Judgment* 19)

When Urizen materializes, he takes a finite shape and limits himself; later he applies self-invented and restrictive laws. His creations, and also his creatures are limited, they are the productions of a restricted existence, a pure reason which is blind to Eternity because—as Blake writes in the *Application of There is No Natural Religion*—"He who sees the ratio only sees himself" (3). This is why Urizen is a solipsistic Demiurge. Blake incorporates his resentment of the philosophers of the Enlightenment into Urizen's character. For example, Immanuel Kant, another admirer and critic of Swedenborg (Dunn, *Abstract*), whose attempt to "purify thought of its assumption,

to turn it into an invisible, mental operation” leads to the “apotheosis of reason, an apotheosis that is blind to its original inaccuracies” (Regier 144). While it is unlikely that Blake read Kant, this kind of thinking is a striking example of an approach that was characteristic not only of philosophy and linguistic theory, but also of other disciplines in the eighteenth century, and which was unacceptable to Blake.

Urizen, however, despite his limited vision, wants to save the Eternals: he tries to stop the change to control life and death by taking on a fallen shape. He also tries to stop his own unquenchable burning by restricting the imagination with laws of pure reason written in his solitude:

Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude. (“The [First] Book of Urizen” 2.7)

Urizen’s power is not light but darkness. As his burnings are quenched, darkness occupies the place of light, and reason fills his entire existence, leaving Urizen devoid of love, desire, mercy and imagination. The criteria he implements are normalization, simplicity and uniformity in the cloak of justice, and he nurtures virtues that in truth are their own contradictions due to the corrupted nature and limited power of the Demonic legislator (1.1):

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. (2.8)

These lines resemble St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians: *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, / One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Eph. 4.1-6). In spite of their similarities, these two passages clearly serve contradictory purposes. St. Paul’s lines articulate a teaching that points to God’s eternal existence and unity in Christ, just as His children must be in unity with one another and with God. At the same time, the “one body” is the mystical body of Christ, and the “one Spirit” is the Holy Spirit that fills and gives life to the body, which is the Church. God, through the active love of His Holy Spirit, distributes His gifts of grace in the community He governs, those who are one in the love of the Lord, in baptism, and in faith, and they adore the “One God” who is also the Father of every single soul. This God is present in His creations and also stands above them, and guides the way of His children. He has the right and ability to create laws according to which creatures are capable of a fulfilled life and they become true images of God.

In Blake’s cosmogony, however, Urizen, the creator of the fallen world, is not the “Father of all,” but only one of the Eternals, so his laws do not apply to his peers, nor

could they be obeyed by his children. These laws cannot be universal because he has neither the authority, nor the ability to create such rules or laws. In addition, Blake believes that there is no universal law except those two of Jesus Christ discussed above, that is, to love God and to love our neighbour. The quoted lines from *The [First] Book of Urizen* (2.8) do not contain explicit rules concerning the love of our neighbours, they rather formulate an attitude along values from Urizen's perspective. What we can clearly read from these lines is the monarchical position of Urizen as a god, from which he seeks to govern everyone else. Although the values mentioned in the first two lines of the quoted section are generally associated with the good and with order, the elimination of personal differences and disregard for circumstances, as well as the impersonal Law governed by pure rationality leave no other joy than literal observance of the law. This theory and practice appears as simple and orderly at first, but actually they deprive man of the alternative paths chosen by their free will. They schematize and generalize individual human lives that are otherwise unique and full of emotions. In doing so, even laws created with the noblest of intent become controversial, which then leads to their violation.

For Blake, the laws of Urizen, just like the Ten Commandments, cannot apply to everyone equally, at least not in the sense of the letter, precisely because every individual is similar, but also infinitely different. Blake proclaims in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" (44). It is not surprising that although the laws of Urizen are similar to those teachings that we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, their purpose is, in fact, to overcome sin by law, not to rectify hearts:

Here alone I in books form'd of metals
Have written the secrets of wisdom
The secrets of dark contemplation
By fightings and conflicts dire,
With terrible monsters Sin-bred:
Which the bosom of all inhabit;
Seven deadly Sins of the soul. ("The [First] Book of Urizen" 2.6)

Of course, all creatures struggle with the same "Sins" as their creator. They try to restrain their natural desires and instincts, but these are stronger than their will and the laws of abstraction. At the same time, it is interesting that for Blake, Urizen is the source of the sin that pervades mankind. He is like Adam, who turns away from the state of order. Unsurprisingly, it will be Urizen, who himself had made a mistake (consciously confronting his place in the universe) and then wished to be a knower of "good and evil" (Gen. 3.5), who will become the perpetrator of the original sin. With this depiction, Blake blames Yahweh-Urizen for the weakness of his children and calls into question his right to impose punishment on them.

According to Blake, the laws of Demiurge-Urizen are objectionable and oppressive because they are intended to prevent the spread of sin by conditioning mankind to avoid punishment, which would be guaranteed by the fear of punishment. Urizen does not succeed in this plan, because this idea is based on a misjudgment of the situation and the presumption of his own divine perfection. When Urizen sees that

his children break his laws because they are too rigid and impossible to observe, he becomes angry:

He in darkness clos'd, view'd all his race
 And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd
 Both sons & daughters; for he saw
 That no flesh nor spirit could keep
 His iron laws one moment ("The [First] Book of Urizen" 8.4)

It is strange that these laws bind Urizen as well. As he is both the legislator and the role model in the observance of them, he cannot act in a way that is not in accordance with his own laws. Urizen is shackled by his own regulations that are based on reason only and created without the power of imagination.

Los, the Eternal of Imagination, was painfully separated from the Eternal of Reason, and their separation damaged the process of creation. There is no hope of healing the rupture in this book, because Jesus, the Healer, the Unifier, is not present. The rebellious Fuzon, the Moses figure of Passion, undertakes to help man alone, but he cannot change the power and validity of the laws, nor can he see the path leading to the resolution of their innermost tension. The estranged and self-contemplative Reason is unable to reconcile the spirit of the law with its letter, which would be necessary for its recreation, that is, fulfilment. The title page of Blake's book already points towards this idea: the problem of blind Reason working alone without the aid of the Imagination, carrying out the process of creation. Urizen is portrayed as writing his own text in a book, while with his other hand he is creating an image in another book, attempting to unite the text with the image solely by the power of intellect, unlike Blake himself, a visionary artist inspired by the Poetic Genius, who created his illuminated books in such a way that illustrations and texts could complement, contradict, or support the message of each other. Urizen is sitting in a cave, the symbol of limited vision, with the stone tablets of the Law behind him. This composition conveys the message that Reason has its limits, just like the bodily senses, and even the Law is the production of that limited Demiurge, deprived of the inspirational Imagination necessary for every artistic act and creation.

Without the power of the Imagination, Reason cannot successfully unite the spiritual with the material, the inward forms with the outward forms, thoughts with their meanings, or images with texts. The one-sided dominance of Reason, due to the categorical nature of rationality, cannot bring individual freedom and universal order at the same time. This artistic law book made of brass is a futile attempt to create appropriate moral and social rules without the inspirational and enlightening power of Imagination, and the inevitable result of this is the book of tyranny where meaning and letter do not meet; the laws are written there, but their true meaning, their real message is a blur. Only Jesus would be able to demonstrate the observance of the spirit of the law and unite the separated powers, but Blake does not assign him any role in *The [First] Book of Urizen*. Here, it is precisely the nature and role of the Old-Testament God that he wishes to investigate, especially the absurdity of his upholding the letter of the law. Urizen's anger and sorrow, caused by the violation of his laws,

eventually result in the punishment of his children: they begin to shrink and become deformed before they finally die under Urizen's Net of Religion:

Six days they shrunk up from existence
 And on the seventh day they rested
 And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope:
 And forgot their eternal life

And their thirty cities divided
 In form of a human heart
 No more could they rise at will
 In the infinite void, but bound down
 To earth by their narrowing perceptions

They lived a period of years
 Then left a noisom body
 To the jaws of devouring darkness (9.3-4)

For the children of Urizen, the worship of their god and the transmission of his teachings means passing on the propensity for sinning, which leads not only to a decline in human dignity, but also to earthly hell itself. They accept their oppression and pass on this attitude and teaching to their own children. They lose their strength for revolution and their spiritual power to see the truth.

In fact, the above thoughts echo Swedenborg's discussion of "the Interiors of the Mind" in *The Last Judgment*. He states that

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. (*The Last Judgment* 28-29)

Urizen's children are almost deprived of their divine abilities of internal perception and are unable to "rise at will / In the infinite void," to the heavenly realms of Eternity. Their spiritual world is closed, which makes them able only to live in the hellish dominion of Urizen; their perception is limited by the boundaries of the Demiurge's Hell. Similarly, Swedenborg argues that those with the "Interiors of the Mind" closed look towards Hell. The "Interiors of the Mind" belong to the "spiritual Man," or the "Spirit of Man," who is the real man within the "natural Man" (38-39). The "natural Man" is just the body or "Instrument" of the spirit within. However, the natural part of man is not only the visible expression of the "spiritual Man," but also the medium that can receive impulses from the worldly things and is in a direct connection with the material world, the executor of the spirit's will (38, 52-53). The "Exteriors of the Mind" belong to the "natural Man" and they are meant to connect man with nature

through senses. Unfortunately, the spirit within the natural body thinks naturally and not with the soul's full spiritual potential (32). When man is too much concerned with earthly things and natural desires, and judges spiritual things based on bodily senses and natural thinking, man becomes closed in the natural world, and an openness of the "Exteriors of the Mind" dominates, which can result in a distancing from the heavenly things and man's spiritual reality, which is, for Swedenborg, the true essence of man. If man, however, observes heavenly things, or spiritual things, the "Interiors of the Mind" dominate and they become open and receptive, thus life flows into the "Spirit of Man" and gives life to "every Part or Particle of natural Man" (38-39, 43). In case it is not so, the "natural Man" becomes lifeless and spiritually closed, and man walks an infernal path that leads to Hell. Swedenborg is a good example of the authenticity of his own teaching: to open the "Interiors of the Mind," he gives up his career in natural sciences and mathematics, dedicates his entire life to the Gospel of the Lord so that he can immerse himself in theology and begin writing his famous theological works.

Swedenborg's passage focuses on the right spiritual and mental attitude of man, while Blake's lines are part of his parody of the biblical Genesis. But the two are analogous in their treatment of man's ability and perception as well as in emphasizing the effect of opposing forces that are able to move man towards Heaven or Hell. Urizen is the power of Reason whose oppressing, bounding, closing tool is religion, by which he manages to rule over his children and create a state of imbalance between Reason and Imagination, control and desire. The following passage from Swedenborg addresses similar questions:

By Babylon are understood all they, who by Means of Religion desire to bear Rule; to rule by religion, is to rule over the Souls of Men, consequently over their very spiritual Life, and to use the Divine Things which appertain to Religion as Means to promote that End. All they who make Dominion their End, and Religion as a Means conducive thereto, constitute Babylon in general. (*The Last Judgment* 100)

Under Urizen's Babylonian reign, the children of Urizen confuse good with evil, heaven with hell, and they do not see the true nature of perceived things, because their spiritual eyes have lost their power of vision:

Till the shrunken eyes clouded over
Discern'd not the woven hypocrisy
But the streaky slime in their heavens
Brought together by narrowing perceptions
Appear'd transparent air; for their eyes
Grew small like the eyes of a man
And in a reptile forms shrinking together
Of seven feet stature they remain'd ("The [First] Book of Urizen" 9.2)

The children become like their creator: legislators and their own oppressors by making new laws, "human constructions" to avoid breaking the rules of Urizen (Regier 170).

In addition, they attribute these new laws to their god to justify their authority and to avoid punishment (something Blake rejects as the tool of oppression that generates fear and makes man feel guilty):

And their children wept & built
Tombs in the desolate places,
And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them
The eternal laws of God ("The [First] Book of Urizen" 9.5)

The "laws of prudence" are laws of self-bondage. "Prudence" here is not a positive noun, but the symbol of rules that guard other rules, which are unnecessary and restrictive human creations. According to Jewish tradition, there are 613 commandments that Moses received from Yahweh and passed on to the nation of Israel, and the "laws of prudence" are references to them (see Deut. 1-5).

Blake sees the commandments Moses received as burdens that people created in the name of God and placed them on each other's shoulders. However, since Deuteronomy teaches the divine origin of these rules, they were made unavoidable for the faithful who wanted to follow the path of the righteous and do God's will. This is the same reason why the "laws of prudence" are apostrophized as "The eternal laws of God" by the children of Urizen. Similarly to the followers of the Jewish faith, the followers of Urizen's religion create laws the same way as their deity, but unlike the two Messianic laws of love towards the Lord and our neighbours, these laws are purely human fictions that have no divine authority, but are still considered sacred by deceived pious people who teach their children the same lies and pass on the tradition of slavery instead of freedom and love. As a consequence, generations feel guilty and suffer punishments for breaking the laws, and this fate cannot be reconciled with the image of a loving God. Swedenborg declares the following about love and punishment in relation to man: "The Judge who punishes the Wicked in Order to their Amendment, and that the Good may not be corrupted by them, loves his Neighbour" (*The Last Judgment* 73). This attitude and method might be based on the teaching of the Old Testament and of St. Paul. According to the Old Testament, if punishment can help a man to return to the path of God without corrupting the punisher, then punishment can be an act of love:

He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, *shall not he know?*

The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they *are* vanity.

Blessed *is* the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; (Ps. 94:10-12)

It is clear that this passage teaches about Yahweh's wisdom and His right to judge according to His will for the benefit of man, which is according to his best intentions and everlasting love. However, since every man is created in the image of God, and

man should become more and more similar to Him, it is evident that man has the same right, but only on the same basis and for the same purpose (see Matt. 5:48). For this reason, this teaching belongs not only to the Old Testament, but also to the New Testament, and its validity cannot expire:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (Heb. 12:6-7)

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Rev. 12:7)

While YHWH's punishment always serves the purpose of directing man to the path of God, Urizen's punishment is a desperate attempt to maintain order among his creatures with fear. Although his original intention was not malicious, due to his polarized nature, he was unable to create a world and laws that are based on the balance of Eternity. His children are servants of his laws and subdued to the self-chaining Demiurge, and Swedenborg states—originally about the power of the Roman Church in the world—that when such a situation occurs, it “is not the Dominion of Heaven over Hell, but of Hell over Heaven” (*The Last Judgment* 106).

As discussed earlier, punishment is the judgment of God, an inevitable consequence of breaking the laws. This process is usually normal and accepted in a country's judicial system, and also with regard to the moral code of a religion. However, Urizen's judgment is unjust in the eyes of Blake, since he thinks that the latter's laws are as imperfect as their creator. In the poet's own prophetic book, the judgment is made by the one who created the laws, consequently the legislator and the executor is the same being, who measures by his own erroneous standards. The problem is that the laws of Urizen cannot be obeyed according to their letter, so to expect them to be observed in that form is incorrect, and even unacceptable, as is the punishment that leads to the final judgment, the stake of which is eternal spiritual life or eternal spiritual death. According to Swedenborg's teachings, the Last Judgment is not in an apocalyptic future and it is not a single act in history. He writes in *The Last Judgment*, his book that teaches about a new era of religious freedom for those who believe in Jesus and accept His love, that there were three Last Judgments in history: the first with the Flood, the second with Christ's coming, and the third in 1757 (the year when Blake was born), and these all meant the end of a Church and the birth of a new one. The first Last Judgment meant the end of the “most Ancient Church,” the second one meant the end of the “Ancient Church” or “Hebrew Church,” and the last one was the end of the “Christian Church” (87-90). He explains that when the Church comes to an end, which happens when the “Equilibrium” between Heaven and Hell “is being destroyed” together with Man's free will and liberty (which happens when there is no more charity and faith in the Church), there a new Church is created on Earth and also a “New Heaven” is formed together with it (56-57).

For Swedenborg, there is no Last Judgment in the classical sense, it is a spiritual event that happens in the spiritual world when it is necessary (49), and this is how creation and judgment are connected to each other in his theology. Each Last Judgment is a decision in Heaven that has an effect on Earth as well, but this is always a renewal, a regeneration of the Church, which is a positive act and serves the salvation of mankind, not a punishment. In *The [First] Book of Urizen*, because of Blake's image of the Old Testament God, Demiurge-Urizen is a judge, a king, a self-proclaimed god, who wants to discipline his children and regulate their lives, and his punishment is fearful. The last judgment he can offer is a one-time rational decision where only obedience and the ratio of good and evil deeds matter, not the new, regenerated spirit and heart of man. Creation and judgment are connected in Blake's theological system as well, and both of them are errors of an imperfect deity in *The [First] Book of Urizen*. Blake believes in forgiveness and notmoral judgment. He refuses to see the God of Ezekiel who gives his children His own spirit and a new "heart of flesh" instead of the old "stony heart," so that His laws may be written into that new heart to make it alive (Ezek. 36.26). In that new state, man does not suffer, but becomes one with the love of God, and His ways become natural to walk, His laws easier to follow. It is a blessing, but for Blake, it would mean to follow the commandments of an oppressive, punishing god instead of accepting the mercy and love of Jesus Christ. He also refuses to accept the servitude of laws that he considers evil, which would fill human life and death with fear and torment.

Conclusion

The [First] Book of Urizen is about "the triumph of Justice over Mercy" (Tannenbaum 210), Hell over Heaven, and all that this book contains can be read in this light. The interconnected concepts of God, man, love, faith, the Bible, and of biblical laws create a synergy that fuels both Swedenborg's and Blake's system of thought. The impact of *The Last Judgment* on Blake's prophetic book is visible: it can be detected in connection with the concepts of God, Man, the Law and the Bible. A good example of this influence is Swedenborg's views on the relationship between "Form" and "Variety" in relation to the "Divine Principle" or the "Divine Being." Blake borrows the Swedenborgian views, interprets them and incorporates them into his own prophetic book: he uses change and variety as inherent qualitative features of the Eternals in *The [First] Book of Urizen* (see 2.4). Formlessness and change are positive features in Blake's universe associated with spiritual existence, and the lack of them means spiritual shrinkage and materialization that leads to a pitiful death. Indeed, Blake reinterpreted many other ideas of Swedenborg, including his teachings about human perception, about Heaven and Hell, about human existence and the person of Jesus Christ, about love and faith, and also about the creation of man and the world, and his critique is as much in his work as his respect for him. Blake's antinomian attitude carries him away from Swedenborg's explanations of the Scripture according to its spiritual sense, and this antagonism reaches a high level in their different interpretations of the Old-Testament laws. While Swedenborg accepts the Decalogue as the work of the One God, Blake attributes those laws to a

Demiurge, who is possibly the manifestation of human abstraction together with his Ten Commandments, the stone tablets of bondage. In depths of this difference we can see a Christocentric God image, which might appear to be very similar on the surface in the theology of both Blake and Swedenborg, but there is a fundamental difference between the images of God of the two, arising from the disputed relationship between the law-making, ruling Old Testament God and the person of Jesus Christ.

Although Jesus is the Only God for both of them, Swedenborg's Jesus is one with the Father, while Blake's Jesus is the opposite of the Father. For Blake, the Father is not God, or if he is, he is not the father of Jesus and he must be a spiritual entity subject to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power and authority over the ancient laws of the Father. Swedenborg, on the other hand, believes that the two divine beings are one, thus the Father is not evil, nor are his commandments. It also follows from the difference in their image of God and their interpretation of the nature of the laws that the two thinkers approach the unity of the Bible differently. While Swedenborg's interpretation shows continuity between the two Testaments, Blake's vision represents an antithetical position, where the New Testament is not the fulfillment of the Old, but the true Gospel of Christ. These theological ideas in *The [First] Book of Urizen* are integrated into the characters and their actions, and also appear in the use of names and adjectives that apply to them. The end of Blake's prophetic book also fits his judgment of the Old Testament texts and their representation of God. For Blake, the Creation of the world and mankind is the story of the Fall where Man is forced to live in oppression, bound by the laws of Urizen in the land of slavery, while Swedenborg's Genesis is about the spiritual regeneration of Man, and the laws of God show the right path to Eternity.

The large number of parallel ideas and contrasts underlines the role of Swedenborg's work in Blake's ideological system, and not only in the prophetic books. Since *The [First] Book of Urizen* was written in the period when Blake started to criticize Swedenborg and reinterpret his theological teachings, this prophetic book is more abundant in contrasts than in strikingly obvious parallels. The influence of Swedenborg's theology on Blake is not a new discovery, but the depth of this influence still holds details to be revealed.

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