

REVIEW

The Basic Philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg with Implications for Western Education by Robert L. Calatrello. A dissertation presented to the faculty of the School of Education, the University of Southern California, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree doctor of education, June 1966. University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Robert L. Calatrello, who in 1966 signed himself as director of teacher education in the University of California, at Irvine, studied in a Catholic seminary in Rome for a time, but subsequently left the authority of the Catholic Church to engage in public higher education. He became acquainted with the writings of Swedenborg, at least in part, through visits to the Wayfarer's Chapel at Portuguese Bend, California, consultation with Rev. Harold C. Cranch, then pastor of the Glendale General Church Society, and visits to the Convention's Theological School when it was in Cambridge, Mass., and to Urbana College, Ohio. Although invited, he has never visited the Academy of the New Church at Bryn Athyn, nor any other school of the General Church.

Calatrello has brought a mind well trained in philosophy and educational history to the tremendous task of reading and understanding all that Swedenborg published and meant. He is to be commended for his over-all grasp of Swedenborg's philosophy and some of the theology of the Writings. However, he seems to miss the whole concept of the internal sense of the Word as unfolded in *Arcana Coelestia* (consistently referred to by Calatrello as *Arcana Coelestria*). It is here that New Church educators find guidance and enlightenment into the understanding of the developing human mind from birth through maturity, and through the various states of regeneration. This vast concept and all its ramifications this author apparently ignored or dismissed as "allegory."

Following the order indicated in the title, we will consider first Dr. Calatrello's analysis of Swedenborg's philosophy, which seems to impress the author. In "Metaphysical Analysis," (Chapter IV) Calatrello states that there are two legitimate approaches. One is to consider only those writings prior to Swedenborg's spiritual experiences.

"The other is to take the whole body of Swedenborg's thought, suspending judgment on the validity of his spiritual experiences, arguing that regardless of the source of his inspiration, all of his philosophical writings must be considered in order to arrive at his true philosophical position. The present study will take the second approach, since . . . the Swedenborg who continues to influence the minds and lives of men today is 'the whole Swedenborg': the Swedenborg both of reason *and* revelation." (p. 76.)

Calatrello early pegs Swedenborg as a holdover from the age of Scholasticism but admits that he is a scholastic with a difference, since he is also "a son of the Enlightenment." (Ibid.) He takes issue with Bishop Elmo Acton's characterization of Swedenborg as "truly a Christian philosopher" (THE NEW PHILOSOPHY, April, 1950, p. 63) because he, Calatrello, sees Swedenborg as "a Unitarian with curious ramifications." "Certainly," the author continues, "Swedenborg accepted the idea that Christ was God incarnate, *but* (emphasis added) felt that 'He was Jehovah Himself' and that 'it was God who descended,' concluding, 'Thus God became Man and Man became God.'" (p. 78; the quoted references are to AC 1992; TCR 89 & 838.)

Dr. Calatrello makes an important point when he writes (p. 86),

"Unlike Plato, Swedenborg did not believe that the only real world was the world of ideas. 'There are two worlds, a spiritual world where spirits and angels are and a natural world where men are,' (TCR 75.)" Unlike the idealists such as Bishop Berkeley, (Swedenborg) "believed in the reality of both worlds of which he wrote, the spiritual world and a natural world which existed independently of man or man's thought."

The author further classifies Swedenborg's philosophy as "Pragmatic Existentialism," with this explanation:

"The choice of this heading may not be fully justified. However, it hints at a concept of the nature of things which is consistent with Swedenborg's belief in a dynamic universe, continually engaged in the act of creation." (p. 96. This ambiguous phrasing leaves us to wonder if the universe is self-creating. RRG) ". . . Swedenborg applies the principle of use to the modification of all that is material, all that is in nature, and to the spiritual aspects of man, asserting that *use*, because it modifies and changes, is Divine. (SD 2512.) Thus does Swedenborg cast his earlier teleological view of the universe, in an existential mode with all of nature and man moving toward the perfection of their essences through an existence evaluated in utilitarian terms." (p. 96f.)

Ignoring the strange use of commas here and elsewhere in the text, and the fact that "utilitarian" leaves something to be desired as a synonym for *use*, this seems an interesting commentary which helps to clarify a point for the newcomer to Swedenborg's philosophy.

Calatrello sees a relationship between Swedenborg's first natural point and the mathematical point of the Greeks. He sees Swedenborg's cosmological system as

"built with traditional materials upon the foundations of the ancient controversy between the Heraclitian proponents of universal change and the Parmenidian concept of permanency. . . . Swedenborg's geometrical approach to the universe is a Pythagorean center-column capped by the Greek answer to the dilemma of change versus permanency: the mathematical point, which led to belief in a real world of matter-in-motion." (p. 101.)

Although the concept of a mechanical and orderly universe is as old as the Greeks, no other philosopher was able to "break free of the Aristotelian net of static substance, into the dynamic, self-creating universe which is implicit in Swedenborg's *conatus* or urge to motion." (p. 102).

The conclusion of the author's chapter on Metaphysical Analysis seems to show a clear and appreciative grasp of two large points of Swedenborg's philosophy. (The lumping together of pre- and post-illuminative references, of course, creates difficulties at times.) Dr. Calatrello writes (p. 102f.):

"Throughout all of the details of Swedenborg's cosmology, including his post-illumination ontology, runs one dominant and recurrent theme. Swedenborg continually places man at the center of a universe which is created for man's use and edification, and which is unintelligible without man to take its measure. Space and time are created for man's convenience and the aim of the universe (Does a universe have an aim? RRG) is to assist man in the perfection of his humanity. . . . Despite, or perhaps because of, its mystic overtones, there is something profound and stirring in Swedenborg's final development of the ontological concept of love as ultimate reality, positing a universe in which 'love is the life of man.'"

Although it would have been more accurate to show a relationship between Swedenborg's concept of use and current definitions of pragmatism, and between his "human-centered" universe and existentialism, the statement is interesting, and relationships certainly exist between portions of existentialism and Swedenborgian concepts.

Not all of Calatrello's inferences and conclusions are as happy as some that we have noted in this review so far. For example, he infers that Swedenborg was "at least reasonably well-satisfied and committed to the type of higher education received in the universities of his day from the fact that he bent considerable effort in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a professorship at the University of Upsala." (p. 149.) Dr. Alfred Acton, and biographers Toksvig and Sigstedt all agree that Swedenborg, then 28 and itching to employ his talents and energies for the benefit of his war-weakened land, was far more interested in founding a scientific society and a learned journal than in becoming a college professor, and indeed only considered the professorship as a means of pumping some new scientific energies into his country's economy, as well as peppering up a moribund university system that pleased its country's youth about as much as America's seems to do today.

Not only did Calatrello bite off all of Swedenborg's works, but he also attempted to read, in what seems to have been a very limited time, everything written about him. A sizable section of the dissertation deals with "Claims of Swedenborg's Influence." (p. 52ff.) On page 56, the author questions the belief "that Swedenborg's ideas were a direct influence upon Mrs. (Elizabeth Barrett) Browning and were reflected in her writing." Seven months before the dissertation was published, there appeared in *New Church Life*, the official organ of the General Church, which Calatrello does not list among his periodical sources, an article entitled, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Swedenborg," by Dr. Robert W. Gladish. (*NCL*, Nov. 1965, pp. 506-13; Dec. 1965, 559-70.)

Dr. Gladish wrote, "Mrs. Browning's interest in the Writings was stimulated only in the last nine years of her life, but in that time she seems to have read them quite steadily and with a combination of eagerness and thoroughness that characterized her approach to most things that interested her. Indeed she called herself a Swedenborgian several times, and, from the evidence that I could assemble, she certainly seemed to understand and accept what we think to be the central doctrines expounded in the Writings." (p. 507.)

On statistical topics Dr. Calatrello can be exceedingly airy, as when he reports, "No figures are available concerning (The General Church's) actual membership." (p. 67.) Perhaps this could be translated, "I didn't have the figures, and it's too much trouble

to look it up." However, this information is carefully published every year in the *New Church Life*. Perhaps this is another drawback of doing your research at a distance. Another statistical gem occurs on the same page when the Convention enrollment in the United States and Canada is given as "perhaps 50,000 in number." This is attributed to "undated pamphlet of the Wayfarer's Chapel. No author given." Calatrello quickly disposes of all the New Church establishments abroad with these words: "There are no figures available for size and number of New Church congregations and assemblies outside of the United States." (p. 68.)

Dr. Calatrello's seventh chapter, "Swedenborg and Western Education," addresses itself to the second part of the title, and asks the question, "Whether what Swedenborg had to say has any application to education in the social and cultural context of western civilization?" He states his intention to examine the Swedenborgian influence through schools now in operation, and the application of Swedenborg's thought to the general purposes and problems of education. (p. 147.)

Calatrello asserts that Swedenborg's comments on education *per se* are "few, incidental, and largely indirect," such as his *Principia* statement ". . . man is formed by the education and exercise of his faculties." The author notes (regretfully?) the absence in Swedenborg's writings of treatises on education such as those of Locke and Rousseau. According to Calatrello's Swedenborg, there is virtually nothing to say about childhood education; the goals of education are freedom and rationality, and since these do not blossom till adult years, the child might as well amass facts and information "peculiar to childhood and adolescence," and let it go at that. At first Calatrello puts forth a bit gingerly his case that Swedenborg placed the greatest premium upon higher education and the liberalizing effect traditionally ascribed to the liberal arts. Later, however, we find the author putting much weight on this rather weak reed. (p. 151f.) In fact he uses it to give blanket approval to Convention education as represented in its theological school and Urbana College, and to condemn the operation of all schools under the General Church. (p. 175f.)

It is a matter of regret that Dr. Calatrello did not confine his dissertation to Swedenborg's philosophy, or at least that he did not visit the Academy and at least one or two of the General Church schools before drawing such sweeping conclusions. One

supposes that such visits would have enabled clarification of the relationship he saw between the Academy's aims and the Montessori plan. (p. 157.) Had the author visited Bryn Athyn or any other General Church site, he might easily have disabused himself of the notion that these schools discriminate against girls and regard women as second-class citizens. (p. 163f.)

"The use of allegory in Swedenborgian Education," is Calatrello's way of describing interpretations of the internal sense of revelation. He chooses three instances with almost no context and the apparent object of arousing misunderstanding, if not ridicule. (pp. 158-62.) The concept of correspondence seems to baffle Calatrello, and so he prefers to leave the problem with Swedenborg, calling it "one of Swedenborg's very great difficulties." (p. 87f.)

But how can New Churchmen, and New Church educators ignore the teaching that the letter of the Word of the Old Testament

"contains deep secrets of heaven, and that everything within it both in general and particular bears reference to the Lord, to His heaven, to the Church, to religious belief, and to all things connected therewith?" (AC 1.)

Can a proper education be *unconnected* with these things?
Again,

"... everything in it (the Word) ... bears reference to the Lord, Who is the very Life itself; so that everything which does not inwardly regard Him is not alive. . . ." (AC 2.) "Without such a life, the Word as to the letter is dead. . . . The Word . . . in respect to the letter alone is like the body without the soul." (AC 3.)

"These matters contain arcana which have never yet been revealed. . . ." (AC 4.)

"The most ancient people, being celestial men, were so constituted that every object they beheld in the world or upon the face of the earth, they indeed saw, but they thought about the heavenly and Divine things . . . signified. . . ." (AC 241.)

Eight big books on the internal sense of Genesis and Exodus! Every nuance of the spiritual development of man from infancy to old age—nay, to eternity—set forth in the *Arcana Coelestia*. Could this be ignored in the education of the young? No! Bishop Benade began the study with *Conversations on Education* (missed by our California critic)—large, perceptive concepts of education based on the Writings: the use of sense impressions in formation of the

mind; the folly of forcing development (now experimentally confirmed by Piaget); the importance of colors, spheres, the pre-school environment for establishment of remains. Indeed, because their source was different, early Academy educators had ideas far in advance of their times, although in candor, it must be said that their practices of necessity were often borrowed from the world around them.

The work of research into the meanings and applications of the *Arcana* has gone on through all the three generations of Academy and General Church education, notably forwarded in Bishop de Charms' *Growth of the Mind* (1932) based in part upon studies conducted in the Bryn Athyn Church School, in consultation with the active teachers in the classroom. Studies have been continued by Bishop and President of the Academy Willard D. Pendleton, with his *Foundations of New Church Education* (1957), *Values and Objectives of New Church Education* (1964), and *Formative States of the Human*, (1968). Perhaps two quotations from the last work will make a good ending for this review:

"The classroom situation must be a vital situation . . . one in which the student participates. In whatever we teach, therefore, let us seek out what is significant, what has relation to life." (Ibid., Chapt. V, p. 17f.) "For he who thinks from use perceives what is true, and he who acts for the sake of use does what is good. What could be more relevant and meaningful than this?" (Ibid., p. 23.)

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Current Trends in Indian Philosophy, edited by K. Satchidananda Murty and K. Ramakrishna Rao. Andhra University Press, Waltair, Asia Publishing House, New York, c1972. xlvii, 307 pp. Price \$7.25.

The Philosophy of Leibniz and the Modern World, edited by Ivor Leclerc. Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 1973. xiv, 306 pp. Price \$15.00.