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Law, Prophets, and Psalms Part Four (2) *by John Elliott*

“Swedenborg’s constant endeavour to be absolutely clear and intelligible is even more evident in his rough drafts of AC.”

The first of the eight volumes comprising this long work (Arcana Coelestia) was published in London in September 1749, about four years after his return home from those two years away during which he received the call from the Lord to serve Him in a new and special way. As His servant he was to receive instruction from Him while he read the Word, but in order to read the Word and perceive its inner levels of meaning he needed to become better acquainted with the Scriptures in their original languages, Hebrew and Greek. His university education, forty or more years before, would presumably have given him a good grounding in Greek, so he now needed to do little more

than ‘brush up’ his Greek in order to read the New Testament in its original language, though sometimes with the aid of a lexicon. But what about Hebrew? He seems to have learned something of that language when he was a young student, but not nearly enough to equip himself with a proper understanding of the literal meaning of the text of the Old Testament. So in the second half of 1745, in his late fifties, Swedenborg started to get to grips with Hebrew, and before long he was able - with books alongside him that dealt with Hebrew grammar, vocabulary, idioms, etc - to read and understand the literal sense of the OT. Evidence of his knowledge and grasp of that language is reflected in AC. For example, in his explanation of Genesis 30:15 he dwells on the Hebrew word *dudaim*, which is generally rendered as *mandrakes* in English

versions of Genesis. But he retains this Hebrew word instead of trying to find an equivalent Latin one, as may be seen in his explanation of that verse in Genesis:

Translators do not know what dudaim were. They all think that they were fruits or flowers and each translator uses a name that fits in with his particular ideas of what dudaim were. But knowledge of what kind of fruit or flower they were is unimportant. All that one needs to know is that among the ancients who belonged to the Church all fruits and flowers had spiritual meanings ... As regards dudaim meaning for them the conjugal element present in goodness and in truth, this may be seen from the train of thought in the internal sense here, and also from the derivation of that word in the original language. For dudaim is derived from the word *dudim* means loves and being joined together by means of these.

AC 3942

Besides learning Hebrew not long after he had returned home from the two years away during which he received his call from the Lord, Swedenborg also began to compile an index of the Bible. This would be of use to him when writing whatever works he was going to publish. And in addition to mastering Hebrew and compiling his index he was also attempting to write an exposition of the inner levels of meaning in the books of the Old Testament. Manuscripts which contain some, if not all, of this exposition were found among Swedenborg's books and papers after his death. These manuscripts, which do not possess any title, show that in his exposition he had certainly reached at least as far as the two books of Chronicles, that is, about half way through OT. A transcription of the manuscripts that was published in the mid-nineteenth century referred to them as **Adversaria** (AD), and a translation that appeared in the twentieth bears the title **The Word Explained**.

By the summer of 1748 Swedenborg had decided that the time had come for him to take his manuscripts of AD to Holland, where he would complete what he was writing and then publish the entire work there. But while in Amsterdam he underwent further spiritual experiences which led him on into greater enlightenment from the Lord as he read the Sacred Scriptures. Soon after this he laid AD aside and moved away to London. Having settled into lodgings there on 23 November 1748 he began to write the first volume of **Arcana Coelestia**, and within about seven months he had completed for the printer the first fifteen of the fifty chapters comprising it. By early autumn this first volume appeared in print (410 quarto-size pages), and during the seven years that followed he composed seven more volumes, one after another at yearly intervals. If E-Readers wish to know more about the spiritual experiences in Holland that caused Swedenborg to abandon AD and go on to write AC, I again recommend that they turn to the biographies I mentioned earlier in this article.

Throughout the eight years in which eight volumes of AC were being published Swedenborg's task involved more than sitting hour after hour at his desk writing out page after page for the compositor to set up in print. But not a single one of these hand-written pages or manuscripts of AC, or indeed any other work he published after AC, has come down to us. Yet we can imagine his neat and clear hand-writing in them from the manuscripts of works he was at some time composing but failed to complete and publish, the prime example of such manuscripts being the 'fair copy' of the lengthy unfinished **Apocalypse Explained**. And in producing AC there was more for him to do than providing easy-to-read manuscripts for his printer. For one thing, in the process of drafting the volumes he needed to compile, as he went along, an index of subjects, so that at any point he could easily refer back to what he had stated already in earlier parts of the work. (My first duty after retirement in 1999 was to transcribe and edit that index, or indexes, to be precise. For more, please see the editor's (English) introduction to **Arcana Coelestia Indexes** published in 2004.) In addition to the on-and-on production of legible manuscripts, and the systematic compilation of an index, there was also the time-consuming matter of carefully reading, and entering corrections on, the 'proofs' of printed pages received from the printer. Such was the whole task of the Lord's servant Emanuel Swedenborg in presenting to the world the teachings contained in AC.

Within a century after the publication of this *magnum opus* in 1749-56 a second edition appeared during the years 1832-43, the editor being JFI Tafel. One reason for a new edition lay in the fact that the first had been long out of print and was scarcely obtainable second-hand. But a second, more important, reason was that there were flaws in the first edition that needed to be corrected, such as wrong spellings, wrong reference-numbers to biblical quotations, incomplete sentences, and so on. Tafel succeeded in identifying and correcting a vast number of these faults. But he did not have immediate access, as we do today, to the author's rough drafts of AC which frequently indicate what he - Swedenborg - intended to appear in the first edition. These rough drafts, housed in Stockholm, became available in photocopies which were actually published in 1916, in the middle of World War One. Over a number of years these photocopies were studied until it became clear that a third Latin edition of AC was called for. This was put in hand by the Swedenborg Society in 1943, in the middle of World War Two. The first volume came out in 1949, the eighth and last in 1973.

The photocopies of the rough draft of AC have again and again served to justify Tafel's corrections of errors in the text of the first edition; but they also reveal further faults which neither he nor anyone else could have spotted without them. For example, there are many places where the printer accidentally left out part or even the whole of a sentence, or perhaps Swedenborg himself unintentionally did so. In other places a statement in the printed text makes some sort of sense, yet seems somewhat odd to

the reader. Again the photocopies of Swedenborg's rough draft can help an editor to determine whether the whole of that statement, however strange it seems to be, is what the author indeed intended, or else something slightly different. Of course, editors' task of correcting faults is sometimes far from simple, and the decisions they make regarding the intended meaning of the Latin text are inevitably tentative. But wherever they decide to change the original wording - or 'emend' it, to use a technical term - they must indicate that original wording in what is technically called their 'critical apparatus'. And in addition they must also include within this critical apparatus, which is usually set out at the foot of a page, the 'emendations' made by other editors in other publications of the Latin text.

Another feature of the Latin AC which may be discerned by those who have a fair knowledge of the language is that Swedenborg normally adopted a style that was easy for the ordinary educated person in his day to follow. He himself was thoroughly soaked in the use of Latin, possessing the ability to write poetry as well as elegant prose. In his young days he certainly composed poems in both Swedish and Latin, and evidence of his stylistic prose is evident in **The Worship and Love of God** which he never published but was found among his books and papers after his death. However it is his normal style in the use of language - which the ordinary pastor and the educated lay-person would be at home with - that exists in AC, and in all later religious works published by him. It exists as well in the Latin letters he wrote to various people, such as Thomas Hartley, with whom he also conversed in Latin when the two actually met each other face to face.

Swedenborg's constant endeavour to be absolutely clear and intelligible is even more evident in his rough drafts of AC. In these we can see again and again how he would change a word he had written, or a phrase, sentence, perhaps whole paragraph or more. And it was with the aid of this evidence that the Swedenborg Society embarked on the production of the third Latin edition, to be followed by a new English edition, for there is so much to be gleaned from those drafts. Let me give just one example.

In translating AC one of the Latin words I came across which I had no recollection of ever seeing before was the adjective *murrhinus*, at AC 5056. To judge from the context in which this word appeared it clearly described a colour. But what was that colour? My Latin dictionary (Lewis and Short) gave the meaning of the adjective as *of* or *belonging to myrrh*, but that didn't really help me. After that I happened to look at Swedenborg's rough draft of AC 5056 and saw that he had first written *bruneus* the common adjective meaning brown, but then deleted this and wrote *murrhinus*. So what he was describing was not just brown but a particular shade of it, namely a reddish brown.

For more about **Arcana Coelestia** please read my *Translator's Introduction* to the first volume of the English translation published by the Swedenborg Society in 1983. But in addition to what is stated in that introduction let me comment on the spelling of the second word of the title. The first and second Latin editions of AC spell the word with an oe diphthong, the third edition with an æ. In a sense it does not matter which of these two is used, for each probably carried the same vowel-sound so far as Swedenborg was concerned. However, in his own indexes to AC he placed the word in a position where the diphthong cannot be anything other than an oe.

In my next article I intend to return specifically to the general title **Law, Prophets, and Psalms**. Having already spoken at length about the second of these three, I must now focus on the first and third.

To be continued...