

THE NATURE OF SWEDENBORG'S PREPARATION

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He who loves a use loves him by whom that use is performed. This is the reason for our celebration of Swedenborg's birthday.

It is very important to understand the means by which Swedenborg was prepared to become the revelator of the Heavenly Doctrines. From the beginning of the Church, this has been realized. Robert Hindmarsh was one of the first men to translate into English one of Swedenborg's Preparatory Works. In the middle years of the last century, J. J. Garth Wilkinson translated several of Swedenborg's anatomical works and thereby awakened a very keen interest in the means of Swedenborg's preparation for the office of revelator. With the rise of the Academy, this interest in Swedenborg's preparation was again renewed, and it reached a high point at the turn of the century with the work that was done by Miss Lillian Beekman. Lately there has been a waning of interest in the Preparatory Works.

One of the purposes of the talk this evening is to arouse a renewed interest in the works by which Swedenborg was prepared. I think one of the reasons for the decline of the interest in these Works was an over-zealousness, resulting in an endeavor to uphold every scientific fact which Swedenborg put forth. This obviously could not be accomplished.

I was very much impressed some years ago by an article that appeared in *THE NEW PHILOSOPHY*,¹ written by Dr. Robert Cole, in which he asked why we did not imitate the method by which Swedenborg studied rather than trying to prove all the facts of his science correct. I thought about this a great deal, and it occurred to me that this is the proper approach to the study of the Preparatory Works.

It is of interest to note that, so far as I know, every man in the Church who has gained for himself a reputation for learning has been a keen student of the Preparatory Works. And the reason for this is that the means by which Swedenborg was prepared

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¹ October, 1958, p. 366. (Ed.)

throws great light on many of the statements that are made in the Writings. This is similar to the work that is being done today in archeology, by which the letter of the Word is enlightened by many of the things that have been discovered, and this increases our understanding of the literal sense of the Word and therefore lays a firmer basis for following the spiritual sense.

And so I believe that there are many statements in the Writings that cannot be fully understood in their letter unless we are acquainted with the Preparatory Works. I do not say that every man, minister and layman, must be a reader and student of these works; but I do say that for the growth of the Church, it is necessary that there be readers and students of these works and, in order that this may be, there must be a general basis of interest in the work among the members of the Church. There must be an appreciation of the work that those men are doing.

I intend tonight to try to review some of the ways in which Swedenborg approached his studies. But before I do that, I wish to quote five different passages concerning Swedenborg's testimony in regard to his preparation. The first is from the *Word Explained*, which was written between the years 1745 and 1747; that is, after his spiritual eyes had been opened:

"At the time I did not perceive what the acts of my life involved, but afterwards I was instructed concerning some of them, nay, concerning a number; and from these I could at last plainly see that the tenor of Divine Providence has ruled the acts of my life from my very youth and has so governed them that I might finally come to the present end; that thus by means of the knowledges of natural things, I might be able to understand those things which lie more interiorly within the Word of God Messiah and so of the Divine mercy of God Messiah might serve as an instrument for opening them" (WE 2532).

I would call your attention to the phrase, "by means of the knowledges of natural things . . ."

Then in 1748 in the *Spiritual Diary*, he speaks of another means of preparation in regard to breathing. He says:

"I was first accustomed thus to respire in my early childhood, when saying my morning and evening prayers, and occasionally afterwards, when exploring the harmonies of the lungs and heart, and especially when deeply engaged in writing the works that have been published. For a course of years I continually observed that there was a tacit respiration, scarcely perceptible, concerning which it was subsequently given me to reflect and then to write. I was thus during many years, from the period of childhood,

introduced into such respirations, especially by means of absorbing speculations, in which the breathing seems to become quiescent, as otherwise, the intense study of truth is scarcely possible" (SD 3464; Oct. 4, 1748).

And I would call your attention here to the expressions, "absorbing speculations" and "otherwise, the intense study of truth is scarcely possible."

In 1766 Swedenborg wrote in a letter to Oetinger :

"I was introduced by the Lord first into the natural sciences and thus prepared, and this from the year 1710-1744, when Heaven was opened to me. . . . The Lord has granted me besides to love truth . . . not for the sake of honors but for the sake of the truths themselves" (Doc., 2:1, p. 257, Swedenborg to Oetinger).

The new thing introduced there is the love of truth.

Then in the work on *Influx* or the *Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body*, written in 1769, is the well-known passage :

"I was once asked how from a philosopher I became a theologian, and I answered, in the same manner that fishermen were made disciples and apostles by the Lord; and that I also from early youth had been a spiritual fisherman. What is a spiritual fisherman? I replied that a fisherman in the spiritual sense of the Word signifies a man who investigates and searches natural truths and afterwards spiritual truths rationally. . . . (And the interrogator commented), you were from early youth a fisherman in a spiritual sense, that is, an investigator of natural truths; that you are now an investigator of spiritual truths is because these are founded on the former" (ISB 20).

Lastly from the *True Christian Religion*, written in 1770 :

"The second coming takes place by means of a man to whom the Lord has manifested Himself in person; that he may teach the doctrines of the New Church from the Lord by means of the Word. He will do this by means of a man who is able not only to receive these doctrines in his understanding but also to publish them by the press" (TCR 778).

What is meant by "receive them in his understanding"? A study of the Preparatory Works will throw light on that phrase.

Now in regard to the means by which Swedenborg studied or the means by which he was prepared. First, Swedenborg accepted a belief in God. Swedenborg believed in God, and he never allowed any of his studies to call it in question. He did not study the sciences or philosophy in order to see whether or not there was a God; he studied the creation in order to see how God operated

in it. But there was never any question or any doubt of the existence of God. And not even of the existence of the Lord Jesus Christ as God, which I shall point out later. In the "Preface" to the *Principia*, he says:

"Without the utmost devotion of the Supreme Being, no one can be a complete and truly learned philosopher. True philosophy and contempt of the Deity are two opposites. Veneration for the Infinite can never be separated from philosophy; for he who thinks himself wise, whilst his wisdom does not teach him to acknowledge the Divine and Infinite, that is, he who thinks he can be wise without a knowledge of and veneration for the Deity, has no wisdom at all" (Princ., Pref.).

You will note here—his knowledge of the Deity was not a pious expression of his lips. He was saying there could not be a true philosopher nor a genuine investigation of natural truth unless there is a belief in God.

And in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, he says:

"To be lost in silent astonishment, therefore, at this display of Divine wisdom is more becoming our nature than to overburden ourselves with proofs of its existence. In all the heavens there is nothing, throughout the whole earth there is nothing, but exhibits in most palpable signs the presence of a superintending Deity; so that he who sees nothing in all these evidences is blinder than a mole and viler than a bat" (2 Econ. 267).

Now I said earlier that his was a belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as that God. This order of the Lord's names was not used by him at that time. But in the "Preface" to the *Principia*, at the end, and in the work following on the *Infinite*, he concerns himself with the problem of what joins the Infinite to the finite, since there can be no ratio between the two. What possibly could join the Infinite to the finite? He comes to the conclusion that what is called the "nexus" (that which joins) is also Infinite, and he defines it as the Divine love of an angelic heaven from the human race. Then at the end of that introduction, he identifies this love which brings about the conjunction, as the Only Begotten Son of God, that is, in the terms of the theology of the former church, the only terms he then knew to express belief in the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next thing that he accepted without doubt was the existence of the soul and its immortality, the fact that man is an immortal being. He says:

"The immortality of the soul is equally certain with the existence of God; the Divine end cannot fail to have immortality in it, seeing that true faith implies a belief in immortality" (Inf. 175).

So that when he studied the human body, the animal kingdom, or the kingdom of the soul, which is the body, and when he studied physiology and psychology, he was seeking to discover the means by which the soul operated in the body. He was not trying to discover the soul. The existence of the soul he unquestionably acknowledged. But he was trying to discover how the soul operated in the body, for he adopted the general principle that where you have two things—where you have a lower and a higher thing—there must be some means by which the higher operates in the lower. It is a thrilling experience to read Swedenborg's works on anatomy, on psychology, and on the brain, following his reasoning concerning their use in ultimating the purposes of the soul. The body is a living thing, a kingdom of uses, the temple of the soul; and he so examines and reasons concerning it.

The third truth Swedenborg accepted was a belief in Revelation, which he again never allowed himself to question. He says in the *Principia*:

"Whatever is confirmed by Holy Scripture is in no need of confirmation from reason, from rational philosophy, or from geometry, this being already sufficiently implied in the fact of confirmation by the Infinite Himself" (Princ., Vol. 1:54).

And in the *Infinite* he says:

"Philosophy, if it be truly rational, can never be contrary to Revelation The end of reason can be no other than that man may perceive what things are revealed and what are created; thus the rational cannot be contrary to the Divine, since the end for which reason is given is that we may be empowered to perceive that there is a God and to know that He is to be worshipped" (Inf., Pref.).

Given these three essentials—a belief in God, a belief in the immortality of the soul, and a belief in Divine Revelation—Swedenborg then asks how man is to go about his investigation of nature. He concludes that the only way that this study can be made is by experience, that is, the analytical way. It cannot be approached from above; it must be approached from below. It must be sought through experience. And he shows in many, many places how vain it is for man to try to approach by the synthetic way, that is,

by adopting a principle as true and then trying to confirm that principle in experience. He says in the *Animal Kingdom*:

"We are very easily impelled and carried away into ideal games . . . inasmuch as they are races of our thoughts from assumed starting places to the very goals we desire to reach. This also pimps to self-love and self-glory, for as nothing properly belongs to us but the produce of our own minds, when these have conceived anything and supported it by plausibilities, we suppose we have divined the pure reality, opened the pure Delphos of heaven itself, unlocked oracles which the genius of our predecessors never penetrated, and, in a word, earned an indisputable palm of victory. But those who commence with this species of scholastic exercitation, that is, who set out relying on mere reasoning, not fortified by the sure patronage of experience, will never, as I think, attain the goal; for they begin from the goal and hurry to the starting place; thus they bend their course outwards instead of inwards, contrary to the order which the nature of the human mind prescribes for the discovery of the occult and unknown" (AK 8).

Having these, a belief in God, in the immortality of the soul, and in Divine Revelation and a thorough knowledge of the sciences from experience, Swedenborg then seeks to discover how these two bodies of truth may be united. He asks how we can discover the way in which the spiritual truths of a perceptive faith are conjoined to and operate in the world of science and experience. He concludes that there must be a body of rational truth by which this bridge can be constructed. Here we come back to the preparation that was spoken of in regard to his breathing: He says in the *Prologue to the Animal Kingdom*, written around 1744, shortly before his spiritual eyes were opened:

". . . the proper time has arrived; for a rich store of experience is at hand; an accumulated heap sufficient to enable us to build a palace; a luxuriant field where our sickles may reap an abundant harvest; a table where we may enjoy the most sumptuous banquets. Nor do I think we ought to wait any longer, lest haply experimental knowledge should be overtaken by age, night, and oblivion; and the arts and sciences be carried to the tomb; for unless I mistake the signs of the times, the world's destinies are tending thitherwards" (AK, Prologue, p. 9).

Several times he presents this conclusion. He likens the accumulation of experimental knowledge to a forest and says that if we continue to accumulate such knowledge without drawing some general doctrine to guide us through the forest, we will lose our way and wander about aimlessly.

We turn to another phase of Swedenborg's preparation: his preparation as to the state of his life. I would ask you, while we

are considering this, to apply it to the work of every man. We are inclined to think of a study as being a purely intellectual thing, having nothing to do with the state of the man who makes that study. If we see things correctly, the state of a man making a study of anything has a definite bearing upon the results of that study and directly affects its conclusions. Unless the man is shunning evils as sins against God, he cannot come to proper conclusions. This statement will be enlightened as I run through these next series of quotations.

First, Swedenborg at a certain point in his studies says that he will no longer use his own experience. He experimented a great deal in his early years, but he arrived now at a state where he says that he will, for the most part, use the experience of other men and for the following reason. This was written in 1740 in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*:

"I found that as soon as I discovered anything that had not before been observed, I began, perhaps from self-love, to grow blind to the most acute lucubrations and researches of others and to desire to lead the whole series of rational deduction to my one discovery" (1 Econ., 18).

In following this practice, he was shunning essentially the love of self in order that he might truly see the facts of science and put them together into an order that would reveal something of the presence of God in the universe or of the soul in the body. In one of his statements we read at the beginning, he said that he was led by the Lord "to love truth not for the sake of glory but for the sake of truth itself." In the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, in speaking of the inward joy perceived when the mind has penetrated into the contemplation of the genuine causes of things, after it has gone through a long and diligent study, he says:

"The mind that has known this pleasure . . . is carried away wholly in pursuit of it—and, in the kindling flame of its love, despises in comparison, as external pastimes, all merely corporeal pleasures, and although it recognizes them as means for exciting the animus and the purer blood, it on no account follows them as ends" (1 Econ., 19).

"Nothing whatever is more to be desired or more delightful than the light of truth; for it is the source of wisdom" (AK, Prologue, 1).

Genuine wisdom loves to know causes, and in several places of the Preparatory Works, Swedenborg mentions this. He says that if a man wishes to be wise, he wishes to know the causes of things.

He sees that man cannot rightly interpret knowledge unless he interprets it in the love of arriving at the truth itself. That man is continually under the temptation to love truth on account of himself and his own glory: this to Swedenborg is a very real thing. He says:

“Nothing superinduces more darkness on the human mind than the interference of its own fancied providence in matters that properly belong to the Divine Providence.

“This faculty, however, is chiefly impaired by the thirst for glory and the love of self. I know not what darkness overspreads the rational faculties when the mind begins to swell with pride or when our intuition of objects calls up in the objects themselves the image and glory of our own selfhood. It is like pouring a liquor upon some exquisite wine, which throws it into a froth, sullies its purity, and clouds its translucence. . . . He sees little or nothing in the most studied researches of others, but everything, oh! how vain-glorious, in his own. Nor can he return to correct conceptions until his elated thoughts have subsided to their proper level. ‘There are many,’ says Seneca, ‘who might have attained to wisdom had they not fancied they had attained it already.’ The muses love a tranquil mind, and there is nothing but humility, a contempt of self, and a simple love of truth that can prevent or remedy the evils we have described” (1 *Econ.* 21, 22).

This naturally led Swedenborg to a state of humility—a humility that, in the beginning, was an intellectual acknowledgment, but in the end, a humility of his will. As evidence of the humility of his understanding, we have the statement:

“Thou canst be great only in this that thou art able to adore Him who is the Greatest and the Infinite” (*Princ.*, Vol. II, p. 161).

And again:

“It is therefore the mark of the highest wisdom to know that we merely know and that our knowledge extends to a very few things” (*Ibid.*, p. 169).

There are the three rather amusing incidents which I think are known to most of you, showing Swedenborg’s fight against this love of self or pride:

“I saw a bookshop and immediately thought that my work would accomplish more than the works of others but at once checked myself . . . that one is servant to another and that our Lord has many thousand ways of preparing one so that each and every book ought to be left in its own worth as a medium, near or remote, according to the state of the understanding of each and every man. Yet pride will straightway out. May God control it” (*Intro.*, WE 70; 1746).

"At a lecture on the history of anatomy, in my thoughts I prided myself that they would mention me as one who understood anatomy better; yet I was glad that it was not done" (JD 270 [1744.], WE 71).

And the third, in speaking of the persistence of self-love, Swedenborg says:

"When anyone did not regard me according to the estimation of my own imagination, I always thought, if you knew what grace I had, you would act differently; which was something impure and had its root in self-love" (JD 75).

His humility in regard to the will resulted from his sincere and intense self-examination. He endeavored to uncover the evils of the love of self that clothed themselves in the external in apparently noble and good ends. His examination was thorough and deep and uncovered evils that few men would recognize in themselves.

"I found in myself . . . that in every single thought—yea, even in that which we believe to be almost pure—is concealed an endless mass of sin and impurity; as also in every desire that comes from the body into the thoughts which are derived from very deep roots. Even though the thought may seem pure, yet underneath it is the fact that one thinks it from fear, from hypocrisy, and much besides; which also one can come to discover to some extent by after-reflection" (JD 109).

And then the following, which reveals this still more clearly:

"Although we may be surpassingly rich in experience and accomplished in the sciences and gifted besides with a faculty of thinking with the greatest distinctness, yet it by no means follows that we shall therefore be able to rid ourselves of the mists that are involved in the fallacies of the senses and in the fallacies of sensual origin, of rational ideas, and to enjoy an insight into real truths, in simple clothing or naked loveliness. . . . The fires that extinguish this light, belong to the body, to the animal mind, and even to the rational mind itself. The fires of the body are the pleasures of the bodily senses. The fires of the animal mind are lusts or cupidities, whose name is legion. The fires of the rational mind are the ambitions and desires of ends that converge to and terminate in the love of self as the ultimate center. These heats are powers deriving their ground of activity from the body, which operating in the rational mind, extinguish that holy fire and purely spiritual altar flame. A light still remains, warm in relation to the body, but cold in relation to the soul and the superior mind. In this case although we revolve and combine ideas with distinctness and perspicuously contemplate analyses framed of reasons, yet these are only the spectres and impure phantoms of truths, which have ultimate ends in ourselves and in the love of self which powerfully and confidently persuade us that they

are Delphian virgins and graces; and lead us to think that if we ourselves applaud them, the whole Parnassian band will applaud them as well; but they are far indeed from being truths, for they differ from them as much as the phantasms of the body and the mockeries of the world from the essences and forms of heaven. Thus if we wish to invite real truths, whether natural or moral or spiritual (for they all make common cause by means of correspondence and representation) into the sphere of our rational minds, it is necessary that we extinguish the impure fires of the body and thereby our own delusive lights and submit and allow our minds, unmolested by the influences of the body, to be illuminated with the rays of the spiritual power; then for the first time truths flow in; for they all emanate from that power as their peculiar fountain" (AK, Vol. II, 463).

Swedenborg in the *Journal of Dreams* reveals a state of humility that became receptive of influx from the Lord through which the Revelation could be given. This state is beautifully expressed by the words:

"Forgive me if I have said that I am Thine and not mine own; this belongs not to me but to God. I pray for the grace of being permitted to be Thine, and that I may not be left to myself" (JD 118).

And again:

"I pray not Thy will be done but rather I pray that I may be worthy to pray Thy will be done" (JD).

Thus Swedenborg's mind, formed according to the order of genuine natural truths and principles and cleansed of evil love and falsities, was so prepared that the Divine could inflow and, within the genuine natural truths present in his external mind, could reveal the truths of the Heavenly Doctrine. Thus he could receive the doctrines of the New Church in his understanding and give them to the world, not as the conclusions of his own reflections and meditations but as continuous truths out of the Lord's Divine Glorified Human.