ON ANGELIC MARRIAGES ACCORDING TO SWEDENBORG[†]

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INTRODUCTION

Swedenborg had quite an extraordinary view of angels. He thought that angels in heaven are involved in marital relations. Of course, Swedenborg was extremely well versed in the Holy Scripture and quoted The Gospel Story on the resurrection of the dead, Mark 12:18-22, for example:

> Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection and they asked him, saying, "Master, Moses wrote unto us, if a man's brother die and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren; and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? For the seven had her to wife." And Jesus answering said unto them, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err."

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THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

Swedenborg declares that everything he writes about the nether world he saw with his own eyes:

> The arcana now revealed in the following pages treat of heaven and hell, and at the same time of man`s life after death. The man of the Church at this day knows scarcely anything about heaven and hell or about his life after death, although they are all set forth and described in the World. Indeed, many people born within the Church even deny them, saying in their hearts, "Who has come from that world and told us?" Lest, therefore, such a negative attitude, which prevails especially with those who have much worldly wisdom, should also infect and corrupt the simple in heart and the simple in faith, it has been granted to me to associate with angels and to talk with them as man with man, also to see the things in the heavens as well as in the hells, and this for thirteen years. Now, therefore, from what I have seen and heard I am permitted to describe these things, in the hope that thus, ignorance may be enlightened and unbelief dispelled. Such immediate revelation is now made because that is what is meant by the Coming of the Lord. (HH 1)

And so, what does Swedenborg as a witness write about marriages in heaven? Before answering this question we have to retell his views on the structure of the nether world.

This world consist of three regions: heaven, the world of spirits, and hell. The inhabitants of these three regions are recruited from the people who have lived on earth. God did not create angels, Swedenborg states, and therefore there has never been such an event as the fall of angels and the creation of hell. Hell came into existence with people making the origin of evil in themselves. What is told about the fall of angels in the Bible, according to Swedenborg, should be understood not literally, but allegorically: Lucifer is not a real angel, but hell itself.

After death the man enters the world of spirits. Having died, he enters the first state of the spiritual condition (or the first state of spirits)—the

state of exteriors. In this state the spirit is different from the living person on earth only in the absence of earthly body, although he now has a spiritual one. This spiritual body has the form of the earthly body and preserves all its earthly qualities: the gifts of speech, hearing, thinking, feeling etc. "So when a man has become a spirit he does not know otherwise than that he is in his own body in which he had been in the world and thus does not know that he has died" (HH, 461). So, in this first state the spirits keep on living basically according to the way they used to live on Earth.

The duration of the man's life in the first state of spirits can be as long as several days or even up to one year, depending on the degree of coincidence of the interior and exterior principles of his life.

According to Swedenborg, the spirit is the inner man that consists of the understanding from which he thinks and reasons, and the will from which he speaks and acts.

The man is basically like this: a) What is the intention of his will, i.e. what is the subject of his love; and b) What is his faith. In *Heaven and Hell* n. 473 we read:

> Because deeds and works are from the will and thought, so are they from the love and faith, consequently, they are such as the love and faith are; for it is the same thing whether you say a man's love or his will, and it is the same thing whether you say a man's faith or his established thought; for that which a man loves he wills, and that which a man believes he thinks. If a man loves what he believes he also wills it and as far as possible does it. Everyone can know that love and faith are within man's willing and thinking, and not outside them, for it is the will that is kindled with love, and the thought that is enlightened in matters of faith; therefore only those who are able to think wisely are enlightened, and in the measure of their enlightenment they think what is true and will it, or what is the same, they believe what is true and love it.

So, the relation of the reason (the thought) and the will is such that "thought is simply the will's form, or that whereby what is willed may

appear in light" (HH 500); thus the understanding and will are not two mechanically juxtaposed pairs, but are mutually interdependent.

The inner and the outer person may not coincide during life on earth: the person may be evil but can do pleasing deeds, or he can be ugly outside but good inside.

The meaning of the first state of spirits is that it makes evident the genuine essence of a person. Depending on the degree of coincidence of the inner or outer person, the spirits can exist for various spans of time in this first state. In the end of their existence in this state the exterior of the spirit fully coincides with the inner state. And so, even by appearance it is evident what kind of a person he or she is.

The same relates to the married life:

> I have often heard that those who have come from the world were rejoiced at seeing their partners again, and that their friends in turn were rejoiced that they had come. Very commonly husband and wife come together and congratulate each other, and continue together, and this for a longer or shorter time according to their delight in living together in the world. But if they had not been united by a truly conjugial love, which is a conjunction of minds by heavenly love, after remaining together for a while they separate. Or if their minds had been discordant and were inwardly adverse, they break forth into open enmity, and sometimes into combat; nevertheless they are not separated until they enter the second state. (HH 494)

Swedenborg expounded the science of correspondences. According to it, every natural earthly subject is related to some spiritual subject, and so the earthly life of a person and his or her love and faith will have a corresponding life after death, with the same love and faith. The only fundamental difference between the spirit and the earthly person in this regard is that the earthly person can change his nature through repentance of sin, but the spirit in unable to change his nature.

In the first state, in the state of the exterior life, spirits live exactly like they used to live on earth, not even knowing about the existence of other spiritual realities. In the second state—the state of interiors—the essence of

people is revealed completely and they begin to live completely in accordance to their faith and love. Their exterior image completely corresponds to their inner contents. "But afterwards, when they come into the second state, their evils become manifest, because their interiors are then opened and their exteriors laid asleep" (HH 497), i.e. it appears as though they die again. If through the death of the earthly man, people are deprived of earthly bodies, after reaching the second state, they lose even that image and now have an exterior that is in correspondence with their faith and love.

If a person while on earth lived well, believed in God and loved truth he or she becomes a good spirit and behaves in a virtuous way. If a person loved evil and falsity, he or she becomes an evil spirit and spiritually goes mad. So, the life of the spirit in the second state is the most evident revelation of the essence of the earthly life. In the second state one's inner, spiritual vision is opened and angels start seeing other realities besides their own existence: good spirits see heaven and evil see hell.

In the second state the good spirits are separated from the evil. The evil spirits go to hell, and good spirits reach the third state—the state of instruction. The transition of evil spirits from the second state into hell is determined by the fact that they lose completely any idea of good and truth and devote themselves fully to their hellish loves.

In the second state the spirits live and act in according to their earthly nature. In the third state the good spirits are instructed about good and truth in heaven. Having received instruction, the spirits became inhabitants of heaven.

The transition through these three states is the general rule for spirits; but some spirits whose true nature is quickly evident after death, go immediately to hell or to heaven. Heaven and hell are by themselves structured in a sophisticated way.

If a husband and wife led a genuinely conjugial life on earth, then they will stay as spouses also in the world of spirits and in heaven as angels. But if the couple had no genuinely conjugial life on earth, then in the world of spirits they separate, if not in the first state then in the second, when the real essence of spouses becomes evident. In heaven every person can find a marriage partner, with the exception of those who kept to the rule of celibacy on earth, for instance monks, who wished to remain celibate after

death. So, these people do not go to heaven or to hell, but they have a special place to dwell near the heavens.

MARRIAGES IN HEAVEN

In heaven the angels live in the married state:

> As heaven is from the human race, and consequently the angels there are of both sexes, and from creation woman is for man and man is for woman, thus the one belongs to the other, and this love is innate in both, it follows that there are marriages in heaven as well as on the earth…Marriage in heaven is a conjunction of two into one mind. It will first be explained what this conjunction is. The mind consist of two parts, one called the understanding and the other the will. When these two parts act as one they are said to be one mind. In heaven the husband acts the part called the understanding and the wife acts the part called the will. When this conjunction, which belongs to man's interiors, descends into the lower things pertaining to the body, it is perceived and felt as love, and this love is conjugial love. From this it is clear that conjugial love has its origin in the conjunction of two into one mind. This in heaven is called cohabitation; and it is said that they are not two but one. So in heaven a married pair is spoken of, not as two, but as one angel. (HH 366-367)

The result of married life is the fullness of being, when the deficiency of one quality (of the will or the understanding) of one spouse is complemented by qualities of the other spouse: the strong reason of the husband is complemented by the strong will of the wife.

> Everyone, whether man or woman, rejoices in understanding and will; but with the man the understanding predominates, and with the woman the will predominates, and the character is determined by that which predominates. Yet in marriages in the heavens there is no predominance; for the will of the wife is also the

> husband's will, and the understanding of the husband is also the wife's understanding, since each loves to will and to think as the other, that is, mutually and reciprocally. Thus are they conjoined into one. This conjunction is actual conjunction, for the will of the wife enters into the understanding of the husband, and the understanding of the husband into the will of the wife, and this especially when they look into one another's faces; for, as has been repeatedly said above, there is in the heavens a sharing of thoughts and affections, more especially with husband and wife, because they reciprocally love each other. (HH 369)

But the meaning of conjugial life is not only in the mutual complementary nature of different qualities but also, in the active interaction of similar qualities, when "one wishes what is his own to be the other's, and this reciprocally" (HH 369). The affections of the wife can be active with the husband, as the thoughts of the husband can be with the wife. Thus each can freely take on the quality of the other. All this means not just the transmission of contents from one side to another or the fusion of their contents, but rather the interaction of qualities and the possibility of using qualities as if they were one's own.

There are degrees of perfection of love, and according to the degree the spouses can get closer and closer to God. The progress itself, and the love, is characterized by freedom. Moreover, freedom is derived from love:

> I have been shown how the delights of conjugial love advance towards heaven…The advance of the delights of conjugial love towards heaven was into states of blessedness and happiness continually increasing until they became innumerable and ineffable, and the more interiorly they advanced the more innumerable and more ineffable they became, until they reached the very states of blessedness and happiness of the inmost heaven, or of the heaven of innocence, and this through the most perfect freedom; for all freedom is from love, thus the most perfect freedom is from conjugial love, which is heavenly love itself. (HH 386)

But conjugial relations on any degree of ascension in heaven are characterized by fullness of being.

> In the inmost heaven there is genuine conjugial love because the angels there are in the marriage of good and truth, and also in innocence. The angels of the lower heavens are also in conjugial love, but only so far as they are in innocence; for conjugial love viewed in itself is a state of innocence; and this is why consorts who are in conjugial love enjoy heavenly delights together, which appear before their minds almost like the games of innocence, as between little children; for everything delights their minds, since heaven with its joy flows into every particular of their lives. For the same reason conjugial love is represented in heaven by the most beautiful objects. I have seen it represented by a maiden of indescribable beauty encompassed with a bright white cloud. It is said that the angels in heaven have all their beauty from conjugial love. The affections and thoughts from that love are represented by diamond-like auras with scintillations as if from fiery stones and rubies, which are attended by delights that affect the interiors of the mind. In a word, heaven represents itself in conjugial love, because heaven with the angels is the conjunction of good and truth, and it is this conjunction that makes conjugial love. (HH 382a)

MARRIAGES ON EARTH

According to Swedenborg, between an angel and man on earth there are no principal differences: both of them equally live their life according to divine reality for "the angels of heaven are men in perfect human form" (CL 27).

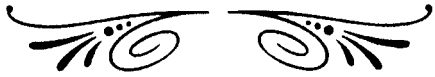
People, according to Swedenborg, just like angels, are fundamentally marital creatures. What has been said of marriages in heaven is good also for marriages in earth. Marriages on earth are also from the union of good and truth, or will and reason, or love and faith. And just as an angel is one marital couple, so also men and women in the fullness of their being can

also make one marriage couple: "The male human and the female human were so created that from two they may become as one human or one flesh; and when they become one, then, taken together, they are man in his fullness. Without this conjunction they are two, and each, as it were, is a divided or half man" (CL 37).

It is easy now to understand the Swedenborgian view of the resurrection of the dead: Sadducees speak about marriage as a social phenomenon which is related to inheritance, and not about love and marriage in the true sense. This is said in one of the talks among spirits which Swedenborg was witness to.

> Certain men said that conjunction with a female before marriage is the same as conjunction with a wife after marriage. On hearing this, the wives were exceedingly indignant and said, "There is no similarity whatsoever; the difference between them is like the difference between the fatuous and the real," to which the men retorted, "Are you not females as before?" At this the wives replied in a louder voice, "We are not females but wives. You are in fatuous love, not in real; therefore you talk foolishly." The men then said, "If not females, you are yet married women." They replied, "In the first days of marriage we were married women, but now we are wives." (CL 199)

So, in the story of the resurrection of the dead cited above from Mark, the subject is a married woman, and not wife. At least none of the Sadducees was interested in her real love. According to Swedenborg there is no problem in this situation: after her death this woman will be really united with the brother whom she loved, if she loved anybody. And if she didn't love anybody then none of the brothers will become her husband.

Thanks to marital love, all corporeal problems in earthly marriage are irrelevant. It doesn't mean that they don't exist; they just cease to be meaningful as far as love is concerned. Just as, for instance, the absence of capacity to fly doesn't restrict man's capacity to love. Yet in real marriage every thing is done in union, bringing happiness and joy, be they from things sexual or social.

Swedenborg's views on angelic marriages is not just a curious example of angelology. In fact Swedenborg introduced quite a new paradigm which in its turn, makes it necessary to re-evaluate many things in the nature of man and the nature of the world. ❑