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Self-Examination and Repentance by Carolyn Kennion

HOUSEWORK

Do you love it when you wake to a fine morning with the sun streaming in through the windows? I know that I do. Everything looks so much brighter.

Well, almost everything. Bright sunlight does tend to show up where I haven't cleaned – the layer of dust on the piano, the windows that could do with a wash, the dirt and leaves that have been trampled into the hallway. While I'm attending to these I notice a pile of junk mail that needs to be sorted for recycling and a worn out pair of shoes I have been meaning to put in the bin. On such a beautiful, sunny day it seems a pity to be doing chores inside, so I head out to the garden. Maybe that will be more relaxing. My spirits rise as I hear the birds singing and notice flowers coming into bloom. But, what's that? Weeds seem to have sprung up overnight. While I am pulling them up I find snails eating their way through a beautiful hosta. Oh no! There are at

least two bright red beetles rapidly destroying my lilies. Sorry, but they will have to go!

I find that much of the day could easily be filled with trying to bring some sort of order to the house and garden – cleaning away dirt, sorting out what is useful from what is not, getting rid of weeds that will choke more desirable plants and pests that will destroy them.

A similar but much more serious situation exists out in the wider world - in politics, in all types of businesses and organisations where we sometimes hear the phrase, 'They need to clean-up their act.' It seems that every news bulletin contains accounts of shady dealings, dishonest practices, abuse, immoral behaviour and so on. History shows that such things have always occurred but changing attitudes and technological advances mean that 'a light is being shone' on what is really going on, making it easier to identify and 'weed out' wrong-doers. I don't think that any organisation involving people, even our church organisation, is immune from this. People are fallible; they make mistakes, succumb to temptation, allow themselves to be led astray by others etc.

What should be our response to such things? I believe that we each need to start with ourselves. If we turn to the Word and the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg for guidance we learn that our main aim in life should be to follow the Lord's Commandments and teaching in order to develop and grow spiritually. To do this we need to continually examine ourselves, identify where we are going wrong, and, with the Lord's help, do better.

In the Word there are many passages and sayings of the Lord which emphasise that repentance is essential for a person's regeneration and salvation, such as in Luke 13:5 'Unless you have repented, you will perish.' and Revelation 2: 13,16 'I know your deeds. Repent.' From these and the many other passages mentioning repentance it is clear that repentance is definitely required. But what constitutes true repentance? We are very fortunate that we are shown in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg what we need to do to really repent.

True Christian Religion 525 states that 'the recognition of sin is useless, unless a person examines what he does in his life, and observes whether he did such a thing in secret or openly.'

'Real repentance is examining oneself, recognising and acknowledging one's sins, praying to the Lord and beginning a new life.' TCR 530

'True repentance means not only examining what one does in one's life, but also what one intends in one's will to do.' TCR 532

‘The reason why what the will intends has to be examined is that the will is the seat of love. There are two loves that have become deeply rooted in the human race – the love of controlling others, and the love of possessing others’ goods. All the many other loves are subordinate to these.’ TCR 533

I think that most of us recognise that we find it all too easy to think we know, or even to tell other people, what they should or shouldn’t be doing and expect them to comply. But we find it much more difficult to recognise in ourselves that what we are thinking or intending to do is wrong and to stop ourselves from doing it. Swedenborg explains that this is because ‘saying no to oneself involves the will, but saying it to someone else comes from a level of thought.’ TCR 535

In TCR 533 Swedenborg says, ‘So the will is the house in which a person lives, and the understanding is the fore-court through which he goes in and out. That is why it was stated that the intentions of the will must be examined.’

I have always thought that cleaning and tidying our house is rather a waste of time and, while I enjoy gardening, the rapid re-appearance of weeds and the destruction caused by small creatures can be disheartening. Perhaps, these everyday tasks will seem much more worthwhile if they remind me of the essential work I need to be doing in my spiritual house and garden – examining my thoughts, intentions and actions in order to ‘clean out’ anything impure, getting rid of attitudes, ways of thinking and behaving that are no longer relevant or helpful, or may be destructive to myself or others, letting in the light of the Lord’s truth to show me how to live in an honest way, with kindness and compassion towards other people.

So, I guess that I had better stop writing and get on with some cleaning or weeding!

‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me’. Psalm 51:10

POST-SCRIPT

‘Looking in the mirror’ and examining our own attitudes, thoughts and behaviour is an important first-step and may be all that we need to do in some situations. However, when we are aware of malpractice, dishonesty, abuse etc I think that we need to do more. Maybe you have felt the need to make others aware of behaviour that you considered wrong, or you have challenged the perpetrators. Have you ever been ‘a whistle-blower’? If you feel able to share any relevant experiences and what, if anything, helped to bring about a positive outcome I would welcome your input.