

THE CONJUGIAL PRINCIPLE

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Then what did I see but a chariot coming down from the highest or third heaven, and there seemed to be one angel in it. But as it came closer I could tell there were two. From a distance, the chariot gleamed before my eyes like a diamond. Harnessed to it were two colts, white as snow. The couple sitting in the chariot had two turtle-doves in their hands...And they came closer, and they were a husband and his wife!¹

This paper will identify and discuss a unique theological principle underlying the ideas put forth in Emanuel Swedenborg's *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore Conjugiali, Post Quas Sequuntur Voluptates Insaniae de Amore Scortatorio*, published in Amsterdam in 1768. Subsequent translators have rendered this title *Marriage Love* (Samuel Warren), *Marital Love* (William Wunsch), *Conjugial Love* (Alfred Acton and others), *Love in Marriage*, (David Gladish), and *Married Love* (Bruce Rogers). A unique book in itself (the first, for instance, of Swedenborg's theological books to be signed by the author), it is pragmatic in its approach to the exposition of principles, yet quite complex in character. It is an ethical discussion of love in marriage, and the perversion of that love. It is practical thoughts on worldly matters. This pragmatic treatment of theological matters has provided generations of readers a rendering of New Church theology into plain religion.

The book is indeed about marriage—the nuts and bolts of the marriage relationship in a variety of situations—and it is about the ethics of marriage as well. Although Swedenborg considered this work to be more purely moral in nature than theological,² it is saturated nonetheless with

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¹Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Love in Marriage*, David F. Gladish, Tr. (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992), n. 42.

² Alfred Acton, ed. & transl., *Letters and Memorials of Swedenborg*, Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955), p. 692: A letter from Swedenborg to Dr. Beyer, 10/30/1769.

solid New Church theology. It is this underlying theology, dealing with the fundamental nature of all things in both the spiritual and the natural worlds, that we shall explore in this study. It will be considered on three levels in turn: 1) the practical theology of the book, or the *conjugal principle* most simply expressed, 2) Swedenborg's immediate theology, or the theological framework in which the work rests, and more deeply, 3) the underlying theology of a reciprocal dualism present in all things, identifiable in virtually all the works of Swedenborg, from his earliest philosophical studies to his crowning works of the New Revelation. The *conjugal principle* is present at all levels, from simple to complex, of Swedenborg's theo-cosmology, and may well represent the simplest statement of it. All elements of New Church theology are connected to this principle.

We will begin with a brief background on *Conjugal Love*. Most importantly, this is a different sort of a book for Swedenborg. It deals with a fairly mundane subject for a writer of sublime theology—of the heavens, the spiritual world, and of the inhabitants there. It is a book about love and marriage. There is not much scripture quoted in *Conjugal Love*, when compared with the weighty exegetical volumes which came before it, and it is not a truly systematic theology. Swedenborg uses this book to talk about real-life situations and problems, and actually gives some workable suggestions for better living.

Because of this departure from his standard exegetical formula into a slightly more pragmatic approach to religion, Swedenborg has given us a rare opportunity, first to experience in microcosm what in his other many volumes is elaborated in great detail, and second, to experience New Church theology as authentic working religion—brought down to earth and user-friendly for us all. Mark Twain said "My books are water; those of the great geniuses are wine—everybody drinks water." In this volume, I believe that Swedenborg was leaving the wine awhile, to bring water, for all of us to drink and understand.

Why is this important? As usual, Swedenborg works on several levels simultaneously, to tell us about something—in this case marriage. Is it not possible that one aim of this book might have been to capture our attention with a subject of universal interest, such as love and marriage; but another aim was to weave through this practical information the fundamental message of all his theology—the fabric of a coherent universe, both spiri-

tual and natural, and the very nature of God—as well? And might the former have been done without overt attention to the latter? It is fascinating to think of this as the plan behind this different sort of book.

What is this coherent fabric of the universe, this purported underlying theme behind the pragmatic lesson of *Conjugial Love*? It is the marriage of structure and function, passive and active, *esse* and *existere*, which is the nature of the Creator himself. It is the *conjugial principle*.

We will now trace the roots of this idea, and examine Swedenborg's thinking on this matter of a dualism of sorts, subsumed within the fundamental disposition of all things. We will not begin in 1768, but in a much earlier period, where this idea was germinating, in different soil.

Well-developed ideas on marriage and the behavior proper to it appear in the *Arcana Coelestia*, where we learn that all things reflect the heavenly marriage, and that there are marriages in heaven (AC 54, 2727-42). We also find reference to adultery and other sexual misconduct in the same work (AC 2743-59). Swedenborg mentions forthcoming works on marriage in his *Doctrine of Life* (1763), and *Apocalypse Revealed* (1766), and although the book itself is either lost or possibly never executed at all, there is an index to a short work on marriage entitled *De Conjugio* (1766).

In many of Swedenborg's other works prior to *Conjugial Love*, we find numbers here and there dealing with the topic of marriage and relationships between men and women, so the ideas set forth in the definitive work were not necessarily new to Swedenborg. It was in *Conjugial Love* (1768) however, that he put them in form and developed them to fullness. It is in this definitive work on marriage love that a pattern emerges, transcending the obvious and practical issues of human behavior, delineating the *conjugial principle* within. This is no obscure undercurrent or countermelody to Swedenborg's message. It is a pattern we encounter over and over again, as its underlying theme.

At every juncture in all his works, Swedenborg bombards us with complementary pairs of things. Nothing, it seems, when we first encounter the Writings, is ever *something*. It is two *things*, at once. This is intriguing, and even confusing at times (although sometimes the variety is due to translators), until we see the universality of these incessant pairs. Swedenborg clearly saw double when it came to great religious principles. As we know from the most basic of New Church teachings, the Lord

Himself is Love and Wisdom—inseparable, interwoven—a one from these two in operation. Swedenborg often uses the term *marriage* to describe the relationship of these elements in the Lord. From a summary of *Arcana Coelestia* 2618 by Potts,³ we find that

the state of union of the Lord's Divine Spiritual in His Divine Celestial...is the marriage of good and truth, whence is the heavenly marriage, which marriage is that of the Lord's kingdom...(which) is therefore so frequently called "a marriage" ...The reason is, that from the Divine marriage of good and truth, and of Divine truth and good in the Lord, is all conjugal or marriage love, and, through this, all celestial and spiritual love.

Other pairs we will readily find in *Conjugal Love* and elsewhere in the Writings, are:

Celestial	Spiritual
Charity	Faith
Will	Understanding
Good	Truth
Passive	Active
Affection	Knowledge
Female	Male

It is important to distinguish these complementary pairs from truly dualistic pairs, or opposites. A central theme of Gnostic systems contemporary with early Christianity expressing a fundamental dynamism between good and evil, Dualism is inconsistent with Christian and New Church cosmology. It implies a Creator possessing both these attributes, but we know that God is one, and from Him is good alone (CL 444, TCR 490, DLW 23, 27). Pairs analogous to Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are two elements involved in a *reciprocal dualism*, a dualism of functional integration. The important principles here are 1) the complementary and

³John Faulkner Potts, *The Swedenborg Concordance* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1976), vol. 4, p. 535.

even symbiotic necessity of the participation of both elements for proper integrity, and 2) the primary passivity of the one element with respect to the active nature of the other. The two are united in operation.

The concept is not unique to the Writings. In virtually all religious traditions, there is the notion of a fundamental duality in the way things are arranged and expressed, from things spiritual to the most basic elements of nature. These things are not simple opposites, as might first be assumed. What is expressed by these binaries is complementarity. This notion even appears in the modern scientific interpretation of the nature of matter. By adding terms from these various traditions to our collection of pairs, we can soon build an impressive list of interactions:

**Expressions of the Reciprocal Dualism Found in all Things,
Reflecting the Inherent Binary Nature of the Creator**

<i>ACTIVE</i>	<i>PASSIVE</i>
<i>Esse</i> (being)	<i>Existere</i> (taking form)
Wisdom	Love
Truth	Good
Faith	Charity
Understanding	Will
Son	Father (AC 3938)
Spiritual	Celestial
Knowledge	Affection
Male	Female
Soul	Body
Light	Heat
Space	Time (AC 3704)
Thought	Affection
Active of 1st Finite	2nd Finite (<i>Principia</i>)
"Judgment"	"Righteousness" (OT ⁴)

⁴A common reciprocal pair of Old Testament theology, to be found in several places. To this pair the Kabbalists added the mediating force of Mercy. (G. Sholem, *Kabbalah*)

Light	Life (NT ⁵)	
Essence	Vessels (Kabbalah ⁶)	
"Beriah"	"Atzilot"	
Being	Becoming (Appearing) (Indian)	
Yin	Yang (Chinese)	
Energy	Matter (Physics)	
Positive Charge	Negative Charge "	
Pure Being	<i>materia prima</i> (Alchemy ⁷)	
King	Queen	"
Quicksilver	Sulfur	"
Sun	Moon	"

What are we to do with all these pairs of apparently unrelated things? Does each pair represent a distinctly separate species of wisdom or reality? Is each a different aspect of the universe, to be dealt with apart from all the others? Not at all. Let's lump these pairs into a single idea, and see if we can make sense of what they represent. I believe they are all reflections of the *conjugal principle*, at work in all things.

We read first that the conjugal (conjugal principle) is, in the supreme sense completeness—wholeness—the Lord's kingdom, and the Lord Himself (AC 6179). Here is wholeness from the combination of two things: Divine good and Divine truth; bridegroom and bride. Elsewhere in the Writings we read:

They are said to be one distinctly, because love and wisdom are two distinct things, yet so united that love is of wisdom, and wisdom is of love, for in wisdom love is, and in love wisdom exists; and since wisdom derives its *Existere* from love, therefore Divine Wisdom also is *Esse*. (DLW 34)

⁵John 1:4; one of the great concepts of this Gospel. An OT link is found in Psalm 36:9.

⁶The *Sefirot* of the *Zohar* have both these aspects, analogous to soul and body. This was an attempt to deal with the issue of pantheistic connection of Creator and creation. (G. Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*).

⁷The true nature of *materia prima* reveals itself to the extent to which it interacts with Pure Being and takes on form. These four pairs are representatives of this marriage of the passive and the active elements. (From T. Burckhardt, *Alchemy*)

Since there is such a union of love and wisdom and of wisdom and love in God-man, there is one Divine Essence. For the Divine Essence is Divine Love because it is of Divine Wisdom and is Divine Wisdom, because it is of Divine Love. And since there is such a union of these, the Divine Life also is one. Life is the Divine Essence. Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are a one because *the union is reciprocal, and reciprocal union causes oneness*. (DLW 35, emphasis added)

There is also a union of love and wisdom in every Divine work; from which it had perpetuity, yea, its everlasting duration. (DLW 36)

The specific term Swedenborg uses to describe the association between the two elements of his pair is *reciprocal union*—not addition, or combination, or amalgamation, or interdigitation—but a reciprocating relationship. Where did Swedenborg get such an idea, and how did he understand this unique relationship? To answer this question, we must travel backwards in time to Swedenborg's earliest works; far enough in fact, to find Swedenborg the savant, not yet the seer. We will begin in 1734, thirty-four years prior to *De Amore Conjugiali*, when Swedenborg the natural philosopher published his *Principia*, or *First Principles of Natural Things*. A little patient exploration of some antediluvian natural philosophy will show us the ground floor of our *conjugial principle* as it occurred to a man who was trying to figure out how the universe worked.

It is important to start here in order to establish the absolutely primal role a reciprocal dualism would play in Swedenborg's theology to come, and to understand the nature of the preparation he underwent in order to identify the *conjugial principle* when the time came to find it. Starting from this historical perspective may also help to remove the barrier which has been constructed between these two Swedenborgs—scientist and revelator. There is a doorway there, for sure, and we must know which way it opens, and how to use it properly. But the barrier is artificial, and serves no good purpose.

The *Principia* is a book on physics, astronomy, and cosmology, among other things, but the opening chapter deals with something more fundamental to science than these disciplines alone. It is entitled "The Means

Leading to True Philosophy," and these means are *Experience, Geometry,* and *Reason*. By volume, twenty-five percent of the *Principia* deals with the nature of matter. Here Swedenborg presents some fascinating ideas on both the origin and the composition of matter, and these differ little from the general plan of the theo-cosmology to come. The book goes from theoretical to practical. The practical portion (on magnetism, astronomy, the starry heavens, our solar system, and the nature of air, fire, and water) is spent describing how the theoretical portion (matter) behaves. It is historically fascinating for its quaint science, often naive by our arrogant modern standards, but of interest for its definition of matter. The rest must be saved for another discussion.

It is in Swedenborg's description of matter—from its most minute division to his description of the atom—that we will find our scientist little different from our theologian. To this man, first principles were not *scientific* or *theological* things. They were simply explanations of how the universe works. He did not divide his mind, or the work it did.

The first (smallest possible) division of matter is a geometrical point—not yet a point in space, because it has not moved. It is theoretical and unobservable; we define it by thinking backwards. It enters our natural world only with motion, which is provided by "the will of God," as a nudge, or *conatus*, which gives it an internal striving toward the perfect motion of a circle, around an axis. The linear motion of this *first natural point* through space is by geometrical necessity a spiral figure. Called a "simple," this is soon to be compounded with other simples into the next higher order of complexity, to appear as *first finites*.

This finite originated from the motion of the points among themselves. As nothing previously existed but a point and a simple, it necessarily follows that what immediately succeeds originates from what precedes. By the accession of motion not only may such an aggregate receive its own proper and certain limits, but its own proper and certain space, and its own proper and certain figure.⁸

⁸Swedenborg, Emanuel, *The Principia* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1912, vol. 1, p. 84.

Spiral motion is reciprocal (from center to circumference and back again, in an alternating motion); a movement of points in and out in orderly fashion, through loci to define the movement of the points and prevent randomness of motion. These communications and reciprocations are obtained by means of poles; motion passes from one pole to another and thus points pass and repass by continuous circles and perpetual spirals. It is this combined motion which causes the poles to describe a regular geometric arrangement, with subdivisions of meridians, ecliptics, circles of latitude, and an equator.

Thus also begins the same order in the microcosm which we see in the macrocosm, and thus almost the same takes place in the smallest figure as in the largest, or in that of the world...All these relations originate from the spiral motion.⁹

We are making progress, but this first finite is not matter. It is *submatter*, of sorts—not yet the building unit we call the atom, because

Our world as yet is lying in embryo. Nothing which can be called elementary [atomic] has hitherto received birth; no active as yet exists, which, when joined with any finite or passive, produces the essence of any element. The world, which as yet lies in embryo, consists solely of the least possible finites.¹⁰

These finites will compound again, into aggregates of combined motion, to produce still another member in the series, the *second finite*. It is here that we find the seeds of our universe, because these finites are not identical, as were the ones before and the ones before, and the ones before. They differ, each dependent on the circumstances of its origin for its identity; one remaining a second finite, but the other becoming an *active of the first finite*, with the power of creation in it.

⁹Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁰Ibid., p 106.

Although the second finite and the active proceed as twins from the same parent, still each is of a contrary character. The one is, as it were, quite opposed to the other. The one is most highly active, the other is most highly passive; so that they cannot mutually consort and associate with each other in the same place.¹¹

As we shall see, an element (atom) is born when these second actives of different types become associated, or “ultimately come into concord.” It is the nature of this ultimate concord that will define matter in the same terms as our *conjugal principle*. We have not lost track of this in our sidetrip through Swedenborg’s eighteenth century physics. It has been there all along.

Finally we come to the end of our stepwise construction of matter. The next order of complexity is the *elementary particle*; the atom, from which all things are built up in aggregations of compounds, molecules, and the structures familiar to our world. It is this which becomes intensely interesting in the light of our topic. Simply stated, these two prior particles, the *second finite* and the *active of the first finite*, are united in a single interactive arrangement which can then truly be called matter. But as we might expect, Swedenborg does not rest with this thought. He immediately sees *infinity* here:

The active always acts and impels. The passive is always acted upon and resists. One is most perfectly mobile; the other in its place, in regard to local motion, is inert...For one cannot as yet be in the same place or space as the other; *one flies away*, as it were, *while the other pursues*. Consequently they cannot be in the same world, unless they are so separate that the passives may occupy their place and the actives theirs.¹²

In this elementary particle, all that had preexisted is latent, such as the point, the first finite, the second finite, and the active of the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 152.

¹² Ibid., p. 156, emphasis added.

first finite. We have thus in a microcosm the whole of our macrocosm; *we have the entire world*, so far as it has developed itself, *in each particle*, in which, therefore, we may contemplate a compendium of the whole world-system...Thus does this first elementary particle, consisting of the active of the first finite and also the second finite, comprise within itself all that as yet is active and passive in the world. *Thus we have the world concentrated in a single particle.*¹³

This is poetry!! Having finally defined the elementary particle, or atom, Swedenborg immediately sees its cosmic implications, and we are left to wonder if we are reading Swedenborg the scientist, Swedenborg the mystic, or might we be reading Blake, instead?

(To see a World in a Grain of Sand
and a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
and Eternity in an hour.)¹⁴

To summarize: At this point we are beginning to see our elusive *conjugal principle* in one respect as a *reciprocal dualism*, lying at the very core of the existence of our universe. The seeds of creation are in this form. It has brought forth the world, so to speak, and, as we have already seen, this conjugal *is the Lord Himself!* As we have just seen, this idea was in the center of Swedenborg's thinking long before *De Amore Conjugiali* was written. Again we find the unmistakable hand of Providence in this man's preparation for the job to come.

Up to this point we have talked all around this principle. We have seen its historical roots in Swedenborg's physics, and we have identified it as a first order concept. But now it is time to see this principle in action—to turn our theology into religion—by putting it to work in creation, and finding it at work in things we can see.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 188, emphasis added.

¹⁴ William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, in Ostriker, Alicia, ed., *William Blake, The complete Poems* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1977), p. 506.

The *conjugal principle* simply stated is in fact simply stated. It is a premise which requires little explanation. The aspect which is difficult to grasp is its sheer magnitude—the all-encompassing nature of it—the fact that it is present as a sort of background to all of Swedenborg’s theology. Our minds are conditioned to believe that these kinds of things are too arcane and too complicated to be simple, but simple this is.

Man (*homo*) exists in the spiritually complete state not as a man or a woman, but as the combination of both male and female. An angel from the Golden Age described it like this:

We are one; her life is in me and mine in her. We are two bodies, but one soul. The union between us is like the two tents in the breast which are called heart and lungs, she being my heart and I her lungs.¹⁵

This mystical union of two into one whole is the first thing we learn about humans, in the narrative of their creation:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27, NKJV)

And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” (Genesis 2:18, NKJV)

...and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24, NKJV)

“One flesh” does not mean two distinct entities simply bonded together. It means two persons united into a “mankind;” *homo*; complete human; inseparable; reciprocal; conjugal. The spiritual experience of *Conjugal Love* 42, quoted in the opening lines of this paper, says it best: an angel couple appears at a distance as a single person. This is no accident, or optical illusion. It is the *conjugal principle* in operation.

¹⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1978), n. 75.

This spiritual union of two into one was manifested at Creation in the natural plane as male and female, each to have his and her distinctly different but complementary character. These differences were not meant to divide, but to conjoin the two in the use of common purpose. “The truth of good or truth from good is masculine, and the good of truth or good from that truth is feminine” (CL 88). “There is conjunction of good and truth in each and every created thing, and conjunction is not possible unless it be reciprocal” (CL 61). This condition is fundamental to the spiritual and mental composition of humans, and represents the conjugal manifested in its fullness on the natural plane. Human marriage is an image of this principle, and therefore the simple relationship of a man with a woman, when that relationship is chaste, or truly conjoined to heaven, is a microcosm of the marriage of good and truth—a true image of the Divine. The *conjugal principle* is the life of marriage.

As stated above (p. 534), “the state of the union of the Lord’s Divine spiritual in his Divine celestial...is the marriage itself of good and truth.” Just above, this union of good and truth, manifested as the marriage of the husband as truth and the wife as good, was said to be the origin of conjugal love in marriage. This in the supreme sense is the union of the (passive) Divine and the (active) Divine in the Lord (AC 6179). With respect to this progression of ideas, we return to cosmology, where we find the inverse of the series as a defining quality of matter:

There is a likeness of a marriage where there is an active and a passive; and there must be the active and at the same time the passive where anything has come into existence; for without the conjunction of these two nothing can possibly be produced. The reason there is a likeness of a marriage in all things, is that all things have relation to good and truth.¹⁶

The *conjugal principle*, then, is a “marriage” or a relationship (defined here as a reciprocal dualism) to which, on some level, everything in the universe corresponds, be it animal (AC 2727), vegetable (DLW 61), or mineral

¹⁶ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1878), n. 7022.

(DLW 61). All things of the world are built on this principle, in corresponding harmony with the mystical union of Divine Love and Divine Wisdom which is the Lord Himself.

In conclusion, we must work our way back to the beginning, to summarize the progression of ideas presented here, for final consideration. We know that the *conjugal* is a relationship which exists in *all things*, and is exemplified most clearly in the ideal relationship of a man with a woman. We know that this relationship is a reciprocal dualism, a symbiosis between two different but corresponding parts into a new whole or total being. We know that this dualism corresponds directly with the dualism of Good/Love and Truth/Wisdom we know to be the mystical constitution of God Himself. But since this God is unknowable to us natural humans, we use His Divine Human, Christ the Lord, as our example and guide, for study and imitation. And it turns out that He represents this *conjugal principle* as the marriage of the Divine Human and the Divine of the Lord, as well as the marriage of the Lord and His Church (Oh, the connections!). And lastly, we know that Swedenborg drew no lines between the existence of this reciprocal dualism in the spiritual realm and its existence in the natural. Separated by discrete degrees, they are nonetheless united by means of the correspondence in their function, or use. He and his great unifying ideas were at home in both worlds.

The main theme to take away from this discussion is the simplicity of this principle which may, due to its sheer size, seem overwhelming. The dual nature of matter and energy, of our physical and spiritual beings, and of our spiritual lives united in conjugal love, is testimony to the living truth that our God in His corresponding Creation provides for us a continual arena for the ultimatum of His very essence in the natural world—in which every least thing is a participant. The nature of this arena also allows for our movement, in freedom, toward heaven or hell. And the beautiful part is that we are invited to make that journey into heaven as angel pairs, “in His own image...as in heaven, so upon the earth.” Clear understanding of this condition provides us with a firm sense of purpose, and a valid spiritual perspective from which to view our world, and every experience within it. □

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- DLW *The Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1988.
- Life *The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem*. In *The Four Doctrines*. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1984.
- TCR *The True Christian Religion*. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1984.



