

Emanuel Swedenborg

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著者:Ernst Benz

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Japanese philosopher D.T. Suzuki once called Swedenborg the Buddha of the North. The 18th-century Swedish mystic's visionary writings also deeply influenced Emerson, Blake, Strindberg and Helen Keller. First published over 50 years ago and now available in English for the first time, Benz's superb biography brings to life this scientific and religious genius. Born in the late 17th century as the third child of a Swedish Lutheran bishop, the young Emanuel absorbed the humanistic currents of the time, reveling in the mechanistic theories of Isaac Newton. When he went to England to study, Swedenborg met Newton and was conducted into his circles. By 1740, however, he had turned from the principles of mechanistic science to organic science, thus arguing for the unity of all things. Early in the 1740s he began to experience dreams and visions that informed his own scientific work. In 1744, Swedenborg's life was changed forever when God appeared to him and told him his mission was to explain... the spiritual meaning of Scripture. From then on, Swedenborg wrote of angels, paradise, the last judgment and the New Jerusalem, explaining them all in terms of the inner sense of Scripture. While many regarded Swedenborg as an eccentric, Benz shows that he was really no different from the medieval mystics or the Hebrew prophets in his ability to transmit God's revelation to his community. Although the prose is workmanlike, Benz's first-rate biography offers a compelling portrait of this extraordinary religious leader.

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目录:

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