

HUMAN SEXUALITY AND RELIGION

The case for or against same sex marriages has suddenly become a political issue, both in this country and in the United States. Those in favour accuse those who are against of being old-fashioned, bigoted and out of touch with public opinion. I don't know about that. 30 of the 50 States in the USA have passed laws banning same sex marriages. So there are a lot of people out of touch. And at the age of 87 I confess to being old-fashioned.

What can religion tell us about this? I can't speak for religion as a whole. I am not a theologian, so the views I am going to put forward are based on my interpretation of the doctrines of the Swedenborgian New Church of which I have always been a member. I can't claim to be an expert on New Church doctrine. I have read all of Swedenborg's religious books, but I don't keep notes and have a rotten memory, but the Dictionary of Correspondences published in 1955 by the Swedenborg Foundation in New York provides useful reminders.

One of the most striking things about New Church doctrine is how central to it is marriage. Marriage in a spiritual sense represents the celestial marriage, which is of good and truth. "Without some kind of marriage it cannot be that anything should exist or be produced; in the organical parts or substances of man, both compound and simple,, there is a passive and an active principle" (Divine Providence para 718). It is not surprising then to discover that angels are in heterosexual marriages in heaven. Perhaps more surprising to most other Christians is the fact that married angels have sexual intercourse. I can't find the quote, but I am sure that Swedenborg says that the climax of sexual pleasure in heaven is the acme of human pleasure. But it is chaste. That is to say that no element of lust is involved. It is not the satisfaction of sexual appetite, but the celebration of a union of souls. Swedenborg says that in the celestial heaven married couples at a distance are often seen as one person, demonstrating how close is their union. In "Conjugal Love" Swedenborg says "Male and female were created to be the essential form of the marriage of good and truth". In an earlier passage he says "The essential difference between the two principles is this; in the masculine principle love is inmost, and its covering is wisdom; whereas in the feminine principle the wisdom of the male is inmost, and its covering is the love thence derived; so that the male is the wisdom of love, and the female is the love of that wisdom". Union is possible because the male and female principles are complimentary.

In the light of this I do not believe that same sex couples are capable of a union of souls. They may have a very close relationship, but it cannot be heavenly in nature. Their relationship may be celibate. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson come to mind.

Marriage must be between a man and a woman.

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