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Sister Wife

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Sister Wife

Abstract

This is a film review of *Sister Wife* (2009), directed by Jill Orschel, a short documentary that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and that has recently been made available online.

Author Notes

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Sister Wife
(2009)
Directed by Jill Orschel

The Sundance Film Festival now makes available a variety of documentary films at its site, *SUNDANCENOW DOC CLUB*. On this site I found a movie in which I thought our readers might be interested. Although a 2009 movie, many of our readers will not be aware of the film, so I am adding a review here.

Sister Wife is a thirteen minute short film about DoriAnn, a Mormon woman who was invited to marry her sister's husband and become a sister wife. She is now the mother of twelve children. In the movie, she describes the invitation of her sister and seeking the advice of elders. She decided that in becoming a sister wife she would be sharing a sacred space with God through all time and all eternity and that she would be doing her duty (procreation), although with a man for whom she did not have feelings. She and her sister would take turns engaging in sexual relations with their husband. When it was her sister's turn to engage in sexual relations, however, DoriAnn began to feel hurt. As time went on it seemed to her as though she experienced a deeper hole, a gaping deeper hole – a wound that started to fester. She felt rage, fear, sadness, anger, hatred, and resentment, but she kept telling herself to "keep it to myself." Listening to her sister having sexual relations with their husband, she begins to feel crazy and twisted. Her relationship feels toxic and poisonous, and it is so intense that it feels as though it will kill her.

One might suggest to DoriAnn that she leave what feels like hell. Move out, leave the State, or give up the very religion that has put her in this terrible situation. But DoriAnn does not take any of these paths. Instead, she stays in the relationship because of her personal desire "to love you (her husband) as much as I love myself." In the effort to love another as herself – under

these incredibly difficult circumstances, the more difficult the circumstances the better for DoriAnn's purposes – DoriAnn feels like a goddess and experiences something akin to what she describes as the pure love of Christ.

You can say many things about DoriAnn's situation and her experiences: she may be crazy, has been duped by the Church, is a fool, disturbed, and so on. But these responses ignore the point of DoriAnn's behavior. The more difficult and painful the experience, the more fulfilling it is to take up and complete the task to the best of one's ability. There is a particular joy or satisfaction in overcoming pain and suffering for God, a joy that cannot be found in any other circumstances. And this seems to me to be one way of explaining some variety of religious experiences. From outside the experience, the behavior seems lunatic. But from inside the experience, the behavior brings us closer to the holy, the sacred, to God.