

God created Adam and Eve, and possibly Sam and Pat

I admire Bruce Jarvis' bravery in tackling the difficult topic of homosexuality in his article "And they will become one flesh" in the June 2013 *Lifeline*.

A New Church person could believe that *Conjugal Love* or *Married Love* or *Love in Marriage* is a Divinely inspired, self-contained manual of sexuality, and therefore, by implication, we don't have to consult the best insights of sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, who have "worldly, natural feelings and opinions" and don't have "divine revelation". (page 3) A different view is that the Lord works both within and outside New Church organisations. Possibly the Church is not the sole custodian of spirituality and we church people can be as worldly or spiritual as any secular sexologist? I would suggest that it is the duty of New Church Ministers and lay people to find the Lord working in the inspired books of the Bible, the theological Writings of Swedenborg, and the best experiences, theories and studies of professional scholars. I would also argue we cannot develop a good Swedenborgian theology of sexuality without considering what the Lord reveals in the written works of those experts outside our denomination.

One could believe Swedenborg's book *Married Love*, rests on the belief or bias, that heterosexual marriage is the only true expression of the Divine will. However this excludes the significant number of spiritually aware single people, whether unmarried or widowed, in our congregations, and ignores teaching within the book itself about celibates and polygamists in heaven.¹

One interpretation of *Married Love* is based exclusively on heterosexual marriage, but such a view largely ignores the more fundamental teaching about the "heavenly marriage" or "the marriage of good and truth" without which a genuinely Christian marriage would not exist.² The primary definition of Conjugal love as being an inspired union of heart and mind in the individual, explains why Marriage Love can exist in only one partner in a marriage relationship and not in the spouse.³ Bruce alludes to the teaching about the "heavenly marriage" on pages 5 and 7 of his article.

Some New Church Ministers or priests selectively use passages in *Married Love* to argue that husbands, and therefore men, lead intellectually and wives, and therefore women, direct through their love, but this presents only one facet of the teachings for the New Church. Both men and women can be motivated by love and be enlightened, and can bring these virtues into whatever relationship they are in by virtue of their being human. Either sex can be in the light of heaven and the heat of heaven.⁴ Unattached children, teenagers and adults, and maiden aunts and bachelor uncles can still contribute spiritually in our denomination!

I struggle personally see how homosexuality "militates against conjugal love" (page 6), but I can see how selfishness, a desire to dominate (the real "Sodom"⁵) or promiscuity⁶ do.

¹ CL 54:3-5; 332:9; 342; TCR 832

² CL 57 vii; 61-62; 70; 83; 92; 93; 116 x, xi; 122; 130-131; 141-143; 161:1, 3; 183:3, 6, 8; 211; 238-241; AC 2728; 2729; 2739; 3077; 3132:2; 9961:3; AE 997:4; 983:4; 999:2

³ CL 226; 351

⁴ AC 6222:3e; 8694:3; 8750:3; 9382:2; 10330:2; 10551:2; TCR 366:2; DP 298:4; ISB 14; DLW 413-415; cf also references in HD 35

⁵ AR 502; AE 1212; cf. CL 248; LJ(C) 51; HH 380; MA 58

⁶ AC 1798:2; AE 1010:4

Having homosexual relatives and teaching colleagues has enriched my appreciation of how the Lord inspires compassion and creativity in individuals, whatever their sexuality.

Again I am bewildered as to how homosexuality is solely motivated by “lower order spirits”, unless you link the story of Sodom with homosexuality and “the evils of the love of self”. (I believe it is a story of heterosexual men seeking to rape other males - that is why it is “the worst adultery”.⁷) We’re all guilty of the desire to dominate. I have read stories of homosexual men caring for their partners dying of AIDS and have been moved to tears by the intense love and genuine compassion shown.

I struggle with Swedenborg’s assumption that every human being has “an attraction to the opposite sex in them from creation and so from birth”.⁸ I believe that the Lord has revealed wonderful teachings about heterosexual love and marriage in the Writings for the New Church, but occasionally they are limited by Swedenborg himself: the celibate, privileged, heterosexual European male of the eighteenth century: “For influx from angels takes place into what a person knows and believes, not what he does not know or believe”⁹ and “in accordance with the quality of” his “reception of the Divine”.¹⁰ If a homosexual New Church person feels that God is calling them to be celibate, then we minister to them. If a homosexual New Church person feels that God wants them to be in a homosexual relationship, then we minister to them. If a homosexual New Church person feels like the Lord wants them to become heterosexual, then we minister to them. However, I have read extremely critical reviews of ex-gay ministries, their statistically, exceedingly low ‘success’ rates and the dubious psychology and theology, which lie behind them, written by clinical psychologists, psychiatrist and sociologists. I am personally struggling to see how homosexuals can be turned into heterosexuals, without causing significant psychological harm to themselves and turmoil to their heterosexual spouses or homosexual partners.

One New Church view is: “But what feels like an unhelpful approach is simply to treat homosexuality as a normal part of God’s creative drive and purpose.” (page 7) Another New Church view, could of course, ask “Why not?” I honestly don’t know whether God created homosexuals to be homosexual. I would suggest as ministers we help people with their reformation and their regeneration from where they are, not where our beliefs want them to be.

It is right to be concerned about the eternal consequences of homosexuality. (page 4) Yes, there is a hell for heterosexuals who attempt to rape other men.¹¹ Appealing to Matthew 11:23-24, Swedenborg argues that it is “Those who are instructed by the Lord concerning the truths and goods of the church, and yet reject and deny them, do worse things than those of Sodom”.¹² However we interpret the story of Sodom, here is another indication that what goes on inside our hearts and minds is more eternally important than our actions. Mercifully

⁷ AC 2220:1; cf. CL 454

⁸ CL 155:1; CL 100; 302, 204; AC 2727; “As regards love for the opposite sex, this is universal in all people, for it is implanted from the moment of creation in a person's very soul, from which comes the essential nature of the whole person, and it is implanted for the sake of propagating the human race.” (CL 46 (Rogers) but cf. joining of heart and mind (AC 4434:2; 10185:3))

⁹ AC 6206:1; TCR 208:2; cf. AE 1086:5; WI 8:2 (= § 102)

¹⁰ DLW 78; cf. AC 1786

¹¹ AE 1006:2; AC 824; SE 4932 = LJ(P) 135 [136] = LJ(C) 26

¹² AE 653:9

we are judged by our motives, not our actions: ¹³ inner motivation “mitigates or excuses” or “aggravates or censures” crimes or deeds. (CL 530:1) “The case is similar with immoral behaviour, whether fornication, taking a mistress or a concubine or committing adultery, since these acts are imputed to each depending not on what was actually done, but on the state of mind while doing them. For deeds follow the body to the grave, but the mind rises again.” (CL 530:3 [Chadwick]) Whether we believe a faithful homosexual couple are fornicators, or adulterers or not, we can find some comfort in the teaching of this paragraph, that their love and devotion to each other will not be overlooked. Homosexuals and heterosexuals are judged from their motives not their actions.

I would suggest that the Christian Church only has to minister to Christian homosexual couples who are interested in an exclusively faithful relationship. The General Conference might opt for an ‘Anglican compromise’ and allow some of its Ministers to arrange ‘matrimonia’ or ‘nuptulia’ (my suggested alternate terms) - I personally only want to use the word ‘marriage’ in a heterosexual context. Maybe the Marriage (Same Sex) Bill won’t allow some ministers within a denomination to opt in and some to opt out of conducting ceremonies for faithful homosexual couples!

Evangelical Christians regard it as a virtue to take the Bible literally. (cf. pg 4) However, it is not necessarily true in New Church circles. In AC 10453:3 we read:

“the literal sense of the Word would have been different if the Word had been written among another people, or if the character of the Israelite people had not been such as it was. For the literal sense of the Word is all about that people since the Word was written among them, as is evident from both the historical sections and the prophetic parts of the Word. ... Most of the things furthermore that present themselves in and constitute the outward sense of the Word were ones that were permitted on account of their hardness of heart, such as those referred to in Matt. 19:8 and also others which need not be mentioned here.”

So for example if we want to find Divine teaching about marriage relationships in the Old Testament, we won’t find it in the custom that Israelite men were allowed many wives, ¹⁴ concubines or sex-slaves. ¹⁵ Under Israelite patriarchal law wives are the possessions of their husbands. ¹⁶ In Israelite tradition if a man rapes a woman, he has to pay a fine and may have to marry her, but will be executed if she is engaged. ¹⁷ The woman’s perspective is totally ignored, she might have to spend the rest of her life with her rapist, because only the father’s honour has been violated. Another example is levirate marriage: if a man’s brother dies childless, under Israelite law he has to marry his sister-in-law. ¹⁸ What she thinks about it is irrelevant! He can refuse but one of his shoes is taken off him and his sister-in-law spits in his face and has to approach another male relative. A woman’s vows to the Lord can be annulled by her father or her husband. ¹⁹ So we have to be very careful about drawing doctrines about sexuality and relationships from the Old Testament.

¹³ AC 2335:2-3; 2349:4; 5068; 8911; HH 475 n. c; SE 2451-2452, 2359

¹⁴ AC 3246; 4837:3; 8809; 10612; AE 423; CL 332:7; 340

¹⁵ AC 8995:5; 9002:3

¹⁶ Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21

¹⁷ Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22: 23-27, 28-29

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 25:5-10

¹⁹ Numbers 30:3-15

I find it fascinating that, the Lord permitted the Israelites, or permits us, to hold partially truthful, or even false ideas, which we've held from infancy, so as not to break us.²⁰ Even though sacrificing animals was "unacceptable in the heavens",²¹ the Israelites were permitted to sacrifice them²² to prevent them from sacrificing their children,²³ because they held the false belief that they would stop God being angry with them.²⁴ But in commenting on Exodus 32:5,6, Swedenborg goes on to say that for Israelites sacrificing animals was their "chief holy thing. Once something has been implanted in people from their earliest years as being holy, the more so if received from their fathers, and thus is inrooted, the Lord in no way breaks it - provided it is not contrary to order itself - but bends it. This was the reason for its being laid down that the sacrificial system should be established, such as one reads in the books of Moses." (AC 2180:5) A good proof text for not taking some or most Israelite laws literally is Ezekiel 20:25 "Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live."

Conservative Swedenborgians believe that pro-homosexual means that we "intellectualise away any challenges which the literal meaning of the Word of God pose so that we change the meaning of Scripture in a way that doesn't allow it to change us. The Writings describe this tendency as 'innovation' ... [see Arcana Caelestia 1241]" All New Church people would argue that our Lord Jesus and Swedenborg were innovators! Dealing with all the six or so passages in the Bible, which appear to be anti-homosexual is beyond this reply. Maybe another letter is needed!!

Having, from Doctrine, legitimately intellectualised away having to believe that certain Old Testament laws are God's laws, I would like to make a couple of comments on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. I have been reading a book by a homosexual Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, Steven Greenberg, (2004) who has great reverence for the literal Hebrew of the Torah, and finds it grossly offensive to intellectualise any Biblical teaching away, and argues that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 refer to homosexual activity with force or violence. His translation of Leviticus 18:22 is "You shall not lie with a man to humiliate him; this is abhorrent." He bases his argument on the use of the Hebrew verb SHAKAV "to lie down" or "to have sexual intercourse with" in the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34:2, 7) which is related to the noun MISHKAV "lying down" which is used in the Leviticus passages.

Cheryl B. Anderson (2009) and other liberal Biblical scholars would argue that to get to God's Word in the Bible you have to go beyond the patriarchal passages, which is excitingly similar to Swedenborg's concept of the "face, [forearms] and hands" of the Word.²⁵ According to this doctrine there is very little in the Bible that we are to take literally: compare the surface area of the face and hands of a person to that of their robes. Sadly Swedenborg gives us few clues as to which passages we can read at face-value. Biblical scholars surmise that in a society where men make the rules and women obey them, another group who suffer are men who are attracted to other men. The Biblical experts suggest that homosexuals challenge the Israelite gender paradigm of a male being actively dominant and women being submissively passive. Such laws I would argue reflect Israelite thinking not God's thinking.

²⁰ AC 1255; 1992:4; 2053:2

²¹ AC 10079:2

²² AC 2180:4; AE 391:32; 650:25; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Psalm 40:6-8

²³ AC 1241e

²⁴ AC 2818:2

²⁵ AE 778:6; SS 55 = TCR 229; SS(P) 10:7

Another suggestion Anderson notes is that the Israelites over-rated or over-valued male sperm, afterall copulation for ancient Jews was just insemination: male seed being inserted in female 'ground',²⁶ and so they saw homosexuality amongst males and bestiality as a misuse or abuse of male seed. Swedenborg explains the patriarchy in the Old Testament is due to the need for ideas and doctrines to shape how we feel and act. (AC 568:2) So, in summary, New Church teachings argue that the Old Testament was adapted to the Israelites²⁷ and changed to suit them,²⁸ so we have to carefully distinguish their prejudices from God's truth.

I will finish by quoting Swedenborg's apparently sexist explanation of patriarchal laws in the Old Testament:

“The reason 'daughters' means things constituting the will, which are evil desires when the will for good is non-existent, while 'sons' means those constituting the understanding, which are delusions when the understanding of truth is non-existent, is that the female disposition and make-up is such that the will or evil desire reigns rather than understanding. Every one of their fibres runs in that direction; and it is their very nature. The male make-up however is such that the understanding or reason reigns; every one of their fibres too runs in that direction, and it is their very nature. Consequently the marriage of the two sexes is like that of the will and the understanding in the individual. And because nowadays the will for good does not exist, but only evil desire, when yet it is possible for something of the understanding or reason to exist, so many laws were for that reason laid down in the Jewish Church concerning the husband's rights and the wife's obedience.” (AC 568:2)

I hope and pray that my thoughts open up the discussion.

Greenberg, Rabbi Steven (2004) *Wrestling with God and men: homosexuality in the Jewish tradition* (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press.)

Anderson, Cheryl B. (2009) *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press)

²⁶ Leviticus 12:2; Numbers 5:28

²⁷ AC 8814; 8443, 8781; 10612; AC 6914:5e; 3417

²⁸ AC 10453:3; 10461