



LOVING ONE'S NEIGHBOUR

By Wayne Kasmar

The Western world changed remarkably in the 1960's. Great social and cultural shifts transformed almost every aspect of life. One of the most important was the loss of the sense of community. The technological developments of the time altered fundamentally how people related to each other. Gadgets and inventions that came into use in the 20th Century meant that people no longer needed others so much to help them do the things they had to do. And this was not least in the area of entertainment. Before the 1960's, people had to entertain themselves and each other, but suddenly television could do all that and people no longer had to venture outside their front doors to find something worthwhile to do with their spare time. Naturally, when people previously did go



out of doors, they met up and developed a social life together. Nowadays, a common experience for people is that they don't even know their neighbours at all, and the extent of modern day social isolation is highlighted when news reports tell of bodies being found in homes many months or even years after the person has died there.

What implications does this have for our lives on the deeper level? Swedenborg points to the Word as ultimately the source of all truth. In the bible, Jesus Christ was asked what was the greatest commandment of the many hundreds that can still be read today in the Old Testament. After giving his answer, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength," he quickly added a second greatest: "Love the neighbour as yourself." Whilst the first commandment speaks of God who is completely unselfish and un-self-centred, the second makes reference to human self-interest. Jesus does not exhort us to love our neighbour *more* than ourselves, rather we are to love our neighbour only as

much as we love ourselves. We aren't required to be quite so self-forgetting as Christianity has tended to preach.

Interestingly, Swedenborg says that the angels in heaven love others more than they love themselves, but here in this life we are generally able to love others only as much as we love ourselves (excluding family). The precise nature of spirituality, as Swedenborg explains it, suggests that it would actually be unrealistic of us to try to love others more than we love ourselves. For the vast majority of people, and perhaps really all of us, it is simply not attainable. The grossness of this world means our experience is too tied up in the natural level of life to focus perpetually on heavenly things. But Swedenborg makes it clear that in this life, we are not meant to be doing this, anyway. In this life here on earth we are apprentice angels, not master angels, and realistically only a certain amount can be expected of us.

Still, because we current-day people are not used to dealing with neighbours, we are pretty ignorant when we turn our attention to what is involved in loving one's neighbour. Because we have little interaction with those beyond our outer walls with whom we live in close proximity, we start to think of the neighbour as generally being any other person, besides members of our family. That can leave us with a mental image of our neighbour as this kind of theoretical idealised person, free of all sorts of associations with real life. The guy who lives next door can be quite disagreeable, but if we never interact with him, then it is a lot easier to foster a sense of neighbourliness towards him, however unrealistic.

That being the case, it is easier for us modern day people to harbour the thought that it is possible for us to love our neighbour more than ourselves. If, in this way, our relationship with our neighbour is more fantasy than reality, then our ideas of what is possible within it may be way off the mark, and if we are not careful, we may even start to indulge in the idea that we are more advanced spiritually than we really are. We may believe we are more capable in how we can love than what Jesus is indicating is