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Everybody Has a Heart and a Mind

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

A Sermon given at the Zoom service on Sunday 13th September

“So God created humans in his image,
 in the image of God he created them;
 male and female he created them.”
 (Genesis 1:27) (NRSVue [2021])

I was brought up to believe that there were heterosexual men and heterosexual women, and that

most, if not all, would find a member of the opposite sex, marry and live happily ever after. I believe that there is some truth in that. But is it the whole truth? I was brought up to believe that conjugal love or love in marriage, could only happen between a heterosexually married couple. I believe that the revelation given to Swedenborg says so much more! These days people talk about being intersex, bisexual, polysexual, pansexual, polyamory, lesbian, gay, asexual, demisexual, transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, demigender, bigender, and so on. “Facebook allowed for seventy-one gender identities and now has the option of a ‘custom’ gender.”¹ People can identify however they want, as far as I’m concerned. This afternoon I will be talking about what all people have, and that’s a heart and a mind, and that is what Swedenborg talks about in his theology and biblical commentaries far more, than he talks about sex and gender!

As you will be well aware, 73% of Conference member voted that the Conference Ministry should make provision to marry same-sex couples. At the Ministers’ Seminar we will be listening to a presentation by a couple of transsexuals. Are such developments scary, or exciting, or challenging?

I have two second cousins who are homosexuals and in happy, fulfilling homosexual relationships. A 10 year-old granddaughter of one of my cousins, identifies and presents as a girl, even though she was born a boy. She only has girlfriends. She is surrounded with love and understanding. Challenges lie ahead when puberty hits, but compassion and support will always be available.

While on holiday in Australia, I read a book by a female Professor of Psychology, who identifies as non-binary, and another book by a male Professor of Anthropology, who identifies as gay. Have I been corrupted or contaminated by either of the books, or my non-heterosexual relatives. No! I have been enriched by their books. I can see the LORD working in them. The non-binary Professor’s book is entitled *Who’s afraid of gender?* She patiently explores JK Rowling and other TERFS – trans, exclusionary radical Feminists’ view of transgender males, and their fear that some or all of them will be sexual predators. She explores right wing fears about non-heterosexuals and the harm that they are doing to them. Why can’t people treat fellow human beings as people first, and worry about their sexuality second?

We love our LORD Jesus and we love our neighbours. Since we are in the Harvest Season, we can think about the Fruits of the Spirit: “²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” We can embody such virtues with non-heterosexuals. Swedenborg talks a lot about ‘Charity’, which is sometimes translated as ‘goodwill’ or ‘kindness’ or ‘caring’. “Among these peoples [of the Ancient Church] doctrinal teachings and religious practices differed from one to the next, but there was nevertheless one

¹ Preston Sprinkle (2021) *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, & what the Bible has to say* (Colorado Springs and Brighton: David C. Cook: 47 n. 25

Church because with them charity was the essential thing. At that time the Lord's kingdom existed on earth as it is in heaven, for such is the character of heaven, see 684, 690. If the same situation existed now all would be governed by the Lord as though they were one person; for they would be like the members and organs of one body which, though dissimilar in form and function, still related to one heart on which every single thing, everywhere varied in form, depended. Everyone would then say of another, No matter what form his doctrine and his external worship take, this is my brother; I observe that he worships the Lord and is a good man." [person] (*Secrets of Heaven* 2385:5e [Cooper]) Christian or spiritually-aware non-heterosexuals are my siblings – they are fellow children of God – and are good.

I am so glad that I have access to the inspired Biblical Commentaries of Emanuel Swedenborg! Swedenborg talks about 'males' symbolising our minds, and 'females' as symbolising our hearts. Immediately we are taken out of the realm of sexuality, and into the realm of spirituality. Everybody has a heart and mind. Everybody has opportunities, to be moved and inspired by the LORD, no matter their gender, nor their sexuality, because they have a God-given heart and mind.

I would go further and mention, that when we are celestial or heavenly, when we intuitively 'know' what our LORD Jesus wants us to do, and spontaneously respond to Divine inspiration, 'males' symbolise our hearts, and 'females' symbolise our minds.² One of the limitations of Swedenborg's excellent book *Conjugal Love* or *Love in Marriage* or *Married Love*, is that it is written from a spiritual perspective: men are intellectuals and women are emotional, even the celestial angels, which is challenged by at least 6 passages in *Secrets of Heaven* or *Arcana Coelestia*, which teach that this is reversed in the "celestial church", or among people who are celestial or heavenly. I would suggest that the deeper level of us 'intellectual' males is compassion and empathy, while the deeper level of 'emotional' women is insight and clarity. We need our spiritual level working and our celestial or heavenly level working in issues of spirituality and sexuality.

Conjugal Love or *Love in Marriage* talks about heterosexuals being attracted to members of the opposite sex from creation.³ But Swedenborg also uses the same Biblical passages, to argue that from creation we have been created to use our hearts and minds together, to serve others and make the world a better place.⁴ The reciprocal conjunction between the Lord and our heart and mind has been "established from creation".⁵ I have a 'rule of thumb' with Swedenborg. I believe that there is truth in everything he says, but how much? I tend to take everything he says as a generalisation. If he says that men are attracted to women, and women are attracted to men, I don't believe that it applies to homosexuals, or non-binary, or asexual people.

² *Secrets of Heaven* 4434:8; 4823:2; 8337:1; 8647; 8994:4; 9942:3. Compare Miss Heulwen M. Ridgway (1998) "Male and Female" *New Church Life* 1998:34-38 lists far more!

³ *Love in Marriage* 46; 155

⁴ *Apocalypse Explained* 1077:3; *Love in Marriage* 203-204

⁵ *Apocalypse Explained* 983:2e-3

One quick example, “Genuine conjugal love is not possible except between two married to each other, that is, within the marriage of one man and one wife.”⁶ Yet Swedenborg says that conjugal love is in individuals.⁷ Heterosexual marriage is not the “unique vessel” for conjugal love, is also shown by the passages in *Conjugal Love* which talk about the marriage of good and truth in individuals.⁸ It seems to me that Swedenborg consistently mentions conjugal love in individuals, which then results in conjugal love in heterosexual couples. That I believe is what the doctrines teach in *Conjugal Love* and other parts of the Writings.⁹ “In a spiritual sense, marriage love is a desire for the goodness that lies at the heart of truth and a desire for the truth that grow out of goodness. When these two wed, so to speak, they produce marriage love”.¹⁰ But I would go further and point out that “the marriage of good and truth”, or the interplay between our hearts and minds, effects and energises all our relationships. This God-inspired unity of heart and mind effects and infills all relationships: familial, parental and so on.¹¹

I am a heterosexual male. I am attracted to women. An angel told Swedenborg: “In heaven we love virgins because of their beauty and the refinement of their ways, and we love them very much – but chastely.” If like me, you don’t like the word ‘chastely’, you could substitute ‘non-sexually’, or ‘not lustfully’.¹² But I am a faithful husband, so I’m only attracted to one woman, my wife, which Swedenborg also teaches we have from birth as Christians.¹³ But I’m content with my sexuality. I might be challenged by homosexuals, intersex people, transgender people outwardly, but inwardly they all have a heart and a mind, which can be effected and impacted by our loving LORD Jesus.

But what about a man leaving his parents and finding a wife? Swedenborg teaches us that we have to understand these verses literally and spiritually.¹⁴ I have left my parents and found a wife nearly 40 years ago! But these verses refer to our identity or personality being infilled with “celestial and spiritual life”¹⁵

Swedenborg in places interprets this as each individual, leaving outdated and outmoded ideas and practices behind, and finding new, more beneficial, more expansive, more progressive ways of speaking and acting. “a man [*vir*] will leave the evil and falsity which he has from his religion and which defile his understanding, thus that which he has from father and mother, and that his understanding, being separated from these, will be conjoined with the correspondent affection of the wife; by this means the two become one

⁶ *Secrets of Heaven* 2740 = *Marriage* 119; cf. *Love in Marriage* 332

⁷ *Apocalypse Revealed* 359; AC 9325:3; 6432:1

⁸ *Apocalypse Explained* §§983:2; 999:2; *Secrets of Heaven* §§3793:1; 3942:1, 3; 9961:3; *Apocalypse Revealed* §359; cf. *Secrets of Heaven* §§9325:3; 6432:1, 8

⁹ *Conjugal Love* 48; 95; 101; 122-124; 130; 230; 238; AE 999:2

¹⁰ *Secrets of Heaven* 3081:1 [Cooper]

¹¹ *Secrets of Heaven* 2739; *Marriage* 118

¹² *Love in Marriage* 22e = *True Christianity* 749e

¹³ *Love in Marriage* 466; cf. 44:6; 48; 58; 93; 188:2; 296; 333:2; 34 5; 509

¹⁴ *Apocalypse Explained* 725:3; cf. *Heaven and Hell* 372

¹⁵ *Secrets of Heaven* 135; cf. also *Apocalypse Explained* 555:14

affection for truth and good.”¹⁶ You’ll note that Swedenborg mixes up his levels of reality or “discrete degrees”: inner and outer, spiritual and natural. Each of us needs to continue to let go of our biases and presuppositions, in order for the marriage of our individual hearts and minds, can become more perfect. It certainly helps to have a partner to help us sort ourselves out.

If we mix up or confuse levels of reality, we can make mistakes:

“Anyone who ponders these subjects on the basis of gradual or horizontal levels rather than distinct or vertical ones can see them only in terms of effects and not at all in terms of causes. Seeing things solely in terms of effects is basing thought on illusions, which leads to one error after another. By inductive reasoning we can multiply these errors so much that ultimately grotesque distortions are labelled truths.” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §187 [Dole])

I quote two passages from Swedenborg’s book *Secrets of Heaven* or *Arcana Coelestia*, which I would like to read out again:

“The Most Ancient people “called the understanding in the spiritual man Male and the will Female, and when the two acted as one, they called it Marriage. From that Church sprang the common usage of referring to the Church itself, because of its affection for good, as 'a daughter', and also 'a virgin' – as in Virgin of Zion, Virgin of Jerusalem — and 'a wife' as well.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 54e [Cooper])

“‘Male and female’ means the marriage of faith and love. “ (*Secrets of Heaven* 475, 476 [Cooper])

Each of us has a heart and mind; will and understanding; volition and intellect. We strive for a balance. If we exercise too much heart, we can be sentimental, or imprecise or vacillating. If we exercise too much mind, we can be cold, calculating, and theoretical. Swedenborg continually talks about “the marriage of good and truth”, which we could express as the marriage of our heart and mind. The Apostle Paul in *Ephesians* writes: “But speaking the **truth in love**, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”. (Ephesians 4:15) We endeavour to lovingly wise, and wisely loving. As an example of getting the balance right between our heart and mind, Swedenborg is fond of encouraging us to show discernment in helping other people. Good Christians show kindness to people according to their character; “according to the good qualities from the Lord in them”, because our LORD Jesus is in their kindness, their empathy, their compassion.¹⁷ Such virtues are not just in heterosexuals!

Conclusion

¹⁶ *Apocalypse Explained* §710:26 [Tansley]

¹⁷ *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Teachings* 85; 89e; 90

Whatever label people use, or of what sexuality they are, it does not contaminate me or corrupt me. I am not afraid of non-heterosexuals. I am happy and secure in myself as a heterosexually married male. I know that our LORD Jesus is with me, and that he is with you, and that he is with people of whatever sexuality. It is the spirituality of people that matters most: “this joining of truth and good is the fundamental marriage in the Lord's kingdom” ¹⁸ “The Lord's providence is concerned first and foremost with that joining together of good and truth”. ¹⁹

Are people able to present their best selves? Are they, and we, open to the LORD moving our hearts and inspiring our minds? Looking upon non-heterosexuals as people, who can be as equally, if not, more inspired and moved to great things by our loving Heavenly Father, is what we should be looking for.

“So God created humans in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) (NRSVue [2021])

¹⁸ *Secrets of Heaven* 3915:1

¹⁹ *Secrets of Heaven* 3951:1