

ELMO C. ACTON

AN APPRECIATION

The Right Reverend Elmo C. Acton, a member of the Board of Directors of the Swedenborg Scientific Association and an ardent supporter of its uses, passed into the spiritual world on Christmas Day, 1975. He had devoted a half-century to pastorships in the General Church of the New Jerusalem and to teaching in various Church society schools as well as in the Theological School of the Academy of the New Church. Following retirement from his final pastoral office as Dean of the Bryn Athyn Church, Bishop Acton continued teaching courses in the Academy, and he gave occasional adult classes to the Bryn Athyn society. Of special relevance to the work of this association was a reading class he conducted in Swedenborg's philosophical works.

While all of his published addresses were originally intended for presentation to general audiences within the Church, Elmo Acton had a strong sense of the importance of philosophy and especially of the meaning of Swedenborg's early works as "preparation"—not only for Swedenborg's own mission as revelator, but also as an aid for those who would devote themselves to the study of the Writings. This can be illustrated by reference to two addresses: the first one prepared very early in his career, and the other a quite recent address.

The first paper, written in 1929 (and published in *NEW CHURCH LIFE* in 1931, pp. 139–164) is entitled "Correspondences, Representatives and Significatives." The section of the paper on correspondences is one of the clearest statements on this subject that I am aware of. For some years it has been of use to me whenever I considered the origin of the notion of correspondences in the *Economy* and its subsequent development into a doctrine during Swedenborg's philosophical period. Thus while this paper was intended for direct application to the Writings, it is also of considerable interest to one who is trying to understand how the doctrine of correspondences came into being as a philosophical doctrine. The temptation to enter here into particulars must be set aside. Let us go to the second paper, which has to do explicitly with Swedenborg's philosophical period. It is entitled "The Nature of Swedenborg's Preparation" (*THE NEW PHILOSOPHY*, 1973, pp. 387–396).

In this address there is strong emphasis upon the subjective use of the philosophical works for one who is a student of the Writings, as well as a discussion of the use which we objectively see them serving in Swedenborg's life as preparation for his becoming a revelator. Bishop Acton said, "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" (p. 387). And in further emphasis he added later,

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. [p. 388]

Not everyone agrees with this. But my own experience is that those who take the negative view have not always given an affirmative study of the preparatory works a fair trial.

Another view emphasized by Bishop Acton in this address is that of reading the preparatory works as philosophy, not as science. This approach to those works also is not generally understood. Swedenborg uses so many explicit references to the science of his day as bases for his philosophical arguments that some readers become confused as to whether they are reading science or philosophy.

An important point made in the address, to support the argument that the preparatory works are philosophy, is the reference to Swedenborg's own statement, in 1769 in *The Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body*, in which he explains how from being a philosopher he became a theologian. There is no reference to work as a scientist. Elmo's contribution consists in calling attention to three important presumptions upon which all of Swedenborg's philosophy depends. These by themselves are evidence enough that the early works are philosophy, not science. Briefly, the three postulates are:

1. Belief in God, God the creator, the incarnate God in Jesus
2. Belief in the existence of the immortal soul
3. Belief in Divine Revelation.

PHILOSOPHY, I hope the Editor will let his interested readers know where it can be found in print.

The Academy of the New Church
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Sincerely,
LYRIS HYATT

Editor of THE NEW PHILOSOPHY:

I should like to comment on Dr. Van Dusen's article on *Meditation* in your October–December issue, 1975. The author anticipates comment, indeed negative comment, for he says: "Some will probably respond to this paper by saying it is not possible to become aware of the internal and will cite some passages from the Writings that seem to suggest this, i.e., AC 2557" (p. 320). This makes it a bit awkward for a respondent, for it might appear that what he might wish to say is prejudged already, and this the more if he should think, as I do, that Dr. Van Dusen's contention may in fact not be in real agreement with the very burden of AC 2557.

However, what I have to say is not all negative. It is quite likely that we New Church people do not meditate as often and as deeply as we should, and therefore it may serve a use for someone to say with a loud voice, Do it! I also feel sympathetic with the author's emphasis on affection. We tend perhaps to bring out the thought-aspect of doctrine and religion more than the affectional elements in life; when yet affection is interior to thought, and is what gives life and direction to it.

What worries me is my impression that the author advocates a form of meditation that I do not find supported in the Writings. He says there are two forms, or kinds. One is "the *Britannica* definition and Swedenborg's main approach," while the other form "does not identify with any content, [but] instead its internal focus is on what is occurring now in the mind in order to look at mental processes without any controls and without identifying with them, or being caught up in their trends" (p. 311). The *Britannica* definition of meditation, as being "a profound and generally peaceful consideration of truths that are thought to have great importance in ordering and living one's life" (quoted by the author on p. 309), fits well with the examples afforded by the Writings. "On a certain day I was in meditation about the creation of the universe" (TCR 76); "Once I fell into a profound meditation about God" (AR 961); "When I was in meditation on the arcana of conjugal love hidden away with wives. . . ." (CL 208)—these are familiar phrases to us and familiar examples of the kind of meditation we meet in the Writings. We recall also Swedenborg's rule of life: "Diligently to read the Word of God and to meditate upon it."

As for the other kind it appears inspired from Eastern religions or from Christian mystics. In the East, especially, meditation is achieved through a prescribed technique (including bodily posture) and consists in a transcendent experience beyond the limits of the world. Buddhist meditation for example, as developed in the Ch'an school in China or the equivalent Zen school in Japan, is "based on the theories of the 'universality of Buddha-nature' . . . [and points] 'directly to the human mind and to becoming a Buddha by