

## **Look to Eternity**

*People who are in a state of truly conjugal love look to eternity in their marriage because eternity is inherent in this love (Conjugal Love 216).*

There seems to be an instinctive feeling that marriage and love will last forever, even when this feeling is contrary to the official teachings of religion. This feeling is often expressed in art—writing, painting, and music. Below are three examples where we might see the idea of eternal love reflected.

### **Poetry:**

This famous poem was written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning for her husband, Robert (who was also a poet). It is one of a series of poems called “Sonnets from the Portuguese” which was published in 1840. The title comes from Robert’s pet name for Elizabeth, “my little Portuguee.”

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of everyday's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.*

Which word in the last line hints at the idea that the happiness of marriage can increase to eternity?

Does it make a difference to know that Elizabeth Barrett Browning had read many books by Emanuel Swedenborg? Are there other ideas in the poem that seem specifically New Church?

How does Elizabeth tie her love for Robert together with her belief in God? Do they go together in her mind?

Collections of love poems are readily available in libraries and bookstores. You might look through one and notice which poems convey the idea that love lasts beyond death. Or write your own poem about a love that will last forever.

### **Painting:**

Even though paintings don’t usually contain words, they strongly effect our feelings and can also suggest ideas. One of these is [Dance Me to the End of Love](#) by Jack Vettriano. You can look it up online.

Do you think this picture gives the idea of eternal love? Why or why not?

Do you think this picture is happy or sad?

Are there things you would depict differently?

You might look through some art collections online or in library books. Can you find one or more pictures that make you think about everlasting marriage? What kind of picture would you draw to show the idea that “*Truly conjugial love lasts to eternity*” (Conjugial Love 200)?

### **Letters:**

Collections of love letters, printed into books, became very popular a few years ago. These letters are often amazing personal testimonies to the lasting strength of love. The author of this letter was a Major in the Union army in the American Civil War. He wrote this letter to his wife, Sarah, in 1861, shortly before he died in the First battle of Bull Run. You can look up the whole letter up on the Internet by searching for “Sullivan Ballou”.

*Sarah my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break....*

*The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them for so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our sons grown up to honorable manhood, around us.*

*I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me...that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name.... Sarah do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again....*

Sarah was only 24 when her husband died. She lived to be 80 and never remarried.

Do you think this letter would have been different if Sullivan and Sarah had been atheists?

Try re-writing one of the paragraphs, deleting all mention of God, providence, etc. Does this change the feelings of love? What about the hope for the future?

If you are interested, look up a collection of love letters. Do many of them contain the idea of love continuing after death?

*When married partners...love each other tenderly, they think of eternity in regard to the marriage covenant, and not at all of its being terminated by death. Or if they do think about this, they grieve, until strengthened again with hope by the thought of its continuing in the life to come (Conjugial Love 216:4).*