

WOMEN IN THE KORESHAN UNITY

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DURING THE 19TH CENTURY WHEN THE SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES WERE UNDERGOING MASSIVE REFORM AND CHANGE, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN WERE SEARCHING FOR THE IDEAL WAY OF LIFE. DURING THIS TIME THOUSANDS OF RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL UTOPIAN COMMUNITIES APPEARED--SOME WERE SHORT LIVED AND SOME LASTED FOR OVER A CENTURY. NEARLY ALL SHARED SEVERAL ELEMENTS OF THEIR SOCIAL STRUCTURE; NEARLY ALL WERE INITIATED BY A STRONG INDIVIDUAL WITH DECISIVE LEADERSHIP ABILITIES; NEARLY ALL GRANTED EQUALITY TO THE SEXES; NEARLY ALL WERE BASED ON RELIGIOUS OR MORAL PRINCIPALS, AND ALL SOUGHT A PEACEFUL, EQUAL, ECONOMICALLY STABLE, EDUCATIONAL AND MORAL LIFE FOR THE MEMBERS.

THE KORESHAN UNITY WAS ONE SUCH ORGANIZATION THAT OFFERED MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO ITS MEMBERS. WOMEN WERE ESPECIALLY ATTRACTED TO IT BECAUSE THEY WERE OFFERED EQUALITY IN ALL FACETS OF THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL, EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND ECONOMIC LEVELS. THE WOMEN WHO JOINED THE KORESHAN UNITY WERE EDUCATED, LITERATE, VERBAL, AND INTERESTED IN THE WORLD AROUND THEM.

MANY DOORS WERE CLOSED TO SUCH ACTIVE WOMEN OUTSIDE THE SANCTITY OF THE UTOPIAN MOVEMENT. PROFESSIONS WERE LIMITED, EDUCATION WAS LIMITED, AND THE MALE VIEW OF THE FEMALE SEX WAS USUALLY THAT OF A PERPETUAL MINOR. LAWS WERE NOT IN THE FAVOR OF THE FEMALE. THEY WERE BOUND TO THEIR HUSBAND, WHO HELD LEGAL RIGHTS TO THEIR PROPERTY AND CHILDREN. IF

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UNMARRIED, WAGES WERE SO LOW IN THE EMPLOYMENT AREAS OPEN TO THEM, THEY COULD SCARCELY SUPPORT THEMSELVES--AS JACOB RIIS RECORDS IN HIS "HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES: STUDIES AMONG THE TENEMENTS OF NEW YORK", PUBLISHED IN 1890.

IN THE KORESHAN UNITY, THERE WAS SOMETHING FOR EVERY WOMAN. THE MYSTICAL AND RELIGIOUS FOUND A SPIRITUAL HAVEN THAT OFFERED MEMBERSHIP IN AN ECCLEASTIC ORDER THAT WOULD PROVIDE THEM A PLACE IN HEAVEN AT THE SIDE OF THEIR PROFIT. THE RELIGION WAS BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST AND HIS MESSIANIC MESSENGER, DR. TEED, WHO EMBODIED GOD AND WHO WAS POSSESSED WITH A ORATORICAL GIFT THAT MADE HIS PROPHECIES AND PREDICTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC THEORIES REAL AND BELIEVABLE. HIS WAS A WORLD OF ORDER AND TRUTH, OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY, WHERE ALL WORKED FOR THE GOOD OF EVERYONE AND NO ONE FELT WANT. IT WAS A WORLD WITHOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, DRUGS OR PROFANITY. IT WAS A FINITE WORLD, UNDERSTOOD AND DEFINED. IT WAS A RELIGIOUS ORDER LED BY A MAN WHO SPOKE WITH THE TONGUE OF ANGLES.

TO THOSE WHO WERE LITERARY, THE UNITY OFFERED A PUBLISHING HOUSE WITH OPPORTUNITIES IN ALL PHASES OF THE PRINTING WORLD--FROM TYPESETTER TO EDITOR TO WRITER. THE ARTICLES BY BERTHALDINE BOOMER IN THE "FLAMING SWORD" ARE VARIED BUT USUALLY PERTAIN TO WOMEN'S ISSUES, SUCH AS SUFFRAGE AND WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS--OR LACK OF. LUCY PAGE BORDEN WAS A WRITER OF ARTICLES OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTEREST, WOMEN'S ISSUES AND SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS. OTHER WOMEN WROTE POETRY, CHILDREN'S STORIES, ESSAYS AND KORESHAN THEORY AND DOCTRINE. THE PAGES OF THE "FLAMING SWORD" WERE A

FORUM THE KORESHAN WOMEN USED TO SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT WOMEN'S LIBERATION.

AT A TIME WHEN WOMEN WERE GENERALLY BARRED FROM THE PULPIT, THE KORESHAN UNITY ALLOWED WOMEN TO PREACH THE KORESHAN DOCTRINE. ONE SUCH LADY WAS ELEANOR CASSEL. SHE WAS A WELL-KNOWN AND RESPECTED ORATOR WHO DREW CROWDS THAT PACKED THE HALLS WHERE SHE SPOKE IN CITIES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES. MRS. ANNIE G. ORDWAY, ALSO KNOWN AS VICTORIA GRATIA WAS ANOTHER ARDENT SPOKESWOMEN FOR THE KORESHAN UNITY, WHO LECTURED AROUND THE COUNTRY.

THE CELEBRATE STATUS OF THE HIGHEST ORDER OF THE KORESHAN UNITY APPEALED TO MANY WOMEN. THE IDEA OF CELIBACY WAS BASED ON RELIGIOUS AS WELL AS SOCIAL REASONS. DR. TEED TAUGHT, AND I QUOTE FROM A PAMPHLET ENTITLED "CELIBACY" WHICH WAS PRINTED BY THE WOMAN'S MISSION, AND COMPILED FROM THE WRITINGS OF KORESH. "WE TEACH THE DOCTRINE OF SEXUAL PURITY, AND THOSE WHO ACCEPT THE DOCTRINE BELIEVE THAT IT IS ONLY BY OVERCOMING THE FLESH (WHICH MEANS ALL THE ANIMAL PROPENSITIES) THAT MAN RAISES INTO "NEWNESS OF LIFE;" FOR ONLY BY OVERCOMING CAN IMMORTAL LIFE BE OBTAINED. IT IS THROUGH MAN'S SUPREMACY OVER HIS ANIMAL NATURE THAT HE COMES INTO HIS DIVINE RELATIONSHIP AND AUTHORITY. REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY IS ONE OF THE TEN LAWS OR PRINCIPLES OF THE COVENANT. IF THIS PERTAINS TO SOME PRINCIPLE IN MAN, SYMBOLIZED BY REST ON THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE WEEK, THERE SHOULD BE SOME PROCESS OF ANALYSIS BY WHICH THE REAL SABBATH MAY BE DETERMINED. IT SIGNIFIES REST OR CESSATION FROM USE. IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE OF

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KORESHANITY THAT THIS REST FROM USE PERTAINS TO THE HUSBANDING OF MAN'S ULTIMATE STRENGTH BY RESTRAINT PLACED UPON THE PASSIONS, OR AT LEAST BY THE SUSPENSION, IN THE MIND, OF THE FORCES OF SEXUAL DESIRE, THROUGH THE SUBSTITUTION OF AN ASPIRATION TOWARD GOD. IF A MAN VIOLATES OR DESECRATES THE SABBATH HE SHALL SURELY DIE. IF A MAN KEEPS HIS SEED HE SHALL SURELY LIVE." DR TEED TAUGHT THAT THOSE WHO KEPT A VIRGINAL LIFE WOULD BE IMMORTAL, AND THE TIME WOULD COME WHEN ALL WOULD BE BORN OF VIRGINS, LIKE JESUS WAS BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

SOCIALLY THE KORESHANS OBJECTED TO THE MARITAL LAWS WHICH THEY FELT WERE DEvised BY MAN TO PROSTITUTE WOMEN. I QUOTE AGAIN FROM WOMAN'S MISSION TRACT NO. 4 ENTITLED "PROCLAMATION" : "TO THE WOMEN OF THIS NINETEENTH CENTURY BE IT ANNOUNCED: THAT YOU ARE DIVINELY AUTHORIZED TO MOUNT UPON THE WALL--THE RAMPARTS OF THE CITADEL OF IMMORTAL LIFE--AND FROM THESE HEIGHTS, AND FROM THY LIPS, AND FROM BETWEEN THY TEETH, PRONOUNCE THE LIFTING OF THE CURSE! IT WAS SAID OF OLD BECAUSE OF THY FALL, 'THY DESIRE SHALL BE TO THY HUSBAND, AND HE SHALL RULE OVER THEE," BUT NOW, BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, THOU ART COMMANDED, O WOMAN, TO LIFT THY HAND TO HIM AND SWEAR, BY HIS MOST AUGUST MAJESTY, AND BY HIS THRONE, THAT THE DESECRATION OF MATERNITY SHALL HENCEFORTH CEASE!

"THE MAN-MADE RIGHT TO OBLIGATE, BY A CEREMONY COPIED FROM THE ANATHEMA OF JEHOVAH, THE SO-CALLED 'MARRIAGE' RITE, IS AN USURPATION OF AUTHORITY, AND BY THE POWER OF THE PURE WOMANHOOD OF THIS AGE, SHALL BE ANNULLED.....FROM THIS TIME

FORWARD THE RIGHT TO HOLD THYSELF AND THY SACRED OFFICES FROM THE PROSTITUTIONS AND POLLUTIONS TO WHICH THOU ART OBLIGATED BY CLERICAL AND JUDICIAL CEREMONIES, ISSUED UNDER THE USURPATION OF THE MASCULINE PREROGATIVE, IS PROCLAIMED..... PROCLAIM EVERYWHERE, IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC, IN THE DRAWING ROOM AND ON THE ROSTRUM, BY TONGUE AND PEN, THE YEAR OF LIBERTY FOR WOMAN! WHERE MASCULINITY YIELDS complacently TO THE INEVITABLE DECREE OF THE DIVINE JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT, CROWN HIM THY KING. IF HE SETS HIMSELF IN AUTHORITY, CONTINUING THE USURPATION OF THY RIGHTS AS BY THE RESTRAINTS OF LEGALLY IMPOSED RITUALS, REFUSING TO YIELD, LET HIM FALL AT THY FEET, A CRINGING VASSAL TO BE JUDGED ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS; FOR NOW IS THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, NOT OF MERCY."

FOR THOSE WHO WISHED TO CONTINUE IN THE MARITAL OBLIGATION, THERE WAS A LEVEL OF MEMBERSHIP WHERE THE FAMILY UNIT WAS MAINTAINED. IT WAS CALLED THE SUPREME MARITAL ORDER, AND THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THIS ORDER, REGARDING THE MARITAL LAW IS THAT "NO MEMBER OF THE ORDER SHALL VIOLATE THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF PROPAGATIVE LAW BY PROSTITUTING THE MARITAL ACT. ANY OTHER PURPOSE THAN THAT OF PROPAGATION IS A PROSTITUTION OF THE ACT, AND A VIOLATION OF THE TRUE NATURAL MARRIAGE. OUR SYSTEM OF MARRIAGE IS MONOGAMIC, AND ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF THE STATE AND NATION." THAT WAS FROM THE "FLAMING SWORD" APRIL, 1895.

TO THOSE WOMEN WHO WERE INTERESTED IN POLITICAL EQUALITY, THE KORESHAN UNITY WAS A MECCA. DR. TEED HIMSELF WAS THE PRIME-COUNSELOR, BUT HE HAD A CO-LEADER CALLED THE PRE-EMINENT, WHO BY KORESHAN LAW HAD TO BE A FEMALE. HE

CHOSE MRS. ANNIE G. ORDWAY FOR THIS POSITION. WILLIAM ALFRED HINDS, IN HIS AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AND CO-OPERATIVE COLONIES, WROTE OF THE KORESHANS, AND QUOTED A SHAKER FRIEND WHO HAD VISITED THE UNITY AT ESTERO. "KORESH MENTIONED TO ME THAT VICTORIA GRATIA, HIS DUAL ASSOCIATE, WAS POINTED OUT TO HIM AT THE TIME OF HIS ILLUMINATION IN 1870 AS DESTINED TO WALK WITH HIM, AND EVENTUALLY BECOME THE MOTHER OF THE 144,000 SONS OF GOD. SHE IS REFINED AND STILL BEAUTIFUL ALTHOUGH OVER SIXTY YEARS OF AGE, PROFICIENT IN MUSIC AND ART, AND THOROUGHLY IMBUED WITH THE IDEA OF HER HIGH CALLING, MOVING AMONG HER ASSOCIATES LIKE AN EMPRESS, AS KORESH EXPLAINED TO ME SHE IS, AND THAT THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS WITH WHICH SHE IS SURROUNDED WERE GRANTED TO HER IN LOVE BY HER PEOPLE.

VICTORIA'S GREATEST WORK IS TO BEGIN WITH THE MARTYRDOM OF KORESH, OF WHICH EVEN KORESH HIMSELF FREELY CONVERSED, THOUGH HE CONFESSED HE WAS WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF THE TIME AND MANNER OF ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT; BUT WHEN ACCOMPLISHED THE CHOSEN WOMAN OF THE AGE WILL BE EXALTED INTO DIVINE MOTHERHOOD AND IMPERIAL PRE-EMINENCE, AS THE DIVINE NATURAL HEAD OF ALL THE ORDERS OF CHURCH AND STATE."

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KORESHAN UNITY IS A FASCINATING DOCUMENT AND WOULD CERTAINLY APPEAL TO MOST WOMEN LOOKING FOR AN IDEAL LIFE. IT IS A COMMUNISTIC SOCIETY BUT BASED UPON TOTAL EQUALITY. IT STATES ON PAGE 4: "AS IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE KORESHAN UNITY TO AVOID AND SHUN THESE EVILS OF CHAOTIC PROSTITUTION, IT IS ORGANIZED UPON THE BASES OF THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE GROUNDED IN THE APPLICATION OF THE PROPORINATE EXERCISE OF EQUITABLE AND JUDICIOUS

RESTRAINT AND LIBERTY. AMONG ITS RESTRAINTS ARE THE ERADICATION OF SEX AND RUM DEBAUCHERY, AND THE TOBACCO AND OPIUM HABITS. PROFANITY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN THE VARIOUS ORDERS OF THE UNITY, NOR ANYTHING PRECLUSIVE OF THE GENERAL TENDENCY TOWARD REFINEMENT, WHICH IS GUARANTEED AND MUST BE INSURED TO EVERY MEMBER OF THE BODY POLITIC."

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KORESHAN UNITY HAD THREE DIVISIONS; THE PRE-EMINENT CONCILLIUM, THE ORDINATE CONCILLIUM AND THE JUDICIAL. THE PRE-EMINENT CONCILLIUM WAS APPOINTED BY THE PRIME COUNSELOR WITH APPROVAL OF THE PRE-EMINENT, AND WAS COMPOSED OF THE STELLAR CHAMBER OF 4 MALES, THE PLANETARY CHAMBER OF 6 FEMALES AND THE SIGNET CHAMBER WITH 6 MALES AND 6 FEMALES. THE ORDINATE CONCILLIUM WAS ELECTED BY THE PATRONS OF EQUATION, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE AT LARGE WHO BELONGED TO THE KORESHAN UNITY. ITS MEMBERSHIP WAS DIVIDED EQUALLY BY SEX AND ITS NUMBERS WERE DETERMINED BY POPULATION. THE JUDICIAL BRANCH HAD FOUR JUDGES, TWO MALE AND TWO FEMALE, AND EIGHT ATTORNEYS, FOUR FEMALE AND FOUR MALE.

THE PLANETARY CHAMBER WAS ALSO THE CABINET OF THE PRE-EMINENT AND THE SIX FEMALE MEMBERS WERE SECRETARIES WITH SPECIFIC DUTIES. THE SECRETARY OF ORGANIC UNITY DIRECTED THE DEPARTMENTS OF GENERAL ROUTINE AND PRESIDED OVER THE DIPLOMATIC SERVICE ESSENTIAL TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE PRESIDED OVER THE COLLECTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF ALL PRODUCTS. THE SECRETARY OF CULTURE PRESIDED OVER ALL RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR EDUCATION AND PERIODICAL PRESS. THE SECRETARY OF ORGANIC CONSTRUCTION

HAD CIVIC AND ARCHITECTURAL DEPARTMENTS. CIVIC WAS IN CHARGE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL GOVERNMENT AND ARCHITECTURAL INCLUDED CONSTRUCTION ON LAND AND WATER. THE SECRETARY OF DISCIPLINARY ORDER INCLUDED MILITARY AND NAUTICAL DISCIPLINE AND THE SECRETARY OF ORGANIC POWER HEADED THE DEPARTMENTS OF GOVERNMENT.

THE WOMEN OF THE KORESHAN UNITY WERE GIVEN POSITIONS OF POWER AND PRESTIGE. THEY WERE MADE TO FEEL THAT THEIR JOB, NO MATTER HOW MENIAL, WAS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE SURVIVAL THE UNITY. TO BE A KORESHAN WOMAN WAS TO DEDICATE YOUR LIFE TO GOD AND HUMANITY. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT ALL THE WOMEN IN THE UNITY WERE COMPLETELY HAPPY. SOME WERE NOT PLEASED AT THE BREAKUP OF THE FAMILY UNIT. BUT CONSIDERING THE ALTERNATIVE FOR THE MAJOLRITY OF 19TH CENTURY WOMEN, IT WAS A WONDERFUL LIFE.

LET ME JUST ADD THAT THE WOMEN OF NOTE THAT LIVED IN ESTERO ARE WORTHY OF FURTHER STUDY AS THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BETTERMENT OF LIFE IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WOULD MAKE A FINE DISSERTATION. WOMEN LIKE DR. TEED'S SISTER, 18 YEARS HIS JUNIOR, EMMA NORTON. SHE WAS KNOWN AND CALLED UPON BY THE POPULATION OF THE AREA FOR HER HERB CURES; HENRIETTA SILVERFRIEND WHO MANAGED THE GUIDING STAR PUBLISHING HOUSE AND WAS THE TREASURER OF THE UNITY; EVELYN BUBBETT WHO WAS THE SECRETARY OF THE UNITY; ROSE GILBERT, THE POSTMISTRESS; AND VIRGINIA ANDREWS, WHO WAS ONE OF THE FIRST FOLLOWERS, AND ALONG WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, VALUABLE MEMBERS OF THE UNITY. THE LIST GOES ON OF THE WOMEN WHO

HELPED PROVIDE THE ENTERTAINMENTS, WHO TAUGHT ART AND MUSIC AND CREATED A CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE IN A ROUGH AND TUMBLE FRONTIER AREA.

THE LIVES OF THESE MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE WAITING TO BE TOLD AND ALL HISTORIANS INTERESTED IN PRESENTING A VERY FASCINATING SEGMENT OF THE HISTORY OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA SHOULD BE ANXIOUSLY AWAITING THE OPENING OF THE KORESHAN UNITY FOUNDATION ARCHIVES. THERE IS SO MUCH TO BE LEARNED ABOUT THIS INTERESTING GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO CREATED A BEAUTIFUL LIFE ON THE BANKS OF THE ESTERO RIVER.