

Gay Pride or Straight Talk

Many people feel puzzled by a reluctance to embrace homosexuality by strands of organised religion. And some feel angry and want to promote the idea that gay people should be proud of their sexual orientation feeling this is their natural inclination.

However although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no firm findings have emerged that permit scientists to firmly conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles.

Swedenborg coined a new word 'conjugal' by adding an 'i' to the old legal term 'conjugal'. He did this to distinguish a quality of love that unites a couple as one in heart, mind and life. When the understanding of what is true in one person makes one with the affection of what is good in the other, there is said to be a union of the two minds into one.

A deep union between two people is said to be characterized by spiritual states of peace, tranquility, intimate friendship, full trust, joy and sexual pleasure. According to Swedenborg this state of 'conjugal love,' has a spiritual source ie the divine union of what is good and what is true. Without this harmony there would be inner tension — thinking one thing but wanting another. Hence in so far as the partnership is a conjugal one, there is a profound joy because the divine harmony is present within the relationship.

Given that each of us has both of some of what is good and true within us, it might be asked whether the conjugal principle has the potential to apply equally to the relationship between two people of the same sex in the same way as between two of the opposite sex. In other words can there be conjugal love in a gay partnership, say between the good feelings of one partner and the true thinking of his male partner?

Gender difference

I believe the answer to this question centers on the issue of gender difference. An idea that both masculine and feminine are found in each person came from Carl Jung. On the contrary, in his book *Conjugal Love* (section 32), Swedenborg says there is an essential difference between male and female and that after death a male lives on as a male and a female as a female. Of course both sexes have thinking heads and feeling hearts and should be equally valued. But there is said to be an underlying psycho-spiritual difference between male and female minds.

Swedenborg maintains that both sexes are capable of intelligent thought and empathy. At the same time, his contention is that men are more naturally interested in using their heads and taking an objective stance. On the other hand, women are said to be more likely to observe what is going on with their intuition and take a subjective perspective. Whilst the man is suited to thinking about what is right for longer in the light of understanding, the woman is suited to sustaining a warm feeling for what is good in the heat of love.

Heterosexual love

This supposed gender difference is Swedenborg's rationale for heterosexual love. Just as opposites attract, the love between a man and a woman can be deeper because it can be between an understanding and its corresponding affection. And so each complements the other. This difference offers the potential for conjugal love to

enter deeply into the relationship between a man and woman and unite them. Unfortunately many relationships break down. Unless the partners are suited to each other and are prepared to constantly work at their relationship, the gift of conjugal love cannot be fulfilled.

If Swedenborg is right about the difference between men and women, then love between two people of the same sex cannot be the same potential quality as the love between those of the opposite sex. In fact in his book *Conjugal Love* section 181, he contends that conjugal love can only happen in the relationship between a man and a woman.

Homosexual love

In the same book section 55, he says that the love of a man for a man or that of a woman for a woman cannot be a deep one. In line with this philosophy, the affection between two men is more about the association between one way of thinking and another way of thinking – between one understanding and another understanding: and the love between two women is more about the association of one state of feeling and another state of feeling.

I can only conclude that, if Swedenborg is right, it is not possible for anyone to develop a conjugal heavenly state within a homosexual relationship.

Stephen Russell-Lacy