

Homosexuality: prioritising doctrinal teaching

In considering the issue of homosexuality, which are the most important principles of New Church teaching? ¹ If you were to answer “being married”, I think Swedenborg’s book *Conjugal Love* or *Marital Love* (Wunsch) or *Married Love* (Rogers) or *Love in Marriage* (Gladish) might suggest that you’re wrong.

The most important teaching in *Married Love* is “the marriage of the Lord and the Church”, or an individual’s or couple’s relationship with the Lord. ² The second most important teaching is “the marriage between good and truth”, ³ or how our hearts and minds work together. The third most important teaching is “true married love”, which depends on the state of the church in the individual, and has its origins in the first two doctrines. ⁴ You could include in “true married love” the doctrine of like-minded and like-hearted married couples, who stay married to eternity. (CL 49)

“The origin of this love [real married love] is a marriage of good and truth.” (CL 57(2) [Gladish])

“Now, since the church is the Lord’s because it comes from the Lord, and since the love in marriage corresponds to the marriage of the Lord and the church, this means that this love is from the Lord.” (CL 62e [Gladish])

So far in this series of articles, I have pointed out that just because people are married doesn’t mean they have “true marriage love”, in fact, neither, one or both could have it. ⁵ The heavenly marriage of good and truth affects all relationships, whether marital, parental, filial, collegial, and so on, ⁶ and I would argue faithful, homosexual ones. When our hearts and minds are enlivened and inspired to work together, good and truth mutually and reciprocally love each other, they resemble a marriage. ⁷ Swedenborg’s use of the phrase “heavenly conjugal love”, refers to good and truth in us being married. ⁸ Marriages only correspond to the heavenly marriage in the area of reproduction, (CL 116viii; 127), and so despite losing this correspondence when the wife goes through the menopause, they can still represent the heavenly marriage through producing “spiritual offspring”, ⁹ as do faithful homosexual couples. The love of producing spiritual offspring, or propagating good and truth, or sharing good advice and performing acts of compassion and generosity, are more important than and precedes that of producing natural children. ¹⁰ In AE 983:3 we read that when “the love of spiritual marriage ... descends into the body, [it] becomes the love of natural marriage.” The Ancients referred to the heavenly

¹ See the article by the General Church minister, Rev Grant H. Odhner “Responding to the Lord’s Word” Part 2 *New Church Life* (2007) 229-230, citing the symbolism of “princes”: AC 3424:3; 4966; 5082; 5084; 6766; 8314; 8585; AE 279:6,9

² CL 62-63; 70-72; 116-131

³ CL 60-61; 65; 83-102

⁴ CL 58-59; 130; AE 983:2-4; 984:2-3

⁵ AC 2742; CL 226; 351

⁶ AC 2739; cf. MA 118

⁷ HD 15; AC 1468; cf. DLW 409; Life 43; HD 15; 32; 121; SE 6110:14; TCR 377; 397:4; 398:5

⁸ AC 3953; 4606; AE 445:5; cf. AC 3957:1

⁹ CL 44:9; 45vii; 51-53; 65; 116(3); 120; 121; 143(6); 211e; TCR 307e; 377; AE 622:11

¹⁰ AE 991:2-3; Marr Index 1:84, 110

marriage and begetting spiritual children when blessing brides, not physical children as did the Israelites. (AC 3187:2) Unexpectedly Swedenborg claims that individuals can have conjugal love: ¹¹ “conjugal love ... does not show itself in infancy and childhood but nevertheless lies concealed within, and does not emerge until every single thing has been properly ordered to enable it to manifest itself. During all that time however it is producing all the means suited to it, that is, they are produced from it.” (AC 3610:3) People are in heaven because of “the heavenly marriage”, ¹² not because they are married. Contrary to a superficial reading of CL 55:6, people of the same sex can have “interior friendship”. ¹³ But such doctrines are not as controversial when it is realised that they agree with the prioritisation of teaching in *Conjugal Love*.

Being married, or being a heterosexual couple, is meaningless without the Lord involved in moving our hearts and inspiring our minds to be united or married. If you take out the inner components or “internal qualities” (CL 478:1) of marriage, you have an empty shell, which is just idolatry. (CL 76:5 = Coronis 44:5) On the other hand, “When the procreations of the human race result from marriages, in which the holy love of good and truth from the Lord reigns, then it is on the earths as in the heavens, and the Lord’s kingdom on the earths corresponds to the Lord’s kingdom in the heavens.” (AE 988:6) When a physical marriage stops corresponding to heaven because the wife goes through the menopause, at least by producing “spiritual offspring”, the couple can still represent the heavenly marriage of good and truth, which is something I believe that faithful, spiritually aware, homosexual couples can achieve.

“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)”

Primary truths

Primary truths or general truths are “Ones which come first and foremost in explanations are those which are pre-eminently suitable for explaining the Word, and so for coming to understand teachings drawn from the Word about love to God and charity towards the neighbour.” (AC 4966:1)

Being married is not a general principle, because “that which is first and foremost is also common throughout since it reigns throughout the rest of the whole” (AC 5082) and “faith is imparted through truths, and in fact through leading ones since they shed light that allows clear perception of the truths flowing from them, called secondary truths.” (AC 8585) Godly virtues like love, compassion, humility are primary truths, because they infill Christians or genuinely religious people, whether they are single, married, widowed or divorced. Married people do not have a

¹¹ AC 3081:3; 9325:3; 6432:1; AR 359; AE 1004:2; cf also AC 3942:3; 3960:3; 4779:1

¹² AC 9325:3; 8495:1; 252; 2729; 2979:3; 3004; 4835:3; 6343:4; 8888:2; 9182:2; 9382:2e; 9385; 10001; 10067; 10300:1; HH 281; 371; AE 638:2; 736; 983:4; MA 113; HD 13; TCR 398

¹³ AR 875:2 = TCR 386:1; AC 2304 = SE 3146; 3545

monopoly on godly characteristics, and so being married is a secondary truth. We are only truly married when we feel led by the Lord to unite what is insightful and compassionate in our hearts and minds.

If you read the passages in the Bible which talk about the Israelites being married to the Lord,¹⁴ it is always talked about in a collective or community sense.

Swedenborg usually talks about being married to the Lord in an individual sense: “the man of the church”.¹⁵ The Church in us is “a Church by virtue of the reception of the Lord’s Divine good in the Divine truths that are from Himself”. (AR 797:1 [Coulson])

Ordering through good

I was once asked by one of our ministers what my agenda was, and I replied with one word – unusual for me! – “compassion”. We worship an infinitely merciful Heavenly Father. (AC 588:1; 714; 1032:2-3; 2401:4) “The same is true of the Lord’s intercession for the human race, especially for those with whom the goodness and truth of faith are present; for towards them Divine - that is, infinite - love is shown, and Divine - that is, infinite - mercy. ... Rather He is constantly excusing and constantly forgiving, because He is constantly showing mercy.” (AC 8573:2) “This is also the situation with simple persons in the Church. The only idea they can grasp, based on the appearance, is that God is angry when someone does what is evil. Yet anyone may see, if he stops to reflect, that no anger at all, still less any rage, resides with Jehovah or the Lord, since He is mercy itself, is goodness itself, and is infinitely beyond wishing evil on anyone. Neither does a person possessing charity towards the neighbour do evil to anyone; and as this is true of every angel, how much more must it be true of the Lord Himself?” (AC 5798:6) “it is impossible for God to remove or cast away any one of the human race; for this would be to act contrary to His own Being (Esse), which, as was said, is that from which all love, all mercy, and all good flow. It is not possible even for any angel, or any man, who is in love, in mercy, and in good from the Lord, to act in this way; and yet their love is finite, and the Divine Love is infinite.” (AE 778:2)

Whatever opinion or beliefs you have about homosexuals, or doctrinal teachings you bring to bear on the issue of homosexuality, they must be infilled with “Christian good” which “has the Lord within it”.

“But the truths known to the Church, which ‘the sons of Israel’ represent, do not come to be arranged into any kind of proper order except through Christian good, that is, through the good of charity towards the neighbour and of love to the Lord. For good has the Lord within it, and therefore has heaven within it. Good consequently has life within it, making it a force that is active and filled with life. But truth devoid of good cannot possibly have any life within it. Good arranges truths into order in keeping with itself, as is quite evident from every kind of love, including self-love and love of the world, and so such love as gives rise to vengeance, hatred, and other evils like these.

¹⁴ Isaiah 54:5; 62:4, 5; Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32; Hosea 1:2; 2:19, 20; Ephesians 5:30-32; Revelation 19:7-9

¹⁵ e.g. AC 10366; AE 660:2; 800:1; 984:2; AR 359; 816:4; HD 15; DP 8:5; SS 82 = TCR 249; cf. TCR 398:5

People governed by those loves call evil good because they take delight in evil. This so-called good of theirs imposes a certain kind of order on those falsities which to them are truths - a kind of order that enables these falsities to lend support to it, till at length all those falsities, which they call truths, are arranged into an order that becomes a sequence of false beliefs. But this order is the kind of order that exists in hell, whereas the order in which truths are ranged beneath the good of heavenly love is the kind that exists in heaven. This also explains why a person with whom the latter kind of order resides, that is, a person who has been regenerated, is called a miniature heaven and also is heaven in the smallest form of all that it can take; for his interiors correspond to the heavens." (AC 5704:2)

I personally value the inspiration and creativity that is shown by artists and musicians, whether heterosexual or heterosexual or whatever other category. I am inspired and deeply moved by the mercy, compassion and self-sacrificial love, shown by homosexual men to their partners dying of AIDS. I am happy to be corrected by wiser homosexual rights activists, when we heterosexuals have got it wrong. I believe that the Lord is at work, and we need to acknowledge that, and not be like the silent, self-righteous bystanders, whom the Lord pleadingly asks, "Which is lawful on the sabbath: to do good or to do evil to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4-5) I don't want to be like the people of Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, (Matthew 11:20-24 = Luke 10:13-15) who see amazing things from God, but are too close-minded to acknowledge the truth "and on account of the falsities and evils which oppose." (AE 637:13) Appealing to Matthew 11:23-24, Swedenborg argues that it is "Those who are instructed by the Lord concerning the truths and goods of the church, and yet reject and deny them, do worse things than those of Sodom".¹⁶

Conclusion

Prioritising the teachings of our church allow us to accommodate faithful, spiritually aware, homosexual couples. The virtues of humility, innocence, inspiration, enlivenment are dependent on the Lord working in our hearts and minds to unite them, they're not dependent on our marital status.

"And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matthew 18:3)

"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" (Matthew 19:14)

"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" (Mark 10:13, 14)]

¹⁶ AE 653:9

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Prioritising the doctrinal teaching of the Church also enables our denomination to retain its belief in inclusivity. Every member of the General Conference can sign up to a belief in a God-directed virtuous lifestyle. We all value humility, compassion, insightfulness and kindness, whatever the marital status of the person who performs it.