

Correspondences of sexual acts

I will be considering the following two quotations. I will argue that such doctrinal views are derived to some extent from the Writings, but are full of half truths, quarter truths and so on.

“Correspondence? Without looking back, I think the matter I raised was how a homosexual union at an ultimate level (and all things come down to ultimates, at least in potential, don’t they?) works correspondentially. I can’t for the life of me work out a positive, heavenly correspondence for a penis inserted into rectum, and the ejaculation of the seed of life into the body’s waste channel. In the case of two women, physical conjunction cannot take place. They are, as it were, side by side, but not conjoined or united at an ultimate level.” (Bruce Jarvice email of 29/08/14)

“There is the further very unpleasant consideration that in male homosexual behaviour, human seed, containing the rudiment of a new soul, is very commonly commingled with faeces or is corrupted and destroyed in some other deplorable fashion.

Of course, in female homosexual activity, human seed is wholly absent. In both cases sexual delights are sought in a context which precludes any conjunction of interior loves (see CL 55), and any possibility of the procreation of human offspring and a heaven from them. Surely behaviour so contrary to the Lord’s Divinely Human end and order must have harmful results to the individual who engages in it.” (Willard K. Heinrichs “The Word and Homosexuality” *New Church Life* [1993] 449-450 [*anglicised*])

One major weakness of the two viewpoints, is that they view sexual intercourse from the outside not the inside. We have to be wary about being “sensual”, that is, when we form our “judgments and conclusions about everything from externals” (AE 581:3) or “from the ideas of the outer senses, which are so limited, corporeal and material” (SE 572), or from our “own imagination and love” (SE 1532) or from “bodily judgement”. (CL 57; cf. CL 340; 478; 530) The angel in us uses “internal sight” (AC 4903:1e) to judge people from inside out, (CL 439) and so “the external is judged by the internal, and not the other way round.” (TCR 595:4e; cf. TCR 654)

After Lord’s coming we are to judge religious ceremonies and people’s actions from “the viewpoint of charity and faith”. (AC 1003e) We worship the Lord from “the inner realities – forms of faith and love” (AC 9002:3), which join us to the Lord. (AC 9457:6) Kneeling doesn’t necessarily imply being humble before the Lord, kisses don’t necessarily imply affection, and rituals don’t necessarily imply worship. (AC 4215:3; AE 325:3; SE 4099) The “soul or spirit is the true likeness of the person, whereas the body is merely a representative image of him. When a person rises again his representative image or that which is external, namely his body, is cast aside, for he is now conscious in that which is internal, namely the true likeness of him.” (AC 4835:4) It is therefore not just what the body does, but what the spirit inside the body intends, loves and thinks.

““Who is there that is wise that regards a man from his deeds alone, and not from his will? If he wills well, he loves his deeds; but if he wills evil, he does not love his deeds: the latter he also sees and explains according to the intention of his will. He who is spiritual attends still less to the deeds, and explores the will. The reason is, as has been said, that deeds are nothing in themselves, but they derive their character entirely from the will; for deeds are the will in act. It is said the will, but, in the spiritual sense, is meant the love, because a man wills what he loves, and what, he loves that he wills.” (AE 98:3)

If anal intercourse is intended as an act of love, then in a consensual, loving relationship, whether heterosexual or homosexual, I find it hard to believe that it is evil.

Sexual reality

We can look a bit silly linking anal intercourse solely with homosexuality. Most homosexuals don't indulge in it! According to what I've read, they prefer mutual pleasuring or inter-crural sex (sex between the thighs) as the Greeks did. There is also no exchange of semen with heterosexuals if the male uses a condom or has had a vasectomy, or the female uses a femidom. With lesbians there are 'sex toys' to compensate for lack of penuses. Oral sex and anal sex is possible for both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

“ ‘Sodom’ is used to mean a certain kind of foul behaviour that is totally unnatural.” (AC 2322) I would suggest that the sin of Sodom is actually attempted male rape by heterosexual men. While anal intercourse might be “unnatural” for me, it's not for other heterosexuals. Statistically, heterosexual anal intercourse is the main cause of the spread of AIDs in Africa. It's a taboo subject, but academic studies seem to indicate that it is more prevalent amongst heterosexuals than homosexuals. Statistically, most male rapes are perpetrated by men who claim to be heterosexual. It is a crime of dominance and control, sometimes committed during wars, such as the Bosnian conflict, perpetrated by men who are sometimes victims of the same depravity.

I'm no biologist or physiologist, but isn't a man's penis a “waste channel”? It's the conduit for urine. Isn't a woman's vagina also a “waste channel”? At the end of each monthly cycle a woman's ova or egg is flushed out the vagina by blood or urine or both. After heterosexual intercourse, if the sperm has not impregnated an egg, it is flushed out by the woman's urine. From my reading it's not immoral in Christianity, Judaism or Islam for a married couple to have anal intercourse, provided both parties are consenting and they have weighed up the health risks.

It's dangerous limiting a symbol, like the anus, or the penis and so on, to one meaning. This caused Swedenborg a grave misunderstanding with extra-terrestrials. He was comparing them to eagles with their keen sight, and all they saw was him describing them as evil with rapacious cruelty. (AC 9970 = EU 140 = SE 4673) I have no experience of anal intercourse, but I've read that the rectum is full of nerve endings and so it is apparently an erogenous zone full of pleasures. Why not see anal intercourse as another possible way of pleasuring your partner?

Possibly it can be regarded as an extension of what Swedenborg says about touch and conjugal love: “The love of linking oneself with a partner arising from the love of uniting good and truth has touch as its special sense, because this is shared by all the other senses and so derives from them their particular roles. It is well known that this love takes all the senses mentioned before into partnership, and makes their charms its own. The sense of touch is specifically assigned to conjugal love and is proper to it, as is evident from all the play it inspires and from the way its subtleties are raised to the most exquisite pitch. I leave it to lovers to pursue this line of thought further.” (CL 210; cf. CL 211) Playfulness: “in conjugal love there is a playfulness like that of childhood and innocence”. (HH 281) Possibly we need to leave it to both heterosexual and homosexual lovers “to pursue this line of thought further”?

From my reading it takes a lot more trust and self-control from lovers to indulge in anal intercourse, than in penile-vaginal intercourse.

A primitive model for heterosexual sex

The idea of a man inseminating or impregnating a woman is actually an agricultural metaphor (Genesis 1:18, 19; TCR 585:1) applied to people, as in the English idiom “to sow your wild oats”. For a woman to conceive children (Numbers 5:28), the Hebrew literally means “to be sown [with] seed”. Intercourse is “the lying down for seed”. (Numbers 5:13) Conception is “to be impregnated”. (Leviticus 12:2) I don’t believe that taking primitive Israelite beliefs literally makes for a good theological argument. Taken too literally this metaphor makes us males out to be seed-carrying dibbles or dibbers. Yes there is some truth in the idea, but how much? What sort of correspondence is maintained for men married to post-menopausal women, or when one or both heterosexual partners are infertile? How much truth is there in Swedenborg’s assertion that it is ultimated in diligent men but not in lazy men? (CL 220:3) What about men on the dole who have fathered many children through different partners? What about adulterers and fornicators, who again, have fathered many children, how is the correspondence maintained in them? (Superficially they have sexual ‘potency’ but not spiritual.)

Another primitive idiom or metaphor is that of the husband impregnating the wife’s flower, as a bee. (CL 322) This leads to the idea of de-flowering a lady or girl.

At times Swedenborg also seems to use this primitive model of sexual relations, by talking about sexual intercourse as a male impregnating a female, for example, to “impregnate our wives” (DP 180:8; cf. DP 277a:3; Wis 76 = 3:2:2) At other times he does mention women contributing an ovum. (AC 1815:1; 8847; EU 79:2; AE 1005:3; LJ(P) 348 [341]) John Chadwick points out that there is a bit of 18th century thinking in CL 90:3, when Swedenborg writes: “In addition to these traits, there is the power of insemination which resides in the male. This has no other source than the intellect, for its source is truth there resulting from good.” ([Rogers]; cf. CL 219) A male angel’s “power of insemination” doesn’t beget children but spiritual offspring. The spirituality of an infertile man can’t express itself by bearing physical children, but can by producing spiritual offspring. (CL 115:5) “The planting of seed

corresponds to the power of truth; the procreation of children to the propagation of truth; the love of children to the guarding of truth and good.” (CL 127)

Swedenborg, as do we on so many occasions, seems to mix up his levels between the physical and the spiritual:

“They are also physically united by the wife receiving the reproductive element of the husband’s soul, and so by having his life introduced into her own, so that she turns from maiden into wife; and in the other case by the husband receiving the wife’s conjugal love. This adjusts the inner regions of the mind, and at the same time the inner and outer parts of his body, to become capable of receiving love and perceiving wisdom, a state which turns him from a young man into a husband.” (CL 321:2; cf. CL 198-199)

Is “the reproductive element of the husband’s soul”, the male component needed for bearing spiritual offspring or for physical children or both? (CL 355:5) In CL 172 it refers to angels, who can’t produce physical children.

How holy is semen?

Yes, Swedenborg says that “In a man’s semen lies the inmost of man’s life, and thence the commencement of a new life; it is holy from this fact.” (AE 1005:2) Swedenborg reacts very strongly against adultery, especially in the mixing of semen. (DP 144:2; AE 1005:2-3; LJ(P) 348 [341]) The “inmost of man’s life” can only be in semen to the outermost degree or in ultimates in this world, not the next. The sin of Onanism wasn’t to perform “coitus interruptus” or the rhythm method, that is, withdrawing before ejaculation, which is not a sin in the Roman Catholic Church, but of not begetting children for his brother, to continue his brother’s name. (Another Israelite custom!) The problem with this argument it restricts the creation of a human being to the physical plane of existence only. We’re born simultaneously into two worlds. (AC 2682:3; TCR 14:1; cf. AC 2588:6) Also, the inmost of any human being is in the heaven of “human internals”. (AC 1999:3) The soul, which is “a spiritual substance” is in all of the body, not just the semen. (CL 220:2e; 315:4-12 (=TCR 697:4-11); Inv 48; cf. DLW 394; DP 336; AE 750:2)

Swedenborg doesn’t just link conjugal love with producing physical children

Swedenborg idealistically links conjugal love with begetting children: “The reason why all pleasures, from first to last, are conferred on that love is that its purpose so far excels that of the others. Its purpose is the propagation of the human race, and so of the heaven of angels.” (CL 68:2 [Chadwick]; cf. CL 387; 389) Also “marriages are the seminaries of the human race and therefore the seminaries of the heavenly kingdom as well, and for that reason must not on any account be violated but be held sacred.” (AC 2733; cf. CL 404) However, children born of an adulterous relationship are not barred from heaven. (AE 989:3) Swedenborg talks of a prince, who died in childhood, who as part of his spiritual make-up, had a tendency to be dominating and promiscuous. (AC 2307 = HH 342:2 = SE 3547-3548) Yet the Most Ancients “their greatest delight in life was in producing offspring, and thus that their greatest pleasures lay in loving their married partner for the sake of offspring.” (AC 1123; cf. SE 3316 and 4628 where love for one’s spouse among Most Ancients wanes but

love for producing children doesn't.) Indeed they even live in heaven with their children. (CL 205) The "goal of marriage is the propagation of offspring". (CL 254) Like the Most Ancients, the same can be said of the Jovians. (SD 546; EU 48, 84; AC 8116; 8380 = SE 558:2)

Is having children the only "greatest delight" of angels? The "greatest delight" of some angelic spirits is to induce dreams of paradise. (AC 1977:2 = SE 3181) The celestial angels receive their "greatest delight" from being with mortals reading the Word, (AC 5249:2; 5648:3) and "know the deepest joy when they are thinking about the Lord and about the salvation of the human race, which took place because the Lord made the Human within Himself Divine." (AC 5249:2)

The "greatest use of all" is to produce children for society and for heaven. (AC 997:2; "Conjugal love is the chief love of all because it has within it the end of serving the greatest use, namely the propagating of the human race, and therefore of the Lord's kingdom for which it is the seminary." (AC 2039:1; AC 5053 has "excels the rest in use" [Potts]; cf. also AC 7038:2; CL 156:1; 183:6; 534) But the love of producing spiritual offspring precedes that of producing natural children. (AE 991:2-3) Love for children is derived from "chaste conjugal love", (AC 1803:3) and is especially felt by women, (CL 393:1; 409) but doesn't have to be. (AC 2745; 3246:4; CL 284; 385; MA 114; TCR 431:2; cf. AC 6323:2) Similarly evil fathers can love their children. (SD 546; EU 48, 84; 8116; 8380 = SE 558:2) Infants and children are preparing for conjugal love. (AC 3610:3) The "spiritual love implanted in every one from heaven, which is that of parents for their children, of children for their parents, and also contrary to conjugal love, which is that of the husband for his wife, and of the wife for her husband, also contrary to mutual love, which is that of brothers and sisters for one another". (AE 724:5)

Yet it as pointed out in AE 991:2-3, it is not just about producing physical children, but spiritual children: "Conjugal love in its origin is the love of the propagation of good and truth (502-511)." (Marr Index 1:84) "Conjugal love in its first origin is the love of the propagation of good and truth (502)." (Marr Index 1:110) The Ancients referred to the heavenly marriage and begetting spiritual children when blessing brides, not physical children as did the Israelites. (AC 3187:2) Some of those who don't want children in the Writings are selfish, evil people. (SE 1202-1203; 1976)

Correspondences

When dealing with correspondences, we need to ask, how much of a correspondence? In mentioning the correspondence of an eagle above, the correspondence is in one aspect of the symbol, the eyesight, not the "rapacious cruelty". Even one aspect of adultery corresponds to heaven to a very limited extent: "Still, there is some correspondence of heaven with proliferation [*the production of offspring, reproduction* (Swedenborg Lexicon)] in adulteries, though none with delight in them." (AE 990:3) Other correspondents which might be regarded as distasteful, and therefore limited, would be Solomon's polygamy (DP 245) – polygamy doesn't correspond to the heavenly marriage (CL 339:2; cf. LJ(C) 71e) but does at least remotely with such as Muslims (Marr Index 1:22), concubinage or sex slavery represented but did not correspond to the heavenly marriage (AC 3346:3-4; 8983:2), and levirate marriage.

Our Word is written in correspondences “more remote” than the Ancient Word. (SS 102 = TCR 279:2 = SS(P) 15:1) In heaven the third heaven can experience correspondence more accurately than those in the spiritual heaven, than those in the natural heaven. (AC 3475) In heavenly societies those in the centre correspond more exactly, and correspond more remotely the further they are from the centre. (AC 2973:3)

So I suppose we need to ask, to what degree is the correspondence?

CL 55:6

“These loves, those between two men or two women, do not sink far into the breast, but stay outside, making merely superficial contact and not leading to any inner union of the two. This too is the reason why two men fence with reasoned arguments on either side, like boxers; and two women sometimes with lusts on either side, like actors pretending to fight with fists.” (CL 55:6 [Chadwick])

It is methodologically flawed to base any argument on just one proof text, which is what Heinrichs has done. It is even more flawed when Swedenborg talks about spirits and mortals can have interior friendship based on religion. (AC 4805) An example could be some ‘Moravian’ spirits, (LJ(P) 302 [280]; 304 [282]; SE 4796; 4801; SE(M) 4749; 4774; cf. SE 4439; 4653), or Calvin among the followers of Gottschalk. (TCR 798) But religion can be a genuine conduit for interior friendship or agape: “The situation with all Churches is that initially every Church regards charity as being fundamental. At that time every individual person loves every other as his brother and is moved by good - not on his own account but on account of that person, of the general good of all, of the Lord’s kingdom, and above all of the Lord Himself.” (AC 2910:2) “It has been shown in various places in the explanations given already that teachings about charity were the teachings in the Ancient Churches, and that these teachings linked all the Churches together and in so doing made one Church out of many. For they recognized as members of the Church all those people who led a good and charitable life, and they called them their brothers, no matter how much otherwise they differed from them in truths, which at the present day are called matters of faith. People informed one another about those truths, and this was one of their charitable works. Neither were they annoyed if one person did not go along with the opinion of another; they knew that everyone accepts the truth insofar as he is governed by good.” (AC 6628; cf. AC 1834:2) Angels regard mortals as brothers (AC 2890; 3796:4; AR 818; 946; AE 977:3) and each other as brothers but according to their quality. (AC 7773 = SE 2515; cf. SE 3131) Swedenborg talks about the possibility of having both an interior and superficial friendship with a person from the same sex. (TCR 786; cf. TCR 493) Sometimes the state of our marriages is such that we’re pretending to be married when we’re not actually. (CL 278e) Some deflowerers love to mimic “interior friendship”, (CL 513) as do adulterers. (MA 63)

The following two references clearly state that men can have a love for each other which is not “merely superficial contact” and have an “inner union”. Swedenborg observed two male angels who had been “bound together by an interior friendship”,

one from the southern heaven and one from the eastern heaven, meet up in the world of spirits. (AR 875:2 = TCR 386:1) We could talk about the love between a brother who died as an infant and grew up in heaven, who met his brother, who had passed on in old age: “The same also spoke to his brother who had died when an adult; and he did so out of so much mutual brotherly love that his brother who could not help weeping declared that he perceived nothing else than that this was love itself which was speaking.” (AC 2304 = SE 3146; 3545)

Conclusion

We mustn't judge anal intercourse from how we feel about the act, or even from “derived doctrine” which pieces together bits of doctrinal information that Swedenborg doesn't link. We also must not judge it from the outside, but from the inside. The reproduction argument that heterosexuals are the only ones who can reproduce, or that the heavenly marriage has to be manifested by a husband having sexual intercourse with his wife, is limited by infertile couples, husband whose wives are menopausal or post-menopausal, and angel couples who can't produce physical children anyway. (I can't see many New Church men married to menopausal wives giving up sex because they can no longer fully maintain a correspondence at the physical level!) There is far more credence to be given to the “heavenly marriage” manifesting as an angelic or mortal couple producing “spiritual offspring”. Yes, it is romantic and idealistic to hope that heterosexual couples will have as many children as possible, and Swedenborg revels in the delight of the Most Ancients and Jovians in their offspring, as we do in our families. Yes, the angel in us wants heaven to continually grow, diversify and specialise, which requires human beings, whether from marriages or even adulteries. However, the Ancients blessed their marrying children to have spiritual offspring. The love of spiritual offspring precedes love of children. Angels can find their “greatest delight” other than in their families.

To restrict the reproduction of children to what we heterosexual humans do, is suspect when we consider that we are born into two worlds not one, and seems to ignore the input of the Creator himself. I do not believe that our heavenly Father only created our sexual organs for reproduction. A healthy, happy sex life is part of a successful and fulfilling marriage, however a couple choose to express it.

I believe that faithful homosexual couples can produce spiritual offspring. I also think they can be good parents through surrogacy or adoption.