

## Homes and Institutions: A Traditional Marriage

By Linda Simonetti Odhner

If our public and private lives were joined in a true marriage, we would enjoy a healthy balance between the two: each would support and enhance the other, and each would have its own areas of supremacy to which the other would willingly defer. The reality many of us face, though, is less a true marriage of equals than a traditional marriage, with the home in the role of a wife who promises to "love, honor, and obey" her husband. Homes defer to institutions more and more; institutions defer to homes less and less.

This situation makes a difference in the way men and women relate to each other, both as groups and as individuals. Whether it should or not, it does, because of customs, opinions, and the facts of human reproduction.

The General Church has used the terms "domestic" or "household" on the one hand, and "forensic" or "marketplace" on the other, a great deal in its discourse about the roles of men and women. Yet that particular dichotomy appears as such only once in *Married Love*, in passing and not as the main focus of the discussion; and in the few other times the term "domestic" is used in the book, it refers to husbands and wives working together to promote household harmony. The only time Swedenborg does define "domestic" he describes the home as a community of family, tutors, and other servants. The question of whether that is to be taken literally has been raised in the past, but in any case the community spoken of hardly exists in our society at this time, and even then existed only among certain classes. Yet it has become an important part of derived doctrine to state where men and women belong with respect to public and private life, and to follow traditional notions in that area fairly closely.

The discussion suffers when we fail to define its terms, and in this case, when we overlook how much the things they represent differ from one society to the next. Examining what homes and institutions are about, and the ways public and private life are related, may give us some useful thoughts to keep in mind, not just about gender roles, but about belonging to the human community.

### **Narrower and More Subordinate**

The role of the home is growing progressively narrower in contemporary society. Activities that used to belong to the home are taken on by economic and government institutions. We might define institutions as organized groups of people with a specific focus on the welfare and activities of the larger community.

Most of us, instead of drawing water from our own wells and gathering our own firewood, buy water and fuel from the utilities. Instead of spinning, weaving, and sewing our own clothes, or bartering for

neighbors to do so, we usually buy them factory-made. Even cooking for the family, still the norm a generation ago, yields more and more to convenience food. Before institutions for sick people and lying-in became common, childbeds, sickbeds, and deathbeds were attended in the home. And a lot of these activities, naturally enough, were carried out by women—not women in nuclear-family isolation, but women in community.

In the past, when individual women were more oppressed than they are today, women as a group wielded power from the pervasive influence of the home sphere. Because of limitations on the speed of travel and communication, and because fewer people were alive at one time, public institutions lacked the reach they have today, the capacity to enter our homes with information, goods and services, regulation, and surveillance. Individual women have gained rights in certain areas, but homes have lost independence; and those two trends don't have to go together. The freedom of both men and women is compromised when home becomes narrower.

This is not a plug for returning to a pre-industrial culture, although it would be good to see support for bringing more personal and family functions back home, and for fostering home-based community. Even wives and mothers who want to devote themselves to home and family have to contend with the fact that nearly everybody over the age of six is away from home for the greater part of the day. The family home, during business and school hours, is at best a nursery for preschool children and their caretakers.

### **Economic Changes**

This in itself is cause for concern, but public life has eroded the sphere of home life in an even deeper way. Home is a setting where marriage and family relationship begin

and develop. The things which satisfy our basic needs for physical survival make up its foundation: food, clothing, shelter, and fuel. We could add health care to that list. One problem with our current economic structure is that it makes having even these most essential supports contingent on a certain level, getting higher all the time, of economic success, while at the same time, earning money becomes a more and more complex, specialized set of skills. Going out and providing basic necessities for ourselves directly, with our own hands, is not a realistic option for most of us at this day, even as much as it still was a hundred years ago.

The concept of land ownership contributes to this state of affairs, and land ownership is part of the institutional tendency to take charge of resources. Even though nobody should starve or freeze in a land of plenty, the buying and selling of food, fuel, clothing, and shelter make some sense at least due to the fact that obtaining them takes time, energy, resources, and sometimes risk. But land is a different thing. No one can make land. One can reasonably claim a piece of ground based on the fact that one is using it—living on it, building things on it, raising crops or livestock on it. But claims of property have gone far beyond that point. Vast tracts of land have been claimed on the basis of military conquest or just "I said it first." Native American peoples "sold" land to European colonists for coats and ridiculously small sums of money because the idea of owning land was foreign to them. In their eyes, land belonged to everybody, like the air we breathe. (Can you imagine governments and corporations distributing breathable air on the basis of who can pay? If they could do it, would you put it past them? Watch what happens if people ever start extraterrestrial colonies.) In the American West, drinking water is regulated much more closely than it is in the east.

Beach tags are required for simply existing on some areas of the New Jersey

shore. Even people who supposedly own property are often forbidden to do something as basic as hang laundry out to dry on it.

Land ownership creates homelessness. People wander from place to place, with no right even to occupy space, because they can't afford a place to live, and they don't fit the usual picture of functioning members of society. Many of them may be able to work, even those who can't hold down a job. But they can't just retreat from society and its demands, because there is nowhere they can go that is not already claimed and regulated. Lacking access to toilets, they can't even go out somewhere and dig a latrine pit. Affordable housing is scarce in part because the prevailing standard of housing includes electricity, kitchen appliances, and plumbing for every person or household, and because, as John Holt once put it, "Nobody wants to compete for the poor man's buck." Land ownership also contributes to the geographic separation between homes and jobs, making transportation necessary. And transportation costs money.

Many mothers of young children who say, "I have to leave my children and work outside the home; I have no choice," face a similar economic bind. The workplace tends to exclude children. For parents to create a meaningful life in the company of their children without the income to do it in accepted ways might require a major break with the mainstream of society. Without great motivation, effort, knowledge, and determination, such an option may well be out of reach.

Emotional and spiritual aspects of home life may not face this kind of direct assault—they contend with other obstacles—but they do depend on basic survival needs being met, and on the ability of family members to spend time at home.

### **Child Welfare and the Law**

One can argue that nobody intended economic necessity to restrict home life as

much as it does. But laws about child welfare do reflect an intention to exercise control over what does or does not happen in the home, often motivated by sincere concern for children's well-being.

We have heard about the dangers of home birth, the family bed, laying infants on their fronts to sleep, prolonged breastfeeding, failing to secure infants and children in approved seats for car travel, and refusing certain forms of medical care including vaccination. Parents are put on trial and sanctioned in other ways for taking risks like these. Midwives are arrested for attending home births, even in areas where medical care is virtually inaccessible.

But who is held accountable for the dangers of companies aggressively promoting infant formula in the third world, where disruption of the nursing bond leads to dependence on formula, and where sanitary and economic conditions make it likely that the formula will be improperly prepared?

Laws about formal schooling lock children into an adult-length work schedule when homework is factored in. Homeschooling is legal in most states, although regulated, but part-time schooling for children is often even more problematic than part-time employment for adults. Schools, partly because of the law, operate under the same all-or-nothing mentality as employers tend to do. This makes a reasonable balance between public and private life difficult. We live in an increasingly institutional culture. "Head Start" preschool programs are seen as the best and most obvious way to prevent student underachievement. If children aren't doing well in school, society's answer is to start them there earlier and keep them there longer, rather than to make it more feasible for parents to improve and enrich their home life.

School requirements and obligations, supposedly for the students' benefit, often crowd out opportunities for children to be useful to their families and help out at home.

Competition may threaten to overwhelm cooperation in their peer relationships.

### **Child Care, Elder Care, and Disability**

We know about the difficulties of obtaining affordable child care, and the economic situations that make it necessary. In some ways there is even less support for elder care. Like child care, it often happens in homes that are stripped of support, resources, and mature, able-bodied people. Elder care, like mothering young children, is often a lonely, limiting, and isolating business, stretching people to their limits of endurance and beyond.

A lot of people in our society need care. The chronically ill, mentally disabled, catastrophically injured, and elderly, who are alive thanks to modern medicine, are added to children, whose need for care is generally, as the saying goes, benign and self-limiting.

A family appeared in the news a few years ago, in which a child had a continuous high level of medical need (an artifact of modern medical advances). The burden of his care fell primarily on the mother. She tried without much success to find support from the public sector, and finally burned out. One day she brought her child and his medical paraphernalia to the hospital and left him there, saying that she couldn't cope with caring for him any more. The result? The child was removed from the family's custody because she had abandoned him. Yet the authorities who took the child without hesitation had been unable or unwilling to see the signs of overload and answer the mother's calls for help, to prevent her from being driven to desperation in the first place. Who asked her, "What do you need? How can we help?" The public sector tends to support the private one only on its own terms, not on the home's terms. They wait till they can make somebody wrong, then move in, point fingers, and take control, much like a parent who ignores good behavior and

takes it for granted, yet focuses on bad behavior, blaming and punishing.

Yes, organizations do need to protect children and other dependents from the abuse that happens in their own homes and families. But the pressure of public life on home life often squeezes families into strange shapes—economic pressure, social pressure, medical responsibilities; pressure to conform, to achieve, to fulfill obligations, to make a good impression.

The senior citizen driven to murder/suicide by the care of a spouse with Alzheimer's is becoming more common. Elder abuse in nursing homes and private homes is an increasing problem, because there are more old people around, and not enough resources to care for them simply because they need care. Relatives are busy supporting themselves and their nuclear families. Nursing home staff are underpaid and stressed out. At least parents naturally love their children, and quality parenting and child care are seen as important to the future of society. Parents, teachers, and health care professionals work for the reward of seeing children blossom into young men and women. In comparison, from a material point of view, elder care must often seem a dead end, a black hole of increasing disability, suffering, and need that ends only with death.

Even families whose financial situation allows them to provide the best possible care for their disabled elders are not exempt from guilt and ambivalence about handing them over to professionals, visiting or not visiting them, and deciding when and where to take over certain decisions about their lives. When to give up or take away a driver's license only became an issue in the last century, but because transportation is so basic to our lives it can be a sore point.

We have more institutions than ever before that serve as homes: schools, hospitals, mental institutions, nursing homes, homes for the disabled. In every case the

tension between the legal and professional requirements of the administrators and the needs of the residents for a private home life must be resolved.

### **Medical Care**

Medicine is an area where many tensions and issues come into play: economics, the right to privacy, child welfare, risks and benefits, allocation of resources, and who is responsible for the consequences of medical treatment, whether they are positive, negative, or some excruciating combination of the two. The medical community is a highly organized institution, making use of the most advanced technology and people of highly specialized expertise, yet it deals with something intimate, personal, and private: the health of our physical bodies.

Because medicine throws together such extremes of public and private life, it contains telling examples of attitudes and mindsets which characterize institutions in general. As a mother, childbirth reform advocate, and reader of medical thrillers, I welcome the opportunity to look at a few of them in depth.

**The Military Model.** Young people who aspired to become medical doctors have often thought of themselves as soldiers joining a war against disease, pain and death. They think of the tools and skills they learn as weapons to be used aggressively. This leads to a simplistic, black-and-white picture of human health and disease. But in fact, disease, pain, and death are not always the enemy; they are often normal, inevitable parts of a healthy life. Acute, non-serious illnesses and fevers in childhood help to mature the immune system. Pain in childbirth is not usually a sign that something is wrong; other pains draw attention to injury and illness and force people to take necessary rest. And everybody dies.

Three areas among many where the military model has led to excess in medicine are: the overuse of antibiotics (with its consequent backlash, antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains), the past tradition of drugging women in labor to unconsciousness, and the use of heroic measures to prolong the lives of terminally ill patients. This last, in the way it intrudes upon the intimacy of death, must often feel like armed tanks and heavy-artillery fire tearing through the bedroom.

Medicine in recent years has become both less male-dominated and less militaristic. These two trends may or may not be causally related.

Other institutions borrow terminology and attitudes from the armed forces—powerful institutions in their own right—as shown by phrases like “the war on poverty” and “the war on drugs.”

**The Cult of Statistics.** Institutions like the medical community deal with large numbers of people and events, and reduce them to numbers as a way of making sense of them. This leads to the belief that THE NUMBERS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT, and that being able to quote a number, especially a percentage or average, is a definitive sign of understanding.

This is one thing that contributes to the perpetuation of medical errors. When a lab test value doesn't agree with a patient's subjective assessment of what is going on, the number tends to take precedence over the feeling, which, after all, can't be precisely measured. The number HAS to be right, especially because it's an institutional number—it comes from the lab, where everything is done carefully and scientifically. But in fact, the number is sometimes wrong. Numbers are subject to wrong interpretation and human error, just like any other kind of information. (Remember the Mars lander with its lethal confusion of metric and traditional measurement.) Bill Nolen, in his classic *The*

*Making of a Surgeon*, recalls a wise doctor telling him, "Try looking at the patient instead of the chart. The chart isn't sick." A lab number may be precise and unambiguous, but even if it is correct it is an indirect indication of the patient's condition, not a direct one.

Medical professionals have relied for centuries on a simple formula to calculate when a woman's pregnancy will come to term, based on the date of her last menstrual period. The resulting due date is invested with an almost mystical status; it is when she "should" have her baby, within two weeks at the most. But recent studies have shown (references on request) that the average length of a normal pregnancy varies between first and subsequent pregnancies and among different racial groups, and is often longer than the formula would indicate. A prediction of the length of pregnancy becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when women's labors are routinely induced because their babies are "late." This doesn't even take into account that women don't always ovulate exactly two weeks after they get their periods, as the formula assumes. The length of pregnancy is an area where the distinction between "normal" and "average" becomes important.

The cult of statistics is part of the illusion of objectivity that most of us probably buy into from time to time, but seems especially prevalent in the scientific and medical communities. Exact measurement may be the backbone of modern natural science, but without a well-developed musculature of rational thinking to keep it in balance and alignment, it will end up prostrate on the floor, with slipped discs and compressed vertebrae from the heavy load we've put on it. Measurement is not an Atlas capable of carrying the world, in medicine, law, social science, industry, or any other field.

### **The Illusion of Safety and Control.**

Medical professionals want to keep us as safe as possible. We hear that it's safer to get early prenatal care, to have an ultrasound scan, to have a baby in the hospital, to use a fetal monitor, to deliver this baby by c-section. It's safer to have this screening test more often, to treat this cancer with radical surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. It's safer to circumcise your son. It's safer for your dying parent to be in the hospital.

Some of these things may sometimes be true; sometimes the procedures themselves cause problems. But statements like these often express an underlying belief that doing the right thing always does, or always should, protect us from bad outcomes. At least, if something bad happens, we the victims, and our doctors, are not to blame, because we did everything we could. We can blame someone else or at least know that we didn't deserve whatever happened. It was unjust and we are entitled to be angry about it, perhaps even to seek restitution.

These three things, the military model, the cult of statistics, and the illusion of safety and control, all come together in the parental role that institutions tend to take with individuals and families, which is central to the lack of balance between public and private life—not only in medicine, but in government, education, law enforcement, and economic organizations like insurance and investment companies.

### **Moral Authority: The Parental Stance**

I recently read a letter in the newspaper from a woman who chose to carry and give birth to a child with trisomy 18, a genetic disorder that causes death before birth or in early infancy. At least one doctor, she said, refused to care for her during her pregnancy because of her decision not to abort.

Medical professionals, like others but even more so, are likely to act and be

treated as if they have some kind of moral authority over us. The choice they want us to make is the right choice, the prudent choice, the moral choice. Don't we want what's best for us, our children, our families? After all, they are the experts. They are leading the fight; they know the numbers; they can keep us safe. They've been to college twice as long as most people.

This attitude may be an appropriate one for parents to take toward their children. But if our institutions become parents to us, they make us into children, and that is not a healthy situation. Children expect to be protected and rescued from the consequences of their actions and the risks they take. They demand that life should be fair. When their supposedly all-powerful, all-wise parents let them down, they get mad. They expect their parents to make it up to them, with interest. The rash of lawsuits in our society may express a childish expectation that if life isn't fair, it must be made so, no matter what the cost.

Obstetricians are under tremendous pressure to produce only perfect babies for their maternity patients, and to make sure the imperfect ones don't come to term. The cost of malpractice insurance is forcing many into retirement. The doctor mentioned above may have considered that overseeing a pregnancy that would not result in a perfect baby, no matter what action was taken, would be an exercise in futility. That doctor might even have feared malpractice litigation.

Yet it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the medical community has brought this burden on itself by its paternalism: by acting as if with its fancy tests and treatments and drugs it actually did have the power to produce perfect babies; by acting as if patients were morally accountable to doctors for not following their recommendations.

But ultimately it falls to us as individuals not to be made into children. Not only in relation to health care, but in every area, adults are called upon to be adults, to take

responsibility for making informed decisions and abiding by their consequences; to remember that life is full of risks and perfect babies are never guaranteed. The child in all of us wants to believe that we are entitled to perfect babies, perfect health, and safe, predictable lives; that we can and should control the way things go, and become the masters of our fate.

Some would argue (and did, in that same newspaper) that knowingly to bring a child with trisomy 18 (or another disorder) into the world is an unfair burden on society, the family, and even the child itself, and that to prevent that from happening is the more responsible, compassionate choice. But who has the authority to decide for others which parts of life are unfair burdens and which parts are the point of our existence? From an institutional point of view, that dependent child might be a liability; but in the heart of the family, the same child might be a blessing.

### **Public and Private Enlightenment**

The way public life invades private life is like the distrust for individual visions, mystical experiences, and enlightenment that arises among those who see religious doctrine as properly filtered through the organized church. The danger of going astray, getting on the wrong track, becomes a justification for trying to control or limit individual experience.

Years ago I picked up a book titled *Obstetrical Nursing*, published in 1934, the year my mother was born. It is fascinating not only from the standpoint of medical history, but also as social commentary on childbearing and childrearing practices of the time. It reflects the peak, I fervently hope, of the trend toward regimentation and control in baby care. It recommends beginning bowel training at one month of age. It shows photographs of babies wearing arm splints and aluminum mitts to prevent

thumbsucking, and a cap that immobilizes the jaws to prevent the baby from regurgitating a feeding. These images coexist oddly with the romantic and sentimentalized attitude expressed toward the sacred and exalted calling of motherhood.

The author quotes with obvious approval, "Is it not preposterous,' says Herbert Spencer, 'that the fate of a new generation should be left to the chance of unreasoning custom, impulse, fancy, joined with the suggestions of ignorant nurses and the prejudiced counsel of grandmothers?' " (p. 625). In other words, put yourselves in the hands of the experts; if you don't you might be responsible for the ruination of posterity—all this with the very arrogance and certainty of rightness attributed to "ignorant motherhood." It is easy to see how "old wives' tales" became a derogatory term for knowledge gained by experience and passed on to younger generations privately, personally, without the sanction or control of experts and institutions.

Yet looking back we see that heeding heart, instinct, and the wise counsel of grandmothers can moderate, in the way mothers treat their children, the extremes to which expert opinion swings from one age to the next. And so it may also be with bringing religion into life.

But we are taught in Swedenborg's Writings that country and church are like father and mother to us, and that we should "honor father and mother." How do we reconcile this with our need to be adults in relation to institutions?

One way is to avoid equating country and church exclusively with the institutions which represent them. Our country isn't just the government; it is also the individuals and families and their cultural traditions that make it up. Our church isn't just the religious organization we belong to, or the building where we attend worship. The church is in each one of us.

### **Restoring a True Marriage**

A marriage is not what it should be if one partner is the parent and the other the child. As things are now, private life—home life—exists on terms set for it by public institutions. Home and public life are not autonomous, complementary spheres.

We now have freedom to drive cars, be insured against disaster, live in single-family homes, receive the most advanced medical care, work full-time and even overtime to earn money and spend it, buy food grown and processed hundreds of miles away. What is in danger is the freedom not to do those things. It was easy not to do them when the choice didn't exist. Now not doing them requires a conscious decision, and sometimes considerable assertiveness and initiative.

More knowledge about what is happening in the world is available to us than ever before. Knowledge brings responsibility with it, either to do something about it, ignore it, or hold it in our minds and hearts, wait, and pray to be shown the right response. Public institutions suffer under the burden of having more knowledge than they can possibly act on in an effective way, yet feeling obligated by their parental role to do something at all costs. If they don't, somebody will accuse them of negligence.

Individuals need to be allowed not to do something just because it can be done. Institutions need to be allowed not to act on all the knowledge they have.

Ina May Gaskin, in her book *Spiritual Midwifery*, quotes the Ninth Amendment of the US Constitution: "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." She continues, "The midwives represented in this book feel that the rights of women, the newborn, and the family during the passage of childbirth are among those unenumerated rights which are to be retained by the people" (p. 11). The Farm in Tennessee is a commune that its members freely choose to join, and it is,



among other things, a support system for personal and family autonomy.

To take back the power of the home and private life, it helps to find and create support systems for doing so, on a local, personal level, to educate ourselves about different ways of living, and to know that individual choices and actions do make a difference in the world. They can be as simple as planting a vegetable garden, baking bread, hanging laundry (if you're allowed!), and sharing a newspaper or lawnmower with a neighbor. This may sound laughably inadequate, a way of trivializing the problem, until we remember the cause-and-effect relationship between seeds and trees.

And what about gender roles? People point to certain passages in *Conjugal Love* to determine what jobs women should and should not do, but not men. Objections to men being ballet dancers are not doctrinal, but homophobic. Ballet dancing in the public arena used to be a men's-only activity; this was before the advent of dancing on pointe. Secretaries and teachers used to be mostly men. In Shakespeare's day women were not allowed to act on the stage, the result being that men played women's parts. You might say that the feminine principle was represented indirectly through men, as people say now about the all-male priesthood. For a long time, women traditionally attended childbirth; when men started doing it, the results were decidedly mixed, and they still are.

An external or institutional mandate that women, especially mothers, should spend most of their time in their homes, or at least outside "the workplace," would limit them now far more than it would have in pre-industrial times. But if women and men feel a calling to reinvent the home and restore it to its rightful place in society, and follow that calling freely as their highest vision dictates, we all might find we have more choices: not the meaningless choices between near-identical products that flood us in the

supermarkets, but meaningful choices that clarify our purposes in life.

### **A Third Alternative: the Communal Model**

What is community? It is the sense of belonging and connection with others that makes us realize that they are our family and with them we are at home.

What do we know about communal living in the past? Fifty years ago communism was a dirty word in the US. One problem with Soviet communism was that it was institutional communism, and mandatory. No one in the Soviet Union could opt out. Many of the Utopian communities of 19<sup>th</sup> century America isolated themselves from society, geographically and ideologically. The Transcendentalists, for example, were so idealistic that they opposed in principle the practice of working for hire, and the Shakers believed in a celibate life, which doesn't do much to make a community self-sustaining. On the other hand, the Israeli kibbutzim established in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century have enjoyed fairly long-term success, yet they consciously distance themselves from traditional Jewish beliefs and practices, and separate parents and children from an early age. (See Bruno Bettelheim's *The Children of the Dream*.) But many people, even those who have lived happily in cooperative communities for extended times, decide they don't want a steady diet of communal life, or at least the traditional trappings of communal life. Can we introduce communal elements into everyday life? Can we recover a sense of tribe or village with our neighbors?

The model of community life that has nourished me most through the years is Laurel, the General Church summer camp at Laurel Hill State Park in western Pennsylvania. Even though each Laurel week leaves me exhausted, disheveled, and with an emotional letdown worse than after

Christmas, I keep going back for more. Why? I call it spiritual community, but what does that mean?

At Laurel, families sleep in separate cabins, but we all eat together, worship together, and learn together, and we work and share with each other in small groups. Every group of adults spends a day helping to prepare meals and clean up after them, and another day teaching the children during the morning program. Teens and preteens share babysitting and children's group leadership. Mothers of babies and toddlers are exempt from camp chores. Many staff jobs are filled on a volunteer basis. Helping each other reminds us of our common humanity.

The heart of the camp for many is the daily sharing groups, and the "lungs" are the adult morning programs. At Laurel, we find closeness to nature, to the Lord, to each other. Many everyday concerns disappear. The burdens of competition, isolation, and our feelings of unworthiness are lifted off. We go back to our everyday lives refreshed and strengthened, once we make the adjustment to mundane reality again.

An example from the past of communal life that fit into mainstream society is the Brandywine School, founded by writer, illustrator, and illustration teacher Howard Pyle at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pyle was undoubtedly a great teacher, perhaps the most distinguished teacher of illustration

who ever lived, but his greatness as a teacher did not rest solely on his ability to conduct formal classes in illustration, or even on his ability to inspire his students with his enthusiasm and to give penetrating criticism of their work. More than this, he created an environment where they could grow and develop as artists. Pyle succeeded in realizing his vision of an artistic learning community, where students of exceptional promise studied and worked together, watched and helped him with his own professional projects, and relaxed and had fun together too. Pyle charged no tuition for teaching his hand-picked students. They paid only for board, lodging, fuel, art supplies and other necessities; they took on various chores in return for the instruction they received. The summer sessions in Chadds Ford were especially memorable in the student's minds for their beauty, inspiration, and camaraderie. This community was highly exclusive; no one could get in just for the asking. But the lucky few who did had a lot of freedom, as well as responsibility.

When homes and institutions can work together to foster a sense of community among individuals, they are manifesting a healthy balance. Institutions with great power, influence, and resources could focus some of those riches on promoting community among the people they serve.

(This essay was written as a chapter for the upcoming Caritas book *Healing Words*)

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Before regeneration one leads a life in keeping with the Commandments of faith,  
But after regeneration, in keeping with the Commandments of charity. AC 8013

## The Tower of Babel: The Beginning of Doctrinal Divisions

by Karin Alfelt Childs

*A little while ago, I found myself wondering, "Why has religion and doctrine been such a divisive thing in so much of history, and why does it continue to be so today? How did human-kind come to this? How can we have different beliefs, yet not let those beliefs divide us?" To get some perspective, I chose to read in Arcana Coelestia about the inner meaning of the Tower of Babel story. There I got a sense of how it all began, and what perpetuates it. Below is the literal story from Genesis 11, and then my own version of the historical inner story.*

### Genesis 11: 1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a valley in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

But Yehowah came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And Yehowah said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So Yehowah scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there Yehowah confused the language of all the earth; and from there Yehowah scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

### **Commentary on the inner historical story, based on readings from *Arcana Coelestia*:**

In the beginning, all people on the earth had one common religion. Even though there were many, many different kinds of rituals and worship services and ways of life and points of view, the people were all of one religion. This is because they all agreed the most important things were:

1. To love and respect each other, and live for the common good.
2. To love and respect the Heavens and the Earth, because they are the Lord's.
3. To love and respect God.

Because they agreed that life was all about loving God, and loving every neighbor as one's

self, their different points of view and ways of life did not cause any strife or disagreements.

But when people began to journey away from kindness and love, their worship became lower, like a valley, and more and more unclean. But that is how people began to live. They began to pay more attention to what they were doing, instead of why they were doing it. They began to forget that love and kindness are the most important things.

And people began to fashion for themselves their own ideas, that were not God's ideas. These ideas were heated with the fire of selfishness. So they used their own ideas to build new kinds of religion, but

now there was much unkindness mixed in. People wanted to convince others that their ideas were the best ideas, the only right ideas, and everyone should follow them. So instead of worshipping God, they began to worship their own ideas of religion.

And so, many different groups of people wanted their own religions to be the best religion, and the most important religion. They said to one another, "Let's build up our ideas and our religion so high and mighty that we will have control of the Earth, and of Heaven! We will convince all others to worship the way we tell them to. Then we will make a name for ourselves! We must have the reputation of being the most powerful and the most true! Otherwise, we will not be acknowledged, and remembered!

But YHWH was not pleased with what the people were doing. Religion of the heart used to hold people together. Now religion was driving people apart. YHWH said, "The people were all one, but now they are becoming different. Now they will get all that they are striving for, because what they are striving for is conflict and competition and dominion."

"I will come near to them, and show that their new religions do not have real truth in

them anymore. They will all choose to be different now, and they will not be able to speak and understand each other any more."

And the religions of the people were not acknowledged by YHWH. Religion was not in their hearts anymore, so they had closed their hearts to each other, and to God. God named this religion "Babel", which means a religion that worships people's selfish ideas. True religion of the heart was scattered, and was lost. People became different from each other, and did not try to understand each other, and their ideas divided them.

*It was striking for me to read in Arcana that people were not called 'different' before this time, even though they observed and practiced quite a wide variety of worship rituals and ways of applying doctrine to life. They only became 'different' when they decided the "my way of believing is the right way, and all should honor that!" What made them the same before was their common agreement that the most important things were to love God and the common good, and to live by that. Now I receive even more meaning from the quote from Arcana Coelestia #2385:*

"...[W]hen truth itself is received as a principle, and this is confirmed, as for example that love to the Lord and kindness to the neighbor are that on which hangs all the law, and of which all the prophets speak...then one church would arise out of many, no matter how greatly the doctrinal and ritual matters that flowed from or led to it might differ. Such was the Ancient Church, which extended through many kingdoms [in the middle east].... If it were so now, all would be governed by the Lord as one human being, for they would be as the members and organs of one body, which although not of similar form, nor of similar function, yet all have relation to one heart, on which depend all and each in their several forms....

Then would each person say, in whatever doctrine and in whatever outward worship he or she might be, "This is my brother, or my sister. I see that this person worships God, and is a good person."

*To me, this says that not only is it O.K. for us to understand and apply and worship in a variety of ways; it is important for us to*

*do so, to make up a healthy body of humankind. A body wouldn't be much good, made up all of noses or kneecaps or lungs!*

*If I can let go of having to be "right", and know that I can only strive to understand, apply and worship in a way that's right for me, then I will contribute to the beautiful hope that is presented in the above quote. And the variety exists within each organized religion, as well as between different organized religions. Right now, I don't see how it can work to have certain policies of*

*how people should understand doctrine and apply it and worship from it. The only way, I believe, is to freely allow the variety to flow and grow.*

*It seems that this may be the path to the Holy City, with its twelve gates open wide to accept a variety of ways of seeing the Lord, understanding truth, loving the Lord, and doing good to each other.*

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*There's a field beyond right and wrong;  
I'll meet you there.*

⌘⌘

*Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are  
hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.*

*Rumi*

## **AMALEK**

*by Helen Kennedy*

When the Writings speak of the Nephilim and Rephaim (AC 1673, SD 4449) or the last generations that caused the fall of the Most Ancient Church, they always speak of their persuasiveness in a way that caused a suffocation of other people's thinking. And the fall of their spirit into the darkness of hell is symbolized by a flood that drowns all that is living. Drowning is taking away of the breath.

One of the tools taught in modern psychology (among other places) is to stop and remember to breathe. This is true when the person is having any kind of feeling that is strong or overwhelming. Overpowering, persuasive feeling which doesn't allow any thinking to accompany it is the cause of many emotional troubles, and is also the source of addictions of all kinds. Many people with addictions have joined 12-step programs; the value of them is in getting the person to be able to stop and think: "For the next minute

I will not have that drink, for the next hour, for the next day". This is called discipline, or teaching the mind to control the feelings and thereby limit wrong behavior.

On a more inward level, Swedenborg explains the difference between the evil spirits and evil genii, evil spirits being those who are ruled by external evil, while those who flow in with interior evil are called genii (AC 8593). In the Old Testament, the latter are represented by Amalek, and his torment extended over the centuries to Abraham, to Moses, to David. Of those represented by Amalek, the Writings say they "act through corrupt affections...doing so in a way almost inconceivable (AC 8593). They are so bad that the Lord told Saul the kingship of Israel was going to be taken away from him and given to David. The reason? Because he did not strike down Amalek and all that he has. The Lord said, "Do not spare him, but kill man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Sam 15:2,3). This is harsh.

But, "Saul and the troops with him spared Agag, the best of the sheep and the oxen, the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. But everything that was vile and was refuse,

that they destroyed utterly" (1Sam 15:9). What was it in Saul and his men that they did not want to kill off the things appearing good? What is it in us that does not want to kill off all our addictive behavior, but wants to hold on to what seems good and falsely comforting? What is so attractive and worldly satisfying but will utterly ruin our lives and then kill us?

It is almost inconceivable how interior evils and addictions twist our thinking and make what is bad for us seem desirable and attractive. It is a wickedness that is truly wicked, the work of the lowest hell. Their method? "Those hellish genii never attack a person openly, or when he can offer strong resistance, but when it is seen that the person is slipping and may therefore give in. At this point they are suddenly at hand, and give him a shove so that he falls completely" (AC 8593:2).

We are at a loss to know who these kinds of people are. "After death people become genii like these if they have had doing harm to their neighbor constantly in mind, allowing such ideas to delight their thinking, and have also inflicted harm, but secretly through others, taking the utmost care to prevent anyone from knowing that they had initiated it. In other respects they were to outward appearances unassuming, polite and seemingly friendly; they were also seemingly Christian in speech, and in life, too" (AC 8622:4). Similar things are said about the sirens, who are interior sorceresses, the worst abusers of affections (AC 1983). They allure the good by merely pretending what is upright and innocent (SD 3700). They "were spoken of or described in the world as most estimable, as to all kinds of external decorum and (polished) manners, and what are termed intellectual endowments" (SD 4448). They appear so well mannered that only our feelings can identify the presence of this evil. Our intuition is telling us that something isn't right.

All of their evil revolves around the world of intention, and not how things appear on the surface. When beset by these evils we have to be something more than the simple good spirits who correspond to the skin. "They pay no attention at all to what is in a person inwardly, only to what is visible outwardly; and if this is seen by them to be holy they think that what is inward is so too" (AC 8588). In Biblical terms we have to be something more than Saul, who represents the literal sense that can never overcome Amalek. And in the last half of the book of 1 Samuel, he doesn't. There he is so busy fighting David — his perceived rival who represents the interior sense which can actually help him. Saul, or the literal, doesn't even have time for Amalek, or "that which resides with a person, hidden inwardly. It is concealed in his will and consequently in his thinking, not a trace of it being apparent outwardly, in his actions, speech or face. People ruled by this kind of evil strive by every method and skill to hide it away, to conceal it under an outward show of being honorable and righteous, and an outward show of love of the neighbor. Nevertheless their only thought is how to inflict harm" (AC 8593).

As mentioned, they do not even attack until someone is already down. During the time of Moses, which was centuries before Saul, the Amalekites "fought with Israel in Rephidim", a place where "there was no water for the people to drink" (Ex 17). During this time the Israelites "were enduring bitter temptation" (AC 8594). During this time they were "wrangling" or "complaining on account of the...temptation, so severe they were close to giving in" (AC 8589).

But the Lord promises to "utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex 17:14). He is promising to take away the emotional memory or attraction of this interior, addictive behavior. The evil genii

causing so much suffering “work not on the truths of faith [in the conscience] but on the actual affections” (AC 8625). Consequently it is not in our thoughts but in our feelings.

An example of this occurs in the story of David: just before Saul's death David had been living with the Philistines in the town of Ziklag because Saul was trying to kill him. David had been pretending to be on the side of the Philistines in fighting the Israelites but actually he was making forays against the Amalekites who were in the south. The time came when the Philistines were amassing to fight Saul and the Israelites. David, who was joining with them, (we don't know whether he actually would have fought with them) was accosted by Philistine advisors as not being loyal to their king. The king, Achish, defended David, but eventually was persuaded by his military advisors to fear duplicity on the part of David and forced David and his men to leave. They did, and spent the next three days travelling through the desert to return to Ziklag. Once there, they discovered that the Amalekites exploited the absence of the fighting men, attacked Ziklag, burned it to the ground and took the wives and children of David and his men captive as slaves. “David, and the troops who were with him, raised their voices and wept until there was no strength left in them to weep” (1 Sam 30:4). This weeping is bitter for us, too — and represents the weeping of our souls when our addictive behavior has come to control us, ruining all the relationships in our lives that we hold dear. But the people in AA and other 12-step groups slowly learn that the Lord keeps His promise to “blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

Moses, after fighting in Rephidim with Amalek and overcoming, is so grateful, he

builds an altar to Jehovah. Many an ex-addict, too, has fallen down on his or her knees before the Lord. We, too, tearfully thank Him for the removal of Amalek, or this thing we can't see but only feel that draws us to our destruction.

In the story of the Odessey, Ulysses and his men have to sail past the island of the sirens while these women are singing to them. To get past without succumbing, Ulysses stuffed the ears of his men with wax so they couldn't hear the sirens wailing and calling to them with their hypnotic singing. Then Ulysses had his men then tie him to the mast of the ship while he struggled to resist their attraction. In our lives the Lord, unseen by us, somehow ties us to the mast of the ship of His Divine Providence, and in a mysterious manner has us sail past the terrible emotions tormenting us. Like Ulysses, it is painful because we hear them calling but we must make no move in their direction. Then our minds open and we learn how really dependent on God we are. Humility then steps in, and subservience to a powerful God, one who is loving to a point that it drives Him to take care of us even though we are wretched sinners. Finally we find what has been eluding us all those years, that the life which comes from the Lord is what is attractive. We no longer find the ox and the ass, the sheep and the cattle of Abimelech pleasing nor want to preserve them. What we had to kill off in us, the Lord is replacing, giving us anew — new affections, new thoughts, new ways of viewing the world and ourselves, new confidence, new joyfulness. And we start to understand what is meant by the forming of a new heaven and it descending to the earth that is ourselves. We learn that the New Church is not with Saul in its externals and organization but in a living, breathing, inner reality that is the Lord's love present with us right at this moment. ¶¶

*There is no conversion without the recognition of sin and no recognition of sin without the experience of sin. The illustrious community of saints has always been recruited from the ranks of sinners and not from the class of Pharisees.*  
*Swedenborg Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason by Ernst Benz p. 184*

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TO:

*Change comes in excruciatingly slow increments. (West Wing.)*

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