

GATHERING LEAVES

A Swedenborgian Women's Retreat

May 7 – 9, 2004

Mission Statement: We are gathering to promote harmony among women who are associated with the various Swedenborgian organizations around the world. We are coming together to acknowledge our common beliefs, explore our differences, develop a respect for one another's contributions, create an atmosphere for healing, and celebrate our spiritual sisterhood. It is our intention to promote a sense of charity and goodwill so that we might say, "No matter what form her doctrine and her external form of worship take, this is my sister; I observe that she worships the Lord and is a good woman."

Lisa Cooper: Two years ago I went to Convention's annual convention in Portland, ME. While there I mentioned to several people my desire to see the barriers lowered between Convention and the General Church. Some of the people I talked to felt similarly, and one of them was Jane Siebert, who was Chair of the Swedenborg House of Studies. She told me she had been dreaming of a women's conference involving Swedenborgians from different branches and had spoken

to the president of Convention about it. I thought this sounded like a great way to start building bridges, and I promised to mention it to my friends when I returned to Bryn Athyn and see whether there was any interest. Not being a member of Caritas, I think I got Claudia Gladish to post a message for me on the listserve, and eventually a small group gathered at Jody Hyatt's house in response to an invitation in the Bryn Athyn Post.

REFLECTIONS ON GATHERING LEAVES

Roslyn Taylor

Gathering Leaves, the retreat for women from all branches of the Swedenborgian faith community, totally exceeded my expectations for a weekend of joining together in unity. I'm not the only one who felt this way: it seems to be the universal

response of all the women who were fortunate enough to attend.

We gathered from Thursday evening through Saturday evening at the Convention's Temenos Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania. On Sunday, we

worshiped at our choice of five locations, and then met up informally in Bryn Athyn at a Mother's Day Tea at Glencairn and at tours of the Cathedral. There were 77 women gathered: 4 from the British Conference, 24 from the General Convention, 39 from the General Church, 8 from the Lord's New Church, and 4 who were unaffiliated.

The theme of "Gathering Leaves" was chosen to represent the notion of the inclusive Swedenborgian faith community being the trunk of the tree that holds us all together, drawing from its deep roots that nourish us from the scriptures and the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Our different organizations are the balanced branches of the tree, and as individuals we are the leaves of the branches. Each woman has her own subjective disposition towards what is true, which we gathered together for healing. I had some expectations for what that healing would look like, and came away with deep joy at how my hopes were fulfilled, and surpassed.

I was feeling a deep satisfying peace, and somehow simultaneously euphoria from the experience of creating connections with women from around the world who share a love for our faith community, for the Divine, and for each other. We managed to celebrate our unity as Swedenborgian Christian women, and honor our differences as women from various communities of faith and charity.

For me, there were many moments of palpably feeling the Divine moving and working among us: the familiar words of the Levitical blessing, asked as a benediction by a strong and beautiful Conference minister at our unforgettable final Vespers in the candlelit and flower-filled chapel of the Lord's New Church; as we laughed at ourselves and our struggles at the opening and closing plenary sessions; as we danced together in a huge sacred circle dance with

song before our final dinner together; as women gathered two or three times a day for worship, with no hint of division but only a complete desire to worship together as sisters; in the tenderness for the babies who were present, especially visible in the care and concern for a baby who was injured. I sensed the presence of the Divine One in the honest, intimate, deep sharing in some workshops; in the beauty all around us, manifested in our femininity, in the flowers, in the woods and fields and stream in the Temenos environment, and in the elegance of the Lord's New Church property; in the gentleness, tenderness and grace in our varied worship services, especially the final Unity Vespers; in the music for both worship and entertainment; and in the power of our voices lifted together in song.

Many women expressed a sense of awe at being part of an historical first step in healing the pain, brokenness, and isolation within the international Swedenborgian faith community. Together, we were starting to overpower the great red dragon in our midst, who has been trying for centuries now to devour the baby that is in our care. We came together as a community of women to protect and nurture the baby, drawing on the strength of our collective mothering feminine spiritual nature. We took a stand to face the dragon and overwhelm it with love. As Louise Rose said at our concluding plenary session, the men have been fighting for two hundred years, and we refuse to be enemies!

There were many special moments that I will remember as treasures from Gathering Leaves. I will share a few treasures as gifts that hold joy and hope for better things to come within our faith community.

It was a gift for me to be able to step into new friendships, as if we had been unknown friends from the past. I wondered if some of our ancestors had actually been friends or even family in the past, and were

now delighted to see the family friendships renewed, and the church circle brought together again. What ripple effects in the spiritual world were we starting? And what changes in the spiritual world were being expressed as ripple effects among us here on earth? I could see and hear the ripples going on all around me and within me, between us women, deep in conversation over a meal or walking together in small groups around the grounds. I'm quite sure my new friends will be in my life forever from all the branches, many states, and several countries even if we meet again only sporadically.

Women are gifted by the Lord with a love for connecting relationships. I was amazed and deeply moved at the intimacy of the last dance in the sacred circle dance workshop I attended, and in the "Dear Friends" weaving circle song outside with which we concluded our last session. Tears spilled over as I looked into the eyes of these wonderful women as we danced and sang our love and friendship for one another, deeply experiencing the reality of God's love between us. "Let me tell you how I feel" we sang to one another. Let me show you how I feel safe and connected, supported, loved and loving, joyous, and strengthened. Let me move and sing, filled with awe at our collective beauty and strength, filled with the confidence that we can be a blessing in our individual churches and our larger faith community, filled with pleasure at knowing the Lord is in this place, and filled with sadness at having to leave this sacred oasis within my faith community. Let me return to the context of my own organization and its struggles, centered now in a deep knowing that peace and unity are strong within our diversities, and that the Divine One has created a place for me and everyone within the church on earth.

Each woman had choices to make for four workshops, only a handful of which

were repeated. What difficult choices we faced! So many appealing topics, and so many issues vital to women in our faith community! The enticing range was from yoga to reflecting on spiritual experience and practices, to sacred circle dancing, to story telling and the Arcana, to the transforming power of spiritual friendship, to marriage and child-raising. We were able to nourish ourselves and each other in our physical, emotional, intellectual, communal and spiritual dimensions, and no doubt on at least two levels in each workshop.

For myself, I had a balance of two intellectual and communal focused workshops (a tea, talk and tour of the Swedenborg Foundation, and a panel discussion about the history of women's roles in four branches of the Swedenborgian faith tree), and two of the physical/emotional/spiritually focused workshops which exemplify the way feminine spirituality often functions. They were about creating community through spiritual direction, and sacred circle dancing. I was blessed to have engaged with other women in a variety of meaningful ways in the workshops I attended. Other participants described having a similar experience. We shared not just intellectual content, but also the emotional realities that make us the vibrant women we are.

Part of my reality as a woman is my calling to ministry, and the mixed messages of support and opposition I get within the General Church community. Gathering leaves was for me a haven for acknowledgment and support for my gifts in ministry. I was able to serve the women at the retreat by working with Star Silverman from the Lord's New Church to plan our worship activities, and to lead or co-lead several of the services. Two ministers in particular, from Convention and Conference, reached out to me to affirm my ministry and offer loving support and direction to me in my journey. I

am deeply grateful for the experience of working with and being nurtured by these extraordinary spiritual women, strong leaders and inspiring pioneers in their faith communities. Their friendship is an incredible blessing for me.

Since the Gathering Leaves retreat, there has been some discussion about where to go from here. Is our focus exclusively on healing the wounds in our faith community from antagonism between the branches, or are we going to continue to nourish our feminine spirituality by keeping subsequent retreats as women-only events? From my

perspective, the goal of healing will be more effectively accomplished if we pay attention to the goal of developing our spiritual strength as women. I believe it is precisely because of inattention to the spiritual gifts that women bring to our faith communities that we have ended up in the alienated positions we have been in. Developing and deepening our individual and collective feminine spirituality will be essential to the process of healing because, I believe, the strengths of feminine spirituality are what is needed for the Divine One to bring us back together in loving embrace.

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And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

*We are of the same tree.
Our Swedenborgian roots go deep into the soil of Scripture
These roots are the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.
Through them we are able to receive spiritual nourishment
From the inner sense of the Word.
The trunk of this tree, which is the good and truth that grows from the Writings,
Has sprouted several branches to better serve the tree
Because the trunk does not bear fruit, except through its branches.
The branches are the affections for the good and truth, which come from the people.
Each branch receives its life-blood from the same trunk and the same roots
While growing in different directions.
The branches vary in their perception of truth but not their love of truth.
The leaves that sprout from the branches are the truths of faith.
They serve for the instruction and regeneration of the human race.
They heal through the recreation and restoration of the spiritual life.*

*It is time
To gather
The leaves
For the
Healing of
The Nations*

Jane Siebert

One Flock and One Shepherd (John 10:16)

(written in response to Ian Lumsden's article *Diverging Paths and Separate Roads* in the November 2003 *Voice*)

Dear Ian,

Thanks for your thought-provoking article, "Diverging Paths and Separate Roads." As you said, "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.... [A] person ... has it in his life if he follows the Lord (CL 531). It is the essence of his life." As you also point out, "Conjugal love has its origins in the conjunction of good and truth." It would therefore be appropriate to emphasize the importance of good as well as truth in the ministry, and of conjoining them rather than separating them. Teaching truth is indeed an important duty of the ministry, and it should come from good and lead to good. You quote from the chapter in *Conjugal Love* on the change of state of life with men and women through marriage, that a man's mind can be elevated into a higher intelligence and wisdom. This teaching is given in the context of a husband and wife becoming conjoined in marriage. The result of this process is that the husband's wisdom is implanted in the wife and conjoined with her love. It is then better and truer. Conjugal love can bring about a similar conjunction in an individual. A spouse is not a requirement for becoming wise, even for becoming celestial; and I believe the process of becoming spiritually married is a process of coming into the Lord's celestial kingdom; that would explain why the roles of women and men are reversed in that kingdom, so that husbands there are the ones with affection, and wives are the ones with knowledge of good and

truth (AC 8994). It is of the Lord's will and power that we can be brought into the celestial kingdom. On the basis of this understanding, derived from "the most beautiful and unique doctrines of New Church theology," I favor welcoming women into our ministry.

You asked and correctly answered the questions, "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." This is a very important point. It relates to the teaching that humility is essential to worship (AC 2327, 9377, among others). If we are in genuine worship, we will have the humility to acknowledge that our policies are merely human, not divine, and we would not claim that ours are in agreement with the internal truths while other people's are not. As you said, externals are important, and must agree with the internal truths. It seems to me that a policy that respects alternate opinions is more in agreement with the internal humility that produces a sphere of true worship than, for instance, one decided by men on the grounds that men have higher intelligence and wisdom than women.

You made a valid point when you said, "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.... This understanding of the doctrine of charity implies that it is an individual's responsibility to guide his neighbors toward the truth whenever possible." The question is, when is it possible, and how? Whenever people have succeeded in guiding me toward the truth, it was when they accepted me and welcomed me into their society even though I disagreed with them, and when they listened to my views with open minds. People of different religions can and do worship together. If a service consists mainly of doctrinal exposition, of course it is

not appealing to people with conflicting opinions; but in my experience that kind of service does not help bring back people who have gone astray. To do that, we may have to be more flexible. It may be uncomfortable to open our minds to other points of view; it may not feel like what we think of as a sphere of worship, but it may be what real charity, and thus real worship, requires.

Sincerely,
Dewey Odhner

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Luther and Faith Alone

Linda Simonetti Odhner

Readers of Swedenborg's Writings are familiar with the oft-repeated teaching that Luther's doctrine of faith alone is a heresy. Yet the passages in SE and TCR about Martin Luther himself, whom Swedenborg met in the spiritual world, also point out that by his own statement the dogmatic path he took was the only way he could break away from Catholicism, that he struggled for years to overcome his false ideas and receive true teachings, and that he personally loved and approved of charity and good works although he did not integrate them into his doctrinal scheme. (See the entry on Luther in Potts' *Concordance*.)

The Catholic context in which Luther arrived at his crucial breakthrough in understanding the nature of God and salvation sheds light on his thought process. In the sixteenth century, Catholics "earned" absolution and thus salvation with a system of confession, penances, and indulgences (cash payments in lieu of penance), a system

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which did nothing to encourage true repentance and was all too easily abused by the Church administration for its own ends.

Luther spent his early adulthood trying futilely to do enough to feel deserving of salvation, and this made him a tense and unhappy person. (The quotes below come from *The Reformation* by Edith Simon and the editors of Time-Life Books, in the series *Great Ages of Man*.)

"If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery," he later said, "I would have made it. All my brothers in the monastery will testify that had I gone on with it I would have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading and other works." Still he did not attain the inner peace for which he yearned (p. 15).

Later, as a student and teacher at Wittenberg University, "still he fretted about his soul, and still he could not come to terms with his God. His superiors were sympathetic and tried to help, but they were also worn down by his persistent anguish. His confessor told him, 'God is not

angry with you; it is you who are angry with God" (p. 16).

Suddenly he saw things in a new light.

Luther had associated the righteousness of God with His eternal condemnation of the damned. But studying at Wittenberg he fell upon a sentence of St. Paul, "The just shall live by faith," and in a flash the words took on new meaning.

"Finally," Luther wrote, "God had mercy on me, and I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that gift of God by which a righteous man lives, namely, faith."

In other words, he concluded that the righteousness of God was not based on a disposition to condemn; it was based on mercy. The despair of Luther's life had been that he saw himself as undeserving of salvation. Now he was convinced that God gave, He did not buy and sell, and therefore grace was not purchasable....

All the daunting associations of sin, guilt, and penalty hung over the concept of "penitence," but metanoia [the original Greek word] could as legitimately be translated as "change of heart." To Luther that signified a state of mind in which man would turn to God in spontaneous good will. Regeneration of the soul, not retribution by a vengeful God, was the intention of the sacrament of penance, he decided. And regeneration of the soul could not be earned; it had to come about through faith in God (p. 38).

This explanation suggests that Luther's original insight was not at fault. God is merciful, not vengeful. He does not sell salvation and we can neither earn it nor deserve it; indeed, we can do nothing of

ourselves. It is indeed a change of heart that makes regeneration possible. Luther's "faith alone" was essentially not faith apart from love, but an internal state independent of the external absolution which, ironically, gave people license to commit sins repeatedly without shunning or repenting of them. Luther's dogmatic rejection of charity and good works as saving had its roots in the debased meaning given to those concepts in the Catholic Church; he wasn't condoning the breaking of the Ten Commandments.

Perhaps the corruption of these true ideas began when Luther used his new understanding for a political end, that of breaking away from the excesses of the Catholic Church. This purpose, worthy as it was, lent a subtly different emphasis to the content of his teaching. The problem was compounded when his followers took up his revolutionary views and elaborated them further, without the benefit of Luther's original spark of personal revelation. Their status as institutional dogma only increased the possibilities for distortion and abuse.

In his heart of hearts, Luther did not separate faith and charity as those terms are used in the Writings, and this ultimately helped to free him from his doctrinal errors. And the Lutheran Reformation, faulty as it was, played an important role in preparing the ground for the revelation given through Swedenborg. It sent people back to the Scriptures for Christian teachings (indeed, Luther himself translated the Latin Bible into German); it encouraged them to question institutional authority, think for themselves, and apply reason to matters of faith; and it goaded the Catholic Church into facing and correcting some of its most objectionable practices. Martin Luther served as a powerful tool of the Lord's Divine Providence in the renewal of Christianity.

Fundamentalism Revisited

by Beryl Simonetti

A couple of years ago I wrote an article for Voice about fundamentalism. I promised then that I would follow up with more on the topic.

Recently I read Karen Armstrong's book *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York, Ballantine Books, 2000). It was an eye-opener for me—one of those books that changed how I looked at things. I want to go back and integrate everything I ever learned about the topic with what she has to say about it.

This book covers a lot of territory. Beginning in 1492, Armstrong traces the development of a few fundamentalist movements from the three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. She concentrates on American Protestants, Jews in Israel, and Muslims in Egypt and Iran. Personally, I found the part on Islamic history a rather hard slog, but I wouldn't want to ignore it altogether—seeing how fundamentalism functions in all three faiths was necessary to grasp her perspective. She seems more concerned with the political rather than the religious consequences of fundamentalism, but she shows clearly how in each case the religious thought came before the political applications.

So—this is a comprehensive history of fundamentalism. What makes it so fascinating and valuable to the ordinary person who is affiliated with the General Church is that the parallels between the fundamentalism that Armstrong describes and fundamentalism in the General Church are quite remarkable! I hope we can become knowledgeable about these things in time not to repeat history in destructive ways.

Throughout this book Armstrong details the history of two complementary ways of arriving at religious truth: *Mythos* and

Logos. She describes the truth of *Mythos* as timeless, eternal, universal, concerned with meaning, not practical matters. On the other hand, she describes the truth of *Logos* as being rational, pragmatic, concerned with scientific thought, facts, and external realities. Through the past several centuries, there has been growing emphasis on *Logos* at the expense of *Mythos*. Armstrong makes a persuasive case for this being the cause of problems in many religious denominations.

The General Church may not be fundamentalist in the extreme ways that Islam, Judaism and Protestant Christianity have been. Still, we need to notice when we use *Logos* in place of *Mythos* in our religious life—when we pay more attention to the letter than to the spirit of our revelation. If we don't, we may move in the same unhealthy directions that these three religious groups have historically taken.

Most of the parallels between the fundamentalism that Armstrong describes and the fundamentalist tendencies of the General Church have to do with how sacred texts are approached and interpreted. Along with the confusion between *Mythos* and *Logos*, there are three characteristics that recur in this process. Sacred texts are read with exclusivity, with selectivity, and with absolute certainty.

Exclusivity

Some Jewish groups insist that they should study and live "by Torah alone." Any study of secular ideas is regarded as unnecessary at best and possibly dangerous to their spiritual welfare. I have heard similar sentiments expressed in the New Church - that all the information we need—particularly about spiritual matters—is to be found in the Word, and any attention to psychology or other sources is unnecessary at best and possibly dangerous.

Selectivity

Some Orthodox Jewish groups, believing literally that God gave them the land of Canaan forever, would like to use scripture to justify a program of ethnic cleansing to remove all Arabs from their territory. This one-dimensional interpretation would do away with, or at least de-emphasize, laws that forbid killing.

A more subtle example of selectivity in the New Church is the traditional interpretation of "Nunc Licet"—"Now it is permitted to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith." (TCR 508)

Note the last phrase—"the mysteries of faith." There *are* still mysteries of faith. Many parts of the Writings are concerned with them. I think of Swedenborg's spiritual experiences—the memorable relations in the Writings—as describing mysteries of faith. Dr. Kristin King has written a valuable article called "Reading What the Writings Say they Cannot Say." (New Church Life, August 1999)

In our emphasis on "a religion that makes sense," and our anxiety to have logical reasons for all our actions, perhaps we have lost sight of the primacy of love and charity expressed in the Two Great Commandments:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 22: 37-40)

"Now it is permitted" does *not* mean "Now it is permitted to ignore *Mythos* and do everything exclusively with our heads rather than our hearts from henceforth." Some of us have always been afraid of emotional involvement with religion, fearful that we would be "carried away" in disorderly ways. This passage may be used

to give us "permission" to avoid emotion in our spiritual lives.

"Now it is permitted" implies to me that we can still use the *Mythos*— the allegories and stories—the perception and subjectivity—of religion. Now we can balance them with the *Logos* of understanding and intellect and integrate them in ways that were impossible before Swedenborg's revelation. It does not imply that we can substitute understanding and certainty for the *Mythos* that still holds meaning for us.

Absolute Certainty

One thread that runs through all the fundamentalist thinking that Armstrong describes for us is summed up in the phrase, "The lust for certainty." Sacred texts — the Koran, the Torah, the Christian Bible — are regarded by their believers as perfect expressions of God's truth, each with only one obvious, correct interpretation. Armstrong observes:

Because by the end of the nineteenth century science and rationalism were the watchwords of the day, religion had to be rational too if it was to be taken seriously. Some Protestants were determined to make their faith logical and scientifically sound. (p. 140)

However, when Protestant fundamentalists attempted to interpret the Bible as factually true throughout, they created a caricature of both religion and science.

In the General Church we have progressed beyond the literal interpretation of the Old and New Testaments and look to their inner meaning as revealed through Swedenborg, but then we stop progressing and regard the Writings as infallible and correct for all time. We hear that "the Writings mean exactly what they say." We have the same problem with the letter of the Writings (dealing with inconsistencies and paradoxes and cultural biases) that

fundamentalist Protestants have with the letter of the Old and New Testaments.

We destroy religious belief if we insist on correctness and certainty and infallibility for one point of view. This was illustrated in the early Academy movement when Benade insisted that his view of the Writings was the only correct one. (See R.R. Gladish, *Bishop William Henry Benade*, Bryn Athyn, ANC, 1984.)

Fundamentalists want to be correct in a rational way, but the *desire* for correctness is an emotional thing. Some people have an emotional need - you could call it an irrational need - for a single correct interpretation of their sacred text. What a paradox - an irrational need for rationality!

As Karen Armstrong puts it:

This is the dilemma that Jews, Christians and Muslims have all had to face in the 20th century: between the fundamentalists and those who adopt a more positive attitude to the modern secular world there is an impassable gulf. The different groups simply cannot see things from the same point of view. Rational arguments are of no avail, because the divergence springs from a deeper and more instinctual level of the mind. (p. 204)

Is there a similar divergence between increasingly polarized New Church groups? I wonder if we are sometimes consumed by the "Lust for Certainty."

Ideals

One of the functions of *Mythos* in a person's spiritual life is to form ideals. We realize that they are largely unattainable, but they guide us and we can use them to measure our progress, or at least our direction. We may wish to have an ideal marriage, or to provide an ideal environment for our growing children.

But if we decide exactly how things should be, if we turn ideals into *Logos* and try to apply them in specific ways, we consider them essential rather than guides for living, and we cannot forgive ourselves or others when we fall short.

If we think to ourselves, "I will never get a divorce," or "I will never use birth control," or "I will always go to church on Sundays," and then find ourselves unable to follow through, we may get into destructive spiritual judgments. This is particularly the case when a community decides to abide by certain ideals, and when those who are apparently unable to conform are shunned.

As Horand Gutfeldt said many years ago in an address he gave at the college in Bryn Athyn, "We must not make idols of our ideals."

I have covered only a few of the topics that occurred to me while I read this thought-provoking book. I highly recommend it, particularly for anyone who feels, as I do, that the General Church is gradually moving in an increasingly fundamentalist direction.

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*A light in the desert is thy spirit, hidden by the niche of thy flesh.
If the niche falls, the desert will become eternally radiant like the sun.
Innumerable are the wonders in thine heart if thou becomes aware of it...
At every moment advance anew in religion!*

Attar, 12 c Persian poet

Half A Husband

Dear Editor,

In response to the anonymous article, *Untitled*, in your last issue: I had to think twice because after I read it I wasn't absolutely sure I had not written it myself. It was so close to my own story. Even my sister assumed that I wrote it and I had to tell her otherwise.

My situation is that I have been married for thirty-three years, and only recently been able to get some insight on the nature and cause of the dysfunction and unhappiness I have felt over the years. We had married quickly during that time of flower children and war protesting, and went blissfully and ignorantly into the marriage, sure all would work out because we were in love. Soon we had a child, and although we continued a carefree life to some degree, the real world started to invade. There was an early infidelity on his part, which I came to terms with for the sake of our son. We proceeded to grow up together, merging our ideas of what marriage was about as our childhood experiences seeped in and caused emotional confusion.

I became more and more accommodating to his stronger will and tried to play the good wife. But I was not getting what I wanted in terms of spiritual interaction with my husband. I immersed myself in raising children. A crisis of his unemployment turned the marriage to an outwardly hostile one, and after many years of this I was worn out from the years of ineffectual attempts to improve things. Many bouts of counseling really didn't change much.

The bottom fell out when my teenage daughter got involved with an abusive boyfriend. The light dawned on me — I had

set a terrible example of a marriage for my daughters. Guilt and despair took over, and I had a kind of breakdown. With help from loved ones, I realized the only one who could help me was God, and myself. I could never change my husband's personality, or the way he treated me disrespectfully. I got help from an Alanon Program, and the Twelve Steps helped me get out of my dilemma.

After several years in the program, life has improved so much for me. The situation has not really changed, but my attitude has a great deal. I'm taking a while to get over the resentment for years of unhappiness. But I am breaking the unhealthy obsession I had with blaming everything on my husband. The program teaches one to focus on oneself. To the degree I can do that, I am happier.

I found it was a lonely place when the marriage was at its worst. Friends seem to fall into two categories: dump the bum, or bear up, you can't divorce. Neither attitude was helpful. What was good was the kind listening and not judging of some friends and people in the program. Now I have made many improvements in my own life. I drew boundaries around myself, started to work hard taking care of my own needs, and gradually feel stronger.

While I was jogging yesterday, as I was huffing and puffing, the words "Half a Husband" seemed to come out as I pounded the pavement. I heard the words in my mind, and realized that's what I had, the same as "A half a loaf is better than none" and a glass can be either half full or half empty. I could look only at the positive side of my husband and perhaps gain even more peace and serenity. I listed his assets in my mind, which I rarely had done in the last

decade. He took care of the car. He did dishes. He loved his children. He loves me, even though his emotional problems prevent him from expressing that love. He is kind to older people. He has a good heart. He is smart. He keeps in good shape. He is very friendly. He is excellent at talking to difficult people, such as bill collectors or insurance adjusters, because of his training in sales. He's the one you call if someone is trying to put something over on you, and he will make mincemeat of whoever it is, get your money back, or whatever it is you wanted.

That same characteristic was one he often used on me to try and manipulate me to do what he wanted. But now I see him as an emotionally injured person who fears me leaving him now more than ever because I am stronger and don't need him anymore. I can find ways to protect myself from him, and not interact with him over issues I don't need to consult him on. I don't fight with him anymore, even though he tries hard to make me fight. I don't fight because I believe it reminds him of his childhood when

his parents fought, and he sees it as a kind of intimacy. I also see that if I divorced him, most of the issues we have would not change. I knew he would fight very hard against the divorce with his many skills and I would be in for a long hard battle that might not be worth it. After that, I would still need to negotiate certain financial things and child-related issues, as most divorced people do. The better option for me was to learn how to live with him in the best way possible for me.

I am immune now to others telling me how to run my marriage. It's an issue for me and God to discuss, and very few others. That is enough. I see that everyone has one really difficult part of their lives, whether it be health, children, money, or a job, and my marriage just happens to be my big issue. I am willing to work on it the rest of my life because I think it's how the Lord is trying to regenerate me. Everyday I pray for a happy marriage and to let the Lord do the timing and the way it will happen.

Wendy Hoo

17th Century Nun's Prayer

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will someday be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody: helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace

enough to enjoy the tales of other's pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memory of others. Teach me the glorious lessons that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint — some of them are so hard to live with — but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And, give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so. ❖

Marriage

by Helen Kennedy

They who have been in the good of life are in doubt at the start, but in an affirmative manner, because good itself is the recipient of the affirmative, or the faculty of receiving is in good itself; of which they are unaware while in doubt. These are able to be led to certainty. If they are such as are in the evil of life, they cannot be because evil is the recipient of the negative, hence every such doubt is led thither and becomes, gradually, a negative also.

SD 4580m

I started to write a story about marriage and assumed it would be about a lot of problems with it. But after a few pages the main characters, a wife and her husband, started to balk and didn't want to go on. I became stalled and kept trying to push these characters forward but they kept insisting on not doing anything. I was in such a plight and decided to go to the library to get some books about marriage. On the shelf, amidst all the ones about problems in marriages was a book called *The Good Marriage*. It seemed such an oddity that I picked it out and started looking at it. Boy, did I feel good as the characters in my mind jumped back to life, happy and wanting to work.

The change in mental direction for me was so startling and delightful that I still feel happy every time I think about it. And I've come to believe that the Writings are sincere when they speak of a heavenly marriage for every one, as impossible as it may seem at times here on earth.

The book, compiled by Judith S. Wallerstein, consists of interviews with married couples (separate interviews) who have volunteered because they consider themselves to be in a good marriage. The first one I read (and became fascinated with) was Nicholas and Maureen Easterbrook who have what the author calls a traditional marriage. He is very

questioning and intelligent, highly competitive, started his own computer-related company, and works very hard for long periods of time when putting international deals together. But in the lobby of the office building for his company there is a lot of Chinese art: drawings, statues and paintings. He is very delighted about it and attributes this beauty to the influence of his wife, from whom he has learned about this whole other side of life.

Maureen, for her part, has created a home that is peaceful for him to come home to. When their first daughter came, the loneliness she was walking around in life with left; she gained purpose, and has loved raising their four daughters. When Nicholas comes home she tries to be upbeat and not hit him with a lot of problems and things he needs to do. Basically she keeps things peaceful and serene. Nicholas regrets not having been more involved when the girls were growing up, but finds comfort and love in his involvement with them now.

With the girls grown and away from home, Maureen has time to indulge in her artistic interests and also her gardening. She loves growing orchids and travels alone to Central America and Brazil to conferences about them. She takes pride in being able to grow very difficult ones. At first, I thought this last thing was an aside to the story of Nicholas and Maureen's marriage,

but it slowly occurred to me this was the central core of their marriage. Maureen, in her way, was as highly competitive as Nicholas, and she took immense satisfaction in being able to grow flowers that few others could. Just as he built his company and maintains it alone, she built the family and maintains the connections and the interworkings alone. What makes the marriage is they both love and very much value the contribution the other one makes to their lives. Also, they are best friends.

At one time in his life Nicholas was going through very hard emotional problems that centered on his highly competitive father. Nicholas started seeing a psychologist and was very careful to explain to Maureen that none of it involved her or their marriage. As a reader and onlooker into this, it seemed to me good but sad that he didn't talk with her about the deep issues troubling him.

In another place in the book the author, Judith Wallerstein, gives an example of a more modern marriage, what she calls a "Companionate Marriage". Matt and Sara Turner have many of the hallmarks of a traditional marriage, for he works and she stays home with the children. But they have something more — they talk with one another about their deep feelings, and in particular anything that is troubling them. Wallerstein says this adds another level to marriage that some people love. She says it has developed since she was married in the 50s. She also explains that not everyone requires it or tries for it because it is very difficult. (It left me wondering just what I would want in a marriage, should I ever, as an adult, enter one again.)

With the death of Sara's father, she learned that she no longer had to be the little girl who pleased. She missed her father terribly but Matt was there for her. So she gave up feeling sorry for herself and grew up. Matt treated her as a full partner and an adult in matters of decision making,

money and sex. And she began to act accordingly. In return, Sara demanded that Matt do what he enjoyed, that he have the courage to follow his interests. She accepted the economic losses involved, and met him halfway. She also demanded that he be a father in the true sense, not like his own, who only got to know his children when they were adolescents.

Wallerstein says both Matt and Sarah could have played their lives differently. Sara could have stayed the lifelong baby always needing a Big Daddy. And Matt could have lived out the conventional role for which he had been primed, spending his life in international trade, hating it but eventually getting used to it and deciding boredom was an inevitable part of life. Like Nicholas and Maureen Easterbrook, they developed an immense gratitude for each other and for the pleasures they had found in adulthood.

For me, reading this book was a continual challenge. The feelings and experiences of the couples kept me constantly questioning what I would want. But their intimacy brought up a lot of old troubles that leave me feeling roughed over instead of drawn in. I questioned Swedenborg's claim that marriage love is so important in heaven and wanted to know why the Lord would not leave people in freedom to enter such a relationship or not. Can't unmarried people actually be in heaven and not just at the entrance to it like the celibate nuns and priests?

Of course, all this managed to get the heat off myself and the broken feelings I have concerning a happy marriage for myself. It helps to know that other people have terrible problems in the areas of intimacy, and it helps to know some are working through them successfully, while others abandon the project. I don't know what the outcome will be in the future as

far as my life evolves, but I do feel better in the adult age I'm in now, rather than the younger, idealized state. I suppose in heaven there are as many varieties of marriage as there are individual couples. And though it seemed a diversion to question the central placement of marriage in heaven, it answered my deepest need — freedom to decide whether I want it or not. It is forcing me to question what my options are and I'm ok with having to be a responsible adult, instead of being a child and breaking important things the Lord is giving me and not knowing what to do about it.

In *Good Marriage* Wallerstein says, "Every second marriage, whether it is romantic, companionate or traditional, is also by its nature a rescue marriage. It rescues the partners, not from childhood trauma, but from the unhappiness of their earlier failure" (p. 296). I don't feel this way anymore. I feel that in the long time that's passed since I've been involved in a marriage (17 years), I've had time to work on myself and learn. Included in this are the

relationship failures that went into my broken marriage: anger, willingness to be a victim, and inexperience with people. I feel like I know myself better, can speak up for myself (most times), and understand the importance of nurturing a relationship. The latter helps me to enjoy people much better than I ever did. I have a full life, can support myself, have some influence with my writing, can be controversial when needed, am not overly clingy, have a fun family, and enjoy the love and companionship of good friends. The only way I could get into a marriage again is if he added so much more to my life than I now have that I absolutely wouldn't want to live without him, and that the intimacy, pleasure and joy would be so much more than either one of us now have.

I don't feel I have to be rescued from anything. For me, it all can be summed up in this last thing: Would I and a future spouse come from a place of freedom, and the beauty of that freedom draw us together and keep us together? The answer is: I just don't know.

OP OP OP OP OP

Conjugal love is [such] that one wishes to be the other's [so as to be] altogether like one; and the highest felicity is to be not one's own, but the other's; ...It is such a conjunction of souls and minds, that the life of one is the life of the other; and it is so reciprocally.

SD 4629m

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Qualities Of a Church

In our January 2003 issue, we included a list of the most important qualities of each major religion that has existed in the world. It was taken from a book *The Essential Mystics* by Andrew Harvey. Since then we have received suggestions for the New Church and we include them here:

Taoism	The Way of the Tao
Hinduism	" Presence
Buddhism	" Clarity
Judaism	" Holiness
Ancient Greece	" Beauty
Islam	" Passion
Christianity	" Love in Action
African	" Invocation

To this we can add:

New Christianity	" Marriage (Love & Wisdom Joined)
	" Being (Both/And)

And for each branch of the New Church:

Convention	" Inclusion
General Church	" Distinction
Conference	" Tradition
The Lord's New Church	" Inner Light

Carla Friedrich writes: I would like to add New Christianity to the list. What would its most important quality be? How about this: *New Christianity - The Way of Being [Both/And]*, or, the Way of Consanguinity. For me, it encompasses a lot of new church/new christianity's beliefs/precepts. For me, this is a contemporary way of saying Distinctly One. It pictures The Divine acting upon us...our connection with the Divine and each other. It pictures for me the Essential Personhood (being) of the Lord and that the Lord desires conjunction, wishes a time when we recognize we are all one in Him. It acknowledges the essentialness or necessity of embodiment. It pictures for me correspondences, a state of conjunction, the Conjugal Principle, community, activity, the Divine Human...natural and spiritual, horizontal and vertical, bread and wine, interior to exterior—general and particulars, continuous states AND discrete degrees, regenerative process. It gives a nod to the "as if" principle. It acknowledges the reality of process, the Incarnational Process, Alpha and Omega, end, cause and effect (use), substance and form. This such a thing AND that such a thing are joined together as one. It pictures angels, Love and Wisdom, Good and Truth, will and understanding, heart and mind. It reminds me that heaven is made more

perfect with the greater variety of unique individuals that arrive there and love Him and one another. It acknowledges a point of convergence of all paths toward The Lord, many churches and yet one church, I am me and you are you AND we are 'as if one' in community together. It voices how one can be at one end of the spectrum and another one at the other end AND the Lord can make us One. [It shows] approximations of truth and The Ultimate Truth. The correspondences go on and on.

Excerpt From "The Church of Christ Not an Ecclesiaticism"

Henry James, Sr.

The only legitimate newness of the Christian church consists in a newness of spirit among its members, not a newness of letter. The letter of the church consists unalterably in its two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. A new literal church therefore must disown these ordinances, must exhibit new ordinances, instinct with new meaning. Clearly Swedenborg never contemplated such a church. Never once in the whole course of his writings has he criticized the administration of the Christian ordinances, or declared it defective, save in respect to the withholding the cup from the laity in the Roman church. He waged no war whatever with the church as an ecclesiasticism, though I doubt not he had his just Protestant predilections, but only as a corrupt spiritual economy. He complained of it only in that respect wherein the Lord complains of it, namely, as being destitute of the life of charity, and being therefore to all heavenly intents and purposes dead or inactive. Accordingly you never find him proposing so cheap and superficial a remedy, for so grave a disease, as the creation of a new ecclesiastical organization. How should a new ecclesiastical hierarchy mend matters? The complaint was not against a particular set of persons, as contrasted with another set. The complaint was not that certain

persons called God's church were worse men spiritually than certain other persons, which other persons must therefore be formed into a new ecclesiastical body, and made to supersede the old one. By no means. The complaint was that the entire mind of man, as ecclesiastically exhibited, was in spiritual ignorance or darkness, and hence the remedy befitting this condition could not be a change in the personal administration of the church, or a change in the persons composing it, but an entire renewal of its spirit. What the church wanted was not a new body, or a new literal constitution; but exclusively a new spirit, the spirit of unfeigned love.

Hence you never find Swedenborg discussing any questions of ecclesiastical polity, or urging any measures of ecclesiastical reform, except that of the administration of the eucharist in the Roman church. He thought, indeed, that from the circumstance of that church exalting a life of charity in its doctrines more than the reformed churches do, it would more easily receive the new truths than any other church, provided it would rectify its administration of the eucharist, and dismiss the worship of saints. But all this of course was matter of private opinion. You always find him treating all questions of ritual or external difference between churches as of no spiritual

significance, save as contributing indeed to the greater *unity* of the church, when charity was its spiritual bond. He invariably represents the true Christian, or the man in whom charity dwells, as gratefully and reverently observing the institutions of public worship established in his nation, and on no occasion whatever does he represent him as finding these institutions inadequate to his need. So also whenever he talks of the external of the church, he does not represent it as consisting in a Sunday ritual, or a correct liturgical form, but exclusively in goodness of life. "The church of the Lord," says he in [note] 403:20 of *Apocalypse Explained*, "is both internal and external: the internal of the church consists of charity and faith thence derived, but *the external of the church* is THE GOOD OF LIFE, or the works of charity and faith;" that is, all those things which charity and faith operate in our social relations. Consistently with this definition, you find him throughout his writings making no ecclesiastical complaint of the church, but only a spiritual complaint, as to its destitution of charity. Thus he says the existing array of divided churches, as Catholic and Protestant, and the various subdivision of these again, would be perfectly conformable to the Divine mind, were they only animated by mutual love or charity. "THE THINGS OF DOCTRINE," he says in his *Celestial Arcana* [note 1799], "DO NOT DISTINGUISH CHURCHES BEFORE THE LORD" — THAT IS TO SAY, THE Lord knows no difference between a church professing true doctrine and one professing false — "but this distinction is effected BY A LIFE ACCORDING TO THE THINGS OF DOCTRINE, all of which, if they are true, regard charity as their fundamental, for what is the end and design of doctrine but to teach how man should live? The several churches in the Christian world are doctrinally distinguished into Roman

Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists. This diversity of name arises solely from the things of doctrine, and would never have had place if the members of the church had made love to the Lord, and charity towards their neighbor, the principal point of faith. Things of doctrine would then be only varieties of opinion concerning the mysteries of faith, which THEY WHO ARE TRUE CHRISTIANS would leave to everyone to believe according to his conscience, whilst it would be the language of their hearts THAT HE IS A TRUE CHRISTIAN WHO LIVES AS A CHRISTIAN, that is, as the Lord teaches. Thus *one church would be formed out of all these diverse ones*, and all disagreements arising from mere forms of doctrine would vanish; yea, all the animosities of one against another would be dissipated, and THE KINGDOM OF THE LORD WOULD BE ESTABLISHED ON THE EARTH."

Think of that, my sectarian friend. These old Christian sects whom you propose to supersede, Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran, with all their subdivisions, were they only enlivened by charity or mutual love, would present no ecclesiastical obstacle to the Divine truth, but would really constitute the Lord's kingdom on earth, would constitute the true and spiritual church which is identical with that kingdom.

[capitalization by author]

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*We're not primarily put ont his earth
To see through one anotehr,
But to see one another through
Peter DeVries*

Subscriptions and Contributions

To get the next issue, please contact Peggy Mergen or send a check to Lynne Smith. A year's subscription costs \$10.00 and to get one issue is \$5.00. When sending us money, please indicate the amount you intend for subscription, and the amount (if any) towards a contribution.

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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
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

TO:

*Writing at the same time as Shakespeare was Miguel Cervantes. He wrote Donkey Hote.
(Schoolchild's answer in an English exam)*

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