

COMMENTS ON THE GOTHENBURG TRIAL

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Background of the Trial

In a letter addressed to the universities of Upsala, Lund and Åbo by Emanuel Swedenborg, dated July 23, 1770, he says that the Gothenburg Trial "has been the most solemn brought before any council during the last 1700 years." He adds that this is so "since it concerns the New Church which is predicted by the Lord in Daniel and in the Apocalypse and agrees with what the Lord says in Matthew 24: 22." The reference is to the tribulations which will accompany the Lord's second coming.

It is obvious that the 1700 years go back to the trial of our Lord before the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme tribunal of the Jews in civil and ecclesiastical matters. When the proceedings of these two great trials are viewed in the light of revelation, certain common features will appear. These will be emphasized at the close of this address.

When the Gothenburg Trial was initiated in the fall of 1768, Swedenborg had written, and in some instances published, practically all of his theological writings, commencing with the *Arcana Coelestia*, London, 1749-1756, and concluding with *Apocalypsis Revelata*, Amsterdam, 1766, and *Conjugal Love*, Amsterdam, 1768. Incidentally, these last two works were the subject of special attack in the Gothenburg Trial.

* Most of the facts about the Gothenburg trial which appear in this paper are based upon a typewritten copy of a translation into English of the minutes of the Gothenburg Consistory and of extracts from a book written in Swedish by Wilhelm Berg on the *Gothenburg Diocese during the Eighteenth Century*. The translation, which was made by the Reverend Emil R. Cronlund and is accompanied by notes made by Bishop Alfred Acton, is in the Library of The Academy of the New Church. Further information has been obtained from Cyriel O. Sigstedt's book, *The Swedenborg Epic*, and from other sources most of which are referred to in notes to the chapter of her book entitled, "Heresy Trial at Gothenburg." The writer records his gratitude to Mrs. Muriel Rhodes and Mr. Lennart Alfelt for their research work, without which this paper could not have been produced.

Because of his membership in the House of Nobles, his long tenure in office as an Assessor in the College of Mines, his attainments in scientific fields, including his treatises on mineralogy, chemistry, cosmology, anatomy, psychology and philosophy, his assured place in the learned world, his powerful family connections, his friendship with senators and leading members of the House of the Clergy, his favor with the royal family, including the crown prince (afterward Gustavus III), Swedenborg was recognized as a great man and had admirers in high places.

Swedenborg's theological writings had excited interest among learned men including some of the members of the Gothenburg Consistory. Thus Lector Magnus Roempke had delivered a dissertation, *De Reprobatione*, in the synod of the ministers of the Diocese of Gothenburg which showed Swedenborgian influences. Doctor Johan Rosen had written a favorable review of *Apocalypsis Revelata* in the *Clerical News*, a monthly magazine published at Gothenburg. Doctor Beyer had edited a collection of sketches for sermons under the title: "New attempts for Explaining the Texts for Sundays and Holidays"—referred to in this paper as *Household Sermons*—in which texts were explained in the spirit of Swedenborg's Writings. Other features in the background of the Gothenburg Trial are the status of the established church in Sweden, the relation of the state and the church, the distribution of governmental powers, and the laws applicable to the questions involved in the trial.

Sweden had joined in the Protestant movement against the Catholic Church and the domination of the Pope. The religion of the state was that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The King was the spiritual leader of his subjects. He maintained councils representing the true and pure faith and they had the responsibility of eliminating anything found to be heretical. All authority rested in the Bible, the so-called *Symbolical Books*, the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Formula Concordiae*. The *Symbolical Books* are a collection of Lutheran doctrines, compiled by Berg, which are peculiar to the Swedish Church.

The government was composed of the King, and his Council, and the Four Houses of the Diet. These were the House of Nobles; House of the Clergy, each diocese having a bishop and a consistory; House of Burghers; and House of Peasants.

Before we look at the record of the proceedings which took place

in the Gothenburg Consistory after Peter Aurelius, a pastor in the diocese of Gothenburg, had made his charges against Swedenborg's Writings in September 1768, something should be said briefly of the laws involved in this trial.

The basis of the laws of Sweden was the Code of Laws of 1734 (Note 1), to which references will be made in this article. Among its provisions were certain ordinances of religion including the following section :

"If anyone falls from the pure evangelical doctrine and tends toward a misleading doctrine and does not let himself be corrected, he shall be expatriated from the country and he shall not inherit property or enjoy civil rights within the Kingdom of Sweden unless he is pardoned by the King and returns to the country." (Page 206, par. 3 and 4.)

By a statute of February 11, 1687 regulating the conduct of proceedings in consistories (Note 2) it was provided :

"If any important matter be brought up that concerns religion, his Majesty is to be informed of it, when his Majesty will immediately give such orders as the nature of the case demands." (This provision is referred to in this address as "the Statute of 1687.")

While the King was the supreme governor of the church, the consistory of each diocese administered the ecclesiastical affairs of the diocese under the Ecclesiastical Law of 1686 which is still in effect with some modifications (*Notes on Sweden: Historical and Statistical Handbook*, Stockholm, Government Printing Office, 1914).

Under laws relating to the freedom of the press, books or writings on theological subjects were not to be printed without the approval (*imprimatur*) of the Consistory. Books published without approval were subject to confiscation. Importation of unapproved books could be prohibited. Other applicable provisions of law, mostly of a procedural nature, are mentioned below.

I. The Proceedings before the Consistory prior to the Royal Decree of January 2, 1770

At a meeting of the clergy of the Diocese of Gothenburg, held on September 27, 1768, Aurelius asked that the Consistory employ the strongest measures to prevent the spreading of books, such as are now reported to have been published, which contain teachings

contrary to the Symbolical Books of the church. When asked what books he complained of, he said that he had seen in *Clerical News* a review by Dr. Rosen of a work by Emanuel Swedenborg which he could not find to be in agreement with "our Symbolical Books."

Doctor Rosen said that as a journalist he had reviewed Swedenborg's work *Apocalypsis Revelata*. He remarked that the magazine was designed for reading by the clergy and was published in Latin. He asked Aurelius whether the latter thought that the review was in violation of the ordinances relating to the freedom of the press. Aurelius then said that he did not mean to imply that in translating the work Doctor Rosen had done a public disservice. On the contrary, it was from Doctor Rosen's review that Aurelius had learned that *Apocalypsis Revelata* contains expositions about the dragon, besides other things, that are opposed to everything "we teach in the pulpit."

On October 12, 1768, the Consistory received a memorial from the pastor in Seglora, Anders Kollinius. He said that Swedenborg's principles in theology are favored and followed by quite prominent men in his locality. He asks that the Consistory consider by what means the priesthood may be informed as to whether there is any real harm in Swedenborg's writings. In the event that these writings contradict the evangelical doctrines as explained from the Word of God in our Symbolical Books, it would be a veritable crime, at least in so far as concerns one who is placed in the teaching office, to seek to impart Swedenborg's principles to others.

The Consistory appointed Doctor Beyer to draft an outline of the pronouncement which the Consistory should give out as a result of the complaints made by these two clergymen. Accordingly, on February 15, 1769, Doctor Beyer laid his proposed pronouncement before the Consistory. A brief summary of his draft follows.

Swedenborg is known as a God-fearing and virtuous man and a quiet, peaceable, right-thinking citizen, highly esteemed on account of his learning. The thoughts of such a man with regard to religion ought surely not to be condemned rashly and without previous thorough investigation. The Consistory had not the time, nor has it found occasion, because no controversy has arisen, to undertake such an investigation. Until such a study has been made the

Consistory does not think it proper to judge Swedenborg's works as belonging to the class of prohibited books. This document was directed to be circulated among the members of the Consistory for their perusal.

On March 22, 1769, Dean Olof Ekebom, who presided over the meetings of the Consistory during Bishop Eric Lamberg's absence at the pending session of the Diet, delivered a written statement denouncing Swedenborg's theological writings. He said in part: "I am not acquainted with the religious system of Assessor Swedenborg, nor shall I take the trouble to become acquainted with it, but from conversations with the author and an examination of his *Apocalypsis Revelata*, I must confess that his doctrines appear to me corrupting, heretical, injurious and in the highest degree objectionable."

Dean Ekebom found particularly objectionable Swedenborg's teaching that the Sacred Scripture has hitherto been wrongly interpreted and cannot be correctly interpreted until one has acquired the spiritual sense which has been given through a revelation to Swedenborg. He took exception to many of Swedenborg's teachings, including his denial of justification by faith alone; and found Swedenborg's doctrines to be diametrically opposed to God's Word and the dogmatic writings of the Lutheran Church, and in most parts Socinian. Finally, he urged Kollinius to disclose the names of the leading men reported to favor Swedenborg's principles; and advised that the Bishop be instructed to report the matter to the House of the Clergy at the approaching Diet, so that they might take the necessary steps to prevent the spread of Swedenborg's doctrines.

At a meeting of the Consistory held on March 30, 1769, Doctor Beyer vigorously defended Swedenborg's writings. He said it was the practice in all courts and colleges that no matter considered should be decided piecemeal, but only after it was brought to a conclusion. He could not join with the Dean in declaring Swedenborg's teachings to be diametrically opposed to God's revealed Word, heretical or Socinian. He saw no reason to pronounce such a judgment without being acquainted with Swedenborg's religious system, and without first proceeding with the matter and the person legally at the proper tribunal. He adds that if the Consistory believes that Swedenborg's doctrines be contrary to the doctrine of the church, the matter should be submitted to his

Majesty under the Statute of 1687, who will direct how the matter should further be dealt with according to law.

The Consistory decided that Pastor Kollinius should be required to inform the Consistory as to the prominent men to whom he had alluded. At a later meeting of the Consistory a letter was read from Pastor Kollinius, who asked that he be excused from divulging the names of persons favorable to Swedenborg.

At this point the proceedings of the Gothenburg Trial were deeply influenced by a dramatic move from the man whose writings were under attack. At a Consistory meeting held on April 26, 1769, Doctor Beyer made known the contents of a letter received by him from Swedenborg. It was written in reply to Dean Ekebon's declaration concerning Swedenborg's writings presented at the Consistory meeting of March 22, 1769.

Swedenborg's letter does not mince words. He says that Dean Ekebon's declaration is full of accusations and untruths and was written by one who by his own confession has not read the writings he condemns. To call the doctrine Socinian is an accursed blasphemy and a lie. He added that "The Dean's opinion may be taken as the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth after the woman to drown her when she was in the wilderness." He asked that the letter be laid before the Consistory and a copy sent to the Bishop. As Cyriel O. Sigstedt aptly remarks in *The Swedenborg Epic* (Bookman Associates, New York, 1952), page 390, "*odium theologicum* now took possession of the Gothenburg Consistory."

There were some sharp exchanges between Dean Ekebon and Doctor Beyer. The Dean said that it did not well become the Doctor to busy himself with commissions of this kind for Assessor Swedenborg, and that before the Doctor knows it he will be in difficulty on account of his *Household Sermons*. Doctor Beyer declared that this last remark was a threat, which he asked to have recorded in the *minutes*. He added that it would have been unbecoming for him to have withheld Swedenborg's letter when Swedenborg had asked him to deliver it to the Consistory.

Following the interjection of Swedenborg's letter into the proceedings of the Consistory, Assessor Dean P. Aurell, through his brother, Anders Aurell, an attorney, appeared from time to time at meetings of the Consistory to challenge the right of the printer, Smitt, to publish various documents—including the *Household Sermons*—and to obtain the approval of the Consistory to his own

publication of the minutes of the Consistory relating to Swedenborgianism.

These efforts of Assessor Aurell to discredit Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen were resisted by them with skill and vigor. They disputed the right of Anders Aurell to appear without a written power of attorney from his brother; they opposed the contention of Anders Aurell that they should be disqualified from attending and voting at meetings of the Consistory. They defended their individual right to act on behalf of the entire Consistory in giving approval to the publication of documents by the printer, Smitt. Incidentally, it turned out that Dr. Roempke, one of the members of the Consistory, had approved the publication of the *Household Sermons*. Anders Aurell also demanded that he be given possession of lectures given by Doctor Beyer to students at the Gymnasium. This demand was resisted by Doctor Beyer on the ground that they were mere scribbles, and not authentic, and that he had the right to correct them.*

Swedenborg was again brought into the Gothenburg case in a startling manner by the publication in the press of a letter, dated October 30, 1769, written by Swedenborg, addressed to "Reverend Doctor and Dear Friend." The letter referred to the favorable treatment he had received from important people, including members of the Royal family. After an extended discourse on his theological writings he states that his work, the *Brief Exposition*, will prepare the way for the reception of the New Church. He says that this little preliminary treatise "has been spread throughout the whole of Christendom, Sweden excepted, because theology is now in its wintry state and here in the north the nights last longer than in the southern parts."

Swedenborg's letter continued: "What you relate respecting your wife in her dying hours, was caused especially by the impression of two clergymen, who associated her in her thoughts with those spirits from whom she then spoke. . . ." He said that those spirits belonged to the province of the dragon, and added: "Your deceased wife was yesterday with me and informed me of many things which she had thought and spoken to you, her husband, and with those who led her astray. Were I at this time near you I might relate to you many things about this subject, but I am not permitted to write about them."

* These were not Beyer's notes but notes taken by students in class.

This letter was a bombshell. It roused the anger of most of the members of the Consistory. They took the position that the letter, because it dealt with theology, should not have been printed without the permission of the Consistory, and accordingly summoned the printer, Smitt, to explain its unauthorized publication.

When the printer appeared, Dr. Beyer said that he himself, as the present Dean of the Consistory, had written the usual imprimatur on the manuscript. Dean Ekebom instructed the printer that hereafter he must not print anything on a theological subject without proper censorship, by which he means the censorship of the Consistory.

At a later meeting of the Consistory the Bishop asked that the Consistory speedily answer the following questions. 1) Who is the man to whom Swedenborg wrote this letter? 2) Who is the man who had this letter printed? 3) How was it that the printer, contrary to the royal ordinance concerning the freedom of writing and the press, dared to publish any theological writing without the stamped approval of the Consistory? The printers, Smitt and Stackberg, were called in and given the warning directed by the Bishop.

Doctor Beyer protested the inquisitorial manner in which Dean Ekebom conducted an inquiry in this matter and at one point remarked that no Spanish Inquisition was permissible in Sweden.

Doctor Beyer would admit nothing. He would not concede that he had received the letter from Swedenborg or delivered it to the printer. He objected to the attempt of Dean Ekebom to bar him from being present when the matter of Swedenborg's letter was being discussed, and his stand on this point was eventually sustained. He took the position that there was no case against him and that consequently the Consistory could pronounce no judgment. He said that the matter should be referred to his Majesty under the Statute of 1687. The Consistory finally so decided. The printer was ordered to deliver into the custody of the Consistory all of the unsold copies of Swedenborg's letter.

It was reported that the attorney Aurell had obtained a summons in the City Court against Doctor Beyer charging that, contrary to his Majesty's resolution of 1768 concerning the freedom of the press, he is said to have sent to the press Swedenborg's letter censored by himself alone. The Consistory was called upon to select an attorney to appear for it. Dr. Rosen was appointed. Doctor

Rosen took the position that the City Court had no jurisdiction to decide whether Doctor Beyer's approval of the letter was sufficient. Meanwhile, all the papers in the case had been sent to the King, who was soon to be heard from.

*II. His Majesty's Decree of January 2, 1770 and
Proceedings Thereunder*

A summary of the decree follows: The Consistory is required to submit its finding on the doctrinal tenets of Swedenborg; and what measures have been taken to prevent them being spread; also a statement as to whether the so-called *Household Sermons* are found to be in agreement with our pure evangelical doctrine; and whether the author of the *Household Sermons* is still unknown to you or can be discovered by you; also whether the pupils are being taught what is erroneous and offensive; also that Doctor Beyer must give an individual explanation concerning that which has been brought up against him personally. His Majesty has caused a legal investigation to be made under the direction of the Gota Court of Appeals as to the person who caused Swedenborg's letter of October 30, 1769 to be printed.

The decree contains additional directions. The Consistory is to keep a watchful eye on everything concerning theological subjects which is announced for publication, so that in accordance with the ordinances in respect to freedom of the press it is first examined by the Consistory; and in case any writing is published without the Consistory's censorship, that copies be confiscated and the author be fined. Reviews and translations of Swedenborg's writings that contain anything against "our pure doctrine, especially if not written in the Latin tongue, are not to be allowed without your careful examination." The Bishop, and in his absence the Vicar, is to inform himself frequently as to how theology is being taught at the Gymnasium.

The Consistory now considered what steps should be taken to comply with the decree. It was decided that each member of the Consistory should draw up his opinion about Swedenborgianism, and that Doctor Beyer, in addition, should answer what may concern him individually. Warnings against Swedenborg's writings were to be given to the Clergy.

After several meetings of the Consistory, Doctor Beyer conceded that he had written the *Household Sermons*, except that Doctor

Göthenius had prepared some applications contained in these writings. He admitted further that the so-called dictata had been taken during his private lectures to young men, but said that they contained many errors.

The Consistory appointed Bengt Ohrvall, rector of the Cathedral school, who was Doctor Rosen's son-in-law, to represent the Consistory in the proceedings instituted by Assessor Aurell against Doctor Beyer.

The members of the Consistory delivered their declarations with respect to Swedenborg's doctrines. A majority of them—including Ekebon, Göthenius, Roempke, Hempe and Kullin—disapproved the whole Swedenborgian doctrinal system as contrary to God's revealed Word and to their *Symbolical Books* to which they had sworn, and also disapproved the *Household Sermons* and the Dictata.

Doctor Beyer said he had not found Swedenborg's writings otherwise than closely in harmony with God's most holy Word in every respect. He said he would give details in a separate statement. This was submitted to the Consistory on February 14, 1770. It comprises some 22 printed pages. Some of its main features appear below.

It is impossible to pass a correct judgment upon the theological works of Swedenborg until they have been compared. He refers to the *Formula Concordiae*, which says that the only guide for doctrine consists of the Old and New Testament.

The royal letter of December 2, 1766, proclaims freedom in matters of religion which are not opposed to our genuine confession of faith and pure evangelical doctrine.

Swedenborg adheres to the Apostles' and the Nicean Creeds. (The latter contention seems strange.)

Any charge that Swedenborg's works teach Socinianism is false.

In conclusion he points out the difficulty of determining whether Swedenborg's books are contrary to established doctrines.

Finally he refers to his service of 22 years as a member of the Consistory and 18 years in the Gymnasium and to his five dependent children.

All the declarations were put in a sealed package and sent to the King.

Pending the receipt of the Royal Letter of April 26, 1770 some interesting events took place. Doctor Beyer reported to the Con-

sistory that his students had been guilty of disorder in the classes. They had engaged in stamping, groaning, howling, shrieking and din. (It would appear that young people were out of control as long ago as 1770).

III. Royal Letter of April 26, 1770 and Proceedings Thereunder

At the meeting of the Consistory when this letter was read, Doctors Beyer and Rosen were directed to stand during its reading. A summary of the letter follows.

Although various things found in Swedenborg's theological writings, considered separately, could be regarded as tolerable and not contrary to our pure doctrine, nevertheless these doctrines, written in dark and mystical language, contain teachings which alter the confession of our Evangelical Church founded on God's Word and the *Symbolical Books*. Wherefore by reason of this, and by virtue of the constitution, the royal charter and ordinances, his Majesty has decided to disapprove, reject and forbid these views contained in Swedenborg's writings.

As to the *Household Sermons*, Doctor Beyer's dictata, and the oration *De Reprobatione*, all of which writings derive their origin from Swedenborg's teachings, precaution ought to be taken against their circulation.

As to Rosen and Beyer, his Majesty had supposed that these clergymen-teachers would be watchful in all that would conduce to the observance of our holy ordinances of religion to which they have sworn. There would be ground for his Majesty to deal summarily with them in accordance with the ordinances of religion. His Majesty orders the Bishop to call these two Lectors before the Consistory, to point out the hazards to which they would expose themselves if dealt with in accordance with the ordinances of religion, and to inquire whether they would heed this warning or continue with their tenets. Meanwhile Rosen and Beyer are not permitted to engage in the teaching of theology.

His Majesty directs that this whole case be handled with great silence and circumspection and that the Consistory should quietly gather in and maintain custody of Swedenborg's theological books, together with the *Household Sermons*.

Doctor Roempke is directed to furnish a clear explanation of his position.

The Consistory lost no time in taking action in compliance with the Royal Letter. The Bishop relieved Doctor Beyer from the duties of his position as First Lector of Theology in the Gymnasium, and forbade him to teach Hebrew or give instruction in exegesis either in the Old or New Testament. He was forbidden to correct the students' sermons or preside when theological theses were read, and until further notice was to teach only the profane authors.

At a meeting of the Consistory held on May 18, 1770, Bishop Lamberg, in accordance with the mandate of the Royal Letter of April 26, 1770, called on Doctors Rosen and Beyer to renounce their acceptance of Swedenborg's ideas. He required them to stand and to move their chairs down a little. Doctor Rosen said he was ready to deliver his written assurance to abstain from Swedenborgianism. He made a passing reference to Doctor Roempke's Synodal disputation which favored Swedenborg.

When the two doctors offered to present their written declarations, the Bishop endeavored to interrogate them, but they stood on their written statements. Their declarations said in effect that they would not urge the tenets of Swedenborg or give instruction in his doctrines. Doctor Rosen stated that in desisting from teaching Swedenborg's doctrines, "I give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

The Bishop told Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen their written statements were not satisfactory. The Consistory decided to report to his Majesty that while Doctors Beyer and Rosen had agreed not to teach Swedenborgianism, they had not renounced it.

At a Consistory meeting held a few days later, Doctor Beyer presented a long list of requests and complaints. He should have had a copy of the comments which the Bishop had made on the student sermon which Doctor Beyer had corrected, and on the dictata which had been delivered to the youth of the Gymnasium; he and Doctor Rosen had in mind complaining to his Majesty about their being denied copies of Minutes of Consistory meetings, being charged with insufficient reading in the works of orthodox theologians, and having their chairs removed from their places. They asked whether their complaints would be permitted to accompany the Consistory's communication to his Majesty.

The Bishop said the Consistory could not be concerned with time-consuming proceedings and asked them whether they were

prepared to give answers to the questions he had put to them at the last meeting. The two doctors stood on their written declarations.

The Bishop then said that as his direction that they answer questions cannot be regarded as a resolution at a trial, and since they cannot be forced to give answers, the Consistory must report the situation to his Majesty. (Bishop Lamberg's statement that the proceeding was not a trial evidently means that as the Consistory had referred the whole matter to his Majesty under the Statute of 1687, the Consistory had no jurisdiction to pronounce a judgment.)

IV. His Majesty's Royal Letter of July 20, 1770

This letter, which dealt with Dr. Roempke's explanations of his synodal disputation, was read at a Consistory meeting held August 1, 1770. At that meeting various complaints were received by the clergy of various parishes, which inquired about the status of the so-called Swedenborgian case and said that some parents hesitated to send their children to the Gymnasium at Gothenburg because they feared they might become infected with the injurious Swedenborgian tenets. Incidentally, similar letters from clergymen of various parishes were read at later meetings of the Consistory.

Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen requested copies of these complaints and objected to the recording of these letters as containing mere rumors. The doctors said that under the law a person charged with an offense must be named and accused of some definite offense, and that these letters failed to meet these conditions.

Doctor Rosen also asked for a decision on his previous demand that he receive the rectorship of the Gymnasium to which he was entitled in the due order of succession. The Consistory decided not to assign the rectorship to Doctor Rosen but to reserve his right to that position if his Majesty declares him to be entitled to hold it.

At this point the minutes of the Consistory are enlivened with complaints of Doctor Roempke that Doctor Rosen had struck his son with a cane and that he had told the boy to stay away from Doctor Rosen's classes lest he be maimed for life. Students were called in to testify about this fracas. Doctor Rosen denied that he had injured the boy and insisted that the boy was impudent and should be punished.

Doctor Rosen said that the proceeding involving the boy was contrary to law, in that, among other things, witnesses should have been examined, that their statements should have been recorded, that no one should have been called as a witness who was under 15 years of age, etc. At a later meeting Doctor Rosen complained of the boy's continued insolence and demanded that he "be beaten on his bare body with a switch." The Consistory decided to report this matter to his Majesty.

At a later Consistory meeting the Bishop said that the students of the Gymnasium are reported recently to have made an unusual noise and to have thrown fire crackers during a lesson given by Gothenius. A summary of the minutes on this subject follows.

The lectors present on this occasion reported that the discipline at the Gymnasium nowadays is unhappily so poor, and the manners of the young in general so demoralized, that it is almost impossible to keep the youth within proper bounds. The Bishop said that it was different in his younger days. He counseled that they choose a rational method, midway between overindulgence and overmuch severity, as a means, long ago found good for maintaining due authority and regard joined with laws. (All modern teachers, please note!)

V. Royal Letter of December 7, 1770

The Bishop said that Doctors Rosen and Beyer should stand during the reading of the Royal Letter. They said they had already risen and intended to remain standing but noted that the other members of the Consistory had sat down. The substance of the Royal Letter follows.

As to the complaints of Doctors Beyer and Rosen as to procedure, his Majesty finds no reason for paying attention thereto, except as follows. It would have been more in accordance with order if Doctor Beyer had received a copy of those comments that the Bishop had made on Doctor Beyer's correction of a student's draft sermon, since this correction had been regarded as redounding to Doctor Beyer's injury. Stories and rumors concerning one thing and another ought not to have been recorded in the Minutes since Beyer and Rosen, who were concerned in the matter, had not been heard and had had no opportunity to give their explanation.

The written assurances of Doctors Rosen and Beyer are not

acceptable. In the case of a teacher he must not only refrain from imparting an erroneous doctrine but he must refute erroneous doctrine. Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen shall explain their renunciation of Swedenborg's teachings before the Consistory within eight days. They shall publish their repudiation of Swedenborg's teachings in the press.

The Royal Letter contained other provisions. The Consistory was directed to call Doctors Beyer and Rosen before it and to give them salutary admonition, then to report to the King. Doctor Roempke's explanation of his Synodal disputation, *De Reprobatione* will be dealt with at some future time. His Majesty will not deal with the student case at this time but the Consistory may deal with it according to circumstances. The handling of the change of rectorship is not unsatisfactory.

At a subsequent meeting of the Consistory Doctor Beyer handed in his explanation in respect of the giving up of all devotion to and connection with the Swedenborgian doctrinal system, which explanation was humbly addressed to his Majesty. Doctor Rosen stated that he agreed with the main points of Doctor Beyer's statement. Doctor Beyer's and Doctor Rosen's statements referred to reported incidents of persons who had had communication with spirits in the past, and who had not been condemned by the authorities of the church.

At the next meeting of the Consistory the Bishop asked Doctors Beyer and Rosen to submit the aphorisms to be published in the press so that the whole matter might be reported to the King. They said they should not be required to do so until they had leisure to prepare their statements as they were now busy with occupations connected with the end of the term—an excuse all teachers will understand.

At the following meeting the Bishop said he had been prompted by the Chancellor of Justice to ascertain when the aphorisms would be ready. They said they could not be ready until Easter and it was finally decided to grant them this time.

Against Doctor Beyer's protest he was ordered not to teach New Testament Greek. On April 27, 1771 the Consistory reported to his Majesty what had taken place after the issuance of the last royal letter and that they noticed no change in the views of Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen.

VI. Royal Letter of May 14, 1771

The letter states that his Majesty has referred the Swedenborgian case to the Gota Court of Appeals to deal with in accordance with the ordinances of religion and the law and the facts.

In the meantime Doctor Beyer is not to engage in instruction in theology. As to complaints by Doctor Beyer against an order not to teach New Testament Greek, his Majesty has not seen any reason to make any change in the decision.

His Majesty has found it well to demand the humble opinion of the ecclesiastical Consistory at Upsala concerning Doctor Roempke's Synodal disputation *De Reprobatione* and also concerning the *Household Sermons*. (This provision proved to be a turning point in the case.) The prohibition against the printing of the documents concerning this religious case will continue in effect.

VII. Proceeding in the Gota Court of Appeals

(The principal source of the text under this title is a book by Wilhelm Berg on *Gothenburg Diocese during the Eighteenth Century*, which in turn refers to Sundelin, *Swedenborgianismens Historia*.) (Note 3)

Within a few weeks the Attorney General in the Gota Court of Appeals was prepared to report on the case. He said that there was no need to show that Swedenborg's teachings are erroneous. However, as the Royal Letter provided for a hearing of the accused, he requested the Court of Appeals to give Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen a limited time to explain themselves with respect to the charges. The Doctors were quick to avail themselves of this opportunity.

They handed in their written defenses. Doctor Beyer protested his orthodoxy and said he believed Swedenborg's teachings agreed with the Bible. He even asserted that he had never defended any teachings that were not in accord with the Lutheran Church. He was convinced they would be found to be orthodox if examined by impartial churchmen. (This is an intriguing statement.)

Doctor Rosen said he had formerly maintained that there was an agreement between Swedenborgian doctrine and the doctrine of the church but he could now hold this view only conditionally.

He said that the question whether the doctrines which he and Beyer held as receivers of Swedenborg were unchristian or not in *no way belonged to the office of the Chancellor of Justice but to the theological faculties of the universities of the Kingdom.* (In this one sentence Doctor Rosen laid the foundation for the eventual outcome of this momentous case.) The Gota Court of Appeals acceded to Doctor Rosen's contention to the extent of requesting the Consistory of Upsala to give the Court its opinion.

When the members of the Upsala Consistory had read the *Household Sermons* and Doctor Roempke's disputation they became convinced that the charges against the members of the Gothenburg Consistory were aimed not only at Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen but at others, and they felt it was offensive that a bishop and a whole consistory should be put on the bench of the accused.

The case in the Gota Court of Appeals lay dormant, awaiting the opinion from the Upsala Consistory.

One June 6, 1773 the Chancellor of Justice appeared before the Consistory to advise himself concerning the state of the diocese and the church. When he suggested to Doctors Beyer and Rosen that they renounce their erroneous Swedenborgian doctrines, they denied that Swedenborg's writings were unorthodox and said that in any event the whole case had been referred to a proper forum which was to decide as to the orthodoxy of Swedenborg's theological writings.

Doctor Rosen suggested to the Chancellor that he advise his Majesty to drop the case. To this suggestion the Chancellor of Justice replied that he had received letters which showed a devotion of some students to the Swedenborgian doctrine.

On September 6, 1773, Doctor Rosen died. Dean Ekebon's son delivered the funeral oration!

Later Doctor Beyer was found to be holding an exegetic course and was reported for legal action. He petitioned his Majesty to be allowed to give instruction in religion but the matter was referred to the Gota Court of Appeals which in a memorandum of June 8, 1776 declared that it could not take any action on this petition or on the case as a whole until the Consistory in Upsala had given its opinion. The Court now requested that it receive this opinion in order to conclude the case.

On September 7, 1778, the Court of Appeals requested that "this religious case with everything connected therewith might be

considered as having been dropped and so to be struck off." No unrest was evident. The writings of Swedenborg could not be printed and the importation of his books had been stopped. The recommendation was granted by his Majesty on September 18, 1778, and on October 12, 1778 the case in the Court of Appeals was struck off. The next year Doctor Beyer died. He was faithful unto death.

VIII. Concluding Comment

The Gothenburg Trial, like many other important trials, has many elements of human interest. We are moved by the ability, zeal, courage and persistence with which these pioneer New Churchmen defended the doctrines revealed in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Their ability was shown at every stage of this litigation and in their final and successful plea that the Gota Court of Appeals should postpone a decision of the case against them until the theological authorities at Upsala should express an opinion as to whether the accused were teaching doctrines which were unorthodox. They also showed prudence in avoiding a brazen defiance of authority, especially in their relations with their sovereign. Incidentally, these doctors of theology, like a modern doctor of theology who for many years was editor of the official organ of the Swedenborg Scientific Association, would have made outstanding lawyers.

Their zeal was manifest in their unswerving devotion to the teachings of the new Revelation. Their courage was demonstrated by their refusal to renounce their faith in the teachings of Swedenborg when faced with the threat of the loss of their connection with the University and their means of support. Their persistence was evidenced by their continuing adherence to Swedenborg's teachings and their claim that these teachings were in accordance with the Word of God. In this case, as in other cases, an enduring confidence in the justice of a cause sometimes is rewarded by an outcome of a case which could not have been predicted.

One of the interesting aspects of the trial was that it involved the delicate issue of academic freedom. The real fault of the majority of the Consistory was that, like some of the chief rulers of old, they did not confess the truth because they might be put

out of the church, "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12: 32, 43.) Looking at the situation merely from an administrative standpoint, it would appear that there was justification for the removal of Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen from their positions, because they were teaching doctrines contained in Swedenborg's works which were directly opposed to the doctrines of the Lutheran Church.

The comparative leniency with which they were dealt with is explained by the fact that, as has already been pointed out, Swedenborg had friends in high places. And Swedenborg complained to these friends about the way in which his writings, and those who believed in them, had been treated. Thus in his famous letter to the King, written on May 10, 1770, he asserts that: 1) the Lord has appeared to him and commanded him to do what he has done and is still to do; 2) his works have been declared heretical without his being heard; and 3) Doctor Beyer and Doctor Rosen, because of their belief, have to a certain extent become martyrs. While this appeal to the King resulted in no open change in the course of the case, it probably had its effect in removing any element of urgency in its decision.

This address opened with a quotation from Swedenborg's letter to the Universities of Upsala, Lund and Åbo to the effect that the Gothenburg Trial "has been the most solemn brought before any council during the last 1700 years." It was noted that the 1700 years went back to the trial of our Lord before the Sanhedrin.

There are features which are common to both of these two great trials. In the earlier case, the Jewish Church denied that the Lord had made His first coming. In the later trial, the Church of Sweden, founded on the doctrines of Luther, denied that the Lord had made His second coming.

Both of these trials took place in both worlds. While the Gothenburg trial ran its course in this world, events were taking place in the spiritual world which appear in letters which Swedenborg wrote as the case proceeded. The Last Judgment on the Reformed Church and the Catholic Church had already taken place in the spiritual world. Reference has already been made to Swedenborg's letter to Doctor Beyer in which the revelator told of his conversation with Beyer's deceased wife. In a letter to Doctor Beyer of December 29, 1769, Swedenborg said he had been told by an angel of the Lord that he could rest securely on his arms.

And in a letter written to Doctor Beyer on April 30, 1771, he says: "When our adversaries enter the other life they will have their places assigned to them. I pity them."

In both of these important trials, as indeed in all trials, there was, to quote no. 252 of the *Divine Providence*, "a spiritual justice in the case in heaven and a natural justice in the world, and this spiritual justice and natural justice are conjoined by means of the connection between things past and future things known only to the Lord."

In a worldly sense the outcome of the earlier trial was disastrous because the claim of a Divine advent was rejected and condemned by the existing church. Yet, from a spiritual standpoint, Divine justice prevailed; because the Lord glorified His Human, the former church was judged, and a Christian church was established which in a few centuries spread throughout the civilized world.

From a worldly standpoint the outcome of the later trial was disastrous because the claim that the Lord had made His second coming was rejected and condemned by the existing church. Yet from a spiritual standpoint the rejection by the Swedish Lutheran Church of the Lord's second coming did not affect the Divinely revealed destiny of the New Church as the crown of all the churches that have hitherto been in the world. Perhaps one of the lessons of the later trial is that the New Church is not to grow by mass conversions, such as occurred in the early Christian Church, but that it will grow out of a new way of life based on the Writings. It would seem that in this era which more and more puts its trust in the horses and chariots of a materialistic science, only the New Church, in which it is given to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith, can support a belief in Divine revelation which alone can show man the way to heaven.

NOTES

1). A copy of *Laws of the Swedish Kingdom* authorized and accepted in the Parliament of 1734, Stockholm 1746, is in the Law Library of the Philadelphia Bar Association.

2). The Statute of February 11, 1687 and the ordinances regulating the procedure in ecclesiastical cases are found *Sveriges Kyrko-Lag* (Swedish Church Law), P. Rydholm, Stockholm, 1902. The Library of The Academy of the New Church has this book.