

Heavenly marriage more important than being married

My Swedenborgian theological model argues that the heavenly marriage is more important than being married, (AC 3951:5) or if we are married, being married only counts eternally to the extent we manifest the heavenly marriage in it. (CL 82; 116; 308; 428; 520; MA 66; 70; 113; AC 5084:7) (This avoids idolatry or making heterosexual marriage an idol.) It is the interplay or interaction between the heart and mind of an individual, or the hearts and minds of a couple or group, which is more important than their marital state. There is teaching that the only marriages which continue in the next world are based on couples being like-minded and like-hearted. (CL 45; 48; 54; MA 50) If people achieve the heavenly marriage on earth, it is achieved in heaven. (CL 41:2)

For some New Church people they take literally teaching that marriage is one man and one wife. While I, as a happily married man, accept this, I struggle to apply it to homosexual people.

The “heavenly marriage ought to be the source of and pattern for all marriages on earth. This marriage consists of one Lord and one heaven, or one Church whose head is the Lord. The consequent law for marriages is that there must be one man (vir) and one wife. When this is the case they represent the heavenly marriage, and are a model of the celestial man.” (AC 162)

The contrast with husband and wife, is polygamy, (AC 1907; 1865:2; 2740; 3829; CL 340:4; 482; MA 119) not exclusive, faithful homosexual partnerships.

When the Writings talk of a willingness to receive ‘something’ from the other, the mutuality or reciprocity in marriages, or being enriched, or of becoming “more and more deeply human” (CL 159; 199; 200), I can’t see any objection to it applying to homosexual couples.

The heavenly marriage in relationships

The heavenly marriage affects all relationships, whether marital, parental, filial, collegial, and so on:

“From the marriage of good and truth in heaven all loves are descended, which are such as the love of parents towards their children, the love of brothers for one another, love towards other relatives, and so on down in their order according to their degrees of affinity. According to these loves that have their origin solely in good and truth, that is, in love and faith to the Lord, all heavenly communities are formed. And these are joined together by the Lord in such a way that they resemble a human being, which also is why heaven is called the Grand Man. There are indescribable varieties, all of which have their origin in and are derived from the union of good and truth from the Lord, which union is the heavenly marriage.” (AC 2739; cf. MA 118) ¹

¹ Swedenborg continually emphasises that inner conjugal love (the heavenly marriage) underpins outer conjugal love in marriages and love in any heterosexual relationship, because conjugal love at

The heavenly marriage can thus be embodied or manifested in any relationship. Gender is irrelevant. The heavenly marriage in an individual, is when the Lord inspires a person's heart and mind to work together. My relationship/marriage with the Lord influences how good and effective I am as a husband, brother, son, nephew, uncle, cousin, friend, Maths teacher, football referee, cricket umpire, and even minister. This is why the heavenly marriage could be represented by two brothers in the Word:

“In the Word the two [good and truth] joined together are represented by a married couple or by two brothers, by a married couple when the heavenly marriage – the marriage of good and truth – and the succeeding generations which spring from that marriage, are the subject, and by two brothers when two kinds of ministry, namely those of judgement and worship, are the subject.” (AC 9806:1e-2)”

Union of minds can be amongst friends. (TCR 44; 99) Two angel friends, one from the eastern heaven and one from the southern heaven, had “interior friendship”, and met up in the world of spirits. (AR 875:1 = TCR 386:1) (I have no reason to believe that they are homosexuals!) This has to be balanced by what the angels from a southern heaven say, “These loves, those between two men or two women, do not sink far into the breast, but stay outside, making merely superficial contact and not leading to any inner union of the two. This too is the reason why two men fence with reasoned arguments on either side, like boxers; and two women sometimes with lusts on either side, like actors pretending to fight with fists.” (CL 55:6) Possibly angels from an eastern heaven would word it slightly better!? This is a more real “interior friendship” than with a deflowerer and a virgin, (CL 513; MA 63) or Moravians. (SD(M) 4749; 4774; SE 4796; LJ(P) 302; 304; cf. AC 4805), or between apparent ‘mates’: A Bond of Love That We Form with Others without Considering Their Spiritual Nature Is Damaging after Death”, (TCR 446) or by religious affiliation. (TCR 798:2e)

The correspondence of the Heavenly marriage in an individual

In our most loving, inspired, creative moments, when we are regenerated or an “image of heaven” or taken out of hell into heaven, our internals and externals are in harmony with each other, and our externals correspond with our internals, (AE 441) or are “conformable and subservient to them”. (AC 911:1; cf. AC 1568:3; 1900:2; 2994; 3425:3; 3835; 3934:2,8; 4288:2; 5511:1) I believe such an angelic frame of mind effects all our relationships. When our hearts and minds are enlivened and inspired to work together, good and truth mutually and reciprocally love each other,

the inner level is “the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven”, (AC 3021:2; 3960:3; 4280:4; 4779:1; 9960:18; 9961:6AE 993:2; 997:4; AR 830:1; AE 993:2cf. CL 67) and “also he is in love to the Lord, and in love towards the neighbour, consequently, in the love of all good, and in the love of all truth” (AE 993:2) I would suggest that in passages like AC 5053; AE 993:2; CL 80:2; 238:2; SE (M) 4604-4607 and throughout *Conjugal Love* (37-38; 42; 48; etc.), Swedenborg (or the reader) might merge the two levels of reality, implying that you have to be married to have conjugal love, (see AC 2470 and note 1 above) or to be married to be a good friend or relative.

they resemble a marriage. (HD 15; AC 1468; cf. DLW 409; Life 43; HD 15; 32; 121; SE 6110:14; TCR 377; 397:4; 398:5) It is chiefly self-love which severs the link between our motives and attitudes and our actions and words. (AC 1594:5) I thus believe that a person, whether heterosexual or homosexual, who values virtues like humility, love, innocence, inspiration, creativity, friendship, faithfulness, and so on, can manifest the heavenly marriage in his or her relationships with other people. I also believe that this correspondence in an individual is enhanced in a marriage, or other intimate relationship.

Correspondence in a marriage

I am happy to believe that there is a correspondence between the heavenly marriage and a marriage between a husband and a wife, (CL 76:5 = CO 44:5; cf. CL 518)

“There is,’ said the husband, ‘a correspondence between the spiritual marriage, that is, of truth with good, and the natural marriage, that is, of a man with one wife. Being students of correspondences, we saw that the church with its kinds of truth and good could not possibly exist except among those who live in truly conjugal love with one wife. For the marriage of good and truth makes the church in the individual. All of us, therefore, who are here now, assert that **the husband is truth and the wife the truth’s own good. Good cannot love any truth but its own, nor can truth return that love to any but its own good.** In other circumstances the inner marriage which makes the church would be lost, and the marriage would become merely outward; and it is not the church, but idolatry, to which this corresponds. We therefore call marriage with one wife a sacrament; but if it happened in our community with more than one, we should call that a sacrilege.” (CL 76:5)

But how much of a correspondence? If “the love of a married pair [corresponds] to the love of good and truth” (AE 985:4; cf. 654:47), which doesn’t exist in polygamous Christian marriages. (CL 339:2; cf. AE 654:47) Or, can it, if Solomon’s wives represent the Church and his concubines other religions? (DP 245) Swedenborg sometimes applies this to “marriages, such as they are in the heavens”. (AE 817:4e; “marriages on the earth correspond to marriages in the heavens; and that after death man comes into the correspondence, that is, comes from natural bodily marriage into spiritual heavenly marriage, which is heaven itself and the joy of heaven.” (AE 1000:5; cf. “in the heavens marriages are of like with like”. (AE 710:24); HH 382b) Our marriages represent the heavenly marriage. (AC 9182:1) According to Swedenborg, truth has to be joined to its own good and good has to be joined to its own truth, (AC 917; 2184:7; 2209:1; 3101; 3179:2; 3206; 3324:3; 3538; 4358; 4434:9; 4988:2; 9637; 10032; AE 375:1; DP 14; HH 205#; CL 270:4) but this can only be a generalization because of his comments about the symbolism of levirate marriages and “kindred good”. (AC 4835:3; 3758; AE 16) I suppose this suggests that sometimes our marriages correspond to the heavenly marriage, sometimes they represent, and sometimes they’re good enough: “kindred good”.

But what is the nature of this correspondence? Sometimes Swedenborg compares marriage to the marriage of the Lord and the church (CL 116; 117; 129) or the uniting

of “the will and understanding in the individual”. (AC 568:2) Just when you think it’s marriage of good and truth only, as in burnt offerings, Swedenborg interprets sacrifices as “spiritual things are those that pertain to charity towards the neighbour, thus not to the marriage but to the consanguinity of truth with good; and truths and goods in consanguinity are like sisters and brothers, but in marriage truths and goods are like husband and wife.” (AE 725:6; cf. TCR 377) Goods and truths inside us match up sometimes as marriages and sometimes as relatives or friends. (AC 917; cf. 2508; 1159:2; AE 725:6) I suppose in our marriages we experience a range of intimacy from apparent enemies to friends to lovers. But it is the same with angels who all go through “evening states”. (AC 5962:2; 6110:3,4,6; 7381:4; 8108; 8431; 8452:1; 8812:4; 10134:3-9; 10135:1-2; 10605; HH 154-161; AE 481:2e; 747;) Angel married couples, I would suggest, would find it hard to correspond with the heavenly marriage, when going through their “evening states”.

So in what aspect of marriage does this alleged correspondence lie? It seems from CL 116viii; 127 that it is in the area of reproduction. In CL 238 Swedenborg mentions “the capability of reproduction implanted in souls from creation”. (cf. CL 190; 223:2; 385; 387; 390) But if I am married to post-menopausal women, I’m slightly removed from this correspondence. The ability of all created things to reproduce, whether in the plant or animal kingdom, mirrors something of the Lord. (DLW 347; DP 56:3; 190:1; TCR 12:2; 585; 618:2; CL 397) Since we are not able to reproduce for the majority of the years in our marriages, possibly the “spiritual offspring” option (CL 44:9; 45vii; 51-53; 65; 116(3); 120; 121; 143(6); 211e; TCR 307e; 377; AE 622:11) has more credance. There was a greeting in the Ancient Church which referred to the wish that people have lots of spiritual offspring, which the Israelites took to mean conquering enemies and having lots of natural children. (AC 3187:2)

In AE 654:47, in talking about Israelite kings not taking “several wives”, Swedenborg says: “for wife and husband signify the affection for good corresponding to the affection for truth, which correspondence exists in the marriage of a man with one wife, but not with several.” Again this correspondence would only operate when the couple are angelic and heavenly.

As a heterosexual I can personally see a lot of truth in what Swedenborg says about the heavenly marriage embodied in heterosexual marriage. However, I would argue that it is not continual – like angels we have alternations of state and especially evening states – because of conflict, difference of opinions, changing moods or circumstances, financial pressures, work hassles, and so on. (CL 234) A relationship only resembles a marriage when the husband and wife only consider the children and property, (CL 177) honour their life-long commitment to each other, (CL 278) the wife falls out of love, or the husband becomes infertile. (CL 290) There are also times when there are “simulations of married love” or appearances or pretences, (CL 271; 277-291) instead of marriage love.

Is this why Swedenborg says that sometimes one man with one wife (AC 162; 865:2) or “marriages on earth” **represent** the heavenly marriage? (AC 6794; 8983:1e; 9046; 9182:1; 9206:1; SE 3348) The high priest marrying a virgin can also represent the heavenly marriage. (AE 768:19) The “preservation and continuation of the Church might be represented through” levirate marriage. (AC 4835:3) But in some ways the heavenly marriages is also represented by the tribes of Israel (AR 349:1);

heart and lungs (AC 418; 3889); celestial represented by marriage with wife and spiritual by marriage with concubine (AC 3246:3); Issachar and Zebulon (AC 3952:5) or Zebulon (AC 6383); jubilee (AC 8802); “conjugal love is represented in heaven by the most beautiful objects”. (HH 382[a] [Harley]; MA 1) So aspects of the heavenly marriage can be pictured and mirrored by all sorts of relationships or people or objects, but maybe marriage is the “perfect resemblance” of the heavenly marriage, (AE 1121:1) but not all the time.

Swedenborg spends a lot of time linking the “infernal marriage” or the “hellish marriage” with adultery, but I don’t think it is always that extreme. “The heavenly marriage is a marriage of good and truth, but the hellish marriage is one of evil and falsity. For where evil exists, so also does falsity, falsity linking itself to evil like a wife to her husband; and where good exists, so also does truth, truth joining itself to good like a wife to her husband.” (AC 5138; cf. HH 377; HD 17) We’re all guilty of trying to dominate our partner. (AC 10173; CL 248; HH 380; TCR 805; MA 58; cf. CL 292; MA 62 = SE 4745; 4768; SE 6110:35) We spouses have our moments of blind rage or panic, when we say the most foolish things, divorced from reality. We put our spouses through hell, literally! I can’t see how marriages correspond to heaven in such circumstances!

Does the Lord inspired individual partners, then the couple?

It seems that the Lord inspires individuals within a marriage, then couples in a marriage:

“That love truly conjugal contains in itself so many ineffable delights as to exceed all number and expression is evident from this, that it is the fundamental of all loves celestial and spiritual, because by it a man (*homo*) becomes love; for from it one conjugal partner loves another, as good loves truth, and truth loves good, or, representatively, as the Lord loves heaven and the church. Such love cannot exist except by a marriage, in which the man is truth, and the wife is good.

When a man (*homo*) has become such a love by marriage, then also he is in love to the Lord, and in love towards the neighbour, consequently, in the love of all good, and in the love of all truth; for from a man as love there cannot go forth anything but loves of every kind. This is why conjugal love is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven. And because it is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven, it is also a fundamental of all the delights and joys of heaven, for every delight and joy is from love. From these things it follows, that heavenly joys, in their order and degrees, derive their origin and cause from conjugal love. (AE 993:2)

In AE 985:3 we read:

“The reason why the love of marriage is so holy and heavenly is, that it has its commencement from the Lord Himself in the inmost parts of man (*homo*), and descends, according to order, even to the ultimates of the body, and thereby fills the whole man (*homo*) with heavenly love, and induces in him a form of

the Divine love, which form is the form of heaven, and is an image of the Lord”.

In MA 35 we read:

“A wife wishes to think and will what her husband does, and a husband what his wife does, and because each wishes this, each is led by the Lord as if they were one, and the two are a single angel. For when one’s will and understanding is not one’s own, but another’s, and this is mutually so in turn, they cannot but be led by the Lord as if one.”

In the context of a marriage, the Lord inspires a couple’s heart and minds to supply (a perspective, an initiative) which the other lacks, to enrich their relationship, (CL 159; 199; 200) which is what happens in any relationship mentioned above, but less intimately. Sometimes a wife sees a situation more dispassionately than her husband, or a husband empathises more deeply with a person who has offended his wife. My view of reality is far richer with my wife’s input. I see the relationship between husband and wife as being far more fluid than *CL* presents, because of:

“It should be recognized however that this is the situation among those who belong to the Lord’s spiritual kingdom, whereas among those who belong to His celestial kingdom the reverse applies. There husbands are the ones with affection, and wives are the ones with knowledge of good and truth; and this is what the desire for marriage springs from among them.” (AC 8994:4e [Elliott]; cf. AC 8647)

“In the spiritual Church ‘wife’ (uxor) represents good and ‘man’ (vir) represents truth, but in the celestial Church ‘husband’ (maritus) represents good and ‘wife’ (uxor) truth. Furthermore – not only represent those things but also in actual fact correspond to them.” (AC 4434:9e)

CL seems to only talk of marriages of spiritual couples and not of celestial couples. (e.g. CL 125) Do married couples alternate between the two?

““that marriages represent the joining of good to truth, and of truth to good. Furthermore conjugal love has its origin in these two joined together. Among celestial people conjugal love has its origin in good joined to truth, but among spiritual people in truth joined to good. Marriages also correspond in actual fact to these joinings together.” (AC 4823:3)

The internal level matched to the external

Whenever Swedenborg talks about the heavenly marriage in an individual, interior good is matched with external truth, that is, some idea or concept or memory or skill comes alive with purpose and new meaning:

“From the marriage of good and truth proceeding and flowing in from the Lord a person receives truth, to which the Lord links good. This is how the church with a person is formed by the Lord.” (CL 116v)

“From the Lord is good, and with man is truth, hence the conjunction which is called the heavenly marriage, from which marriage love truly conjugal exists between two married partners, who are in such conjunction with the Lord. Hence it is evident, first, that love truly conjugal is from the Lord alone, and exists in those who are in the conjunction of good and truth from the Lord.” (AE 983:2)

“At this point I must now disclose the following secret, that the marriage of the Lord and the church consists in the Lord’s flowing into angels and people with the goodness of love, and in the angels’ and peoples’ reception of Him, or of the goodness of His love, in truths. By this means a marriage of goodness and truth is formed, a marriage that is the essence of the church, and one that becomes heaven in the recipients.” (AC 3952:1)

“For example the idea that something of marriage must be present if the Church is to exist; that is to say, the idea that some marriage must exist between truth and good. Also, the idea that what is internal must be present within what is external, and that without this and the previous requirement no Church at all exists.” (AC 4899:1)

I assume in a marriage that one partner is inspired or enlivened by the Lord, and the same feelings or sense of purpose is aroused in the spouse, when he or she is in the right frame of mind. We’re taught that “the Divine marriage of good and truth, forms the will of the two of them by virtue of good. There is a difference however, which is like the relationship of good to its own truth. Consequently ‘husband’ also means good and ‘wife’ truth. For when the house is one, good is in that case the all in it, and truth, being wedded to good, is good as well.” (AC 3538; cf. AC 4434:9)

Conclusion

So my theological model has the heavenly marriage within the individual, as the primary or governing teaching. (AC 5044) The heavenly marriage or the marriage of good and truth, effects us individually and effects all our relationships whether marital, parental, filial, collegial and so on. To the extent that our internals (motivation, affection) correspond with our externals (words and actions), we manifest the heavenly marriage in our daily lives. We don’t have to be married to be correspondences or representatives of the heavenly marriage. When an individual or a couple, whether human or angelic, are having “evening states”, for example, when one tries to dominate the other, there is very limited, if any, correspondence between, or representation of, the heavenly marriage and the state of their marriage. When individuals or couples are the Lord’s mouthpiece and hands, then they correspond to the heavenly marriage, to the extent they are moved and inspired by the Lord. Then they produce “spiritual offspring”. If people of the same sex can have “interior friendship”, that is mutually and reciprocally, indeed eternally enriching, I can’t see why loving, faithful homosexual couples can’t.