

Book Noted

One Heart: Finding True Happiness in Marriage by Erik J. Buss, General Church of the New Jerusalem, 2006, 432 pages, soft cover

A number of new books on marriage have been published recently in the church. The latest, entitled *One Heart*, is a substantial volume by Erik Buss, currently pastor of the Westville New Church in Durban, South Africa. What follows is not a review but simply a description of the book to acquaint readers with this new publication, now available. We hope a reviewer will come forward in the future to provide a deeper analysis of this significant work.

In his acknowledgments, Mr. Buss credits the seed of the book to a New Church couple who asked for a book that brought together the clear teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine about marriage along with commentary, concrete applications, and stories from actual experience illustrating the teachings. No small task! “My thanks to them for the seed, without which this book would never have grown.” And grow it did. In total, there are 432 pages in compact but very readable type.

To collect the teachings of the Writings about marriage is, in itself, a daunting effort, for these teachings are not contained only in the work *Married Love*, also called *Conjugal Love*. No less than twenty works of the Writings from which passages have been garnered are listed in the key to abbreviations. We would estimate that as much as half the book consists of direct quotations from the Heavenly Doctrine organized according to specific topics.

Mr. Buss elaborates in his preface: “The goal of this book is to present the Lord’s teaching on a subject, then to offer pathways toward applying that teaching. Each chapter begins with passages the Lord offers on a subject with only minor comments

from me.” He continues: “Toward the end of each chapter, I offer my thoughts about what the passages mean, along with some questions to ponder, activities for you to do, and in some cases stories that illustrate the theme of the chapter” (i). In other words, extensive quotes about various topics on marriage begin each chapter. Key principles are drawn out from these. The author’s commentary and questions follow, but leave the reader the option of drawing his or her own conclusions from the selected quotations on the subject.

After an introduction of eleven pages on “The Lord’s Wish for Us,” the book is organized into three main parts: 1. “Preparation for Marriage,” 2. “Married Life,” and 3. “Challenges in Marriage”. These parts are followed by a chapter expounding the lessons of the marriage in Cana of Galilee found in John, chapter two. This is called “The Wedding Story.” Finally, an appendix is added which includes five essays about marriage by four priests and one lay woman: “Love is Not a Feeling,” “Internal Invulnerability,” “Woman as Heart,” “Some Thoughts on Masculinity,” “Common Misconceptions about Marriage in the New Church.”

Returning now to the three main parts with their numerous chapters, Mr. Buss explains, “I have tried to make each chapter self-contained, so that the book can be used as a topical reference work” (Preface i). It is not necessary to read consecutively through the book to gain the benefits of it. The reader can go to a specific chapter or topic of interest and find there the key passages from the Word that apply to it.

The first part on “Preparation for Marriage” may particularly appeal to young people and those looking toward marriage, but has teachings of interest to all. Fifteen chapters present a variety of topics from “The Nature of Men and Women” to “Contemporary Issues.” Along the way are sections on “What to Look for in a Partner,” “Why Is Virginity So Important?” “Physical Intimacy Before Marriage,” and of course, “Betrothals” and

“Weddings.”

The second part on “Married Life” again presents a wide variety of topics about which teachings from the Heavenly Doctrine have been drawn together. Among the eighteen chapters are “The Special Gifts of Men and of Women,” “Roles of Husband and Wife,” “Acknowledging the Power of Heredity and Upbringing,” “Lovemaking,” “Having Children: Strengthening Your Marriage.”

Finally, the third part of fifteen chapters on “Challenges in Marriage” brings together passages that bear on some of the difficulties couples may face during their marriages. Subjects such as “Doubts: ‘I Married the Wrong Person,’” “The Power of Commitment,” “Who is in Charge?” and “Separation: A Tool for Saving Marriages” are a sampling.

Mr. Buss is to be commended for making the many teachings of the New Church about different aspects of marriage so readily accessible. The hard sayings are presented along with the beautiful and encouraging ones. Readers may not always agree with Mr. Buss’s comments or conclusions about the topics under consideration, but he has not shied away from presenting his thoughts on dozens of difficult questions relating to marriage. One value of the book is to engage the reader in serious consideration of the important and crucial questions that arise from the application of the Lord’s teachings to our marriages.

We conclude with the opening sentences of the Preface: “In New Church teachings, the Lord has promised that true married love will be raised up again. As they work on their marriages, people on earth will increasingly experience a level of spiritual connectedness and natural delight that has been missing from this earth since ancient times.”

Kurt Horigan Asplundh