

Marriage

It's Sacredness and Symbolism

An examination of the ancient account in Genesis of the creation of the male & female

By Christopher Hasler

Marriage Today

People define marriage in many different ways, ranging from the declaration that marriage is:

- out of date and irrelevant;
- nothing short of legalised prostitution;
- contract between consenting adults;
- useful for the protection of families;
- insoluble religious union;
- of God's making and therefore holy;
- spiritual union which lasts beyond death'

And of course, all these definitions are true, because in the end, marriage is what we make it.

Today we talk about sexual matters quite openly, and this is good, because we are all sexual beings and Freud has demonstrated what harm can come if we deny or repress these strong feelings.

Recently there has been talk about the new morality and this or that liberation. But cynics have pointed out that another name could be, 'the old immorality' and that permissiveness can claim no originality. Throughout history man has been as 'liberal' as he dared to be. If it appears to the older generation that young people are rejecting all the old standards, we should first ask if this is not the fruit of the emptiness of marriage in the eyes of their children who look at their parents and other adults and say,

"Love ought to be more meaningful. We want to find something different, which is more alive and joyful."

More people today get married in the Registry Office than at church. This may reflect a more honest attitude on the part of those who do not wish to make promises to God in whom they no longer believe. But equally this could be a result of the failure of the churches in showing just where the sacredness of marriage lies.

Beginning With God

The New Church from its conception, over 200 years ago, has always taught a view of marriage which is unique and distinct, but above all deeply Christian as it draws its inspiration and life from Jesus Christ whom it sees as the only God made visible in the Human Form.

It is therefore with God that we must begin our search, because if He is the source, the origin of all life, then His character and purposes must be imprinted on creation. The New Church through its doctrines helps us to see and interpret these purposes in the marvellous and varied forms which are around us, but above all indelibly imprinted upon us.

The sacredness of marriage does not lie simply in a Divine "fiat", just because "God said", and having said, He does not like being contradicted. It lies in His very nature.

The simplest way to understand it is to realize that the nature of God is composed of two realities:

LOVE and WISDOM

In God, these exist in perfect harmony and balance, so that He acts from His love, but always expresses that love in a wise and orderly way.

They are called realities for two reasons:

I) Nothing can ever come into existence unless the love of God wills it, and unless His wisdom forms it.

J) In our personal experience, nothing is truly real to us, unless it affects our love in some way, and unless we can comprehend it with our understanding.

This is the reason why marriage is so real to us and why it can make us supremely happy, or if it fails, supremely despondent; so much of our love, and therefore of our life, is invested in it - with all our thoughts, hopes and ideals. When it is destroyed, we feel "unreal", as if we did not exist.

Man's creation

The creation of man could have been a simple act of making a single sex individual in whom love and wisdom could have found perfect harmony. To some extent this ideal MAN is hinted at in the book of Genesis 1,37, where we read that in the beginning:

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him,"

But then another dimension is introduced as the text goes on to declare:

" . , male and female created He them."

From reading some of the old theologians one could conclude that this introduction of bisexuality into creation was a most unfortunate mistake. It is therefore often argued that sexual differences belong to the body or flesh only. The spirit is regarded as 'pure' and non-sexual.

The New Church has always maintained that this is not so, and that nothing can exist in the body which is not a direct expression of the spirit, for the body is in correspondence with that which forms it and controls it. The words in Genesis express a marvellous and universal truth about human beings which is that the sexes - the male and the female are mystically part of each other on all levels of their being, but are temporarily separated so that they can find the joy and fulfilment of returning where they truly belong: to each other.

Romantic Ideal

Marriage as an institution may be questioned, or even despised, yet the romantic search for the ideal partner is felt in the heart of most lovers. Its glory has been praised in poetry and music.

Most people would like to attain what the book of Genesis announces as a basic fact of human life. Only together, in the close union of their fruitfulness can the male and female attain the true manhood which is the perfect image and likeness of God. The idea of unisex is nonsense. We are not the same, but essentially different. Yet we are complementary and the continuation of life depends on the endeavour to become one.

Whatever we might feel about homosexuality, it is obvious that such unions must remain unproductive and so cannot seriously be compared to marriage. They are something else.

Our Experience

However, no doctrine can stand simply on its own argument and authority. It must be felt to be true in our experience. What then is our experience as we look at the opposite sex? What do we make of them?

Is the pleasure and frustration of our relationship with the opposite sex derived from our similarities, or on the contrary from those differences?

And here we must not think simply of the physical differences of organs and outward looks because the reality goes much deeper.

But let this be made quite clear first: The New Church teaches that every person in order to function as a person must have a will and an understanding. Everyone must be able to love and choose as well as have

the ability to think rationally. But the underlying attitudes are different in the man from what they are in the woman.

The Male

Man in himself has a basic intellectual urge to search for, explore and understand knowledge. Knowledge as such has a specific significance for him and is closely linked with his masculinity. This 'know how' is essential to him and is a mark of his virility.

If the woman does not understand how the car works, or she cannot repair it, she can be frustrated, naturally, but she does not feel any less a woman. Her femininity can almost be enhanced by such ignorance.

The man sees this quite differently. He is affronted as a male and feels less a man if he has to admit ignorance. This is because he was created to search for knowledge so that he may always reach towards the unknown and extend the horizons of human capabilities. Ideally, this search should begin with nature, but should reach beyond it to embrace the truth of man's spiritual existence. That is the true science because it examines what is real and lasting rather than the purely physical which is only apparent and temporal. The tragedy of our age is that few men go beyond the material and are profoundly ignorant of the spiritual.

The Woman

She finds expression and fulfilment in quite a different manner, and it would be useful at this point to turn again to the book of Genesis 2,18-23

The LORD God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

A story which has often been ridiculed and misunderstood in so many ways. But let us see what it can tell us about the mysterious relationship between a man and a woman, between husband and wife.

It can bring a smile to our lips when we read that when *"It is not good for the man to be alone "*, God brought to him all sorts of creatures to see what he would call them. Is this a child like story in which God is making an attempt to distract the man from feeling lonely? Or is this a deeply psychological revelation which is true of all of us in our own preparation for marriage? Let us see and examine it in that way.

When we are young we are told what is what:

"This is Mummy, Daddy, table, apple, doggie. . "

Later we learn higher concepts:

"This is naughty! "

"You are a good boy."

"Now tell me the truth. I don't want any lies!"

We accept what things are called as well as the standards of right and wrong. But there comes a time when we are "alone" with our thought, and seldom could we call this a good time! We are no longer satisfied

with what we have been told and we have to find out our own "names" or qualities for everything. Whatever we want to call good or evil; true and false, that is how it remains for us.

Until a man has come to know his own mind, he is hardly attractive to the opposite sex. The woman has an inner discretion and perception about the man's mind. The male with strong views is far more attractive to the female, whatever his looks - than the indecisive or naive character who may be called 'a nice young man', but whom the young ladies leave well alone. Parents often wonder why their daughters are drawn to the rather brash fellow who shows off.

However the woman has no need to prove herself in order to be feminine. Her gift is that she is creative in "processing" the ideals and strengths that the man has acquired and which she can bring to life. This mysterious interchange is described as taking the rib from the man and building it up into a wife. Something like that really takes place on the psychological level.

This is why the woman must see something in the man that will attract her and that she can respect and with which she is willing to identify. She must feel that he is worthy of her love and be worthy enough to be the father of her children.

This spiritual and psychological transcription of the inner strength of the man is also reflected in nature. The stronger male takes the herd to himself, the weaker one must wait until the next season to offer challenge. If Mr. Blackbird's nest building is not satisfactory, Mrs. B. hops in and out and looks for a better builder. It is interesting to note that in nature there is no such thing as 'free love' without some victory, attainment and responsibility. Free love seems to be the innovation of the degenerate and immature male in human society.

Fruitful Union

The Genesis account reveals that there are different, but complementary urges in the two sexes.

The man is driven by the need to name and understand creation around him. Yet this in itself brings him no satisfaction, and if he rests in more knowing he soon becomes arrogant and so danger to himself and others. Since he is essentially hard, and this is represented by the rib, he needs the redeeming grace of his partner.

The woman is credited with warmth and softness: the flesh. This means that her deepest motivation is not coldly intellectual, but is concerned with love which alone contains the conjunctive principle. She can and must unite herself with the man, because he has no capacity to do so without her inspiration. She acts as the gravitational force of constancy against man's outgoing centrifugal restlessness which could easily lose him in sterile flights of fancy. But together they process and consolidate the truth which the man discovers and make it fruitful.

In this dual action and reaction they become increasingly more closely united and the husband becomes more masculine as he acquires greater wisdom, and the wife becomes more feminine and beautiful as her loving nature brings life to the truth.

Eternal Union

Our life is perpetual becoming and seeking after perfection. We are born either male or female and therefore shall never cease to need to express our essential sexuality, and since the sexes were created to be part of each other, then marriage with a true partner continues beyond death. Those who are not married, or are wrongly married have a now opportunity to discover their true consort in the spiritual world with whom to be united forever.

True love, when it is experienced, cannot but think in terms of eternity. Swedenborg, the amazing revealer of the spiritual world was permitted to see angelic beings united in such true marriages and living in joyful happiness.

But he describes that an experiment was made, specially for him to witness and describe, in which the thought that marriage is not eternal was injected into the minds of those beings. Immediately, they began to grow cold towards each other. Their union now appeared like prostitution: a temporal union that was to

end, and so it lacked complete commitment. However, as soon as the awareness of the eternal returned, they saw that their union was pure and sacred because it reflected the everlasting union of the Divine Love and Wisdom.

In his Writings, Swedenborg called such heavenly marriage love *conjugal love* to distinguish it from the purely carnal sexual love which man shares with beasts. But our sexuality must be more than a physical union, and it can only find true fulfilment in a monogamous and permanent relationship with the one whom we see as the God given partner. The one with whom we can reach true manhood, that is, the full image and likeness of God.

This lecture is based on the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish scientist, philosopher and theologian (1688 - 1772). His revelations contained in some 30 volumes forms the basis of the theology of the New

This theology is Christian and firmly founded on the Bible as the Word of God, but understood spiritually according to the amazing science of correspondences which shows the direct relationship between the spiritual and natural worlds.

The subject is fully treated in Swedenborg's work 'Conjugal Love' and more briefly in a chapter in the work 'Heaven and Hell '.

Some extracts from 'Conjugal Love' follow. The numbers refer to paragraphs.

37. Love regarded in itself is nothing but a desire for and consequent effort to conjunction, and conjugal love is a desire for and effort to conjunction into one. For the human male and the human female were so created that from being two they might become as though one person or one flesh. And when they become one, then taken together they are man in his fullest sense. But without that conjunction they are two, and each is like a person divided or half a person.

48. A love for the opposite sex is love for several of the opposite sex and experienced with several, whereas conjugal love is love solely for one of the opposite sex and experienced with one. Love for several and experienced with several is moreover a natural love, being shared in common with animals and birds, which are natural, while conjugal love is a spiritual love, being particular and peculiar to human beings, because human beings were created and are thus born to become spiritual.

66. The male was created to become a form of wisdom from a love of growing wise, and the female was created to become a form of love for the male on account of his wisdom, thus in accordance with that wisdom. It is evident from this that two partners are real forms and reflections of the marriage between love and wisdom.

216. Those who enjoy truly conjugal love have eternity in view in their marriage; but the reverse is true of those who do not.

The reason why those who enjoy truly conjugal love have eternity in view is that eternity is contained within this love. This is because this love increases for ever in the case of the wife, and wisdom increases for ever in the case of the husband

168. The male employs the intellect to perceive, the female love. ...For the intellect works by light, love by heat, and what belongs to light is perceived, what belongs to heat is felt.

321. The two are still not parted by the death of one, since the spirit of the dead man or woman constantly lives with the spirit of the one who is not yet dead. This continues up to the death of the other, when they meet again and are re-united, loving each other more tenderly than before, because they are then in the spiritual world.

From 'Heaven and Hell'

414. People in heaven are continually progressing toward the springtime of life. The more thousands of years they live, the more pleasant and happy is their springtime. This continues forever, increasing according to the growth and level of their love, thoughtfulness, and faith.

elderly women who have died of old age - women who have lived in faith in the Lord, thoughtfulness toward their neighbor, and in contented marriage love with their husbands - come more and more into the flower of growing youth and into a beauty that surpasses any notion of beauty accessible to our sight.

In a word, to grow old in heaven is to grow young.

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