

They will become one flesh

Preamble

Such is the heat associated with homosexuality and same-sex relationships, it is very difficult to voice an opinion or put pen to paper in a way which runs contrary to contemporary, though far from universal, opinion. One runs the risk of accusations of prejudice and bigotry, even homophobia. Well, that's a risk one has to take. The alternative is to remain silent out of fear. But that would have consequences for one's integrity, and history illustrates the dangers of keeping quiet.

Within the Conference ministry we have learned to acknowledge one another's sincerity, and to accept that all our views can only ever be "approximations of truth". I hope and trust that such a spirit will prevail amongst readers of *Lifeline*. None of us can claim, and neither should we, absolute understanding of these deep matters. All we can do is explain, with a good degree of humility, where we have got to in our own thinking.

This is possibly the most difficult article I have ever tried to write for *Lifeline*, and I offer it in a spirit of sharing beliefs and interpretations that have become important to me. It seems to me that it is worldly, natural feelings and opinions which have been leading the human race in this delicate and controversial area, in which there are so many profound disagreements, whereas the Church can help shed light only if its source is in Divine revelation and its teaching from love. It is the function of the ministry, all of whom have made solemn vows at their ordination, to lead people to think from above, to see eternal values, and to acknowledge what it is that the Lord wishes for His people.

The basis of unions

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. [Genesis 2:24]

Here, at the outset of the Word, the Lord is revealing to us that He has made a man's spirit and a woman's spirit to be distinctly different so that they can be joined together to make a single complete spirit which becomes an angel in heaven. When an angel is viewed from a distance in heaven it appears like a child, and when approached it becomes clear that it is two young adults, a man and a woman. The main purpose of life on earth is to begin this process, even if it is only by setting the mind in favour of it. ... *for the male person and the female person were so created that from two they may become as one person or one flesh; and when they become one, then, taken together, they are a person in fullness. Without this conjunction they are two, and each, as it were, is a divided or half person.* ... [Conjugal Love 37]

Homosexuality and same-sex relationships have become, arguably, the most hotly debated subjects in the Christian world and elsewhere at the moment, causing great confusion and deep anxiety. In the world beyond the Church, and in particular sections of society, it has become almost obligatory to support and promote it. The New Church is inevitably affected by cultural and political trends, so we find ourselves trying to work out where we stand. As ministers of the Word of God, trained and appointed by our people, how do we give guidance as to the eternal consequences of any particular change or development in human activity?

On the one hand, we have the literal interpretation of Scripture which can sometimes be hard and lacking the softening effect of charity. On the other, we can intellectualise away any challenges which the literal meaning of the Word of God pose so that we change the meaning of Scripture in a way that doesn't allow it to change us. The Writings describe this tendency as 'innovation', and tell us that it is the mechanism responsible for the degeneration of all the churches on earth which have declined since the first Ancient Church. This unhelpful type of "innovation" turns religion into the art of the possible. [see *Arcana Caelestia* 1241]

It was the Apostle Paul who said that Christians should be in the world but not of it, and that is an immense challenge for us all. We live in an age when the power of the social media has

become apparent. By means of it, a small number of people are able to wield enormous influence on the rest of society, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. Beliefs and habits absorbed from the world - especially in the area of human sexuality - appear to be more commonplace and accepted than anything suggested by Divine revelation. This is possibly especially the case for younger generations of people both inside and outside the church. To put it another way, worldly ideologies and lifestyles are subtly encroaching on the church and being accepted as heavenly, sometimes because Christians are unaware of what the Word says about these things, or else for a lack of a rational explanation of deep principles. Some actions and lifestyles lived out in ignorance of higher, heavenly principles and values are not so spiritually dangerous as becomes the case when they are accepted and absorbed by the Church because then there is the danger of profanation, particularly if the Scriptures are used to support the activity.

New light on relationships

We in the New Church are blessed to be in the possession of the most enlightening explanation of the Word of God ever to be revealed in the history of the world. The last two major publications of Emanuel Swedenborg were *Conjugial Love* (CL) followed shortly after by *True Christian Religion* (TCR). It is not an accident that CL was written first because it is a necessary background to and basis for TCR. *The conjugial union of one man with one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the treasure house of the Christian religion [CL 457]. These (the fruits of conjugial love) are by no means possible except in the marriage of one man with one wife: This is the conclusion from all that has hitherto been said. It also forms the conclusion from all that is to be said hereafter. Therefore there is no need to confirm it by any special comment [CL 181].*

Conjugial love is the Lord's universal sphere [CL 222] because it contains His desire for the propagation and nurture of the human race and so of the angelic heavens. It is His highest, most internal and fundamental sphere of life, on which all other spheres rest. The Lord's intention is that we will all become angels in heaven. It is perhaps less well-known that conjugial love flows from the Lord through women alone, and that men receive it only through women. ... *This sphere is received (from the Lord) by the wife and by the husband solely through the wife [CL 224].* If this dynamic were properly understood and appreciated, many relationship difficulties might never arise or be more easily reconciled. [It would be so illuminating to know more about how women and men deal with this fundamental dynamic in the context of modern social patterns.]

It is a fact of creation that men and women possess both understanding and will. In men, it is the understanding that predominates, whereas in women it is the other way round. In an individual it is what predominates that determines human character. [Heaven & Hell 369, etc.] This internal bias towards the heart can cause conflict for many women who follow a professional career either from interest or necessity. In so many occupations, it is principally the head or the intellectual, understanding side of us which has an intrinsic monetary value, whilst the affections of the heart, which is the woman's dominant and blessed quality, attracts only compliments. Many women become troubled at any suggestion that their main strengths are heart-centred, as if this is in some way of lesser value.

Are we really to believe that a devaluing of the woman's bias to the heart is what God intended? Surely his divine purpose was for both the sexes to be equally happy and content with who they are as He created them. The discontent just described is a consequence of the world that we men and women have created - largely by men - and then by women's reaction to it!

Always male or female

A man is defined not just by his physical characteristics but by the fact that it is his understanding which predominates. Similarly, for a woman it is not her body that defines her (however beautiful and attractive it might be) but the leading of her will or heart. The marriage of goodness and truth within each individual is a necessity for our spiritual progress, but conjugial love can exist only between a man and a woman when the love in a woman's will

forms a bond with the wisdom in her husband's understanding. Divine revelation suggests that this is possible only between one man and one woman. [CL181]

This is the ideal, and provides a paradigm for heavenly life. But the potential conjugal bond between a woman's heart and a man's head is open to attack through the myriad flaws and negative tendencies that became part of the human psyche as a result of the 'Fall'. To make this potential union fail is one of the highest priorities of hellish spirits, so they invade and attack us, sometimes using our most noble principles as a weapon against us.

In an understandable attempt by communities to find solutions for variations of human sexuality apart from faithful heterosexual relationships, ideas have emerged about gender and the psycho-spiritual make up of human beings. For example, Carl Jung's concept of the 'anima' and 'animus' has been misinterpreted to support the view that a man can be a woman in a man's body and vice versa. The Heavenly Doctrines indicate that this is an impossibility because it is the male type of soul within the sperm which directs the development of a baby boy's body, and it is the female soul which directs the development of a baby girl's body [CL220]. So a man who has all the physical characteristics of a man is fully a man right through to his very soul, and will continue to be a man in the afterlife, and vice versa [CL 32, 33]. Science continues to debate this issue but with no really clear, unambiguous conclusions.

In the Heavenly Doctrines, and possibly even in the writings of Jung, the reasons given or implied for such feelings as gender dysphoria and homosexual attraction, as well as all other lifestyles which militate against conjugal love, lie in the realm of spiritual psychology, inner hidden motives or needs, and external personas or masks. Although it may sound somewhat strange, we are all subject to influences from within a hierarchy of spirits, some good, some mischievous, some downright destructive. A clear explanation of this principle is given in Wilson van Dusen's book: "The Presence of Spirits in Madness."

The Lord's role

It is a fundamental teaching of the Scriptures and Heavenly Doctrines that the whole human race was redeemed by the Lord's incarnation, glorification and resurrection. In other words, He restored our spiritual freedom to choose between good and mischievous spirit attachments. Regeneration or spiritual growth occurs as a result of cooperation between ourselves and the Lord. Our part, while at the same time acknowledging the Lord as the One who alone can bring about inner change, is to reject those lower order spirits and the feelings they inject. The Lord is then able to replace them with higher order spirits, who bring with them feelings of love, compassion and peace. This is often a grievous matter as it means letting go of something we love, and it is a pattern that is to be repeated time and time again. We are also told that the Lord allows us to be associated with 'transition spirits' because the whole journey would be too great in one step, like jumping up too many steps on a staircase. The critical thing is that our mind is set on a journey towards the conjugal, irrespective of where we are now, and that we are making some progress in that direction.

Returning to the subject of conjugal love, a woman directs the love flowing into her from the Lord in three ways so that this inflow leads to fruitful outcomes. Firstly, it flows back to the Lord; secondly, it flows towards the children or spiritual fruit she wants to produce; thirdly, it flows towards her husband as co-partner in the procreation and nurturing process. What women love in their husbands, besides many other aspects, is their rational and moral wisdom. This wisdom is developed by co-operation with his wife, manifesting itself in a wise, joint lifestyle. If women are not available to love men's wisdom, men have a tendency to love it themselves, which is potentially utterly disorderly, and the source of many of the world's problems, as history tells us. *Conjunction is inspired into the man by the wife according to her love, and is received by the man according to his wisdom* [CL 161].

This is a complex dynamic which has only had a cursory explanation here, but it is not, as I understand the Heavenly Doctrines, a dynamic which is available to same sex-couples. The primary directive for men which emerges from this is that a man's reason for being is to become wise, and wisdom is entirely related to the conjugal sphere of the Lord through

women. In the final analysis, wisdom has no other use than to support the purposes of conjugal love in the procreation and nurture of the human race and thus the angelic heavens. At an inner level, it has its essential usefulness in "procreating" activities and initiatives which bring fruitfulness to the relationship and to the community.

Discrimination and resolution

Discrimination occurs when people are regarded as lesser human beings, even when they have no control whatsoever over their situation. Obvious examples are skin colour, race, age and disability. Other than that, each one of us is required, initially through obedience and then through choice, to conform to the Lord's divine order for His people, not for His sake but for ours.

Conference has made it clear that there is no room for discrimination against men and women of a homosexual inclination in the day-to-day life of the Church. Admittedly, this leaves us with the challenge of working out how we can best help and serve them. What measures fall within the Lord's wish for His people, and how can we best express our love for people who are in some way different? Avoiding blindness, bigotry and prejudice against homosexuals is an absolute requirement. Looking for the good - loving the neighbour - in every human being is a fundamental requirement of Christian life. But what feels like an unhelpful approach is simply to treat homosexuality as a normal part of God's creative drive and purpose.

The Church, its priesthood and members, has to go farther than avoiding bigotry and a simplistic approach to loving others. It has to draw its inspiration and understanding from what our Lord has revealed in His Scriptures and in His Heavenly Doctrines. It has to look to the eternal welfare and happiness of men and women. At times that may take us where we do not wish to go because it is painful, and sometimes unpopular, and requires us to draw boundaries in all aspects of life. The Lord's command to the prophets of old not to preach peace where there is no peace seems to be apposite here.

Our Lord tells us that in this world we will have many troubles. He also says that with Him, and in His name, all things are possible. What might seem impossible for us to resolve - because it is impossible when we try to do so from our own flawed and fallible wisdom and insights! - has to be seen from His light rather than the light of the world. Only when love and wisdom are married together within us can we hope to find ways forward that are authentic, just and truly loving.

Rev Bruce Jarvis