

Notes and Comments

Summer Seminar

Introduction

From July 13 to 17, 1992, the New Church College in Manchester, England held the "Summer Seminar of Swedenborg Studies," with special focus on Swedenborg's influence on Western literature. A collection of papers has been published, and it is these that I would like to comment on. In addition, other talks given at the seminar are available on tape.

Rarely can one find a collection of papers from one seminar on Swedenborg that are so uniformly absorbing; and from the listing of talks available on tape (see below), I have no doubt that they, too, would be well-worth the listening.

The Papers

The collection includes two papers by Dr. Friedemann Horn. In the first titled "Swedenborg and the Jews," Dr. Horn explores one of those difficult subjects treated in the Revelation given through Swedenborg—the internal nature of the Jewish people. He begins with a biographical account of his experiences in pre-WW II Germany, during the war and in the early post-war period. These serve as a background to his reflections on the history of the Jewish people, and on what the Writings of Swedenborg have to offer. Both parts make for fascinating reading, serving to challenge our own thinking on this matter, and indeed on the nature of Revelation and of the role of the men who served to bring it to mankind.

His second paper, "Swedenborg and Kant," analyses aspects of Kant's reaction to his reading of *Arcana Coelestia* as portrayed anonymously in *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*. This paper gives a glimpse of the significance of Kant's reading of Swedenborg to his philosophic position on metaphysics and on the existence of the after-life. We note that Dr. Horn draws attention to the work of Gottlieb Florschütz, whose full text is now being published in this journal.

Dr. John Chadwick's "A Swedenborgian View of Greek Myths" gives a fascinating introduction to myths for readers not well acquainted with them. After giving a brief account of the five main types and offering some comments on myths in general, Dr. Chadwick illustrates how they may be interpreted by means of correspondences, analyzing the myth of Oedipus.

Rev. Christopher Hasler's paper "The Structure of Truth" presents an appeal for readers of Swedenborg's Writings to look for the coherent structure of truth presented in them, a structure that can only be seen by continuous reading of the text, rather than piece-meal study of the works through a focus on a particular aspect of faith. The latter approach he characterizes as "The One Issue Heresy," drawing on *Arcana Coelestia* n. 363: "Whenever a Church exists, heresies arise in it as a consequence of people basing their thinking on one particular article of faith to which they attach supreme importance."

He draws attention to the section title to *True Christian Religion* n. 349: "The mass of truths which cohere as it were in a bundle, raise the level of faith and bring it to perfection." Rev. Hasler reminds us of the structure and coherence in creation as a whole, and of what Swedenborg has to say regarding the structure within both the human body and mind wherein the grand plan of creation finds fullest expression.

"The Inspiration of the Word" by Rev. Norman Ryder treats of the texts of Revelation and their significance for the human mind. He does so under several headings: "Inner degrees of meaning," "Creating the Word," "The accuracy of the written text of the Word," "Degrees of truth," and "Creation continues." I give these to indicate the scope and content of the paper. A summary paragraph toward the close of the paper gives a good sense of what the author is leading us to see:

It is only an appearance that the Word of God is STATIC. But remember that God is not concerned only with getting His Divine Truth expressed in a BOOK:—He wants to express His Truth in PEOPLE...The one creative power produced the Word with all its vibrant, inner levels and strives to produce it in the human mind in all the vibrant, inner levels which He has created within us.

Mr. Anders Hallengren opens his paper titled "In search of the Ancient Code: New Church Spirituality and New England Transcendentalism in the Age of Newness" with the following:

In New York as well as in the New England world, there was, in the era of 'Newness' (from 1830 to 1850), a freshly built vision of Adam's primal language; the expressive power within things themselves and their inner essence and their meaning reborn, revealed. American transcendentalists, from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) to Walt Whitman (1819-1892), dreamed of reproducing the expressive power of the language of nature. We will, in this discourse, approach the very essence of this vision...

The author, well known for his scholarship surrounding American transcendentalism, gives further insights into its literature and the humanity it portrays. Central to this is the theory of correspondence. In his closing paragraph, Mr. Hallengren writes:

The prospect in the age of Newness was one of "the original relation to the universe," a state of mind when the different planes of reality and our awareness once again coincide and everything suddenly becomes "transparent," reveals its inner nature, its truth.

I highly recommend this collection of papers ("Papers given at Summer Seminar of Swedenborg Studies, 13-17 July 1992"; spiral bound; 67p. photocopied MSS) available from The New Church College, 25 Radcliffe New Road, Radcliffe, Manchester M26 9LS (\$4 plus postage—\$5.00 airmail; \$2.00 surface mail). Pounds Sterling payable to "The New Church College" is requested.

The Tapes

As a matter of information, the titles of the talks available on tape are: "How did Blake discover Swedenborg? What use did he make of Swedenborg's ideas?" (Rev. L. Chambers); "The influence of this new

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spiritual age in the arts" (Mr. P.L. Johnson); "Inner and outer worlds" (Rev. M.M. Stanley); "Swedenborg's influence on Balzac" (Mr. D.A. Lomax); "Emanuel Swedenborg and the Swedish literary tradition" (Rev. O.H. Hjern); and "The manifestation of creative energies via the Masculine and the Feminine" (Rev. I.A. Arnold).

Editor