

DREAMS

by Helen Kennedy

Dreams are full of odd and unusual imagery and there are many books trying to explain the images in dreams. But in sifting through some, I'm convinced it's a matter of the person being the only one who can interpret a dream for herself, or himself. To our western, rationalist culture, it is not quite understandable why the Bible includes so many of them. Abraham Lincoln once remarked:

It seems strange how much there is in the Bible about dreams... some 15 or 16 chapters in the Old Testament and 4 or 5 in the New. If we believe the Bible, we must accept the fact that, in the old days, God and His angels came to men in their sleep and made themselves known in dreams (Dreams & Healing John A. Sanford p. 6).

And the dreams always had an important meaning, like in Egypt when the Pharaoh dreamed of cows that were both fat and skinny. Joseph interpreted the fat cows as meaning the present time of plenty, and the skinny ones as a time of famine that was to come. As a result of his interpretation, Pharaoh stored up grain and many people were saved from starvation during the famine that ensued, including Joseph's father and brothers (Gen 41).

The chapters on Daniel have several dreams and visions in them. In one, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and the fear he felt was so intense that his conscience mind drove the dream from his thinking. Daniel had to then both tell Nebuchadnezzar what his dream was and interpret it for him (Dan. 2:28). Not long after, the king again was troubled, and he said to Daniel:

These were the visions of my head while on my bed (Dan 4:10).

Daniel interpreted the visions, telling the king that he would be driven from the company of men. Also he told him:

Your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen...till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses (Dan 4:25).

In the next chapter the king's son, Belshazzar, is troubled so terribly by the vision of a hand writing on the wall that:

The joints of his hips were loosened, and his knees knocked against each other (Dan. 5:6):
He was so desperate for someone to interpret what he saw that he:

Cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans and the soothsayers (Dan 5:7).

But none of them could interpret it. But because of all the noise, the queen came into the banquet room. When she learned what was going on, she remembered what Daniel had done and said:

Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding [of] interpreting dreams, solving riddles and explaining enigmas was found in this Daniel, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation (Dan 5:12).

Not all the dreams in the Bible were given as portents of terrible things to come. Some have a highly mystical quality, as in the story of Jacob where he is told by Isaac to go to his mother's father in Padan Aram to take a wife. On the way Jacob had a dream:

And behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it (Gen 28:12).

The New Testament shows clearly how dreams helped protect the infant Jesus. Even before He was born an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him:

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:20).

Then again in a dream Joseph was instructed to take the infant, Jesus, and flee to Egypt (Matt 2:13). He had the time to do this because the wrath of Herod was forestalled when, in a dream, an angel instructed the three wisemen not to return to Herod but to go home by a different route (Matt 2:12).

What makes the difference between ancient people who regarded dreams as important and us? Joseph Sanford writes:

Ancient people believed dreams to be an important way in which the soul received guidance from the spiritual world (Dreams and Healing)

And also:

Our culture is greatly impoverished in this respect, and a wide gulf has emerged between our conscious life and the life of our souls (Ibid).

What he is saying is that for all our material well-being, we are a culturally deprived people.

But other peoples continue to find value in dreams. Anthropologist William Merrill writes that to the Raramuri of Mexico:

Dreams are real events. On numerous occasions, people would describe to me quite incredible personal experiences, but fail to mention that the events had taken place in dreams until I asked. This does not mean that they do not distinguish between

their waking and dreaming lives, but that they attribute comparable reality to both (Healing Dreams p. 316).

The Writings say the cerebellum is where the spiritual first flows into, which explains why medical science knows so little about it, for science can explain the world around us but not spiritual things. One of the few uses it ascribes to the cerebellum has to do with the muscles and walking. Paul Whitfield writes in *The Human Body Explained*:

Nestled at the lower rear of the brain is the cerebellum. It coordinates movements, especially the fine, rapid, accurate movements of skilled actions such as writing or playing a sport. The cerebellum receives motor signals from the motor cortex, as well as sensory signals from the muscles, joints and skin about how a movement is progressing.

But a finer use is given by Stanley Finger in the book, *Minds Behind Brains*:

Today we know that the cerebellum plays an important role in allowing us to walk without thinking about how to move one leg in front of the other, and in allowing us to drink from a cup without consciously plotting how far to tip it as it approaches our lips (p. 96).

From this it is clear that the cerebellum helps control the unconscious functions in our body, even to the point of spontaneously being able to eat or drink something. It actually is pretty amazing that we can do such things without having to think about them.

The *Spiritual Diary* shows that the cerebellum is the center of spontaneity:

At night-time man is in spontaneous things, and the cerebellum is the source of what is spontaneous (SD 4518).

But it also functions spontaneously during the day, too:

The influx from the cerebellum insinuates itself into the face, as is evident from the fact that the disposition is inscribed on the face, and affections appear in it, for the most part without the man's will, as fear, reverence, shame, etc. These come from the cerebellum by means of its fibers when there is no dissimulation within (AC 4326:2).

The passage also says:

The cerebellum perceives everything the cerebrum does, but does not publish it, or is unable to think or speak in the way that is peculiar to the cerebrum. [It] has an exquisite perception of all thoughts... The cerebrum is comparatively in a turmoil, but the cerebellum is in quiet (AC 4326).

From this we see that the cerebellum doesn't communicate in words.

When it's ready for its nightly romp, the cerebellum gears up to communicate with us. The deeper we are asleep, the more we dream, and probably the more vivid they are. Another thing dreams are is confusing, which makes it hard to find meaning in them. Most of us want to try and make sense out of what is confusing, but sometimes it is better to let things become more confusing until they make sense out of themselves.

One source of confusion is when our spirit is communicating with us, but our conscious mind doesn't yet know what it is saying. In *Journal of Dreams*, Wilson Van Dusen writes:

Some would think dreams can't design outer circumstances. But on closer acquaintance one finds that they can.

Swedenborg had been lodging with a Moravian man and attending that church every Sunday. After a series of dreams he didn't join the church, though he respected their simple piety, but followed his own individual path. What we see is the inner world shaping Swedenborg's religious life. This is part of a series of dreams tracing Swedenborg's transition from being a well known scientist to a visionary and revelator.

This shows that dreams function on a very personal level. However dreams work, the key for me is the feeling I have when I am waking up. That feeling usually leads me to an area of trouble in my life, often something I hadn't even thought of or couldn't put into words. The Writings explain that:

When a man dreams, his natural understanding is laid asleep and his spiritual sight is opened, which draws its all from affection (AE 706:3).

In his amazing exploration of the spiritual world, Swedenborg relates that at times his dreams coincided with what angels were saying:

I once had quite an ordinary dream, and having woken up I related it all from start to finish. The angels said that it coincided exactly with what they had been discussing; not that the things they were discussing appeared in the dream, but instead things completely different, into which the thoughts in their discussion were transformed, yet in such a way that they were representative and correspondent. Not one detail was missing (AC 1981).

And in AC 6319 he says essentially the same thing:

As regards what flows into a person from the angels present with him, it is not of the same nature as the objects of his thought but is that which involves correspondences; for the angels think on a spiritual level, but the person perceives their thought on a natural one. Thus spiritual realities come down into images that correspond to them. ...When for example the person speaks about bread, sowing, harvest, fatness, and the like, the angels' thought is about aspects of the good of love and charity, and so on.

Swedenborg explained, though, that dreams come from varied sources in the spiritual world:

- 1 *One flows in from spirits, who act [the part of] the persons that are seen in the dreams, and precisely as the dreaming appearance is.*
- 2 *The other kind consists of things introduced by those who are in front above... which are usually representations.*
- 3 *A third kind is from the Lord mediately or immediately through heaven (SD 3877).*

The last ones, that come through angels, he said are:

beautiful, delightful, instructive and predictive (SD 8 - index).

And of those wonderful beings who help give us such delight:

Those in whom...dreams originate are angelic spirits at the entrance to the paradise gardens. They are commissioned also to keep watch over certain people who are asleep, to prevent them being molested during that time by evil spirits.

They perform their task with very great delight, so much so that they vie with one another to be there, and they love to fill man with joys and delights such as they see within his affection and disposition. Those who have become angelic spirits are drawn from those who during their lifetime took delight in and loved in every way to make other people's lives delightful (AC 1977:2).

These are the dreams we don't want to wake up from.

How do the angelic spirits know how to give dreams? They said:

Representatives so beautiful and delightful came to them all in a moment; but they were told that they came from heaven. They belong to the province of the cerebellum, for the cerebellum, as I have learned, remains awake even during periods of sleep when the cerebrum is sleeping (AC 1977:2).

AC 1976 restates what the different types of dreams are in a slightly different manner:

- 1 *The first type comes from the Lord mediately by way of heaven; such were the prophetic dreams spoken of in the Word.*
- 2 *The second type comes by way of angelic spirits, especially those who are situated ...over towards the right where the paradise gardens are. This was the source of the dreams that members of the Most Ancient Church had, dreams that were instructive.*
- 3 *The third type comes by way of the spirits who are close to a person when he is asleep. These too carry spiritual meanings.*
- 4 *Delusory dreams however come from a different source.*

By this I believe he's talking about dreams that come from a directly spiritual origin, not the ones that many dream researchers think are a rearranging of the events of the day. Those dreams occur earlier in the night, while ones that are very different in content and imagery occur later in the night and towards the end of the dream cycle.

The unconscious function that brings us dreams comes by way of the imagination and the imagination is important in understanding even

very literal things. Ernst Benz writes in *Swedenborg: Visionary Savant In the Age of Reason*:

The history of science can produce many examples of dreams reflecting the day's work, with the dream illuminating and directing the scholar's work in progress.

Dreams helped Swedenborg in his scientific research and in his writing of *The Animal Kingdom*:

A dream of 11/12 April (1744) gave him particulars of the thymus gland and its connection to the adrenal glands, which he was discussing in "The Animal Kingdom". A dream of 14/15 April [1744] relates to his researches on muscles. Another of 3/4 July is connected with the conclusion of a chapter in his work dealing with the senses and with the beginning of the next part on the brain. He understood a dream of 8/9 August as an indication that a particular medical discussion in the third part of "The Animal Kingdom" was incomplete, while a dream of 1/2 September confirmed that the conclusion of his first chapter on the sense of taste was "correct and satisfactory". In a dream of 29/30 September, he similarly finds corroboration of his explanations of organic forms in general and of his concluding chapter in particular (Ibid).

In more recent times, the leading 20th century scientist Albert Einstein imagined he was riding on a beam of light from one star to another. That vision was central to his developing his theory of Relativity. He says that:

The imagination is more important than knowledge.

Or, I have it in French on a bookmark:

L'imagination est plus importante que le savoir.

Even people who do not have our type of modern science attribute help in developing their specific form of science to dreams. Marc Barasch writes:

Many a tribal shaman claims to have learned medicinal use of specific plants through dreams (Healing Dreams p. 75).

Once we have a dream that seems important, how do we know what it is saying to us, or if it is saying anything at all? Again Barasch writes:

The most reasonable-seeming answer is

often the wrong one. Dreams play by rules that confound the waking mind. But at the heart of healing dreams are certain consistent, if challenging attitudes (Ibid p. 28).

Are we too far removed to get anything from our dreams? The Lord wouldn't keep sending them for no reason:

In our society we have not lost our dreams, but our organic connection to them, and thus our ability to act upon them. If we fail to give our dreams a place in our life, our existence may become a wraithlike affair. Healing dreams are not career counselors, telling us how to repackage our assets for success. They speak for the innermost when no one else will. They do not calculate the shortest distance between two points but suggest that we take the long way home. Though we often content ourselves with having to maintain different faces — one for the job, one with our families: one for society, one for the heart — healing dreams want to make visible the pattern that con-

nects; they tempt us to bring forth what is most passionate and profound within us, for our own sake, and for the world (Ibid p. 118).

There is much to be said for dreams and paying attention to them. The psychologist Kathryn Asper writes:

A dream unnoticed is like a letter left unopened (Inner Child In Dreams).

By noticing what is in them we may get clues to what our life will be like in eternity, for the Writings say:

Angelic thought, or man's interior thought ...may almost be likened to living dreams and the living thought he has in them (SD 1309).

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A Dream

Kim Clark:

I was seven months pregnant. I was walking in a round, spherical, maroon colored hallway, just outside my womb. I knew there was no way to get inside, but just then, an angel-midwife of the Lord was present. She was all aglow and lightly perspiring. She said, "The so and so's just finished their work and you should see how fantastic the production is going. Next such and such will be doing their part, and this part and that part, and it's nearly done, and it's really a masterpiece! Never has she seen one like this!" And then she went on in her joy, so happy to be a part of executing the blue prints, a general helper there from beginning to end. And by the way, it's a girl.

It was like being told how a baby is made. It's all in the blueprints, and the files are all condensed, and they unzip at each successive phase, and the angels do all the work, each in his/her specialty, layer on top of layer. So beautiful. Each angel so excited about the production. The idea is DNA serves as the master blueprints with every miniscule detail called out with exact precision — grand construction projects with many subcontractors who are experts/specialists. No delays, no mistakes, everything is perfect. Many things are

going on at once. Many builders and artists. At seven months pregnant, the angel told me something like the main programmers just finished. A team come in, works, then goes away. They read the blueprints, carry out the instructions, connect this to that...encrypt this code...program these functions...bypass that section ...reroute previous provisions...lift contingencies ...impose new ones. They even have briefcases and pocket protectors. There is a great deal of excitement about the incredibleness of it all. And the helper angels

who are around for the whole project are falling so in love with the new baby. They are ecstatic and in full delight. I seemed a mere adoptive parent, the one who signed on the dotted line. Nothing of it belonged to me. I was almost insignificant in the full glory of this creation.

The work was so grand, the amazing creation so unique — never again to be

duplicated. I also could talk of the disappointment and grief the angels feel at the unexpected termination of a pregnancy...the loss so great to the world, and to them. The love they feel toward the child is real, and now there is a loss to mourn. I think they must have to go away for a while to recuperate...to be able to accept this potential in their future work.

Celestial Life

Karin Childs

*[Angels] say that each individual has a central or highest plane of life into which the Lord's Divine flows first and directly... they call this central or highest level the Lord's gateway to us, and his true home within us."
(The Last Judgement: 25)*

Most Swedenborgians would say that a celestial state is the ultimate goal, right? Celestial angels don't have to puzzle over what is true anymore. They just perceive it in their hearts, have fun talking about it, and live it. They don't stress about whether they're worthy of

But I've spent most of my life with a curious dilemma that I didn't even realize. I've internalized two messages:

1. that you **MUST** strive to be celestial
2. that you mustn't **EVER** think that you're celestial (or anywhere near it, for that matter)

What a hopeless situation! The message I internalized was, work **HARD** for something you can never achieve. **THAT'S** enough to put a damper on life!

Included in this outlook was that celestial angels learn through perception but don't trust **YOUR** perception, because it will never be trustworthy! It's **BAD** to think you're **GOOD**, and **GOOD** to think you're **BAD**. Becoming celestial can only happen through regeneration, which is a process of endless battles against the proprium. If you think you're anywhere near regeneration, that's prideful, and you must be really **UN**-regenerate.

WAIT! STOP! This means, whenever I'm starting to feel peaceful and good about myself,

God's love or not. They just innocently rejoice in the fact that they are loved. They don't feel threatened by evil, or feel a need to battle anything, because they know nothing can hurt them. It's in a celestial state that we'll find ultimate peace and happiness.

or if I'm starting to feel that I'm learning some truth through perception, I've got to beat that down because **IT CAN'T BE!** I can't possibly be celestial. But keep trying, of course. You **MUST** strive to be celestial.

WHAT????!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I'm ready for a new outlook.

I first started reaching for a new outlook after my daughter passed away. When Annica died, I had some battling to do inside of myself, because of a feeling that I wasn't allowed to trust what my heart was telling me, if it was different than ideas that were already in my head. This was a lot of added anguish on top of devastating pain. These voices told me that the head, with its ideas learned from without, is more trustworthy than the heart, which learns from within.

For example: one particular message I struggled with, that I had been taught from the Writings, was that people who died quickly forget all their earthly friends and relatives.

Can all you parents imagine how that felt? In my head were messages that to be upset about this would be selfish, etc. But my heart was telling me that this just couldn't be so—that there was real affection between Annica and me that wouldn't disappear. Then a friend of mine began to have regular visions about Annica, and Annica continued to speak lovingly of us, rather than forgetting us. My heart wholly believed in these visions, and these messages. Opposing messages in my head and outside of me said, "Well, you're emotional now—you'll come around, back to rationality, in time..."

I found myself releasing the distressing "head-messages," and turning to the more comforting "heart-messages." And the thing was, with this new heart-knowing about this subject, I noticed places in the Writings that supported this new view that I had never noticed before. This new heart perspective opened my eyes to see things that had always been written there, but never pointed out to me.

Before experiencing the death of my daughter, knowledge about a relationship with someone who has died was gained through detached book learning. This is fine for a start and a foundation, but I now believe that detached book learning—deciding how things are and should be in situations that one has never experienced—is quite limited, even if the book is a sacred text. It is EXPERIENCE that opens the door to deeper and deeper truth, because then the subject or issue is no longer an intellectual exercise. Now the subject really MATTERS! And when the search and the answers deeply MATTER to the heart, then God answers in deeper ways.

Once I began to allow myself to trust the inner knowing that came, and not always shun it in favor of detached book learning, I found confirmation and new learning in many places—in my feelings, in new beliefs, in my experiences, in visions described to me, in other people's experiences, and yes, also in Swedenborg's works. Looking in the Writings for new answers was no longer detached book learning. I was finding confirmation in a sacred text of what my

heart was telling me, and was learning more about it that way. There were many other issues like this to work out, to trust what I was feeling against things that I believed before, or what others were saying to me, either directly or indirectly. I can't know the whole Truth about any matter. I can't know how Trust applies to anyone else. But I am the best, and the ONLY, person who can learn how Trust applies to my own life, and my own relationship with God, and with the Word. The Word becomes alive, not when I am told from without what it is saying about me, but when I DISCOVER for myself, through experiences, what it is saying to me. And this may take a very different form than the way I had thought it should apply.

A comparison can be made about the subject of raising children. When one is brand new at it, there is great value in reading books on the subject and getting tips and ideas from other parents, because you have NO idea what to do! Then, as one actually experiences the care and raising of a child, one starts to gain some "inner knowing." At some point, a parent can begin to trust their inner knowing about how to raise their own child. Books and advice from others can still be very helpful, but at that point the parent can FEEL more what outer advice rings true for their particular situation, and what doesn't.

So how does this all relate to the subject of a celestial approach to life? The celestial approach involves learning from within instead of from without. I know some people who are making a point of deciding to adopt a celestial way of life right now, dropping things like doctrinal discussions or other things that don't seem to fit into that. Others believe that one cannot possibly claim to be able to live "celestially" without having battled long and hard through the natural and spiritual levels. As for me, I'm seeing the issue not so much about whether to adopt a celestial way of life or not, or having to drop certain things or not. Rather, I'm seeing the issue about not FIGHTING AGAINST the celestial when it shows itself in my life! Don't always shun the feelings of the

heart in favor of the head. Don't always think so darn hard that it takes away the fun of thinking. Don't always decide that adult-like work and stress and striving to always KNOW the exact right answer are more important and good than childlike play and wonder and acceptance of NOT being able to figure everything out! Like a child, I can rest in the fact that my Divine Parent has it all figured out, and I will be shown and taught everything I need to know, step by step, as I am ready.

So, my point is that I think it's a good idea to acknowledge that "celestial" ways are allowable and good, and can fit into life along with many other levels to make life better. It doesn't have to be all or nothing, or that you're not allowed there until you're sure you've graduated from the level before that. I don't think it works that way. It's allowable to let the heart guide instead of the head, to do what you want in your heart instead of what you "should", to look at regeneration as an unfolding rather than a relentlessly hard battle, to believe that you are loved and loveable and good, like a tiny child who has no doubt about those things (which is why a tiny child can run without inhibitions into someone's arms!), etc.

I've seen other damage in a "suspect-and-resist-the-celestial" approach to life. I've seen that if I believe that I can never be good enough to trust my own perceptions or desires, then I'll never trust that others can have trustworthy perceptions or desires, either. If I don't believe that God guides me from within, then I won't trust that others can be guided from within, either. This will always keep me poised for doctrinal arguments, instead of enjoying the wonder of the different ways that God guides each one of us.

I've recently been exposed to some ideas through a Swedenborgian friend who trusts the perceptions of the heart, and is receiving floods of new insights there from God. What I've read in these insights has led me to consider that it is celestial to come to a childlike belief that I am

good and lovable in God's eyes, which are the eyes that see true reality. I'm being led to see that believing I'm bad and that my wants and perceptions are always suspect, as I thought I must be a good General Church girl, is actually blocking me from God. This is the same as if I was insistent that I was not good enough to be loved by some other person, which would make me keep that person at a distance. The innocence of believing in the view that God has of me of good and loveable would break down that barrier, and allow me to run without inhibitions into God's arms. And this, of course, will also break down barriers between other people and myself.

As I've been led to these thoughts, I've had the phrase come into my head, "Except you become converted, and become as little children..." I'm now seeing a celestial state as surrendering to innocence again, of a playful approach to life, of a view of my wants and feelings as something to learn from instead of something to shun, and no cloud of self-hatred over my head that makes me lash out at people. This simple approach will not be easy for me, but I'm intrigued to give it a try! It seems more hopeful than endless battles that just keep coming back, over and over and over. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." Swedenborg writes that being led by the more detached vehicle of rational trust must give way to being led by the innocent goodness and perception that is "God with us". I used to assume that innocent time to be forever in my future. Now I'm wondering, why not begin to open to it now? Swedenborg writes that God is found in the deepest level of our being, and I believe it is there that we can turn—to the deepest feelings and truths in our hearts—to truly hear and obey the voice of the Lord.

Marie Odhner

Marie Odhner was born in Glenview, Illinois, on April 28, 1951 and died in Glenview on February 15, 2004, at the age of 52. She spoke with me frequently and in detail about dying and how things should be arranged following her release into spirit. She said, "I want you to be happy. I want you to tell stories and laugh and dance." She did not want a traditional, life-story funeral service given by a New Church minister. She asked that, if a service was needed, to please ask Roslyn Taylor to write something, to minister to her family and friends left behind. When you know something of her life story, you may understand why she would ask a woman to write her memorial.

Marie's background included an alcoholic father and a very sick mother who died when she was a teen. A middle child, she was surrounded by four brothers who never understood her or honored her. She began a lifetime of work with children: babysitting and, after graduation from the Academy College, teaching for 20 years in the Glenview Church school. Marie was gifted in teaching young children and in storytelling. She excelled in the teaching of reading and, to show the college reading classes how to really make it work, she was videotaped teaching in her classroom.

But life was difficult for Marie and her increasing weight was a physical strain that made even walking difficult. After more than twenty years of teaching, Marie was fired by a New Church minister who had just moved to Glenview. Teaching was her life: losing that broke her heart and mind, and eventually her body. The minister hurt her when he could have offered help. Though the minister was eventually removed from his position, Marie never recovered from the depression brought on by being fired. In that state, she refused offers of help, continuing a pattern, based on fear, that

developed early in her life. Her recovery began in the last few years when she moved to the Junge House. She lived there with two other women, Joyce and Mickle, who, in the end, shared in Marie's life and helped her with her last wish, which was to die at home.

In her last months, people started to notice a spiritual rebirth in Marie. This was helped by an online study of Divine Love and Wisdom that she participated in. It was perfect for Marie: No pressure, no travel, no body, just pure Marie—caring, questioning, praying—finally a community where she could be loved and accepted unconditionally. This brings us to why she wanted Roslyn to do her Memorial. Mainly, her family and friends have been women, and so she wanted a woman to say the final words for her. Bless Roslyn for her ability to be comforting and honest, for her willingness to say parts of Marie were broken yet Marie was a powerful, strong, reflective, intuitive woman. The text of the service Ros helped to form is printed next, but I would like to end with a poem that Marie wrote. Though her life was painful and difficult, Marie loved deeply and widely. She ended it with a deep sense of love for God and for us.

Your Light

by Marie Odhner

Swiftly, silently, the shifting clouds
Unfurl across the sky above
Allowing Your light to pour through.
It illuminates grass, tree, and lake
Shining forth upon my humble life.
Light pours through shifting clouds of pain,
Through grievous hurt and dreadful loss
Giving hope to brighten my dark path,
Saying once again that it is good.

So I surrender up my life,
Seeking a path that leads towards You.
My way illumined by Your Love,
Knowing that You look upon my life,
Saying once again that it is good.

May God bless Marie as she lives and loves in the spiritual world. She did not realize how much she would be missed. I think that she would say, "Tell your family and friends that you

love them—don't wait!" And she would say, "Thank you to all my online friends and Caritas family for making a positive difference in my life."

Love, Deena Odhner, sister-in-law and friend

For Marie

A memorial, with love from Roslyn

(Marie leaves behind a community of friends on the Caritas and DLW listserves. We will surely miss her wisdom, compassion and humor. The Caritas community extends sympathy and love to her family and friends, and the many people for whom she was a beloved teacher. She wanted a gathering of friends and family to celebrate her life and death with happiness. Roslyn Taylor read this memorial at a service in Janie Lemole's chapel in Bryn Athyn at the same time it was read at her service in Glenview. We share it with you.)

People of Jacob, why do you complain? People of Israel, why do you say, "The Lord does not see what happens to me, the Lord does not care if I am treated fairly?" Surely you know. Surely you have heard. The Lord is the God who lives forever, who created all the world. God does not become tired or need to rest. No one can understand how great God's wisdom is. God gives strength to those who are tired and more power to those who are weak. Even children become tired and need to rest, and young people trip and fall. But the people who trust

the Lord will become strong again. They will rise up with wings as an eagle; they will run and not need rest; they will walk and not become tired. Isa 40: 27-31

The Lord was put God's Spirit in me, because the Lord has appointed me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord God has sent me to comfort those whose hearts are broken, to tell the captives they are free, and to tell the prisoners they are released. The Lord God has sent me to announce the time when the Lord will show kindness and the time when our God will punish evil people. God has sent me to comfort all those who are sad and to help the sorrowing people of Jerusalem. I will give them a crown to replace their ashes, and the oil of gladness to replace their sorrow, and clothes of praise to replace their spirit of sadness. Then they will be called Trees of Goodness, trees planted by the Lord to show God's greatness. Isa 61:1-3

Reflection

These scriptures came to mind as I reflected on Marie's desire that we celebrate her life and death with joy and happiness. From what I know about Marie's life, she suffered significant brokenness in several contexts. She had reason to ask the questions posed by Isaiah: Lord, do you know what is happening to me? Do you care whether I am treated fairly? She had reason to feel like one of those whose heart is broken, who is imprisoned, who is sorrowing and sad. She experienced being tired and weak, being unable to walk, being in need of God's kindness and comforting.

Yet Marie wanted us to celebrate with joy and happiness! She pointed us toward the hope and joy that perhaps sustained her life here: the Lord gives strength and power to people who are weak and tired, not only from physical ailments and exertion, but also from spiritual struggles. She wanted us to tell the good news — God shows kindness, God comforts brokenness, and God can set us free from all the ways we are physically

Blessing

*Marie,
May the Lord bless you and keep you!
May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you!
May the Lord's countenance look kindly on you,
and give you peace!*

and spiritually imprisoned! As Marie so eloquently demonstrated to those of us who were lucky enough to be her companions on the Caritas and Divine Love and Wisdom listserves, she found spiritual comfort and joy in reading and discussing the Word and the Writings, and deeply sharing life lessons with her community of trusted friends. She taught us so much, as she had been able to teach so many children earlier in her life, with compassion and incredible insight. I am grateful to Marie for the way she let the Lord work powerfully through her brokenness and sorrow, to give up strength and comfort and freedom to see and think in new ways!

Now we can celebrate with Marie the fulfillment of these promises in Isaiah. The Lord has lifted Marie up with wings like an eagle! Now she can walk and run in spirit without getting tired or needing rest! Now she has a crown of even more beautiful truths, and the oil of gladness that comes from her goodness, and clothes of praise for the Lord whom she loves! Now she is flowering as the unique tree of goodness that God means her to be! Now she is, in the words of the American Spiritual, truly free at last!

Prayer

Lord, we gather together today to remember Marie, and to celebrate the ways you let her touch our lives. You know our sorrow in saying goodbye to Marie, just as you know the sorrow that was in her life. Yet you have given us joy in knowing Marie, and in sharing her joy at being set free. Lord, we thank you for comforting us, and for your promise of joyful liberation. Please strengthen us and life us also with wings like an eagle, as we entrust Marie with joy into your loving care.

Diverging Paths and Separate Roads

by Ian Lumsden

A person's religion can shape every aspect of his life. This makes the decision to follow a certain religion or worship God in a specific way a very pivotal one. Although all religions have truth in them, some provide a clearer and more accurate picture of God. A distorted image of God arises when a religion intertwines falsities into its doctrines. It then becomes the individual's responsibility to choose which religion he most agrees with and which teachings of that religion to bring into his heart. Each person has freedom to make decisions in regard to his spiritual life.

As people make decisions about their spiritual lives, they develop unique perspectives on God. This creates difficulties when people gather together and organize a church. How does a church decide which are the essential doctrines that its membership must agree upon? How does a church decide which rituals the members are to be involved in during external worship? In all churches, these questions are answered by people, who are guided by their interpretations of holy scriptures. This means that although the Word of God is considered while making these decisions, they are still merely human guidelines for the church.

These guidelines are necessary because of all the different scriptures and interpretations that exist in the world. Church organizations have to determine whether they will follow the road set forth in the Koran, the Torah, or the Bible. This division between different religions and organizations is necessary to prevent conflict between the teachings that different religions incorporate. Consider the difficulties a priest would face if he tried to write a sermon that appealed to both Baptists and Jews. If the priest taught the Baptist truth of vicarious atonement, or the saving grace of Jesus, he would be teaching an idea that is held as a falsity in the Jewish religion. The Jews do not accept Jesus as the Son of God and He therefore has no saving grace to offer. It is obvious that a church cannot hold services that incorporate the conflicting doctrines of multiple religions, but

what about services including ideas from different sects of a religion?

In the Writings it says, as some people interpret them, that the New Church is meant to increase and fill the world. This idea is presented through the internal meaning of one of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in Daniel. The dream is a figure of a man made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. The image is struck and destroyed by a stone, that then turns into a mountain and fills the earth. The Writings offer this explanation of the dream, "The destruction of this [Old] church is described by the stone breaking in pieces all the parts of the statue. By the stone is signified Divine truth; and the Lord as to Divine truth, by the rock which the stone becomes" (AE, 1029).

Although it may seem clear that the growth of the church is the focus of this passage, the idea that the New Church will fill the earth is derived doctrine. The passage only says that the Lord's Divine Truth will fill the earth, which can happen without the New Church specific enveloping the earth. So where does the New Church fit in?

The New Church is referenced later as the kingdom that "will arise which shall never perish" (AE, 1029). However, in recent years there have been many conflicts over specific doctrines which have led to schisms in the church organizations. If the specific doctrines a church organization supports are determined by people, why do these human decisions contain enough authority to divide a church that is meant to

never perish? Instead of accepting that people choose different paths in their search for God, our organizations only see the ideas as radical and contrary to the majority. This attitude has resulted in the deviant group feeling not welcome and starting its own organization.

Yet, though arguments over church doctrine can rapidly reach an uncharitable verbal battle, it might in fact be charity that sparks the harsh words. Charity is in essence loving the neighbor, but charity must also be discriminating. The Writings use the example of disciplining a child in order to demonstrate the concept of discriminate charity. It is revealed that "a father who chastises his children when they do wrong loves them; and in the opposite case if he does not chastise them for it, he loves their faults, and this cannot be called charity" (TCR 407). The message is clear. It is not charitable to allow someone to continue to do wrong or believe in falsity if there is something that can be done about it. The person should be loved, but not his faults. This understanding of the doctrine of charity implies that it is an individual's responsibility to guide his neighbors toward the truth whenever possible.

Although everyone is entitled, moreover encouraged, to find his own path and interpret the Writings in his own way, if personal interpretation is used too liberally, falsities are twisted into personal truths. This twisting of falsity into truth occurs when a passage from the Writings is interpreted in a way that begins to contradict other teachings from or based on the Writings, but is still accepted as a truth. This is where a decision must be made. Either the falsities are corrected and the deviant accepts the church's doctrine, or a split must be allowed in the church. The split must be allowed for the same reason that services for multiple religions are not held. The conflict between the falsities and truths would destroy the sphere of worship. At this point in a disagreement, it must be recognized that diverging paths have created separate roads.

One issue that has catalyzed such a divergence, is whether or not women should serve the church organization as ministers. The General Church firmly maintains that women should not serve as ministers, while the Convention allows women perform this use. Since the Writings do not directly address the issue, either stance is based on derived doctrine. However, opinions that oppose women in the ministry are derived from the most beautiful and unique doctrines in New Church theology, the doctrines pertaining to conjugal love.

Conjugal love is a wonderful gift God has given to the human race. Not only does it contain the highest delights, but it makes us what we are, it provides the character and life of our soul. "Conjugal love is the precious jewel of human life because the character of a person's life is such as the character of that love in him, that love forming the inmost element of his life... In a word, a person is a living soul as a result of that love" (CL 457). From this it is seen that even if a person does not attain conjugal love with his spouse, he still has it in his life if he follows the Lord (CL 531). It is the essence of his life. Now, reflect on this: how is it that conjugal love exists in the world?

The answer is direct and simple. Conjugal love has its origins in the conjunction of good and truth. With this truth in mind, it is easy to see why it is necessary that "the male was created to be an expression of the understanding of truth, thus a picture of truth, and the female was created to be an expression of the will of good, thus a picture of good" (CL 100). Again, the truth is simple and direct. The sexes are different and must be different.

The spiritual differences between men and women not only create the capacity for conjugal love, but also cause men and women to have different uses. These spiritual differences allow for a man's mind to be "elevated into a higher light" (CL 188) than a women's. Here light means "intelligence and wisdom" (CL 188), and therefore it can be seen that men more easily understand doctrines and truths. Also, since a man is a form

of truth, and loves knowing the truth, it is appropriate that he presents the truth. On the contrary, a woman is a form of good, and thinks from her affections. This makes it difficult for her to present truths that are not in line with her affections and thus inhibits her from performing the primary duty of a minister.

Yet, the minister presenting the truth is only an external of worship, so why is this issue so important to so many people? One reason is that people who follow the Convention's doctrines believe that women are just as capable in their abilities to serve the church as ministers. Furthermore, they believe that the woman's perspective on the Word can offer new and useful interpretations. On the other hand, those who follow General Church doctrines see women in the ministry as a denial of spiritual differences necessary for the precious pearl of conjugal love. Also, allowing females in the ministry implies that we, as humans, know more about who can best understand and teach truths than what is given in Divine revelation. Therefore, because it opposes the doctrine logically derived from the teachings concerning conjugal love, having women serve as ministers during external worship is contrary to a beautiful truth set forth by Divine revelation and indirectly diminishes the holiness of the Writings,.

It may seem a little extreme to claim that practices involved in external worship have such a profound impact on the church. Yet, in one of Jesus' parables a man is cast into outer darkness for not wearing the appropriate garment to a wedding (Matthew 22:12-13). Externals are important. Their role in our spiritual life must

not be overlooked. The externals of worship help to contain the truths that are presented and add to a sphere of worship. Further, the externals of worship must agree with the internal truths. This idea is evident when Jesus says that people do not "put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:17). Since wine corresponds to truth and wineskins to containers of truth, or the externals, this passage clearly conveys the importance of having externals of worship match internal truths. Finally, because having female ministers in external worship does not agree with the internal truths in the General Church's doctrines there is no hope having a unified church organization until this argument is settled.

Ultimately, there will always be varying interpretations of the absolute truth. Many new ideas are useful, provide a greater understanding of the Word, and promote the growth of the church. However, these ideas can be flawed, and flawed ideas must be removed from the church to prevent them from corrupting the existing doctrine. Divisions in the church are distressing, but overall they are a necessity.

Ian Lumsden is from Georgia and currently is attending Bryn Athyn College. He writes, "My major, like a lot of my life, is undecided. I enjoy sports and sciences. I also like having good discussions, getting strong responses from people, and hopefully helping people to really understand why they believe what they do."

Weighing In

Wendy Hoo

I recently lost a third of myself. That is, I lost a third of my body weight. I was motivated by an increasing set of health problems which finally led to a moment of truth; hey, maybe if I took off some weight my knees and feet would stop hurting! That made sense. I was in danger of losing my one physical activity—my daily three-mile walk. I could no longer do it without pain. My body was full of creaks and aches. If I sat on the couch too long, it was a big production to get the joints moving again.

Although I expel a lot of energy in my job as a teacher, I could feel a deterioration I labeled as age. Was it possible to forestall the inevitable a decade or so? Or was this my fate, to gradually become more immobile? My new job was extremely demanding physically, emotionally, and mentally, and I was the old person there. Most of the others were in their thirties, and I was turning 54. I wanted to keep up. I loved the job, and I loved walking enough to try. I prayed for help.

In the summer I had time off and God sent me the motivation to spend it at the gym. I added a low carb diet that made me realize immediately that sugar and flour had been making me tired and hungry. By the third week the scale said I lost ten pounds, and I had established a routine of half an hour on the cardio machines, and fifteen minutes on the weight machines. I added a daily 20-minute yoga session, since I already liked yoga.

There were classes offered for the older, more out of shape women and I took a few, and looked on enviously at the fast-paced "cardio blast" classes that I tried but couldn't keep up with. The staff of tiny hard-bodied girls at first paid me no mind (probably counting me as one of the novices who, after plunking down \$240, wouldn't come back after the first week). But as I faithfully showed up every day, these girls began to encourage me and give me pointers on how to use the machines.

When a person is 75 pounds overweight, no one really notices the first fifteen pounds she loses. Size 20 looks the same as size 18. But there were changes. I noticed my clothes were a little baggy, and I had more energy. Loading the dishwasher seemed easier, and I was more willing to do household chores since it started to feel better to be moving than to rest. My mood

started to lift and I realized a lot of things that used to make me irritated were actually because

I was feeling sluggish. Also, I was surprised at what I thought were emotional or spiritual problems, when they turned out to really be physical ones.

My first temptation was to take a good thing too far. I became obsessive about the exercise, worrying if any activity prevented me from my routine. I almost didn't go on vacation for a week with my family, but found a way to keep on the low carbs and exercise in different ways—swimming, biking, and even walking. They were becoming tolerable. I was terrified I might stop my exercises before I got any real results. Since no one was really noticing my efforts for the first three months, I kept my little secret and didn't talk about it much. I feared it might jinx my progress, or people might start to give unwanted advice.

By the time the fall teachers' meetings began, I had lost 25 pounds. And I had a goal—I was giving a speech to a group of women in my hometown in October, and wanted to look different by then.

Vanity started to become part of the picture. My 19-year-old daughter, a fashion expert, began to notice my changes and took me shopping. She found me a smashing outfit or two—still not my goal size, but down a few

numbers. These boosted my moral. I looked ok in them. And now that I felt better this wasn't so much about health but about showing off.

My family back home was surprised to see me looking healthier and dressing in something other than my usual dark "disguise" that I had sported for the last ten years. Only my mother, who sees me as the little girl she adores, seemed unaware. She never noticed that I had gained any weight in the first place because she saw me with her heart. From others I started to get comments like, "You look healthy, what have you done?" And, "Your face looks different!" In the past I had become one of those women everyone looks past—an invisible, gray blob. No one had commented on my looks (to my face) during the past decade.

By Christmas I had dropped another two sizes. And I decided to go all the way—to wear new, bright colors and even makeup which I had avoided during the gray years. Everyone noticed now. Comments ranged from, "You look so happy and move with such energy", to the less polite comment of my brother-in-law, "Wow, you look 20 years younger—keep going, you need to loose fifty more!" It was sobering for me to realize people had been thinking negative thoughts about my looks for years. But I admired that they had been kind enough to not say anything—other than my 5-year old nephew who asked if I had a baby inside. Still, I felt some anger at those who had been judging me all along and wondered how much I judged others without thinking about it?

Everyday at least one person commented. I got compliments so often that I started to expect them and spent time dressing nicely so I would get more of them. They became a new kind of high.

There were a few friends who didn't seem to notice any change. Like my mother, these friends never saw me in my body but always looked past it at my spirit. If it was pointed out by another person they would comment, "Oh, yeah, I guess she is smaller." I'm glad it mattered very little to these friends what I

looked like. But other acquaintances were very aware of the change and asked lots of questions. Some of my more glamorous women friends seemed to think I was now eligible for their sorority—I had joined the "league of women who tried to look good". Before I wasn't even in the game, being was more like their Mom. I noticed I felt judgmental towards them, even as I was becoming a little like them.

If a day went by and no one commented on my looks, I felt cheated. I considered getting my hair streaked, bought more and more clothes, threw away most of my old ones and put darts in the rest. At first it had been women who commented, and the men only looked with a fast, up-and-down glance. As their eyes moved, they tried not to seem obvious but eventually some ventured comments. They would begin with, "I hope this doesn't sound rude, but you look very nice" or "May I ask if you've lost weight?"

Despite my nephew's comment about the baby inside me (which wasn't a bad thing to him), the children in my life seemed oblivious. But a couple of teen-age boys finally ventured comments that went like, "Mrs. Hoo, why do you look so different?" I just told them I went to the gym and changed the subject to keep them from further embarrassment.

One young woman I taught said, "Wow, you look hot!" That had moment for me because no one had seen me as a sexual person for a long time. I wasn't sure I wanted to be hot since I was not in the market for a man. An old feeling of shame about being sexual, and shame in the joy in feeling pretty, came back from years before. It started in the culture I grew up in where a female was either a wife or a whore (or a virgin, which was too late for a mother of three). Since that girl's comment I've been asking myself, "Am I a bad wife if another man finds me attractive?" I am still not sure about this question.

In reality I long for the anonymous days and actually am getting tired of the compliments, especially the question, "Have you lost weight?" After loosing 70 pounds, a person could hardly

mistake it, so I feel stupid answering, "Why, yes!" But I have contempt now towards those offering comments and take it as evidence this character flaw of mine didn't recede with the weight. To offset this I make an effort to switch to the topic of health and in that way try to turn the conversation around to the other person.

Another side effect is that a couple of my overweight friends are mad—they look at me and turn away, acting as if I've betrayed them. I know because I used to look at others who had lost weight in the same way. I'm sure these friends feel I'm showing them up by destroying their theory that weight loss is impossible. I don't know how to treat them except to try to tell them they are beautiful, because they are to me. This is an opportunity for me to be more compassionate, another spiritual need I've prayed about.

Our society has made people think slimness is equal to goodness. I'm not a better person now, though I did try to be a nice, fat woman so that I wouldn't bother anyone with my fatness. Now I know I was committing a sin against society and myself by being unhealthily overweight. But I am angry at the people who think I am a better person—angry that they didn't love me as much the way I used to look. And I get annoyed at the people who didn't used to speak to me but now do, and invite me out, when before they wouldn't have socialized with me at all. I don't accept any of their invitations, and this is a place where I need to practice forgiveness. All this makes me feel cynical about who my real friends are. It's similar to the time I was having a financial crisis and some of my friends dropped out of my life. But I am learning and now feel I can identify my true friends, those who want the best for me, and separate from those who think of me as some kind of appendage to their lives. In this lesson my hope is that I become aware of my own judging of others for external reasons.

As a young woman, I was vain and always would use my looks to my advantage. Now I feel

that urge coming back. But there is an addictive quality to focusing on looks. I want to go shopping for clothes all the time, just to see what size I can squeeze into. I've bought too many things that I'm already too small for. I know I should wait until I level off, but can't seem to help it. I used to be infuriated with my beautiful daughter's obsession with shopping, but now see I've been angry at that quality in myself because she actually has been my best support for me in changing my body, and has done it with love for her mom. The other day I called her at college to get sympathy because I had wandered into a boutique and bought a silk jacket that was NOT on sale. In the past my yearly clothing budget was below a few hundred dollars but now, in just a few months, I've already spent that much.

My real task is to find another project to occupy myself, another way to improve myself and not get trapped in this cultural obsession with looks. (But I have to admit I've been watching extreme makeover shows. It's not that I want plastic surgery, but I try to imagine what I could do if I wanted to.)

So I pray for balance and a sense of humor—to be able to laugh and not feel disgusted at the loose skin under my arms and the wrinkles on my face where the skin used to be filled up with fat. I hope to be able to take my sense of success and turn it towards some of my more internal issues. If I can remember that this is the Lord's work and it came as an answer to a prayer, it seems easier. My original goal has been met. I have plenty of energy for my job and can walk all I want. The creaks and pains are all gone. I am praying that I will stop obsessing and make the experience work in my favor emotionally and spiritually, for I know there is a person within me who needs a makeover more than I need a new brow lift.

Untitled

Anonymous

My marriage is dead.

This is not just an intuition, it's something I know for sure. I know many women who wonder whether their marriage is alive or not. I know divorced people who knew that their marriage was over. But I don't know anyone else choosing to live in a marriage they know is dead. They are out there, but it's so hard for us to connect. How do people advertise that they're pretending their marriage is okay?

I used to wonder whether people could really know for certain their marriage was dead. After all, some people divorce and remarry. And some suddenly have life breathed back into a marriage that seemed over. There's good reason for others to question whether I really know my marriage is dead, but I have no doubts. It's been important for me to know my marriage is dead. It's the only way I can make the progress I need to. Again, this isn't just an intuition.

Staying in a dead marriage is a lonely business. I've told a few friends — not necessarily the closest ones, just the ones it was most useful to reveal it to. But that leaves an awful lot of people I'm on edge with. I know some who look at the two of us and don't have a clue, and others who look at us and know all without being told. That doesn't bother me, as long as they don't confront me with it. I dread letting people get to know us well enough to see the cracks. A friend once criticized my marriage, and all I could do was listen and silently agree. But another friend once sympathized with my position, and that led me to see that a lot of the difficulties were my own fault.

The people who condemn divorce make me nervous because some of them would condemn me for not making it work. The people who are already divorced make me nervous because many of them think divorce is the solution for every broken marriage. They don't think they apply pressure to me because all they're doing is

supporting the option of divorce. They apply pressure anyway because I know they don't approve of staying in a broken marriage. They would consider it unhealthy. The people I feel most comfortable with are the ones in marriages that are difficult but not yet absolutely dead. They face many of the same struggles I do.

Why do I stay in this marriage? There are a lot of possible reasons. I guess the main reason is that I've never felt called to leave it. And I can think of several possible reasons why that is true: I was brought up to think divorce is usually wrong. In addition I can see advantages to staying together. And it's part of my nature. Let me talk more about these things.

First — I was brought up to basically believe divorce was only for adultery-type situations. I don't know for sure any more whether I consider that true, but I'm not sure it's not true either. I feel the belief has served me pretty well, either way. In addition, in all areas of life people have to get along with others they can't stand. They might not like their kids or brothers or sisters or parents. People they work with might drive them crazy, their boss might be horrible, or their minister might rub them the wrong way or teach things they consider wrong. Sometimes people can get out of these situations but other times they have to just live with them. Even when they can get out of the situations, as they move on the next set of people are going to have their problems, too. So hopefully there should be some way to deal with these people, including

a spouse — that is, barring certain kinds of abuse.

Another aspect of this first point, too, is that when I married, I promised to stay with my spouse for the rest of my life. That is what I just can't get beyond. To me, a promise is a promise. I said I'd stay with this person for the long haul, so I will.

Secondly — there are advantages to staying together. I can see why people think it's unhealthy to stay in a broken marriage. For one reason, if the person holds on to bitterness, hatred, a sense of superiority, etc., he or she is just getting sucked down into hell. But it's also possible to let go of those things. I knew before I married I wasn't going to get divorced. Along with that I knew staying married meant learning to make it work. That has to be true whether I'm in a real, living marriage or not. This ties in with what I said above: for people I have problems with, there's not much I can work on but my own actions and reactions. I bring that into my marriage. Learning to get along with my spouse is making me a much happier person. Getting rid of some of my faults has made my life much easier. I feel I've become a better person. And staying married also has advantages for the other people in my life. I know some look down on "staying married for the sake of the kids". I guess this can be unhealthy, but if I do it in a healthy way, it's got to make my life more stable. And that affects not just my children

but also my parents, relatives, friends, and in the end, the whole community.

Thirdly — I'm staying in my marriage because that's how I am. I don't give up on any relationships easily. Or any commitment. This is probably the reason for all the above things, and why I try to get along with people I find difficult. It's also why I keep promises, and work on getting rid of the things inside me that make life unhappy. As a result, I place a lot of value on stability.

I have a hope that when I marry again, in this world or the other, it will be easier. I hope I'm truly getting rid of some of the ugly stuff inside me. Instead of making others out to be either better or worse than they are, I hope I'm learning to see them lovingly but also realistically. I also hope I'm learning to be my real self. Maybe next time I'll be able to marry wisely and find a way to work out a true partnership. It would make up a little for the unhappiness. But I also have to admit I have trouble believing in a next time. Can men and women really understand and appreciate each other? Can they really let go of their defenses way down deep in their souls? Is genuine intimacy really possible? Is it possible for me?

Note: We would like to invite responses to these last few questions either from your experience or from your thinking about the topic.

Renku

The following poem is called a renku. In Japanese tradition it was written by four or five poets who got together for an afternoon and took turns writing verses. The following renku was written by: Wendy Hoo, Lori Nelson, Linda Odhner, and Helen Kennedy, with Peggy Mergen contributing a verse towards the beginning.

As a rule a renku must be 36 stanzas long and made up of a haiku followed by a couplet, etc. Cherry blossoms should appear in verses 17 & 35, and the moon in verses 5,13,29. As you will see we missed one of the rules.

Since we live in an age when people don't actually talk to one another, but do things by electronic particles whizzing back and forth, this renku was written by e-mail over the course of a year. If anyone wants to try and guess which verses were written by a particular person, it may be fun. Or to participate in writing one, contact me at HmKennedy@aol.com.

Jo dug deeper, glad
to struggle with the root. Leaves
fluttered in an oak.

Sweat ran paths on her hot brow.
arms ached gladly as she bowed.

Soft earth crumbled, rough
beneath her knees. Warmed garments
clung to her damp back.

Springy rope's elastic tug
led soiled hands where more lay snug.

Work, wait for night, wash.
moonbeams rooted in water
slid out of her way.

Monday he comes. Slung across
her mind — their burdensome past.

Gray sleep is broken.
clouds black like enmity
spit shots on dry roof.

Day's door widens, night is slain,
cheeks grow wet with tears and rain.

Striding through the rain
he hurries, arms up and wide.
to shelter? Hit? Hide?

"He's thinner!" she gasps. Tears and
smiles make words unneeded.

Fingers explore flesh,
like rooting deep for lost dreams.
then, peace and hot tea.

Afternoon drenched in new sun
leaves them shining more as one.

Fresh dampness sparkles
on moonlit mysteries of
purification.

As the rain makes mud of dirt
it washes the garden plants.

By firelight, the
quiet conversation drifts
to pain — is it healed?

Her hair trails on his warmed shoulder
suddenly turning, she looks much older.

His hands cup her face,
he looks deep into her eyes,
all is understood.

Wanting to lighten the mood:
"So, what have you been digging?"

"A kiss first." "Hmm-mmm."

"Your grandmother's peonies."
"What?" he cried startled.

"Only the white ones with blue green eyes —
I couldn't stand their stark-faced lies."

"Flowers never lie,
They only jest, perhaps not
Tastefully enough."

"These will lie where I dump them.
Gardening is serious."

"That's why I've tickets."
"Where?" "Lutzi Gardens." "In Rome!"
"Yes...been working there."

"My bags are packed, so take me.
Let the peonies languish."

She jumps eagerly
To her feet. He rises and
Takes her hand. "Let's go!"

(Certainly she will help him
to dig in the display bulbs.)

"I'll bring the cell phone."
"No, let people wonder 'til
they get your postcard."

⌘⌘⌘

Sleeping on the jet plane,
Their fingers entwined gently.

The moon shone in on
their lax expressions, fine lines
highlighted silver.

Dream/reality melded
as spirits played in sleep realm.

Three neon gold stripes
etch dawn's birth. They wake,
high on fragile plans.

Putting on shoes they wonder:
Will customs take them off?

"Here's an ad! Lutzi —
Open air museum of
Med'eval flowers."

But Fates cold surprise
Lurked in the plane's gut.

"Do cherry blossoms
Rain wet from Italian skies?"
Pink, red. Petals or...

"Here's our ride. Lutzi's truck to
haul dirt and trees. Ciao, Marco!"

⌘⌘⌘

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CARITAS STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To seek the Lord's will as we provide opportunities for women and men to pursue their spiritual growth and change in the New Church, including but not limited to: women in the clergy, governance structure, decision-making and variety in doctrinal interpretation.

To deepen our understanding of the Old and New Testaments and the Writings. To research other religious and secular literature for fresh perspectives. To come to terms with how historical and cultural influences affect our thinking.

To understand the effects on everyone of the suppression of women in the church.

To cultivate tolerance and respect for the variety of spiritual paths, and ways to worship, within the New Church.

To acknowledge the alienation of women and men whose gifts have been lost to the General Church.

To promote a true understanding of the Lord's Second Coming, so that we can help the church on earth to heal and grow.

c/o Lynne H. Smith
Box 3
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TO:

*Don't let your worries get the best of you, remember, Moses started out
as a basket case.*

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