

Translator's Corner

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This issue brings us a further paper presented at the Translators' Conference in August of last year, this time by Richard L. Goerwitz III, to be followed in coming issues by some others.

Chapters XXXV, XXXVI, and XXXVII of the work *On Common Salt* add another installment to this much needed first English text.

HISTORY-ASSISTED TRANSLATION: SOME SIMPLE WAYS TO PUT EARLY MODERN LITERATURE TO WORK IN TRANSLATING THE WRITINGS

Richard L. Goerwitz III

I. Theologian as Historian

It is my profound belief that divine truth is never displayed as is, because we would not be able to understand it, still less live it. Divine truth must always be clothed, i.e. "accommodated" to the state of those who are to receive it. What this means, in practical terms, is that if we are to understand a piece of revealed truth, we must also understand the religious, moral, scientific, and linguistic background of the people living at the time when the revelation was made.¹

II. History and Translation

What I have said above has direct application to the task of translation. If we want to translate Swedenborg's works adequately, we obviously cannot treat them as if they were written in some kind of a vacuum. We must become intimately familiar with the thought-world within which

¹ See my note "On the Nature of Swedenborg's Theological Works," *New Philosophy* 90:3 (July-September, 1987), p. 387-388.

they were created, and with the language used to express these thoughts. If we rest content with a knowledge of Swedenborg's Latin, mixed with a little classical Latin, we will find ourselves at a loss when it comes to reproducing the exact nuance of terms like "solemn,"² "domestic,"³ "hieroglyphic,"⁴ "chyle,"⁵ "animal spirits,"⁶ etc., as they were understood in Swedenborg's time-period. We will therefore end up either mistranslating these terms, or else having to fall back on a literal translation which does not convey to today's reader what the original Latin would have conveyed to a reader in Swedenborg's time (which is, by definition, a mistranslation).

It used to be that, at least in the General Church, Alfred Acton Sr. was the only one who really knew much about the literature of Swedenborg's time-period. Today, however, we have several additional people who are making headway in Neo-Latin. Among them are Durban Odhner, Michael David, and Jonathan Rose. At various points, Bruce Rogers has also given me clever advice on how to get by with even quite minimal lexical tools (see below on the OED). I am sure that there are many others who have had to become *ad hoc* Neo-Latinists, and who have found their way into various Neo-Latin books and lexicons. I am convinced, however, that they represent only a small percentage of those interested in reading the Latin of the Writings. Just to make sure that no one gets "left out," I've decided to put together a brief paper on how to define words in the Writings that can't be defined by ordinary means (i.e. Lewis & Short, the Oxford Latin Dictionary, and Chadwick). I hope that those who know more about this than I do will feel free to add to it—even in the course of this talk—and help me get the word out to the Church at large.

² Letter to the editor, *New Church Life* 105:8 (August, 1985), p. 376.

³ See the letter in the upcoming issue of *New Church Life*.

⁴ On this term, please see my articles in *Studia Swedenborgiana* 6:3 (July 1988), pp. 5-34, and in *Covenant* (literary issue of the *Glencairn Museum Newsletter*) 1:1 (Spring 1989), pp. 1-16 (the latter being an abridgement of the former).

⁵ This term refers to that portion of the ingested food which passes across the intestinal membrane. I first discovered this fact while commenting on a preliminary version of Frank Rose's dictionary of Swedenborg's terminology.

⁶ I believe that this term refers to the finest fluid in the body, thought in Swedenborg's day to have had its seat in the ventricles of the human brain. It was looked upon as the medium of connection between the spiritual and natural worlds.

III. Translator as Early Modern Biblical Critic

One area of translation in which a need for understanding Swedenborg's intellectual environment is particularly acute is in his biblical quotations. It is often very tempting to try to modify Swedenborg's rendition of biblical verses in a way that is not in keeping with his original intent. Back when I was taking second-year Latin from N. Bruce Rogers at the Academy of the New Church, we students used to call strings of Bible quotations "the woods," both because of their murky vocabulary and their dense and tangled syntax. The fact is that, although Swedenborg typically writes simple, clear prose, his biblical quotations strive for pedantic accuracy—almost to the point of developing a metalanguage halfway between Latin and Biblical Hebrew. When he translates the Word, Swedenborg throws aside his literary priorities, and lets intelligibility take a backseat to literal fidelity. My point is that if we fail to adopt this same goal in our translations, we will inevitably tend to diverge from his original intent.⁷

The difficulty here is that translators—whether consciously or not—sometimes let more elegant vernacular translations interfere with their rendition of Swedenborg's biblical quotations. From notes in Swedenborg's parallel-column Latin-Hebrew Bible, we can see that he more or less understood the Hebrew, and constantly referred to it.⁸ Moreover, he made heavy use of what was one of the most literal translations available—that of Sebastian Schmidt.⁹ If we are to be faithful to his original intent, therefore, we should, if possible, look only at his (often Schmidt's) Latin, and, in light of the Hebrew, try to determine just what he (or they) had in mind.

⁷ For an example of how failing to understand the translation and punctuation techniques of Swedenborg's translator affects one's English translation of a given passage, see my comments in 1 Sam 2:3 in "Getting Down to Brass Tacks with the Old and New King James Versions," *New Philosophy* 90:4 (October-December, 1987), p. 458-459, especially note 23. Swedenborg, at least for his Old Testament quotations, relied mostly on the Latin translation of Sebastian Schmidt (he used both the Latin-only version, and the parallel-column Schmidt-van der Hooght Latin-Hebrew Bible). These editions may be located by using the well-known *Historical Catalogue of Printed Bibles* by T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule (1903), vol. II.

⁸ Stephen Cole, "Swedenborg's Hebrew Bible," *New Philosophy* 80:1 (January-March, 1977), pp. 28-33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, esp. p. 32-33.

If their intention remains elusive, I would again encourage people *not* to consult vernacular translations. Parallel passages should be sought out, and contemporary lexica should be consulted. Contemporary lexica can be especially useful, because they can often pinpoint the exact sense in which early modern educated people would have understood a given Latin word, as used in a biblical translation.

Some works that are particularly helpful in accomplishing these aims are:

Buxtorf, Johannes I. *Lexicon Hebraicum et Chaldaicum*. My ed., Basil, 1631.

Stock, Christian. *Clavis Linguae Sanctae*. My ed., Leipzig, ca. 1750.

Swedenborg owned the edition of 1744.

There were many Hebrew lexicons floating around the learned world in Swedenborg's day. I myself own at least three—one that I am particularly proud of is so big that my wife (who binds books in her spare time) had to make a huge box for it. All these lexicons have proved useful to me at one time or another in helping me step backwards in time, and in discovering how early modern intellectuals understood a given passage. For general information on what sorts of lexical tools were available back then, see:

Wolff, Johann Christophor. *Historia Lexicorum Hebraicorum*. Wittenburg, 1705.

Also of great use are commentaries (which are too numerous to be listed). Scholars of the early modern period were quite good about providing bibliographic resources, and these can be used to locate commentaries 1) on the Old or New Testament, 2) on specific books, or even 3) on specific chapters. Most of these bibliographies are annotated, giving a brief summary and/or evaluation of each work. My favorites are:

General introduction (Lutheran): Glaß, Salomo. *Philologiae Sacrae... Libri Quinque*. Many editions; mine, Amsterdam, 1711.

General introduction (Reformed): Carpzov, Johann Gottlob. *Critica Sacra Veteris Testamenti*. Leipzig, 1728.

Bibliography: Pfaff, Christophor Matthew. *Introductio in Historiam Theologiae Literarium*. Tübingen, 1724.

Mayer, Johann Friedrich. *Bibliotheca Biblica*. Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1709.

Walch, Johann Georg. *Bibliotheca Theologica Selecta*. Vol. IV; Jena, 1765.

Synopsis of opinions on each passage in Scripture: Poole, Matthew. *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum et Commentatorum*. My edition, Frankfurt, 1794; the Utrecht, 1784 edition is supposedly much better (the entire work is actually an abridgement of a larger [!] work, entitled *Critici Sacri*).

IV. Translator as Eighteenth-Century Intellectual

Another area in which translators need to be cautious is in rendering scientific, theological, philosophical, and cultural terms proper to Swedenborg's era. The easiest way to define such terms is to try to cull the necessary information from modern etymological dictionaries. Generally, specialized Latin terms have cognates in the Western European languages, and by looking at a good English or French (or other?) historical dictionary, one can often find the meaning for the Latin term from which its modern cognate is derived. German dictionaries are not so good because the Germans have historically shunned foreign words. The best dictionary for these purposes is the nineteenth-century British OED (many thanks to Bruce Rogers for pointing this out to me; his clever trick has served me well).

Should the modern dictionary approach fail, one must begin to look at Latin lexicons from Swedenborg's time-period. The biggest and best of the era is, of course, Forcellini's *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon* (1772). However, this dictionary is bent more on classical usage. Neo-Latin terms tend to slip more easily into some of the earlier lexicons. My favorite is:

Thomasius, Thomas. *Dictionarium*. My ed. (7th), Cambridge, 1606.

A preliminary list of other useful lexicons may be found in *New Philosophy* 87:4 (October-December, 1984), p. 392-393. A very good analysis of

all the Renaissance and Early Modern English-Latin and Latin-English dictionaries may be found in:

Starnes, De Witt T. *Renaissance Dictionaries*. Austin, 1954.

Starnes lists all the major dictionaries, and gives a surprisingly in-depth characterization of their strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies. I use Thomasius because of the relatively good coverage medical and philosophical terms receive there.

Should this approach fail, one needs to delve into literature appropriate to the field in which the term in question is used. This requires entering the world of subject dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Probably the most useful work of this kind is the one used by Durban Odhner and Michael David in their translation, *On Common Salt*, namely Johann Zedler's *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (Leipzig & Hale, 1741). For most purposes, this work will be sufficient. It is so important as a repository of historical information about the period that it has been reprinted recently, and is available in most modern research libraries. For terms not found in this work, sometimes the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* will do. Usually, however, it is necessary to consult:

Tonelli, Georgio. *A Short-Title List of Subject Dictionaries of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries as Aids to the History of Ideas*. London, Warburg Institute, 1971.

For most major categories of knowledge, this work lists the main lexical works that were available. I would recommend that every good Swedenborgian translator get on the mailing list of some of the better European booksellers, and look for stray copies of works listed in Tonelli's catalogue. The main dealer to contact is in the Netherlands: Antiquariaat Spinoza, Den Textstraat 26, 1017 ZB, Amsterdam, Netherlands. The Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, 10020) sometimes can point you in the right direction. There are also several good book houses in Sweden and England that have been of considerable help to me, although I no longer seem to have their addresses. They can easily be located, however, by going to a local reference library, and consulting their lists of worldwide booksellers.

Libraries with large collections of rare books will have people to talk to about who to reach for specific needs.

One of the works mentioned in Tonelli that has proven very useful to me is:

Chauvin, Stephen. *Lexicon Rationale*. My ed., Rotterdam, 1692.

For theological matters, I have also found

Altensteig, Johannes and Tytz, Johannes. *Lexicon Theologicum*. Köln, 1619.

to be helpful. Both Chauvin and Altensteig are available in modern reprint from Georg Olms Verlag, a German press largely dedicated to reprinting such works.

Note that Tonelli's emphasis is on the history of ideas. He is consequently a bit shy on medical works. For these, one needs to consult:

Garrison, Fielding and Morton, Leslie. *A Medical Bibliography*.

London, 1943. At the end the medical dictionaries are listed.

I personally have had the most success with medical terms using the English work,

James, Robert. *A Medical Dictionary*. London, 1743-45.

V. Where to Find These Works

Since these are highly specialized works that I have been listing, they are naturally hard to find—even in major research libraries. As I mentioned above, one way around this problem is to find them for oneself. This is the course I have taken. Be warned, though: It can easily take three or four years of intense work to build up a minimal collection. I am still missing a good medical dictionary.

Better is simply to reconcile oneself to occasional pilgrimages to large university libraries. Again, be warned: Most of even the best libraries will not have even half of the books you need. For American scholars, there is an easy way of getting on the right track. To determine which library will suit your needs best, you will need to make a list of the books you want, then go to a library that has a *National Union Catalogue*. This catalogue lists all titles printed before about 1950 (I forget the exact date) that were

available in the United States as of that time. In each entry, the author, title, etc. are given, as you might expect. At the bottom, though, is a very important addendum: A list of all the libraries that are reported as having the work. From the addenda at the bottom of *National Union Catalogue* entries, therefore, you can quickly build up a list of libraries that have what you want. With a little elementary statistical work, you can then figure out which ones have the greatest percentage of books you need. The great pilgrimages can then begin. I assume that those working in other countries will be able to find similar resources.

VI. Neo-Latin in General

Despite the existence of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and bibliographies that can suit the needs of Swedenborgian translators, there is still no substitute for a close familiarity with the literature of Swedenborg's day. Often terms can be defined using this or that reference book. These works, however, are not well-suited to helping one understand common, everyday usage. Nor are they well-suited to helping one get an overall feel for Swedenborg's tone and style as it relates to that of others in his day.

General information on Neo-Latin literature is sparse. No grammars or systematic works exist. We have a few surveys, such as:

Benner, Margareta and Tengström, Emin. *On the Interpretation of Learned Neo-Latin*. *Studia Graeca et Latina Gotoburgensia* XXXIX. Göteborg, 1977.

Other literature on the Latin literary output of the early modern period may be found in surveys, such as:

Jones, William M. ed. *The Present State of Scholarship in Sixteenth-Century Literature*. Columbia, 1978. See especially pp. 197-357.

There are also the conferences periodically sponsored by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, whose proceedings are generally available under the editorship of Joseph Ijsewijn. In my opinion, these sorts of literary affairs, while of importance, are not as useful as ones dealing specifically with the history of science, philosophy, and religion. Since I am not a translator—nor even a classicist—I will need to defer to Jonathan Rose in this area,

however. Presumably he will have much to say on this topic when he delivers his talk on Wednesday, and may in fact reverse what I have just said.

VII. Concluding Reflections

In conclusion, I would just reiterate that it is of great importance that we maintain a clear understanding of Swedenborg's intellectual and linguistic relationship to his contemporaries. It should come as no surprise that the Lord accommodates his truth both to the person who reveals it, and to the people for whom it is initially revealed. This does not mean that the revelation mediated by Swedenborg is just a product of his age. It simply means that his revelations may be viewed in either (or both) of two ways. On the one hand, they can be viewed as timelessly relevant documents. On the other hand, they can and should be analyzed as examples of the language and literature of a certain historical period. By looking at things historically, one comes to understand better the terms used, and the issues being addressed. Historical modes of inquiry thus ultimately help us appreciate better the meaning of the text we are studying. Unfortunately, some will inevitably misunderstand this methodology. Others will perhaps misuse it. Historical inquiry nevertheless remains an important way of helping both scholar and theologian understand more fully the truths the Lord has communicated through Swedenborg to humankind.■

¶ XXXV

Salt Born from Sea Foam

In many places where the seashore consists of rocks, also around islands, in Sweden as well as elsewhere, the sea, seething with agitation, stirs up spray, drives it onto the rocks, where it is cut off and deposited. There it dries out and is converted into salt. This is called "salt born from the sea foam," of which Caesius and others treat. This salt is white, and has tiny grains.

¶ XXXVI

Production of Salt in India from Wood

The authors note that there is a certain kingdom in India called Dancal, which annually produces enough rock salt to load six hundred camels. It is said that they use it as money in Egypt. It is always shaped like little pyramids, and is therefore called Egyptian pyramidal salt [see chapter IX].

But nowadays in India, and even in Amboina, salt is prepared artificially, in almost the same way that mineral salt is produced in Europe. Although the Amboinese Indians can buy salt of the best kind from Europeans, they still produce this salt, which is coarse and impure, and which they call *Sassi*. It is more like dark, greyish stone than salt, besides which it is always damp. It is prepared as follows: They select pieces of wood that have lain in water for a long time, stripped of their bark. They cut these with double-edged axes into logs two ells long, then throw them into piles, which they presently set afire. Once the wood pieces are burning, they throw and sprinkle salty sea water on them, but not so much that it puts out the flame. They continue with this until there is no fire left. The wood thus burned and sprinkled with sea water crumbles into a crude and reddish stony material, almost like calamine. Next they take baskets woven from green leaves and put that material in them. They put the baskets on a kind of trough or hollow wooden vessel, and pour sea water on the material in the baskets. This sinks down as a solution or brine through the baskets into the trough underneath, and this process continues until the material is reduced to a kind of earth or ash. They put this brine into small earthenware jars, which they call *ulen* and *samam*, and place them on the fire to boil until a fairly hard rock salt remains, which retains the shape of its jar, having a round appearance. They expose these pieces to smoke, and so preserve them. This is their common or cooking salt, used for food, especially for their *Papeda*, which is said to taste better as a result. They pound these round egg-size pieces of salt to bits, and sprinkle this on food. This salt hardly keeps unless it is smoked, for it easily attracts moisture and dissolves; and its flavor is not sharp enough for it to be used to salt meat.

The suitable wood for this purpose is procured near their seashores during the rainy season, for a great amount of wood drifts ashore there, so that the beach is littered with it in all directions. This was especially observed in the year 1664, at Ambon, Keriamian, Manipa, and Bum.

This task requires a lot of work, since a very heavy smell and smoke results when sea water is poured on the wood, even if the wood has already been lying out in the sun to dry for a long time. A careful choice of the wood pieces is also requisite.

¶ XXXVII

The Salting of Fish in Holland

A method of salting herring and putting them in vats was invented in 1416 by a certain William Buckelz. Because of the utility and profitability of his invention, it was valued so highly and the inventor became so famous, that even princes did not scorn to visit his grave.

When the herring are caught, a crewman removes their heads and guts them, saving any roe or milky substance. Next they wash the herring in fresh water, then spice them by putting them immediately in a vat full of a brine made from fresh water and sea salt, and leaving them in that liquid for a period of twelve to fifteen hours. They are then removed and thoroughly drained, rendering them fit to go into large jars. That draining process has a special name, *varander*, and that of putting them in jars is termed *caquer*. In the jars they arrange them in layers, which is called to *liter*. A quantity of salt is put in the bottom as well as higher up in the jar, so that it is piled up from the bottom to the top; and thus they are packed. The jars are completely closed, and care is taken that there is no leaking of the salty liquid, lacking which the herring would immediately spoil.

Sometimes the herring are salted the same night they are caught, and are called *harengs dune nuit* ("one night herrings"). Those that go into the jars the next day are called *harengs de deux nuits* ("two night herrings"), and these are valued less, for they spoil more easily.