

The Spiritual Origin of Sexuality and Gender: The Difference That Makes the Difference

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is not to seek conformity of view or belief, or to pursue or abolish political correctness regarding the issue of gender. Rather, it is to facilitate and encourage thought, reflection and discussion, especially from a spiritual point of view, with regard to the differences between the genders. What is it that is truly feminine? Is it only in women? What is it that is truly masculine? Is it only in men? Is someone like Carl Jung right or helpful in asserting that men and women have both the feminine and masculine within them, however these two terms might be defined? Are the masculine and the feminine differences of kind, or are the masculine and the feminine some sort of continuum which, perhaps, overlaps somewhere in the middle?

These are the kinds of questions I want to address. Increasingly in our world and culture there are basic business, political and religious decisions being made, or being asked to be made, that rest upon some kind of understanding of the above questions. Some would say there is no difference between the sexes, other than the obvious physiological differences; others would take other views. But, in either case, I believe there is a prevailing pressure to try to make the sexes more and more the same, as if there really is no profound or significant difference between them. I also sense that it is part of current political correctness not to challenge this assertion. I do not agree.

The assertion that there is no significant difference between the sexes comes from many quarters, not the least of which is the field of professional (primarily Jungian) psychology that would have us believe that each of us is some kind of blend of both masculinity and femininity. I believe this kind of thinking leads to all kinds of problems and confusion, as people, especially as individuals, try to think about this subject from, shall we say, a more psycho-spiritual viewpoint. It might have been less confusing and more helpful if Jung had spoken of the love principle or the wisdom principle instead of the feminine or masculine principle. As we shall see, femininity is not something men have, but love is; and masculinity is not something women have, but their own form of wisdom is something they very much have.

But, perhaps, we're getting ahead of ourselves. For now, it's important to say that these basic matters of sexuality and gender have received many challenges in the last few decades and that they need to be pondered anew. Indeed, it may even be harmful not to do so; culture can be quite repressive at times. And, so, I offer this paper.

I have another purpose as well. And that is to stimulate or facilitate a genuine love and deep admiration between men and women in general. In parts of today's climate, such a thought may, unfortunately, seem old-fashioned. Recently I went into a waiting room at a Midas muffler shop. There were five men in there and one woman who looked to be about 75 or 80 years old. I said to her in a kind of joking manner: "Looks like you're the only woman in here." Instantly, she said back to me: "Oh, that's just fine." I said, "Why is that?" She again answered without hesitation, but this time more slowly and deliberately and with even more sincerity and genuine feeling in her voice, putting exaggerated emphasis on the last word she spoke: "Because I think men are *wonderful*." I was stunned! Quite frankly, I don't hear this kind of sentiment expressed very often, let alone to the degree she said it. And that is very sad to me. It would, of course, be just as rare to hear a man say something like that about women; not only just say the words, but really feel and mean them from the bottom of his heart the way she did. And can you even begin to imagine a world where most people felt this way? Can you imagine the peace and joy? Instead, what we too often

hear is alienation, men-bashing and women-bashing. Some of that can certainly be expected here on earth, since so many people are just beginning their spiritual journey. But when that woman said those words it was like music to my ears. In this paper, I'd like to play that kind of music. In my own way, I'd like to help promote such attitudes, if only in a small way.

And, finally, I should certainly also say that I'm going to be speaking primarily from the point of view of my perception of what Swedenborg has to say about this whole matter and I would, of course, welcome any and all responses, whether you agree with me or not in my interpretation of what Swedenborg is saying.

When talking about the gender issue, both physiology and psychology are, of course, fundamentally important and should never be left out of the discussion. But, at least for me, if that is all there is to the subject, it is terribly incomplete.

Why? One reason and one reason alone: because God actually exists! Given that, it seems entirely appropriate that God be included in this discussion, especially since it is God who made us! We may not fully understand God or the exact mechanisms of creation, but any God worth his or her salt will also surely be our creator as well! And, as most everyone is aware, creatures often reflect on their creators. Clearly, God should be a part of this discussion.

For example, think about the notion that God is actually the one who made *you*; that is, it is literally the Lord who designed you, intentionally crafted you the way you are, basics and potentials. Not just part of you, but *all* of you, and, most especially, for this discussion, your sexuality and gender; made your femininity or masculinity, and made you sexy and appealing to the opposite sex. In particular, it is the Lord who made you have all those wonderful and powerful feelings and enjoyable thoughts, of loving to make love, and doing so with great energy and passion. That was not an accident. Our sexuality and gender were created on purpose!

And so, what in the world does all this say about God, about the very nature of God? It's pretty simple really: our creator's stamp will be found on the fundamental aspects of our being, our gender and our sexuality. It is in the deeper, spiritual part of us that God made all our differences in the first place. What is it about the nature of God that has so profoundly affected our gender and our sexuality? What are the spiritual differences between men and women that make the sexes so different from each other, both physically and psychologically? Here's where it gets really interesting. The basis, intensity and quality of our sexual experience, the actual sexuality we feel in our bodies, the feelings that can make you want to shout "whoopie" (or whatever your expression might be) have their true origin from the nature and quality of the Lord's internal life and makeup. It's not simply hormones or culture or whatever. One of the things this means is that the closer to God you come, the *more* deeply and truly sexual you will become from the inside out. In addition, there are very deep spiritual reasons why that sexuality, as it expands and deepens and becomes more and more alive and vigorous, will move in the direction of monogamous sexuality; not only because, from a practical point of view, we can't love in depth more than one person, but also because monogamous (*feeling*) sex more readily images the holiness, energy and passion of God's internal life. Stated simply, it is *one* Divine wisdom and *one* Divine love that, united in deep attraction, make up the completed glory that is the one living, *incredible* God.

Because we are primarily spiritual beings who are now living in a very limiting physical body with all that this entails it may be important to add at this time that as our spirituality increases, our sexual experience will become less and less focused on the genitals only and become more and more spread out throughout the entire body because it will become more truly feeling-combined-with-sensation and, therefore, less sensation only.

It's important to add immediately that we can choose not to accept the spiritual stamp that God has impressed on our being. If we choose hell, our gender and sexuality (and many other things) will be different than if we choose heaven! This is vitally important. If we choose heaven, it will have one nature. If we choose hell, it will have another nature. And this is, in part, what makes this subject so tricky and difficult. In terms of the inner natures of human beings, one can't simply talk about that by just studying people. The living, human document is not unchanging. It can vary from growth and development. Which kind of person or persons are being studied? How far along, for example, are they in their development, both their first commandment spirituality (loving the Lord) and their second commandment spirituality (truly loving other human beings)? The inner nature of the person who's grown and

developed is going to be very different than the nature of the person who has not grown or developed, and this is especially true in the area of our sexuality. In either case whether we chose heaven or hell the true origin of our innate sexuality is still spiritual; not merely biological, cultural, or accidental.

Let me elaborate. If a man and a woman have chosen heaven, the basis and origin of their sexual feeling and experience comes about differently than if they have chosen hell. If the two individuals have chosen heaven, each one of them will, by definition, become more like God. That is, they will bring love and wisdom closer and closer together within their own personal being and life. For example, rather than being harsh or negligent about confronting others, each may do so more gently, and at the same time speak more truthfully. But, in addition to this, this woman and man will also, as a couple, become more like God as a result of their closeness to each other as correspondents of Divine love and wisdom, which, in God, are perfect. This coming together of love and truth is the source of all life and excitement, all energy and creativity. Any time we do anything in our life that brings love and truth closer together in their actual functioning in our lives, we move toward a greater sense of realness, power, passion, and holiness because love blended perfectly with truth is God. Speak as warmly and truthfully as you can and you will affect others at a much deeper level. Bring true feeling and sexuality together but hold on to your hat! Moving closer to God intensifies, broadens and deepens human sexual response and functioning, which also, then, intensifies and enhances whatever gender we may be.

This correspondence to the Lord's life is the real reason why women and men are attracted to each other in the first place, why all the fireworks go off! It's as if the very attraction itself between men and women is saying: "When you come closer to each other, and because of what you then correspond to, you come closer to the fire and life of God's very being." It is no exaggeration to say that there is an overwhelming, powerful attraction, between Divine love and Divine wisdom within the Lord that makes the whole reality of Divine love-wisdom so internally alive, powerful and cohesive. Now to keep this understanding from being in our heads only, recall what it actually feels like to be sexually attracted to a person of the opposite sex, especially when love is present! It is very powerful and enlivening. This is real stuff.

At this time we need to go down a small side road. In describing the deepest nature of men and women, we are in a very real sense talking about a vision, a vision of what can be, but a vision that is not pie in the sky mere hope but a very real potential, in the same sense that a seed of corn really can become a stalk that produces juicy corn on the cob. When that seed of corn goes into the ground it's not just some vague hope that it will produce ears of corn. Its growth is for real. Its growth is "in the cards," as the saying goes. Its destiny is part of its very real future if all goes as it should.

This analogy applies to the real gender differences. If we move along a line of what Swedenborg calls regeneration (roughly translated into modern terms as personal spiritual growth) the relationship between woman and man will be healthy, rewarding and productive.

However, before regeneration gets seriously under way, these gender definitions and traits appear one way. In regenerating people however, they make a different, more developed or advanced picture. So we're dealing partly here with a vision, but one rooted in reality, and we'll be focusing primarily on the view of regenerating people, which for us remains simply our potential, our angel-potential, if you will. This gender potential is *very* positive, but it can nonetheless be derailed. It is a real potential, but it is certainly not inevitable. But even so, that potential does have consequences now for each gender.

Now let's get really serious. We begin at the top with the nature of God. As most Swedenborgians are aware, the actual substance or "material" of God is Divine love-wisdom. This is the "spiritual stuff" out of which the physical and spiritual universe is made.

At this point I would just like to make a brief but significant departure from our primary discussion. What I've just said about the substance of God is a lofty statement, but one that we cannot readily verify through normal, direct sense experience the way we can about science or geometry. But it is possible to experience it directly through any number of different kinds of spiritual experience, not the least of which is a near-death experience (NDE). The issue here is that the substance or "material" of God is not just some doctrine or idea, but is actually quite capable of being

experienced, is quite real. In fact, when the Lord is experienced directly, God feels the most real. As Swedenborg remarks, the Lord is the most real person. You literally can't experience anything more real than God, no matter what it is. The point here is that discussing the Lord in this way (as Divine love-wisdom) does not mean we are merely having some nice, but basically unreal, metaphysical discussion that doesn't actually have much to do with anything in real life; real, for example, in the way our sexual feelings and experiences are real. The Lord is actually more real than even these. It's important to remember that as we proceed, because it can begin to sound awfully theoretical to some people. It is not, as many NDE'rs can readily attest.

Now these two essentials (Divine love and wisdom) *are* the Lord, but, as such, they are, as Swedenborg phrases it, "distinguishably one"; i.e., they form a perfect and total unity but without losing distinctness between them. This is extremely important, and relates directly to the sexes and our sexuality. What we are talking about here is perfect and total unity between these two aspects of the Lord with each remaining clearly different from the other. This is the spiritual origin of the sexes that causes them to be different physically and psychologically, and to relate to the Lord in fundamentally different ways.

The origin of the sexes:

This over-all, totally unified reality of Divine love-wisdom could not be created into a single-sex human being, even if that human being was, in itself, a correspondential image of the Lord. Because the Lord could *not* do that, two sexes were created to image these two aspects of the Lord which, in the Lord, are not split up at all, but are two distinct realities perfectly and completely united.

One of the things that's important to say at this point is that Divine love-wisdom means that God has an inner and outer nature, just as we do. There is an inner and outer in all things; it's one of the fundamental aspects of all reality, including God. If you want to know what God's outer nature is, you look at Divine wisdom. If you want to know what God's inner nature is, you look at Divine love. Everything about wisdom is more external relative to love. Reflect or meditate for a moment about your own experience of wisdom. Now do the same about your own experience of love. Clearly there is a fundamental difference. That difference, as we shall see, is also the difference between the sexes.

The masculine:

What, then, is the spiritual, or core, basis of masculinity? In regenerate human males it is wanting to be and function as that external aspect of God, in a correspondential form of it; wanting to be that wisdom; wanting to be wise. There is a great deal entailed in this.

The deepest dream of any regenerate or developed male is to *be* wise from love. To see and perceive things fundamentally, to understand them as they really are, especially the spiritual basis of all things in life, is the cornerstone of the male soul. This is the true life, nature and basis of what is genuinely masculine, and there is a great deal that springs from this design. But one of those results is not that men only think or are only left-brained, to use more modern terms. And it certainly does not mean that men don't have feelings. Indeed, their greatest wisdom comes about as a result of a very deep integration of their thinking and feeling abilities. Granted this may be rarely noticed in men, but this is why it's important to say that it is their deepest dream, and not necessarily the reality of their life, while they live here on earth, especially in the early stages of their spiritual journey.

This fundamental nature of men, this fundamental love of being "externally wise," if you will, as a top priority, has certain consequences. It means that men will primarily think and function in terms of wisdom, if they're spiritually developing. If they've chosen darkness as their preferred way to live, they will think and function primarily in terms of what is untrue which to them is thought to be truth.

In everyday conscious experience, men will naturally respond first in terms of what's true, of what's right, of how things really are. Neurosis aside, this is how they really are and is why being right is generally so important to them; it's the first or primary wave length upon which they operate and experience life, even though, as said above, they too have feelings and need to be in touch with them if they are to be their *most* masculine self! This most

fundamental orientation of theirs is really their orientation to God, and is what makes men's bodies generally bigger, harder (less subcutaneous fat) and stronger, because that's the way truth and wisdom are, relative to love. Wisdom is also more external, more "externally powerful" as well. Generally speaking, men are, in their outer over-all nature, more external than women, and this is reflected in their sexual organs as well. These are literally external to their bodies. Among other things, this means that men are going to be more action oriented in an overt sense; more on the doing end of external things, as opposed to the feeling, relating, being end of things. Although men can certainly be feeling and relational in their own way, that will not be their first love. Along with this kind of action, they will first tend to stress perception and understanding, almost, it may seem at times, for its own sake. This is due to their fundamental correspondence, their correspondence to the (outer) part of God that they are most created like. Even when men are being relational and more directly loving, we often say it's "in a masculine way." Their basic correspondence is the reason.

To say this in a different way, the male nature is fundamentally more like light than like heat, even though both come totally united to us from the spiritual sun. In a very basic and fundamental way, men are oriented to the light band of the wave length. They see truth more than they feel it, and generally see further and more of it; light travels further than heat. Swedenborg remarks that men stand in a light that women do not experience. And because of the basic ideas here, it is appropriate to add: or ever can experience or even should experience! The corollary is also true. Women stand in a warmth or heat that men do not experience. But in any event, if men are true to their correspondence they will experience deep peace and an intrinsic sense of worth and joy because they are in touch with their very reason for being. This is what is essentially masculine. Ideally, women have no desire to be that way as their primary mode of being, but they respect and love it, even thrill to it, when men are truly and deeply this way.

As we take a look at the deepest internal nature of men, though, the plot thickens. As I've said, their most basic desire is to be this outer aspect of God (in correspondential form) which is wisdom from love. But don't forget that God's outer nature is linked perfectly to something more internal, and that internal nature is one of pure love. Men are similar. This is not something that is part of men's conscious experience. They do not move and live this out in their external, visible nature. It is, instead, their deepest core, inner being, the life energy that fuels their outer way of wanting to move and be. Because of this, men's orientation to love will always want to make them express their love through love of being wise, express it in terms of wisdom.

This is why when men are being wise their experience inside is that they are loving you very deeply, even though they can also be "directly feeling." But if they do, it will not be their fundamental way, nor will it ever be like the way women are warmly relational. Women are born into the knowledge of the particulars of the expression of love. Men are born more into understanding love. Because of this, there is actually a sense in which men understand women better than women understand themselves and, conversely, women feel men's nature and being more than men do. This is not cultural or only biological. It is ontological, which simply means it is a part of the intended, created order.

So much for the male. Let's move on to one of the most beautiful, wonderful creatures the Lord ever created: woman; the feminine.

The feminine:

We've been talking about the external nature of God that men want to be like. There is also an internal nature to God. It is called Divine love, and this is what women correspond to and have been created to express. And because it is Divine love, there is something else that is "something very special" within that love. That "something else" is quite remarkable, and is critical to understanding the true nature of femininity. The aspect of Divine love I am talking about is this: it is the most profound, the most serious, and the most total self-respect imaginable. We are talking about an immense dignity and integrity that is an intrinsic aspect of all love, especially Divine love. Or another way to say this is that Divine love has within itself the absolute love of itself, but without a trace of ego or conceit in it God loving God, you might say, with not a scintilla of self-centeredness, but brimming with self-respect.

This is difficult for many of us even to imagine, let alone take seriously. In scripture this aspect of God's self-respect is expressed when the Lord says to Moses, "I am the I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." And in the New Testament he says, "I am meek and lowly in heart."

We are beginning to move in on what is truly feminine, namely, to want to be a correspondence of that Divine love, which includes loving of all kinds, but with absolute self-respect. In women this aspect of their correspondence is the spiritual reason why they want and need to be cherished by men, and why they can handle it so well (indeed, thrive) when they are cherished! It is also important in helping to counteract men's innate tendency toward egocentricity, the so-called male ego. Men must cherish, must basically serve, women as an antidote to their own internal tendency to be conceited, a problem women do not generally have because of their basic correspondence to Divine love.

Being a correspondent of this kind of love is also the source of the feminine altruism that men often marvel at. Put simply, love wants to love. And since real love is basically so self-giving and so self-effacing, femininity is also about loving God, as well as wanting to be a correspondent of Divine love. This means women will automatically relate to God first and foremost through a feeling, loving connection which is a part of imaging Divine love.

This desire makes women's fundamental orientation to life a feeling one. It makes them be feeling *first* and understanding second. This is not the only part of their being, but it is their first or primary mode of being. This makes love or relationship the actual milieu through which she wishes to live and move and have her being. It is her *raison d'être*. Let me emphasize this very central meaning; being feeling or love oriented is the central nature of women and corresponds to the innermost being of God. This fundamental loving relationship to God and to all of life is why children come through her and not through the male. Love is life giving. It is soft and nurturing and caring. It is also more essentially alive. Women are, in a very real sense, essentially more "alive" than men because that's the way feeling is: it is more primary and more vital, relative to wisdom or understanding.

And since their first priority is to love God, rather than to understand God, women are primarily loving in their overall approach to life; they're really loving love, loving goodness (God) more than anything else. This basic nature of their life and soul is why they are also more inherently beautiful than men. Men can be beautiful, too, in their own way, but they can never compare to the magnificent beauty of women. Is there anything more inherently beautiful than love, anywhere?

But, as in the case of men, women's internal nature is different from the external. Their core being, the part that they are not conscious of and do not normally experience directly, but want to connect with more and more, is very deep and very internal wisdom. Thus, that wisdom is intelligence, knowledge, and wisdom about what life at its deeper, more personal levels is really all about. This also makes them very practical in a certain commonsense way about people and their situations. They know, in very deep ways, what makes people tick. This is women's wisdom and it comes from deep inside them, the very core of their inner life and being.

Women know (feel) love (God) the way men never can or will. This also makes their wisdom very internal and is what feeds into the particulars of their ability to express love, assuming, of course, that they too grow and regenerate. Without this, we see the phenomenon of, as one book put it: "Women who love too much." That is, women who love very unwisely, who don't connect more and more with their own internal life.

What this all means is that both females and males, as individuals, but also as couples, are instinctively trying to approach their greatest fulfillment, which is to become more and more a correspondential form of the unified Divine love-wisdom that is the Lord. The more women and men move and live from connection of love and wisdom within themselves, as well as between themselves, the more happy and blessed they become. These two things together complete the picture of what God really is, and when you image what God is like in your life you touch real power, power to make life beautiful, meaningful and very happy. But notice that for this to happen, men and women must remain fundamentally different from each other so they can come together. Their differences should actually be accentuated and celebrated for this very reason, and certainly should not be diminished or obscured, or, as happens far too often, put down.

For women, one of the practical consequences of their overall nature will mean that their biggest issues in life will be wisdom issues. Their biggest challenges in life will be issues of wisdom, or more specifically, coming to love in truly wise and discerning ways, just as men's biggest issues, because of their over-all nature, will be love issues, coming to be wise but in very warm and loving ways. For them, this will mean being wise from love rather than only having knowledge or intelligence for its own sake, and it will, in particular, mean the necessity of being in touch with their own feelings.

Men's feelings will be one of their most profound regenerational issues, especially, interestingly enough, feelings of sadness, because these are essentially about caring for something that was hurt or lost. But they will also need to have access to other feelings, as their love of being wise becomes more warm and alive, which really means more essentially wise. But though they may become loving and feeling men, they will still find their greatest reward in being wise, in being that outermost nature of God. That is simply how men have been created. Women should not try to make them into women, or secretly want them to be more like them. They should celebrate what men most essentially are and love them for that. And, of course, the same is true of men. They should never want women to be like men, but must love and cherish them for what they essentially are.

And even though women may become very wise, their greatest and most fundamental desire in life will always be in expressing love, expressing it in all the thousands of ways that they innately know. And they will continue to become ever more loving in ever more wise ways as they continually connect to eternity, with their own very real self, the most internal life and being of God.

Strange as it may sound, there is a sense in which men, as they grow, become an outer expression of women's deepest inner life and core being. But it must be added that it will always and forever be an external expression of it, an echo, as it were. This is why, when men are really in touch with their own true masculinity, they are so exciting to women, even just by being themselves. And this, of course, works the other way around as well. Women's ways are an external expression and, therefore, joy of the inner love that guides and informs men's desire to be wise. Thus, when both are growing, people of each sex tend to draw the other sex toward their own individual center, men toward their inner love, women toward their inner wisdom and, thus, toward greater and greater integration and, therefore, integrity. It is not just a trite saying that men and women truly need each other; it is built into creation.

One of the consequences of this arrangement is that both sexes literally need to be in touch with the deepest levels of their own self-respect in order to be really in touch with each other. With regard to the relation of the sexes it is particularly important; for without it, each will seek to move away from the opposite sex as they move away from their own deeper, inner nature. As said above, when that self-respect is there and growing, each sex should affect the other by drawing them closer and closer to their own respective internal natures; and, of course, therefore, to God; to an ever closer connection to both of these, simultaneously to eternity. Joy! Joy!

We can never completely blend or become the same, however, just as Divine love and wisdom do not. And the closest we can ever come to God, without, of course, ever really being God, is by means of an ever closer, more intimate, more truly united connection or relationship to our partners. That warm, intimate relationship comes closer and closer, in correspondential form, to the unity of love and wisdom within God, which is why there's so much power in it. This is also why marriage has the greatest problems as well. When big power sources go wrong, they can really go wrong and be the most difficult to rectify. But nowhere is there so much creativity, ecstasy, growth and energy as when the unions are at their best, which they never are unless both individuals go a long way down their own respective, regenerational paths. Personal, spiritual growth is a prerequisite to realized marital love.

In more down-to-earth terms, the way this all works out is that men should ideally bring quality to women's essentially loving and feeling nature. If their relationship is a good one, women will become more and more discerning in their relationships and natural loving ways, and men will become more and more loving in their natural ways of discerning and doing things. Women should bring a sense of life, a sense of energy and aliveness to men's wise or perceptive way of doing and understanding things. Isn't a man somehow more full of life when he is related seriously with a woman? When a woman is growing and is happily related to a man, doesn't she become deeper and more wise in the way that she loves others?

But, again, we are talking about what's possible. We are talking about each sex's deepest dreams of what's possible between them when both grow. The picture changes dramatically when regeneration is not taking place.

In unregenerate men, we not only have a dislike of women, we have an ego out of control which is what it's like when someone cares only about the truth and cares nothing for love. When truth stands alone it is harsh and hurtful. This is the "I only want the facts, man!" kind of mind set facts without caring, information without an underlying loving or humane purpose. Truth by itself eventually becomes total untruth; it becomes hell. Or, perhaps, another way to say this more broadly is: any external without an internal is hell.

In unregenerate women we have, as said before, the picture of women who love too much. Eventually this becomes smothering or distorted in some other way in time, no love at all. We can never have too much wise love, or too much loving wisdom. But we can have too much of love and wisdom when these two are split up and separated from each other. The more love and wisdom come together within us and between us, the more creative, happy and blessed we will be; and the more sexy and truly sexual we will be as well.