

# Spirituality and Morality

(with specific reference to Adultery)

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## **Application to Adultery**

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## Introduction

In the following notes I have tried to present teaching, insights and problems in relation to both the subject of Spirituality and Morality, and that of Adultery. As a strongly Swedenborgian thinker and New Church minister I have drawn mostly on our authorities of the Word and the Writings – rather than looking to other Christian (modern or otherwise) authors on the subject.

I hope that in the context of the specific Conference ministerial request and need for papers of this sort at this present time, this might prove appropriately helpful rather than be thought of as limiting.

The subject tackled here I have found to be extraordinarily tricky and ‘slippery’ to clearly grasp hold of, though the problem is sometimes more in how to express and apply an insight, than in reaching some sort of perception of the inner realities involved. Overall, I raise more questions than I attempt to answer, though paradoxically, I believe that fact itself is part of the ‘answer’!

This fairly intensive study of the subject leads me to believe that we need much more research into the area of sex, marriage, fornication and adultery, and that Swedenborg’s *Conjugial Love* may well be an unreliable –even dangerous - book of **moral** instruction and guidance for our times – as I have tried to show in what follows. Nevertheless, for me *Conjugial Love* remains a wonderful Divine revelation of true marriage love, its origin and its need for protection and preservation.

But first, I want to try to set the tone or atmosphere for our discussions, by facing up to the virtually *universal* human tendency to interpret and/or break many of the 10 commandments in one way or another.

## Breaking the Commandments

Let me state at the outset that I believe it is very important to realise and bear in mind that we are all persons who can said to frequently fail to keep the 10 Commandments. It seems it is virtually inevitable that we shall find ourselves breaking some of them - at least from time to time – even though the Writings regard them in origin as Divine laws or Divine truth (cf AE 696:23), and Jesus teaches,

*Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven”* Mt 5:19

### Keeping the Sabbath day holy

Perhaps the clearest example is that of the commandment to keep the sabbath day.

Firstly, as Christians we fail to literally keep the seventh day as the Sabbath, changing the day to the first day of the week. Then most of us fail to keep it as a day of rest, but do some or a lot of work on both the first and the last day of the week

What we have done in effect is *alter the original interpretation of the law*, as did Jesus himself of course, so that our conscience may be clear no matter how much work Jesus or we ministers and lay people did or do on the Sabbath day. But some, the Scottish ‘Wee Frees’ for example, would still regard us all as inveterate breakers of this particular vital commandment!

### Honoring Father and Mother

Next consider the law of honoring father and mother.

Some people’s parents live completely dishonorable disreputable and destructive lives. What in them can or should be honored? Jesus, though on the one hand, concurring with the need to keep this law, also teaches that unless we *hate* our father and mother we cannot be his disciples!

(Lk 14:26) Clearly there is here an apparent contradiction, and *interpretation* is needed again.

You shall not commit murder

But what constitutes ‘murder’? Do killings in war, pre-emptive strikes, and euthanasia constitute murder?

Jesus declared that even anger and hatred in the heart against anyone constituted murder. (Mt 5:22)  
Have we never experienced that?

You shall not commit adultery

What constitutes ‘adultery’? Does fornication, for example? The original Greek word in the gospels can mean either type of behaviour.

Jesus declared that even a man experiencing lustful feelings for a woman constitutes adultery. (Mt 5:28), though strangely he fails to attribute the same assignation to a woman’s lustful feelings! Should we *interpret* it to include women as well?

You shall not steal

Should we never ‘steal’ an alcoholic’s bottle, ‘spoil the Egyptians’, or steal a gun from a homicidal maniac? Might the civil law even make one an accessory before the fact of the murder by *not* doing so?

[Kant was famously opposed to telling a lie to a would-be murderer to save his victim’s life.]

And is the government stealing in taking taxes from unwilling persons?

You shall not bear false witness

Should this ban all ‘white lies’, forcing us all to always tell the actual truth however destructively painful for another person that might sometimes be?

You shall not covet

Have any of us never coveted anything in our lives? I seriously doubt it.

The First Commandment (against making a graven image)

What are we to make of following statement in the Writings?

Everyone sins against this first commandment if he acknowledges and worships any God other than the Lord, the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who is Jehovah God Himself in human form. In much the same way do those too who convince themselves of the actual existence from eternity of three Divine persons.

TCR 296

So are all non-Christians and tripersonalists (formally, most of non-New Church Christendom), sinners who are breaking one of the 10 commandments?

And consider also the following from the Writings concerning the so-called ‘Golden Rule’.

This Divine law:

*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets* (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31).

This law in heaven is the law of mutual love or charity, from which it becomes the opposite in hell, which is, that to everyone it is done as he had done to another; not that they who are in heaven do this, but that they do it to themselves.

AR 762

So if, for example, you knew of someone who would fancy ‘propositioning’ you, should you deliberately proposition them in order to keep to this Divine rule?! Of course, I’m sure that this is not how we would choose to interpret this law! But again interpretation needs to be invoked if we are not to be accusable in principle of breaking the Golden Rule.

We should perhaps note here that the 10 Commandments have nothing to say about marriage, divorce, permissible grounds of divorce or remarriage. For that we would have to look to the divorce laws of Moses, which Jesus indicated should no longer be regarded as valid.

## Maintaining a Non-pharisaic Context

The point I am trying to make here is that however we interpret the 10 Commandments (and we all do interpret them, necessarily), we may all be regarded as having broken some of them (and may well inevitably continue to do so). And there certainly are some serious problems associated with interpreting the commandments literally, and deciding whether in any particular case someone has or has not actually broken a commandment. This should have a strong affect on our attitude to public cases of alleged commandment breaking – whichever particular commandment is being regarded as having been broken.

*“Do not judge, and you will not be judged”* Lk 6:37 (cf Mt 7:1)

## Spirituality and Morality (according to the Writings)

I will return later to the question of the interpretation and application of the commandments to particular circumstances, but now let us look directly at the general subject of Spirituality and Morality from the teaching of the Writings.

### Spirituality

The origin of spirituality is the heat and light from the sun of the spiritual world which contain spirit and life. Anyone in the light and heat radiated by the sun of the spiritual world is in spiritual faith and charity.

Spiritual light is contained within natural light, and spiritual heat is contained within natural heat. (cf TCR360)

Therefore spirituality could be well described as ‘love and light’ radiating and shining through a person’s spirit.

Spirituality itself is characterised by:

- shunning sins from spiritual law, and living according to the commandments for the sake of the Divine that is in them. (AE948:4)
- love for and delight in truths and in doing good for its own sake or for the sake of the Divine. (AE1145:11, TCR 361:2, HH512:4)
- thinking about Divine things in whatever one is doing (HH530)
- acting from a spiritual motive (HH530)
- in doing what is useful from love to the Lord and the neighbour (CL18)
- and overall, being led by the Lord (D Wis 11:147)

Take charity for example.

Charity in its origin is spiritual but in what is derived from this it is natural...

Charity is acting in every deed and employment from a love of justice combined with judgment. The spirituality [in acts of charity] consists in their being done from *a love of justice combined with judgment*, that is, in a person looking to see, when he does something charitable, whether he acts from justice; and it is judgment that allows him to see this. For a person can do harm by kindnesses, and do good by things that look like doing harm...[or] wrong-doing. TCR 459:13-15

Spirituality then, cannot be divorced from the leading of a moral and civil life of which it is the spirit that should be in them as a cause is within its essential effects.

So a spiritual person is also necessarily a moral and civil one (cf AE188, DP322:3 TCR360, HH512:4, D.Wis 11:147).

### Morality

- Moral truths concern personal interaction with others, and relate to sincerity and uprightness, charity, chastity, temperance, truth, prudence and benevolence. (D Wis 10)

- Morality relates to *what is honest in one's actions* in life. (AE188, HH512, 530)
- Moral good is based on reason [whereas spiritual good is based on love] D Life 12

[Swedenborg's great stress on the importance of **reason in moral matters** will be taken up in the section on Adultery]

### Civil Behaviour

- Civil life is concerned with justice in society (HH512:4)
- Civil truths are the civil laws of a society which relate to justice and antisocial behaviour. (D Wis 10)
- Civil law involves precepts of the kind in the 10 Commandments against murder, adultery, theft and false witness. (CL 351)

[Both] civil and moral actions are dead until or unless there is spirituality in them. (DP322:3)

### Genuine Morality v. merely obeying moral and civil laws (codes)

As we have seen, a spiritual person is also a moral and civil one, that is, honest and just in his behaviour and dealings with others. It does *not* follow that he will therefore in all conscience feel able to obey every current moral or civil law. There could at times be serious problems with this for his spirituality and love of justice.

A spiritual person is a genuinely moral one who uses his reasoned judgment to do what he has judged to be honest and just. He is not a person who obeys every current civil and moral law in unthinking 'knee-jerk' fashion.

As the German American theologian Tillich puts it,

“Love without justice is a body without a backbone”

Another American Theologian, Joseph Fletcher, expresses it thus:

Justice is love working out its problems (Situation Ethics p.95)

Justice is Christian love using its head. (ibid p.95)

## Problem Areas

### Ambiguity How to understand and interpret Divine Laws

We have already noted this in relation to the 10 commandments, even without invoking an interpretation in terms of any internal senses believed to be contained within them.

### Incompleteness - of Moral Codes (especially with Jesus, and in CL itself)

- Jesus' (and Swedenborg's) omission of the subject of homosexuality is just one glaring example.

Why have we been left without insight and direct teaching on the possible qualities and rightness or wrongness of a homosexual relationship, and so many other tricky sexual situations?

- Swedenborg's frequently simplistic treatment of moral matters (relying too often on the same simple examples he has given before) – leaves many questions seeking moral guidance or directives unanswered. (see section on adultery below).
- Some Major Omissions in CL.
  - woman/wife's position re permissions such as that of concubinage.
  - homosexuality, transvestism, transsexuality, child pornography, voyeurism, birth control, masturbation, sterilization, artificial insemination, abortion, petting, etc.

- romantic love - something Swedenborg appears never to have experienced himself (and which still should not excuse his omission of such a common and overwhelming experience!)
- Swedenborg's not directly addressing the issue of the inevitable incompleteness of any moral or civil code.

### Question

What are we supposed to think, judge and do (or not do) when we are given so little or often no instruction/guidance on such major moral issues? Why have we been left with so many major omissions in the guidance we have been given in the moral areas of life?

## Relativity and Changeableness (of all moral and civil codes)

### Relativity of moral codes

- **Corporal punishment** (in the Writings)  
*Is anyone unaware that it is good for servants to be chastised by their masters, or children by their parents, when they do wrong.* TCR 459:15  
Should we still today regard such instruction and practice in the Writings as suitable moral behaviour? Are we wrong in having doubts about the wisdom of corporal punishment?
- When I first lived in Mauritius (1971-3) It was clearly regarded as morally wrong
  - to *not* employ any servants
  - to pay them more than the pittance that was the going rate.  
In agreeing to 'fit in' with the current 'code there, was I acting morally or immorally?
- Changes in the civil law concerning unmarried sex or consenting homosexuality – making them no longer a crime. Which should one keep to – the current civil code or the current moral code, if it differs?
- Swedenborg abrogates (does away with) very many of the laws of the Old Testament as no longer applicable.  
Jesus offers “Don't resist evil” in place of the law of retaliation,  
“*An eye for an eye...*”

If we must expect moral codes to vary and change with place and times, how can we ever know for certain if any particular moral injunction is right or wrong, spiritually helpful or restrictive?

### Clash between spirituality and certain moral or civil laws

- a. Cases of civil disobedience on religious principle - as with CND or pacifism for example.
- b. Cases of moral disobedience (white lies as an expression of caring love, for example)

Luther expresses the situation rather well as follows:

“Therefore when the law impels one against love, it ceases and should no longer be a law; but where no obstacle is in the way, the keeping of the law is a proof of love, which lies hidden in the heart. Therefore you have need of the law, that love may be manifested; *but if it cannot be kept without injury to the neighbour, God wants us to suspend and ignore the law.*” (quoted in Fletcher, *ibid* p.62) [my italics]

Unfortunately Swedenborg never seems to have brought this possibility so overtly to the fore. This is especially true in the case of grounds for divorce, where he introduces permissions (especially concubinage) as a kind of ‘lesser of two evils’ – rather than as exceptions stemming from wise love.

## Nature of Laws

Swedenborg counsels us to make clear distinctions. The following is an attempt to see some clear distinctions in different types of law.

### Absolute v. Relative Laws

There do exist some laws that are absolute i.e. apply universally to all situations at all times. But generally, the vast majority of laws are applicable and valid only throughout some limited area, and/or may not be applicable to certain exceptional situations, circumstances or times.

To illustrate these distinctions we could look at examples from the world of physics (which mirrors or represents the spiritual domain extraordinarily well), but for now I will stick to examples from the more familiar area of the Word.

#### Examples from the Word

##### Absolute law [type A]

The Beatitudes are a good example: also the following.

*“Remain in me and I will remain in you.....”*

*“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit...”*

*“If a man does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers”* Jn 15:4-6

##### Relative law [type R]

*“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s....”*

Mt 22:21

*“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”* Mt 5:39

Type A laws [in the Word] occur, I believe, only in the realm of the **spiritual** (i.e. spiritual states), whilst Type R are to be found in the lower **moral** and **civil** behavioural domains (e.g. honest or dishonest, just or unjust, appropriate or inappropriate).

Type R can be seen

- as particular *applications* of Type A to the outer realm of human behaviour, and
- as means of *protecting* Type A in the realm of human behaviour.

Herein, I believe, lies the ultimate justification for all moral and civil laws.

### Descriptive v. Prescriptive Laws

Laws may be expressed in a form which is essentially *describing* what is – how certain things behave (as with the law of gravity in physics, for example).

Or they may be *prescriptive* – telling you what you should do or not do

(such as, ‘Do not step off the edge of high cliffs’, or ‘Don’t put your hand in the fire’.

#### Examples of Descriptive laws [type D] in the Word

*“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul....”*

*“The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes....”* Ps 19:7,8

*“Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery”*

Mt 5:32

#### Examples of Prescriptive laws [type P]

*“Do not resist an evil person”*

Mt 5:39

*“Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you”*

Mt 5:42

The laws of Providence in the Writings are of course, excellent examples of *descriptive* laws.

Another excellent example is the spiritual law that evil brings its own punishment on itself.

In fact the whole tenor of the book DLW could be seen as a revealing of the unseen but necessary and absolute laws of Divine Love, sometimes termed Divine Wisdom or Divine Truth.

Such laws (which are spiritual) don't tell you to do or not do anything. But they do help reveal how underlying unseen spiritual life works and affects us, just as physical laws reveal how beneath outward appearances, physical matter operates and affects us, so that it is beneficial for us if we come to know and understand such laws, and monitor our life accordingly.

But as soon as their effects show themselves, we leave the realm of absolutes and enter the realm of the relative – prescriptive laws for behaviour which are there to express and fulfil the workings of higher descriptive spiritual laws, but which thereby are limited in their scope or area of validity.

So, for example the two great 'heart' commandments concerning love to the Lord and the neighbour, become the protective behavioural laws of the 10 Commandments.

If mankind were perfect, there would be no need of such lower restrictive laws: love would act instinctively according to its nature and purposes, just as 'water finds its own level'.

Such was how the Most Ancient Church lived before the time of any need for moral and civil laws to govern behaviour: so also celestial angels, eternally.

### **Uses of Behavioural Laws**

But with the Fall and the emergence of unregenerate impulses came the need to avoid anarchical collapse by guiding and restricting behaviour with laws *to protect the underlying absolute law of love*. Such laws are guidelines (like knowledges of truth) for the regulating of life at the behavioural level for those who do not have them 'written on their hearts', or who cannot yet derive them for themselves from the absolute Law of Love. They are 'rules of thumb' which in many or most situations may normally need to be rigorously applied if a spiritually ignorant or unregenerate society is to be able to hold together.

### **Necessity for Exceptions**

But to serve the purpose of their establishment, such behavioural guidance *must necessarily be relative to situations, circumstances, times and cultures*. Such exceptions to, or interpretations of, the behavioural law will be necessary to protect the higher law (and one's love of justice) which the behavioural laws are there to protect in the first place. So behavioural laws, being relative, *absolutely* require modifications, exceptions or interpretation - according to times and circumstances.

It is well known that the quality of every deed and, in general, of every affair depends upon the circumstances, and that these mitigate or aggravate. CL 487

This ability to perceive the uniqueness of individual situations and circumstances arises in the celestial part of the mind.

The perceptions of the celestial man lie beyond all description, for they enter into the smallest details and are *for ever varied according to states and attendant circumstances*. AC 521

We may reconsider some of the examples from the 10 Commandments already given previously. Or Swedenborg's well-known guidance on giving and true charity, is a good example and illustration of this point.

So we need to distinguish as clearly as possible between the following two discretely different types of law with their discretely different properties - as tabled below.

<b>Divine/Spiritual Laws</b>	<b>Moral/Civil Laws</b>
* Fundamental	Derivative
* Absolute	Relative – to times/cultures/circumstances
* Descriptive	Prescriptive
* Relate to quality/state of heart (motive/intention) and mind (wisdom)	Relate to actions and behaviour
* Revealed – to intuitive insight	Taught – by authorities
* Reasoning plays only a confirmatory role	Reasoning should play an essential role
* Breaking them brings automatic negative repercussions	Breaking them makes one liable to censure/punishment by current authorities

## Misuse of Civil and Moral (Behavioural) Laws

There are a number of ways for this to occur.

- Treating them as if they were absolute
- Applying them heartlessly, moralistically and legalistically
- Judging situations according to outward appearances
- Fuzzily lumping together things that should be clearly distinguished.

### Applying them heartlessly, moralistically and legalistically

To be legalistic or moralistic in demanding no exceptions to these behavioural laws is tantamount, I believe, to flouting the absolute law of love. It is indeed the opposite of being loving towards God and one's neighbour. It is to be lazy, uncaring and unwise, so misusing law and the vital protective purpose behind it.

### Judging according to Appearances

Since we are often to use our own judgment in cases concerning the application of behavioural laws, Swedenborg is very mindful of our Lord's warning

“Stop judging by appearances and make a righteous judgment” Jn 7:24

Angels with their angelic awareness, certainly heed this warning as we learn in the following quote, concerning their ability to judge a person's purpose, intention or end rather than their appearance.

I have met many who in the world had lived outwardly like others, dressing finely, faring sumptuously, doing business for gain like other men, attending dramatic performances, joking about amatory matters *as if from lust*, besides other like things; yet in some, the **angels** condemned these things as evils of sin, and in some they did not account them as evils; and the latter they declared guiltless, and the former guilty.

To the question why they did so, when yet the men had done the same things, they answered that they **view all men from their purpose, intention or end, and make distinctions accordingly**; thus, that those whom the end excuses or condemns, they excuse or condemn, for all in heaven have good as an end, and all in hell have evil as an end; and that this and nothing else is meant by the Lord's words,

*Judge not that ye be not condemned* (Matt. 7:1).

CL 453

So also we cannot or should not judge whether conjugal love is present or not, by the appearance of a couple's relationship.

There are marriages in which there is no appearance of conjugal love, and yet it is there, and there are marriages in which there is an appearance of conjugal love, and yet it is not there. ....

**External appearances, however, afford no conclusion as to imputation.**

**The sole thing which affords a conclusion** is the conjugal which is inseated and guarded in the will of every man in whatsoever state of marriage he be, this conjugal being as a balance wherein that love is weighed; for, as shown above (nos. 457-58), the conjugal of one man with one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the repository of the Christian religion. This being the case, that love may have place with one married partner and not at the same time with the other; and it may lie so deeply concealed that the man himself does not notice it; it may also be inscribed during the course of his life [on earth]. The reason is, because in its steps, that love accompanies religion, and religion, being the marriage of the Lord and the Church, is the initiament and engrafting of the love.

Therefore, after death, **conjugal love is imputed to every one according to his spiritual rational life**; and for him to whom it is imputed, after his decease, marriage in heaven is provided, whatsoever may have been the nature of his marriage in the world.

And now, from the above comes the final clause:

Conclusion as to whether a man has or has not conjugal love must *not* be made from the appearance of marriage or of scortation. Therefore,

*Judge not, that ye be not condemned* (Matt. 7:1). CL 531

Our reasoning faculty may need to lead us to a different judgment to that of a legal judge.

That circumstances and contingencies vary everything is well known. Yet they are accounted in one way by a man from his **rational lumen**, in another by a judge from **the law**, and in another by the Lord from **the man's state of mind**.

It is for this reason that predications, pronouncements of guilt, and after death, imputations, are spoken of.

Predications are made by a man according to his rational lumen.

Pronouncements of guilt are made by a judge according to the law.

Imputations are made by the Lord according to the man's state of mind.

That these three greatly differ from each other can be seen without explanation.

**According to circumstances and contingencies, a man from rational conviction** may absolve one whom a judge, sitting in judgment according to the law, cannot absolve; and a judge may absolve one who, after death, is condemned.

The reason is because the judge pronounces sentence according to the *deeds*; but after death every one is judged according to the *intentions* of his will and thence of his understanding, and according to the confirmations of his understanding and thence of his will. Neither of these is seen by the judge.

Still, both judgments are just, the one being for the good of civil society and the other for the good of heavenly society. CL 485

But can we or should we always accept Swedenborg's particular *reasoning* (as opposed to what comes to us as Divine *revelation* in his Writings)? Is not his reasoning the aspect of the Writings that is his finite human contribution to the revelation and application of Divine truths? Can we or should we follow Swedenborg here, for instance?

Virginity is the crown of chastity, being the token of the conjugal love that is to be; and that *the virgin gives up her soul and life to him to whom she gives up her virginity*. Upon it also is founded conjugal friendship and the confidence thereof. After this door of conjugal love has been broken through, a woman deflowered by such men loses her modesty and *becomes a harlot*. CL 504

Here, Swedenborg, without mentioning it for support, seems to be influenced by a literal understanding and application of what Jesus says in Mt 5:32! - that if a woman is divorced by her husband, *she* is, as a direct result, committing adultery! However, Swedenborg goes further, and seems to believe that it will inevitably turn her into a prostitute!

## Failure to make Clear and Unambiguous Distinctions

The ability to make a rational judgment is often hampered by a lack of clarity in the understanding and use of terms, as Swedenborg himself overtly calls for in the following quotes.

How [debauchery and adultery] differ from fornication cannot be seen by any rational person unless he clearly sees love for the opposite sex *in its degrees and diversities*, placing its chaste forms on one side and its unchaste forms on the other, and dividing each side into classes and types so as to distinguish between them. Otherwise the difference between what is more chaste and what is less chaste, and between what is more unchaste and what is less unchaste, cannot appear in anyone's idea of them; and without these distinctions, every means of comparison is lost, and at the same time any clarity of sight in matters of judgment. CL 444a

Failure to make distinctions leads people to use 'keeping a mistress' (pellicacy) and 'having a concubine' (concubinage) indiscriminately, as if they meant and signified the same thing. But these two types are different; the term 'mistress' suits the first, the **mistress** being a **loose woman**, and the term '**concubine**' suits the second, because a concubine is a **bedfellow**. So we can keep these apart by distinguishing having a **mistress** as a **pre-nuptial** agreement with a woman, and having a **concubine** as a **post-nuptial one**. (Chadwick translation) CL 462

So also as is well known, Swedenborg outlines and stresses some different degrees and kinds of adultery that are to be clearly distinguished.

## Determination of Valid Exceptions

But how are we to know when or in what circumstances a particular behavioural law should be regarded as inapplicable - from a spiritual and/or rational point of view?

### Who should be the Judge?

Should we look to the Bible, the Writings, other spiritual writings, the Church, our elders and betters (whoever we believe they are!), the general community, an appointed judge or judges, the Lord (but in what way exactly), or our own (celestial?) insight and good conscience?

### Use of Reason

Swedenborg frequently makes overt use of his (enlightened) *reason* or rational judgment, and counsels us to do likewise.

That circumstances and contingencies vary everything is well known. Yet they are accounted in one way by a man from his **rational lumen**, in another by a judge from **the law**, and in another by the Lord from **the man's state of mind**. CL 485

In fact in reference to his book *Conjugal Love* he warns about relying on authority rather than rational understanding, stating,

What is written in this book has for its end that the reader may *see truths from his rational understanding* and so may give them his assent. In this way his spirit is convinced, and that of which the spirit is convinced is allotted a higher place in the mind than that which enters from *authority and the faith thereof*, without any consultation of the reason. *What enters from authority alone*, enters the head no farther than the memory, and there, is commingled with fallacies and falsities. *Thus it has its place below things rational* which pertain to the understanding. Any man can talk from the things of his memory as though rationally, but in inverted order; for he then thinks as a crab walks, the sight following the tail. Not so if he thinks from his understanding. When he does this, his rational sight makes suitable selections from the memory, and by these he confirms *a truth which is seen in itself*. CL 295

Also, having stated that the marriage covenant (in this world) is regarded as a covenant to be maintained for life, Swedenborg goes on to say that nevertheless, there are *reasons* for permitting

separations and sometimes even concubinage, to help avoid the need for the breaking of the legal marriage contract by divorce and remarriage. (CL 276)

In considering just cases of concubinage for example, he lists many situations which he claims are seen to be just ‘by reason without a [civil] judge’. (CL 470)

He goes on to say that

In addition to *just* causes....of concubinage, there are also *weighty* causes which depend on the judgment and justice of the man. CL 470

There are also milder causes [for concubinage] which are real weighty causes and separate from the bed though not from the home, such as the cessation of childbearing with the wife due to the feebleness of advanced age, and hence a non-tolerance and refusal of actual love, while ardor still continues with the man; besides other like causes in which the *rational judgment sees what is just, and which do not hurt the conscience*. CL 473

But why on earth should concubinage sometimes be justified? And why not then, ‘toyboying?!

*so that [conjugal love] may be preserved*, it is expedient that [there be] concubinage from really weighty causes with one only. CL 476

In other words, to preserve the inner presence and hence the higher law of conjugal love, it may be ‘expedient’ in some circumstances, to allow the use of a single concubine [but not ‘toyboying’, it seems]

[Note that Jesus never offered us this ‘concubinage’ exception. So whose exceptions *should* we go by?]

## Example of Remarriage

Is it permissible to remarry after the death of one’s partner?

Whether to marry again after the death of a partner depends also on the status of the marriage in which they had been living. By the status of the marriage we do not mean the state of the *love* which we took up under the preceding heading, because the state of the love engenders an inclination for or against remarriage that is internal. By the status of the marriage we mean rather *its circumstances* which occasion an *external* inclination for or against. Such *circumstances* together with their resulting inclinations are manifold. For example:

1. If there are little children in the house and a new mother must be found for them.
2. If there is an earnest desire for still more children.
3. If the house is large and equipped with servants of both sexes.
4. If constant responsibilities outside the house divert the mind from domestic concerns at home, and trouble and misfortune are feared on that account without a new mistress.
5. If there is need for joint assistance and shared duties, as is the case in a variety of businesses and trades.
6. It depends, moreover, on the nature of the partner who is left, whether after the first marriage he or she can or cannot live alone or without a mate.
7. The previous marriage also imparts either a fear of married life or a preference for it.
8. I have been told that polygamous love and sexual desire, including a lust to deflower and a lust for variety, have led the hearts of some to a desire to remarry. Also that fear of the law and fear for their reputation if they were to go awhoring have led the hearts of others to it.

There are in addition many other circumstances which induce external inclinations towards remarriage.

CL 319:2

So again Swedenborg refuses to legislate, but calls on us to use our reason applied to the individual circumstances.

People who before had lived in a state of truly conjugal love do not wish to marry again.

If they nevertheless do afterwards enter into something like a marriage, it is for reasons dissociated from conjugal love; and these reasons are all external ones. As for example: If there are little children in the house and there is need to provide for their care. If the house is a large one, equipped with servants of both sexes. If responsibilities outside the house divert the mind from domestic

concerns at home. If there is need for joint assistance and shared duties. And other like reasons.  
CL 321:4

But Swedenborg fails to consider the case of initial marriages in which there turns out to be no conjugal love able to develop, and (without the death of one of the partners) subsequent marriages where that might have a better chance of occurring - and this despite his acknowledging,

On earth it is very difficult to contract a marriage which forms an inward link, because it is impossible for the choice of inward likenesses to be provided for by the Lord as it is in the heavens, because choice is restricted in many ways; for instance, to those of similar rank and condition, to those living in the same district, city or village. In these circumstances it is mostly outward bonds which bring them together, and so not inward ones  
CL 320

How slim then were the chances in Swedenborg's day of first marriages proving suitable for the formation of the conjugal bond! Why then, should remarriage be restricted to death or the involvement of an act of adultery in the first marriage?

## Summary Conclusions

- Moral and civil behavioural laws for unregenerate societies are unquestionably essential. But by their very nature they must all admit of exceptions, if they are to serve the higher laws they are there to protect.
- The determination of valid exceptions in the case of civil laws is the responsibility of a civil judge, who must uphold the law, but use his reason in determining an appropriate sentence, or 'warning,' if he deems the case is appropriately exceptional.
- But to whom should we look as judges in the case of deciding valid exceptions to moral laws? Swedenborg invites us to take note of *his* reasoning, and also to employ our own.

With the above in mind we turn now to focus more directly on the subject of adultery.

# Application to Adultery

First we need to look at Swedenborg's attitude to the legal marriage covenant.

## The Marriage Covenant

Swedenborg promotes society's preserving of the *legal* bond or contract of marriage for life, in this world.

For the averting of these transgressions [enticements to things unchaste coming from unchaste persons] *society has taken upon itself* the protection of this [marriage] covenant, and has enacted penalties against those who break it. In a word, the ante-nuptial covenant [betrothal] makes known the ordinances of love truly conjugal, establishes them, and *binds libertines* to obedience to them.

Add to this, that by this covenant the right to propagate children, and for the children the right to inherit the goods of their parents, *is made legitimate*. CL 307

He is aware of the flimsy external nature of such marriages when he writes,

Marriages in the world are generally contracted on the basis of outward affections. This is because inward affections are rarely considered; and even if they are, still a reflection of them is not seen in the woman, for by native instinct she withdraws her inner affections into the secret chambers of her mind.

There are many outward affections which induce men into marrying. A primary affection in today's world is enlargement of the family fortune by wealth, either to become rich or to have the means. Another is aspiration to positions of honor, either to be held in high regard, or to enjoy an increased state of prosperity. Added to these are various enticements and lusts [romantic love?!]. These, too, do not allow opportunity for exploring congruences of inward affections. From these few observations it is apparent that marriages in the world are generally contracted on the basis of outward affections. CL 274

But after death this legal bond no longer has validity or use – why? - because then each person becomes able to be more aware of his or her inner states.

We will now show whether or not a marriage covenant contracted in the world will continue and remain in force after death. . . .

(3) Most married couples meet after death, recognize each other, associate again, and live together for a time, which occurs in their first state, thus while they are still maintaining the outward aspects of their lives as they did in the world.

(4) Progressively, however, as married partners put off outward appearances and *enter into their inward qualities, they gradually perceive what sort of love and mutual feeling they had had for each other*, and consequently whether it is possible for them to live together or not.

(5) If it is possible for married partners to live together, they remain partners. But if it is not possible, they separate, the husband sometimes separating from the wife, the wife sometimes from the husband, and both of them sometimes from each other.

(6) A man is then given a suitable wife, and a woman, likewise, a suitable husband. CL 45

But what if people generally, in this present age of the Lord's New Church, are beginning to gain this inner awareness sooner – *before death*, as seems to be more the case now in these days of greater psychological awareness and counseling processes? Is the 18<sup>th</sup>C worldly legal binding (until death or act of adultery) still as helpful to the cause of conjugal love, or might it be getting more detrimental? Would we need to be arguing for a permissible system of concubinage in the way Swedenborg saw the need to in his day? Reason, we are taught by Swedenborg, needs to be alert to, consider and take on board changing situations and circumstances.

The 18<sup>th</sup> C (as also the 19<sup>th</sup>) was much more an age of external appearances than is our own time. According to Swedenborg hardly anybody could regenerate much beyond the first stage. Hardly any couples were capable of a conjugal relationship. Recall again Swedenborg's comments on his own times.

An approach to [conjugal love] is rarely made at the present day, unless by a few steps...At this day this love is rare, there being few who even touch it with the finger. CL 318:3

*On earth it is very difficult to contract a marriage which forms an inward link, because it is impossible for the choice of inward likenesses to be provided for by the Lord as it is in the heavens, because choice is restricted in many ways; for instance, to those of similar rank and condition, to those living in the same district, city or village. In these circumstances it is mostly outward bonds which bind them together, and so not inward ones* CL 320 (cf also CL 49)

So he counsels the simulation of conjugal love in ‘apparent marriages’ to help maintain the legal bond of ‘marriage for life’, even though the development of conjugal love may be an impossibility for most such relationships.

Since the marriage covenant is accordingly a covenant for life, it follows that appearances of love and friendship between married partners are necessary. CL 276:2

But though there is much valuable and still very relevant advice in CL’s chapter on ‘Apparent Love in Marriages’, we should still be asking whether all the reasons given there are likely to be just as sound in today’s changed material, moral and spiritual climate and situation, with its new status and freedom for women, and increased psychological awareness and sophistication, for example? We need at least to examine the possibility of whether such simulation of conjugal love is still always as appropriate and conducive to the cause of conjugal love, and not just ‘lazily’ (?) treat them as absolute spiritual laws, or to rely on the Writings when they invoke special arrangements such as that of concubinage!

Since the likelihood of meeting one’s conjugal ‘soul-mate’ first time round is so slim (effectively zero in Swedenborg’s day), could it be that legalized marriage in this world is essentially to be regarded not as an endeavour to find one’s soul-mate, but as

- a training experience in gradually learning to distinguish illusory marriage love (e.g. romantic or lustful) from true marriage love in ourselves and relationships,
- an opportunity to reject adulterous love, and to develop and maintain our desire for genuine conjugal love,
- and all this by treating our legal marriage partner as if he/she were really our eternal conjugal soul-mate – and continuing to do so to the end of life - even if our true ‘soul-mate’ were to come upon our scene?

## Jesus’ Words on Adultery and Remarriage

There are just four such texts in the gospels, as follows.

*“Anyone who divorces [puts away] his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”* Mk 10:11, 12

*“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”* Lk 16:18

So here, it is the act of **remarriage** that is classed as a committing of adultery – not the divorce itself.

But in Matthew, an exception is now admitted

*“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness** [porneia = fornication, adultery, unchastity], and marries another woman commits adultery.”* Mt 19:9

And then, in the Sermon on the Mount we have the strange statement,

*“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery**, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery.”* Mt 5:32

Now it seems to be the act of **being divorced itself** which is said to cause the person so divorced to commit adultery!

### Questions arising

- Is Matthew's exception to the prohibition, a later addition by the Church, as many commentators believe? In other words, did Jesus ever offer that exception himself?
- What exactly constitutes 'marital unfaithfulness' [porneia = fornication or adultery]?
- There is no mention of cases of mutually agreed divorce
- How do we know whether Jesus is making a statement that is intended to be moral and spiritual, or only applicable at the legal level (where his questioners were coming from), and related only to the current society he lived in?
- What are we to understand by the statement that the act of divorcing one's wife will cause her (though not the husband!) to commit adultery (Mt 5:32)? Why do all the commentators (Swedenborg included) close their eyes to it by making no mention of it?

The well-known Anglican scholar and churchman, Hastings Rashdall, well summarized his view on this difficult subject of Jesus' words on adultery and remarriage, thus.

That the ideal is permanent monogamous marriage is undoubtedly the principle which Jesus taught; and that idea still appeals to all the higher ethical feeling of our time [1916]. By what detailed enactments, however, the ideal may best be promoted, and which is the less of two evils when that ideal has been violated and made impossible, is a question which must be settled by the moral consciousness, the experience, and the practical judgment of the present.

[quoted in R.V.G.Tasker's commentary on Matthew's Gospel, p. 182]

## Swedenborg's Terminology

How are we to understand (i.e.define) such terms in the Writings as fornication, stupration, pellicacy, whoredom, harlot, adultery, adulterer, etc. Has their meaning changed since Jesus' time and Swedenborg's?

### Common Usage Today

#### OED definitions

Lust – very strong sexual desire

Fornication – sexual intercourse with someone who is not married

Promiscuous – having many sexual relationships, especially transient ones

Debauchery (Swedenborg 'stupration') – excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures

Whoredom – prostitution or other promiscuous sexual activity

Harlot – prostitute or promiscuous woman

Adultery – voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their Spouse

### NT Terms and their Meanings

#### Whoredom

The Greek term '*porneia*' (the exceptional grounds for remarriage given in Mt 19:9) (often translated as 'whoredom') – makes no distinction between fornication and prostitution, though the Greek word '*porne*' means a prostitute – not a fornicator.

In its compound forms of '*porno-*' it is used to indicate what relates to prostitutes, as in *pornographos* which means 'prostitutes' writings.

Divorce ('putting away') -

The Greek is from the verb *apoluo* which means to set loose from, set free, or divorce

Although Swedenborg counsels clarity of terms and clear distinctions (CL 444a), he sometimes (often?) fails in this respect himself. For instance, it is not always clear whether by the term ‘**marriage**’ he means a legal contract (for life) or a uniting of souls and minds.

Similarly, does he mean by ‘**adultery**’ an act/acts of adultery, or a love of adulterous behaviour (scortatory love).

Is an ‘**adulterer**’ a person who has committed at least one act of adultery (for whatever reason and in whatever circumstances), or someone prone to think lightly of, and/or involve himself in, such behaviour?

When should a woman become rightly labelled a **prostitute** – when she is divorced by her husband, when she subsequently remarries, or if she were to offer her body for material gain? What are we to make of the following CL quote?

After the maidenhead has been breached and her virginity tasted, a maiden becomes a wife, and *if not a wife, a harlot [trollop or promiscuous, depending on the translation of the Latin meretrix]*. For the new state into which she is then initiated is a state of love for her man, and if it is not one of love for her man, it is a state of lust. CL 503

Swedenborg here seems not to believe there can be any intermediate state for an impregnated woman other than that of either a chaste wife or a prostitute! Are we perhaps misunderstanding what he means by the term prostitute [meretrix]?

Swedenborg seems to be alert to the dangers and pitfalls for society and individuals of easy divorce, and goes very much the other way by interpreting Jesus’ words in Mt 19:9 to mean that **divorce itself** is only allowable in the aftermath of an adulterous act, (not that **remarriage** after divorce is an act of adultery as Jesus seems to be declaring). This very strained non-spiritual interpretation will lead Swedenborg into the need (as he sees it) of proposing limited concubinage as a reasonable permission in many cases of unconjugal but legally bound marriages! Can our 20<sup>th</sup>C reasoning really follow him here?

## Adultery as the only grounds for divorce

Swedenborg selects the version in Matthew 19:9, (not the Marcan or Lucan versions), and interprets it very literally, taking Matthew’s exception of *porneia* to mean just adultery - without the inclusion of fornication or unchastity in general. But does he mean here an *act* of adultery, or the *love* of adultery?

The following quotes are the only occasions, I believe, where he quotes any of the other texts containing Jesus’ sayings on adultery as the only grounds of divorce.

ADULTERY IS THE CAUSE OF DIVORCE. For this there are many reasons which, though visible in rational light, are yet concealed at this day. It can be seen from rational light that marriages are holy and adulteries profane; and thus, that marriages and adulteries are diametrically opposed to each other, and that when opposite acts upon opposite, the one destroys the other to the last spark of its life. It is the same with conjugal love *when a married man commits adultery from some principle which he has confirmed and thus from set purpose.*

These reasons come into clearer rational light with those who know something of heaven and hell; for they know that marriages are in heaven and from heaven; that adulteries are in hell and from hell; that the two cannot be conjoined, just as heaven cannot be conjoined with hell; and that if they are conjoined in a man, heaven instantly departs and hell enters in. It is because of this, then, that adultery is the cause of divorce. Therefore the Lord says:

*Whosoever shall put away his wife except for whoredom, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.* Matt. 19:9.

He [Jesus] says that he commits adultery if he put away his wife, except for whoredom, and takes another, because **putting away for this reason is a complete separation of minds.**

This is called divorce; but **all other cases of putting away for specific reasons are the separations** which have here been treated of. If after such **separation** another wife is taken, adultery is committed; but not after **divorce**.  
CL 255

Is Swedenborg's 'law' here meant to be **descriptive** or **prescriptive** when he uses the term 'cause'?

Notice here how Swedenborg has given above a *different* definition of what he means by divorce – not the *outward* appearance, but the *inward* reality! But he is back to the outward definition in this next quote.

By divorce is meant the abolition of the conjugal covenant and thus plenary separation and entire liberty thereafter to take another wife. The one only cause of this total separation or divorce is whoredom, according to the Lord's precept in Matthew 19:9. CL 468

Nothing else closes off and stops up this seat, source, or wellspring of conjugal love and its flow but adultery, as is apparent from the Lord's words, that only on the ground of licentiousness [adultery] is it lawful for one to divorce his wife and marry another (Matthew 19:4-9); and from this statement in the same passage, that whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery (verse 9). CL 482

Does this mean that whilst a married partner actually committing an act of adultery makes divorce permissible, a confirmed love of adultery in either or both of them does not, so long as neither actually commits an act of adultery?! Is there not a clear 'separation of minds' in the latter case?

## Questions and Problems

- Swedenborg here takes Jesus' words very literally and legalistically, without apparently any spiritual or rational reasons. Why, especially when it is going to lead to him recommending the very unchristian practice of concubinage in some circumstances?
- Why does he totally ignore the statements in Mark and Luke where Jesus offers *no* exceptional circumstances at all?  
So how do we know whether Mark and Luke perhaps give the real Divine Law – absolutely no divorce for any reason, 'full stop'?
- Why does he not deal with the reverse case of a woman divorcing her husband, as referred to in Mark's version, or cases of mutual divorce?
- Why does he make reference to, change the meaning of, then take literally, the strange clause in Mt 5:32 concerning a divorced woman being thereby caused to commit adultery, with no attempt to explain it?

Malicious desertion which involves whoredom causes the wife to commit adultery and thus to be put away (Mt 5:32) CL 468

- How on earth is the cause of conjugal love furthered and protected by banning a divorced person from remarrying – just because no act of adultery was involved?
- So why should remarriage (except in the case of adultery) be regarded as adulterous?

## Conclusion

Swedenborg builds his case for grounds for **divorce** on one text - Mt 19:9 which literally concerns the grounds for **remarriage**. He takes it at a literal level of interpretation, dogmatically and legally, and in terms of a legally binding marriage contract – but not in terms of conjugal love.

He ignores the parallel Marcan and Lucan passages, and modifies the additional causal phrase in Mt 5:32

All this suggests that we may be on very slippery ground indeed if in our own later era, we insist on taking literally the gospel passages on the possible grounds of divorce and remarriage, just because Swedenborg seems to find support thereby for the hopefully helpful and reasoned advice that he offered into the 18<sup>th</sup>C domestic situation.

So why *did* he do this?

### **Possible Reason** (why Swedenborg took Mt 19:9 so literally, but with a twist)

Relatively unregenerate/unregeneratable societies cannot hold together without the enforcement of civil and moral laws such as those in the 10 Commandments prohibiting murder, adultery and theft. Without them the resulting anarchy and suffering would be intolerable for those involved, and virtually destroy any opportunity for most persons to be able to regenerate at all.

In the case of divorce in the 18<sup>th</sup> C there were grave social dangers and hardships for an abandoned or divorced wife – as opposed to husbands who were not likely to suffer materially. Therefore Swedenborg perhaps believed that only some extreme grounds should/could justify such a step that would be so harsh and unfair to women and any offspring. The literal force of Mt 19:9 as he interpreted it, seemed to him to fit the bill pretty well (not Mk or Lk, of course, with their absence of exceptions). However, he perhaps felt that he still had to ‘juggle’ things a bit for the legal and moral circumstances of his day, by introducing the permission of limited concubinage, for example – using his enlightened reason. [But would even superficial 18<sup>th</sup>C society have been able to regard such an arrangement as that as acceptably moral?!]

So might the above reasons account for his reluctance to sanction remarriage in this life? Maybe he also had serious family/legal complications in mind.

Whatever, it appears that he was struggling with the question of **justice** in marital affairs for his own 18<sup>th</sup>C European situation, ready to regard a literal interpretation of Mt 19:9 as still applicable at that time – and not trying to lay down absolute, unchangeable spiritual- moral laws for all time on the basis of a doubtful exegesis of one gospel text (and to the exclusion of others)

### **Further Questions and Problems** (arising out of *Conjugal Love*)

- Can a Swedenborgian ‘concubine’ ever become someone’s true conjugal partner? According to Swedenborg it would appear not.
- Does a ‘concubine’ have to be a harlot (or for a woman, a toy boy)?
- How can Swedenborg not regard concubinage as adulterous?
- Why is romantic love never mentioned and incorporated? Does it not differ in some ways from both lust and conjugal love, though combining perhaps, something of both?
- How are we to understand and interpret the book *Conjugal Love*, as primarily
  - a revelation of a new moral code for the coming age of the Lord’s New Church?
  - a revelation of spirituality in moral affairs relating to marriage?
  - a revelation of the nature of conjugal love and its origin?
  - a combination of some or all of the above?
  - or something else?
  - Who is to tell us what the Lord really wants us to believe and take from CL?

### **Overall Conclusions**

- One cannot be in a spiritual state (essentially one of love to the Lord and the neighbour) without at the same time living in a moral and civil way, which is to be *behaving honestly and justly* in one’s dealing with others.
- This usually means abiding by society’s current moral and civil laws, but may well on occasions involve some situations where an exception needs to be made to the moral or civil law - *if genuine spirituality is to be maintained*.
- This is because such behavioural laws, by their very nature, cannot *in all varying situations and circumstances*, protect the spiritual law they are set up to protect.

- Love is absolute: deeds are relative, being the means by which the ends of love may be achieved. It is always the end that justifies (or in the case of evil ends, attempts to justify) the means, according to whether it is a good or evil end. But if the means (however lawful at the ‘deed’ end of the scale) ever fail in this regard, can they still be justified spiritually?
- Divine Love is ‘married’ to Divine Wisdom, not to prescriptive law. True Wisdom must always consider the here-and-now personal/individual circumstances – never slide into an unthinking reliance on abstract yet relative behavioural laws which could hurt or destroy the potential love (including conjugal love) in the situation.
- To determine valid exceptions to behavioural laws requires the exercise of enlightened reason – not authoritarian dictate – even one apparently from the Word or the Writings.
- Undoubtedly the question of valid exceptions will frequently raise problems – not least who, in any situation may be deemed capable of exercising such judgment. [Children, for example, may be rightly regarded as not yet having sufficient rational development]. Therefore normally rigid, legalistic application of laws may often be desirable and necessary.
- As long as the prohibition against remarriage protects the conjugal principle, it remains valid. But in any circumstances where it fails seriously in this purpose, it must, in such cases, surely be regarded as spiritually invalid.
- Swedenborg’s age was especially one of external appearances in which very few were able to be aware of their inner states from which to make truly rational judgments
- It was also an age of very limited opportunity for meeting others. These two factors alone, made it very difficult or even impossible for people to establish conjugal relationships in this life.
- Conversely, the developing age of the Lord’s New Church is one of far greater mobility and opportunity, and one enabling more rapidly developing spiritual awareness and growth in this life. Hence surely *spiritual* law should more and more use and guide the application of behavioural laws for its own higher purpose. This must inevitably entail some modifications (possibly major ones at times) to former moral guidelines or injunctions.
- In particular, we need to reexamine *rationally* how the ‘precious jewel’ of conjugal love in the human spirit may best be protected, preserved, and developed in our radically changed and changing era, by appropriately protective moral guidelines and appropriate applications of and exceptions to them in matters of sex, marriage, adultery divorce and remarriage – as well as all other moral areas of life. No room for lazy, rigid enforcement of old moral codes here!
- Overall, I have found that this study raises more questions than it may answer, and that could be regarded as very significant in itself. But it seems clear (to me, that is), that the book *Conjugal Love* must not be regarded as laying out any moral or legal directives for all future times and circumstances, just because we turn to it for a wonderful revelation of conjugal love, its origin and the vital need for it to be protected. The use of (enlightened) reason in currently applying absolute laws of Love to any situation is essential, though this must always be in relation to current moral and civil laws which should normally be upheld and obeyed as an essential norm in relatively unregenerate society.

Finally, as a Church we surely need to remain mindful of the Lord’s teaching on the essential heavenly qualities of understanding, compassion and forgiveness, and to heed his potent words to the moralistic and legalistic Pharisees, by aiming not to merit, as they so clearly did, the following sad indictment:

*“You have neglected the more important matters of the law  
justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”* Mt 23:23

Michael Stanley March 04

# Addendum

## (for New Church Ministers)

### Remarrying Divorced Persons

#### Relevant Key Quotes from the Word and the Writings

The following quotes from our Revelatory writings seem to me to be the main stumbling blocks to a rational, believable and acceptable understanding of the subject of allowable remarriage.

Following them is a brief examination of the problems they cause for us ministers when faced with divorced persons seeking remarriage.

#### Jesus Christ

*“Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness,  
and marries another woman commits adultery”* Mt 19:9

#### Swedenborg

From CL 276:2 according to 3 different translations

That matrimonies once contracted must continue to the end of life in the world, *is from* [Lat. *ex*] Divine law....

*From* [Lat. *ex*] Divine law....it is not lawful to put away his wife and marry another except for whoredom...

From the latter and the former together, or through the latter from the former, can be seen the great number of enormities and social destructions [that would result from] the dissolutions of marriages before death, or the putting away of wives at the good pleasure of their husbands....

These causes, however, do not stand in the way of separations being permitted for their own causes....and also concubinage, of which in the second part. [Acton] CL 276:2

The need for marriages entered into to be maintained until the end of life in the world *arises from* [Lat. *ex*] God's law....

*It is* [Lat. *ex*] God's law that it is not permissible to divorce a wife and marry another, except for unchaste conduct, as was shown just above....

Today]\* numerous examples are to be seen of aberrations, the destruction of communities, and the dissolution of marriage before death or the divorce of wives at the husband's whim....

These reasons, however, do not prevent separation being permissible for special causes.... and also having a concubine (which is discussed in Part Two [Chapter XX]).

\* The sentence appears to be incomplete in the original. [Chadwick] CL 276:2

The principle that marriages once contracted are to continue on to the end of life in the world is *based on* [Lat. *ex*] Divine law....

It is *based on* [Lat. *ex*] the Divine law which says that it is not lawful to divorce a wife and marry another excepting on the grounds of licentiousness....

It is a matter of rational law, because rational law is founded on spiritual law, since the Divine law and rational law are the same. In the light of the one and the other together.... it may appear to a great number of people what monstrous and destructive ruinations of society and dissolutions of marriages would result if divorcings of wives were at the good pleasure of husbands, prior to death.....

However, these considerations do not prevent separations from being permitted for their own reasons.... and also *the taking of a mistress*, which we consider in Part Two. [Rogers] CL 276:2

NB We might note the translators' struggles here, and how Swedenborg is promoting the permission of mistresses in Part I - long before CL Part II which doesn't start till nos. 423ff! Therefore, is this too *from* Divinely revealed Law?! Remember that '*an eye for an eye*' is also part of Divinely revealed law!

## Some Serious Problems Arising

If as ministers we are approached by a couple, at least one of whom is a divorcee, seeking to get married in our church, do we, or *should we*, question them first to ascertain which of the following categories they fall into.

- A. Neither has ever committed an act of adultery -
  - during their former married life,
  - nor during any period of separation,
  - nor as yet with their new partner.
- B. Neither has committed an act of adultery -
  - during their former married life
  - nor during any period of separationbut has had sexual relations since then with their new partner.
- C. Neither has ever committed an act of adultery -
  - during their former married lifebut has had sexual relations with their new partner during their period of separation.
- D. At least one of them has committed an act (or acts) of adultery during their former married life with the person they now wish to marry.
- E. At least one of them has committed an act (or acts) of adultery during their former married life with someone *other than* the person they now wish to marry.

**Q.** Assuming we could (and should?) have elicited enough information to determine the appropriate category, do we then decide whether remarrying them would cause them (according to the above quotes) to commit adultery, and if so, refuse to remarry them? Which of the above 5 categories allows a remarriage to be classed as **non-adulterous**, and which must be regarded as an **adulterous** one – according to a literal, face-value interpretation of the above relevant texts in the Word and the Writings?

**Q.** If we refuse to remarry the couple, do we (and ought we to) explain to them precisely why we have refused – i.e. that remarrying them would mean that somehow they would be thereby committing adultery?

**Q.** How many remarriages in the Church and in the ministry (perhaps of partners whose former marriage(s) had gone stone cold, bitter and/or totally dead – but with no desire for, or involvement of, any act of adultery) should be classed by the Church as ‘adulterous’ – *due to the very lack of any previous adulterous behaviour by either partner or their former partners?*

**Q.** So can it really be that a former act of adultery can make a remarriage non-adulterous, and a lack of any such adultery can make it adulterous?!

### Conclusion?

Do we need a *blind irrational faith* here, perhaps? Do we need to surrender our rational capacity, so as to be able to declare the following - that some persons who have always been chaste - never committing or wanting to commit any acts of adultery, have now entered an adulterous relationship – simply by reason of entering into a new marriage - albeit with chaste intentions of it being or becoming, unlike the former also chaste relationship, a conjugal one?

And conversely, are we also to declare that some remarriages are *not* adulterous *just because* one or both of the partners engaged previously in adulterous behaviour?

Michael Stanley April 04

## Postscript

I have just been alerted by Kenneth Alden on the American Cybercouncil, to the following passage in AC which throws up another serious restriction on who should be allowed to be married by the Church – if we take it literally and at face value.

'He shall have no power to sell her to a foreign people' means that it must not pass to those who are not of the Church's faith. This is clear from the meaning of 'the foreigner' as those outside the Church, thus those who are not of the Church's faith, dealt with in 2049, 2115, 7996; and from the meaning of 'selling' as alienating, dealt with immediately above in 8997. The implications of this are that **those born within the Church and imbued since early childhood with the fundamental truths taught by the Church ought not to enter into marriages with those who are outside the Church and have therefore been imbued with ideas such as are not the Church's.**

The reason why is **that they are in no way joined to one another in the spiritual world**; for in that world everyone's association with others is determined by his good and from this by his truth. **And since such are in no way joined together in the spiritual world, they ought not to be on earth**; for essentially a marriage consists of one human mind and inclination joined to another's, which derive spiritual life from the truths and forms of the good of faith and charity. Therefore also **in heaven marriages on earth between people of different religions are thought to be detestable, and especially those between members of the Church and people outside the Church.** AC8998

I can't imagine the angels being concerned with the outward nature of our religious affiliations or lack of them. They surely focus on internal states – motivations, qualities of spiritual perception, love for what is divine and one's neighbour, etc. How then are we to understand the terms 'religion' and 'Church' here?

Or should we refuse to marry any couples except those of the same denomination and religion?

Should we allow our Church to marry *only* those couples who we have reason to believe can represent the marriage of one good to its one and only corresponding truth – lest it be detestable for the angels?

Swedenborg certainly seems to believe he is *explaining* why these things should be – not laying down some eternal moral law and vital restriction for the Church (?) to adhere to. But taken at face value it would seem there is a serious laxity in our marrying practices that is quite distasteful to the heavens.

Sorry to keep raising these problems (and only the tip of the iceberg, I'm sure) but the lesson is surely,

Never give blind obedience to the letter of the Writings (or of any Divine revelation) or *any* church, but look to the Lord alone, and seek spiritual enlightenment from him in how to interpret, understand and apply what the Lord has revealed in what you have reason to believe to be, written forms of Divine revelation.

PS In AC 3246:4 the Writings do actually say that

'Christians are not allowed, as the Jews were, to take a concubine in addition to a wife, and....**such is adultery**'.