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SWEDENBORG'S *SELECTED SENTENCES* ITS PLACE IN THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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The first complete translation into English of Swedenborg's *Selectae Sententiae* was published in the January-March, 1967, issue of the NEW PHILOSOPHY. Since this is the only work of Swedenborg known to be directly connected with his studies at Uppsala University, it may be of interest to try to establish its place in relation to the academic curriculum.

Emanuel Swedenborg or Swedberg, as his name was until the ennoblement of his family in 1719, enrolled in the Department of Philosophy in June 1699 at an age of eleven years and left the university in the summer of 1709 at the age of twenty-one. At this time there were only four departments or faculties at the university: Theology, Medicine, Jurisprudence, and Philosophy. However, the term "philosophy" as used to designate the last-mentioned department had a much broader meaning in Swedenborg's days than is commonly understood today. It still had something of its ancient connotation of universal knowledge, or of "a science, or collection of sciences, of which the universe is the object."¹ Thus we find that within this department a variety of subjects were taught, ranging from philosophy, languages, and literature to mathematics and the physical sciences.

University education at Swedenborg's time included many elements characteristic of today's high schools, colleges, and universities. This combination on the university level is understandable considering the fact that students were often admitted at a very early age. (The youngest were usually from well-to-do families and had tutors to guide them in their studies.) As a result the time required for the completion of studies toward a

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (Dublin, 1795), vol. XIV, p. 573.

degree at the university varied considerably depending on the student's previous education and maturity. A contributing factor was the lack of organized courses which in the modern university normally lead to a degree within a certain time. The only degree conferred within the Department of Philosophy at Swedenborg's time was the degree of Master of Philosophy (*Filosofie Magister*).

When a student had advanced in his studies to the point where he felt himself ready to undertake a series of tests and examinations, the successful completion of which would lead to the granting of a Master's degree, he would ask the faculty of his department and/or the General Faculty for permission to start the tests. Before permission was given, three professors had to guarantee the student's progress and proficiency. Among the requirements were: The student should be well acquainted with the Greek and Latin languages, especially the latter. He should be familiar with such authors of history as Sulpicius Severus, Justinus, Eutropius, and Florus, and with the chronology and geography covered by these authors. Furthermore, he should be sufficiently familiar with each of the subject areas taught in the department, especially with those that were connected with his chosen future occupation.² (The statutes required the professors to see to it that every student, as soon as possible and not later than during his seventeenth year, decided on a certain career in order that time and money would not be wasted.)³

As soon as the student had received permission, he could start on the series of tests and examinations which generally followed the sequence outlined below. It should be noted, however, that the time interval between the several steps varied considerably—from a few days to months and years.

I. The so-called "private" examination

A. Written specimen in Latin (*Exercitium stili latini*). This exercise was especially designed to show the student's ability to write a grammatically correct Latin and to express his thoughts with reasonable coherence in that tongue. The dean of the faculty and two professors (of which one always should be the professor of eloquence) should go through the composition and thereafter submit it to the entire faculty for evaluation. If the student was

² Claes Annerstedt, *Uppsala Universitets Historia* (Uppsala, 1877–1913), vol. II: 2, p. 135.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. II: 1, p. 21.

not passed by the faculty he was not allowed to continue the examination.⁴

B. Disputation *pro exercitio*. If the student was passed by the faculty the next step was writing (often with the assistance of the professor) and publicly defending a thesis on a subject chosen for the most part by the student himself. As the name implies, this was a thesis written as an exercise giving the student an opportunity to show his ability to set forth a subject clearly. At the public disputation, the student had to defend his thesis against the scrutiny of two or more opponents, whose task it was to question the statements and conclusions made by the author.⁵

Swedenborg's *Selected Sentences* was a disputation *pro exercitio*. His opponents were A. O. Rhyzelius, an assistant teacher at the university, and Jonas Unge, who later married Swedenborg's sister Catharina. Swedenborg's father, bishop Jesper Swedberg, appeared as extraordinary opponent.⁶ Often several professors and students entered into the discussion, which at times could become rather animated and loud.

C. Examination by the Theological faculty. Some time after the disputation *pro exercitio* the student was required to undergo an examination by the theological faculty in *doctrina ecclesiae et articulorum fidei* (the doctrine of the church and articles of faith). This applied to students of all departments and was a prerequisite for graduation.⁷

D. Essay in Latin. This essay was basically of the same kind as the one mentioned under A above, yet with an added emphasis on content and composition. The main purpose seems to have been to find out if the student was capable and mature enough to write his own dissertation *pro gradu* (for the degree). Since considerable time often elapsed between the first essay (A above) and this composition, it was also a means of finding out that the student still had sufficient mastery of the Latin language.⁸

E. Oral examination. The professors and students of the department assembled in one of the official lecture halls where each of the professors examined the students in the subjects he had taught. Frequently it happened that one or two professors had

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II: 2, p. 135 f; vol. III: 2, p. 222.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II: 2, p. 121 ff; vol. III: 2, p. 222.

⁶ Academy Collection of Swedenborg Documents, no. 39.11.

⁷ Annerstedt, U.U.H., vol. II: 1, p. 22; vol. II: 2, p. 132.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II: 2, p. 136; vol. III: 2, p. 222 f.

examined a student beforehand or otherwise knew that the student possessed the required knowledge in his particular subject. In such a case the professor did not examine on this occasion but merely sent a statement to the effect that he passed the student without further examinations. The oral examination lasted for four hours and was the final examination. If he passed, the student received the title of Candidate of Philosophy (*Candidatus Philosophiae*). This was at the time not a degree but merely a recognition that the student had passed the "private" examinations and was now a candidate for a degree.⁹ However, in order to receive a degree it was necessary for the student to complete also the public part of the examination series.

II. Public part.

A. Disputation *pro gradu*. The thesis required for this disputation was the graduation dissertation proper. The subject matter was often related to that of the *pro exercitio* thesis and sometimes formed a second part to it. The author had to defend publicly this second thesis in much the same way as he had the first. This time, however, it was done in a more festive way with many relatives and friends present.¹⁰

B. Lectures. Finally the prospective graduate was required to give two public lectures on a subject that properly belonged to the department in which he was graduating.¹¹

The student was then entitled to the degree of Master of Philosophy. Yet he might have to wait for a few years before the degree was officially conferred on him. At Uppsala University the official graduation ceremonies took place only every third year. At the graduation in 1707 Swedenborg had not yet completed his studies, and when the next one was held in 1710, Swedenborg was in England on his first foreign journey.

As may be seen from the above outline, Swedenborg's *Selected Sentences*, being a dissertation *pro exercitio*, was in the beginning of the series of tests and examinations for a degree. Whether or not Swedenborg completed any of the subsequent steps is at present not known. He would not have had much time to do so. The disputation on his dissertation *pro exercitio* took place on June 1, 1709. He must have left Uppsala for Brunsbo (Bishop Swedberg's residence near Skara) at the latest in the first week

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II: 2, p. 136; vol. III: 2, p. 222.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. III: 2, p. 222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

of July following, for there is a letter in his handwriting to his brother-in-law Eric Benzelius, dated Brunsbo, July 13, 1709.¹² In any case it seems clear that Swedenborg did not, either in 1709 or later, fulfill all the requirements for a degree and consequently did not receive any degree from the University of Uppsala. Whether or not he intended, on leaving the university, to take the degree later is not known. A catchword¹³ on the last page of his thesis may indicate that he contemplated writing a second part, perhaps as his dissertation *pro gradu*. In his letter to Eric Benzelius just mentioned above, Swedenborg writes :

If there should be any one to succeed me in my room (Swedenborg had stayed for several years in the home of Eric Benzelius) then I would respectfully beg d: Brother that the papers which were left there might be gathered together and laid for keeping in the vault, for among them lie some which I assembled for *Publium Syrum* and which I worked hard enough on.¹⁴

Publium Syrum (Publius Syrus the Mime) evidently refers to his work on *Selected Sentences*. It is not known whether these papers contained material for a continuation of the *Sentences*. In any case, since Swedenborg was anxious to have them preserved it would seem that he had some future use of them in mind. (Cf. also *Selected Sentences*, introduction, entitled "To the Reader.")

That at least Swedenborg's father urged him to take a degree seems to be indicated in a letter by Swedenborg to Benzelius, dated Rostock, Sept. 8, 1714.

I promised d: Father to give out a *specimen Academicum*,¹⁵ for which I will choose some inventions which I have in *Mechanicis*.¹⁶

After his arrival home in 1715 Swedenborg busied himself with a variety of pursuits and tried to secure a position at the university. His appointment in 1716 as "assessor extraordinary" in the College of Mines led him into an occupation that would be his for thirty years. There was no longer any need for him to complete the requirements for a university degree.

¹² Alfred Acton, *Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, (Bryn Athyn, 1948-1955), p. 2 ff.

¹³ *Effugere*, printed in the lower righthand corner. It is the first word of the next sentence of Syrus: *Effugere cupiditatem regnum est vincere* (To shun desire is to conquer a kingdom).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Specimen Academicum* was a dissertation for receiving a degree or position at the university.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56 f.