

Discussion Paper on Homosexuality

A. Introduction:

1. Mandate from Committee of Ministers

From minute 23 of the Committee of Ministers AGM (April 2005) we read:

“23. SPIRITUALITY AND MORALITY and HOMOSEXUALITY.

Resolved: That the Rev Gillian Gordon ask the Rev Brian Talbot if he would be co-ordinator for the group on homosexuality and that the Rev Michael Stanley ask Mr Stephen Russell Lacy if he would be co-ordinator of the group on Spirituality and Morality.

Gill Gordon and Michael Stanley would report back to the Secretary of the Ministers' Committee. The composition of the groups would be left to the co-ordinators to determine.”

This discussion paper will list and discuss as many different views and interpretations of the Scriptures and the theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg as possible. As with most Christian denomination, apart from the Quakers, the Unitarian Church, and the Metropolitan Community Church, there is a range of views within the different New Church denominations, from making homosexual Swedenborgians members of congregations to ordaining them, to an apparent rejection and shunning of them.

We will try as hard as we can to be as ‘politically correct’ as we can and not use language which holders of different viewpoints would find divisive or alienating. It however needs to be stated that at face value - some would say ‘categorically’ - the revelation given to Emanuel Swedenborg presents a consistently negative attitude towards homosexuality.

Our duty is to “first of all” “get to know what the Church teaches” about homosexuality, “then one should discover from the Word whether such teaching is the truth.” When an affection for truth motivates the search, a person receives light from the Lord so that he may discern, though unaware of the source of his enlightenment, what the truth is and may be assured of it in the measure that he is governed by good. But if the truths discerned by him are at variance with the teachings of the Church, let him beware of creating a disturbance in the Church.” (AC 6047:2; cf. AC 8993:4; 5432:4-5) Those people who do not genuinely love the church’s teaching “confine themselves to endorsing the teachings of the Church in which they were born, regardless of whether those teachings are true or not. They are also in the dark so far as real truths are concerned; for worldly ends or gains, and selfish* [* lit. bodily] ends or important positions make people completely blind.” (AC 8993:3) We also need to remember that “one person's truth cannot be transferred to another, for when it is transferred it passes into the form that is peculiar to the recipient and takes on a different appearance”. (AC 4149:2)

2. Current practice in Convention, General Church, etc.

The General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches in North America is probably the most liberal of Christian Swedenborgians. In the early eighties 'Convention' was considering ordaining Paul Guinta, who was a practising homosexual man, when he was tragically murdered, and his murderer has never been found. They have since ordained a practising homosexual, Rev D Jonathan Mitchell one or two years ago. At Convention in July 2005, Sage Currie-Rohrer, an openly "feminist women and ... lesbian" was ordained into the Convention ministry. (*The Messenger* (September 2005) 84c) At least one of their ministers, Rev Dr Jim Lawrence, conducts blessing ceremonies for faithful homosexual couples with the agreement of his San Francisco congregation, openly sharing with homosexual couples what he sees as doctrinal difficulties or lack of clarity in the teachings for the New Church, and "erring on the side of compassion".

The General Church of the New Jerusalem, with headquarters in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, USA, are opposed to homosexuality, seeing its various manifestations as examples of adultery, condemned in the Word and the Writings for the New Church.

In the world-wide Church of England, in Canada in 2003, in the Episcopal diocese of New Westminster, Bishop Ingham began conducting wedding blessings for homosexual couples, which attracted "immense criticism from African and Asian Anglicans especially, but also from traditionalists in Britain and North America." (Bradshaw [2003] xiii) Also in 2003 in the United States we have the first man in a monogamous, homosexual relationship to be consecrated as a bishop, in this case, Rt. Rev Gene Robinson, the Bishop of New Hampshire. Here in the United Kingdom, we have Canon Jeffrey John who was forced to withdraw his nomination as Bishop of Reading in England, due to Evangelicals questioning his homosexuality, despite him being celibate.

3. Different interpretations of the Bible and the Writings

Is the necessary guidance for forming an opinion on homosexuality written down in the Bible and the revelation given to Emanuel Swedenborg, or written in our hearts, caused by inflowing Divine Life, (Jeremiah 31:33; cf. John 16:13-15) or a combination, or permutation, of both? In AC 3645:8 we read that Jeremiah 31:31,33 refers to "members of the Lord's spiritual and celestial kingdoms", who are "joined to the Lord by means of good" and have "a perception of good and of truth springing from that good, and also for conscience." In AC 10336:3 we read "'Writing the law on the heart' means entering Divine Truth into the will, thus in a person's love. When this is done the person no longer has to draw Divine Truth out of store in his memory; instead the good itself belonging to love causes him to perceive intuitively." Some may feel more of an obligation to follow what is written in the Bible than others, who might be more comfortable seeking the Lord's guidance through and beyond what is written in the Bible, through modern knowledge, psychology or whatever.

4. The role of doctrine and charity

The role of charity: humility, tolerance, and so on, will be paramount in our deliberations of this most difficult of topics:

“[3] By itself doctrine does not constitute the external aspect of the Church, still less the internal, as stated above. Nor on the Lord's part is it its teachings that make one Church distinct and separate from another, but its life in accordance with those teachings, all of which, as long as they present what is true, regard charity as their basic principle. What else does doctrine do but teach men the kind of people they ought to be?” (AC 1799:3)

If Christian denominations “were to make love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbour the chief thing of faith”, they would be united and not have disagreements about doctrinal matters. Their “doctrinal differences would be no more than shades of opinion concerning the mysteries of faith which truly Christian people would leave to individual conscience, and in their hearts would say that a person is truly a Christian when he lives as a Christian, that is, as the Lord teaches.” The hatred held against Christians of other denominations “would be dispelled in an instant, and the Lord’s kingdom on earth would come.” (AC 1799:3-4) “That matter of doctrine they would leave to each individual's conscience, provided it did not deny anything fundamental, that is, the Lord, eternal life, or the Word, and provided it was not contrary to Divine order, that is, to the Ten Commandments.” (AC 1834:2) Despite the Ancient Church spanning many countries in the Near East and many cultures, and differing as to “doctrinal teachings and religious practices”, “there was nevertheless one Church because with them charity was the essential thing.”

“If the same situation existed now all would be governed by the Lord as though they were one person; for they would be like the members and organs of one body which, though dissimilar in form and function, still related to one heart on which every single thing, everywhere varied in form, depended. Everyone would then say of another, No matter what form his doctrine and his external worship take, this is my brother; I observe that he worships the Lord and is a good man.” (AC 2385:5)

How will charity dictate our words and actions, if we believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Is it all right to regard it as a wrong life-style for us personally, but not for others? How far can we leave “the mysteries of faith” “to individual conscience”? Are the different views of homosexuality merely “doctrinal differences”? Is a person’s homosexual life-style contrary to the Ten Commandments? If so, what does the Church say to a homosexual person, and how do they say it?

Now we consider the role of doctrine. Without guidance or teaching we would not be able to distinguish a truly kind act from an expedient, sentimental, or superficial one. (AC 3310:1) We need doctrine to help us differentiate between what seems to be the most helpful thing to do, from what is conscience-driven and spiritually-aware. (AC 4988:2-4; 3470:2-3) We can be at our worst when we are too well-meaning. The good deeds of a Christian or non-Christian look the same on the outside, but “it is faith that determines their quality. It is faith that causes God to be in them and links them with itself in the internal man. It is this that makes natural good deeds inwardly spiritual.” (TCR 654)

Doctrine may limit the apparent ‘anything-goes’ philosophy of the more liberal thinkers in our congregations and New Church organisations. We need a balance between charity and doctrine. “How judgmental should we be? It is easy to be judgmental. Maybe we should take the narrow path and attempt to discover how accepting and understanding we can be.” (Anne M. York [1993])

5. Different views before regeneration and after

Before regeneration we follow the commandments, but do not know “from affection what charity is, only from doctrine”, but after regeneration we love our neighbour and have “a heartfelt desire for his welfare”. Consequently a person’s “life is now directed by a law written on his heart, for an affection that belongs to charity governs” our actions. Before regeneration we blindly follow what we have been taught is true, because we “are in dim light so far as the truths and the forms of the good of faith are concerned”, and can convince ourselves that both truth and falsity are true. But after regeneration we are “in bright light”, and can “see truths and corroborate them in a state of enlightenment”. “From this one may recognize what is meant by leading a life in keeping with the commandments of faith, and what by leading a life in keeping with the commandments of charity.” (AC 8013:2) We can be pharisaic, legalistic, sanctimonious, and uncaring, if we ‘Bible-bash’ we can keep people at a distance, by hiding behind revelation instead of stepping out from behind it to build relationships. Do we “tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but ... are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”? (Matthew 23:4) Rev John Odhner [1993] reminds us that angels can see our faults and failings, put an encouraging and hopeful interpretation on them, and defend our false ideas and self-centredness when we are tempted. (AC 1079; 761) To such points, we would add: angels are gentle and do not crush our misconceptions or baseness, (AC 5992:1) and “so far as the person allows them, ... they turn evils into good, or into something approaching good, or into something which leads in that direction.” (AC 5980)

6. Everyone is being withheld from greater evil by the Lord

We have a teaching in our church that every mortal, angel and devil is being “withheld from evils” or “greater evils” by the Lord. (AC 2116:2; 9333:3; AE 1145:10; DP 296:12; HD 163; SE 4055) and that if this were not the case, we would rush “headlong” into hell. (AC 789; 929; 1919:2; 2116:2; 2307; 2410) It is the virtues we receive from the Divine which hold us up, (AC 2410) and “by the influx of the life that is the life of the Lord's love, and by an extremely powerful force.” (AC 3318:5; cf. AC 5758:1e; 7206:2e; 7989; 8287; AE 689:2e) or “higher force”. (AC 5113:2e) Angels willingly admit this to newly arrived spirits, (AC 2016:1) and can perceive the withholding. (AC 1614; cf. AC 4295:2; 4564:2) In the process of our re-birth, the Lord leads us to milder hells before leading us out of hell, (e.g. DP 183; AC 3854:2) while when we or others don’t want to be helped, the Lord does his utmost to lead us to a milder hell. (AC 8391; AE 1145:10) To the extent that we turn away from and resist our shortcomings and failings, and live “a life in keeping with the commandments of faith”, our “sins are removed” and we are forgiven. A person “can be withheld from evil in the next life to the extent that during his lifetime he was resisting evil, and he can be maintained in good then to the extent that during his lifetime he was doing good out of an affection for it.” (AC 8393) In AC 9014:3 we learn that sins are not “forgiven unless the person sincerely repents,

refrains from evils, and after that leads a life of faith and charity, doing so to the end of his life. When this happens the person receives spiritual life from the Lord, called new life. Then when with this new life he looks at the evils of his former life, turns away from them, and abhors them, his evils have for the first time been forgiven. For the person is now maintained in truths and forms of good by the Lord and held back from evils". People who are "permanently evil" are in hell, (AE 1159:5) which suggests that people who are temporarily evil are not. Evils that are justified are indelibly imprinted on our character. (DLW 265; 268) Possibly one teaching that everybody can agree on, is that the Lord is withholding every one of us, heterosexual and homosexual, from evil. But can or should a homosexual person repent of his homosexuality? Is homosexuality a sin?

7. So far as we ..., so far can the Lord

In the Writings for the New Church, we frequently come across the phrase "so far as ..., so far" (e.g. AC 10378) "It happens otherwise with any one who actually does the work of repentance. The evils of his that he recognises and acknowledges he calls sins, and therefore he begins to flee from them and avoid them and to feel their delight as undelightful. And in so far as this is done, so far he sees and loves goods and at length feels the delight thereof; which is the delight of heaven. In a word, in so far as any one is putting the devil behind him, so far he is being adopted by the Lord and being taught, led, withheld from evils and kept in goods by Him. This is the way, and there is no other from hell to heaven." (AR 531:6 = BE 114:6) " 'For everyone,' they said, 'is restrained from longing for evil, and is kept in intelligence in proportion to the extent he looks to the Lord and at the same time is linked with Him.'" (TCR 662:2)

This teaching and Swedenborg's exposition of degrees of adultery in the book *Conjugal Love* or *Marriage Love*, might suggest, that a consensual, long-term, homosexual partnership, is not as morally wrong, as a promiscuous homosexual, aimlessly going from one relationship to another. Possibly that is another point that every one can agree on. Although some would say a faithful, homosexual relationship is always wrong.

In the revelation given for the New Church, we learn that as far as we detest adulteries and "unchaste and filthy thoughts, so far chastity enters, "which is the inmost love of heaven, in which love chastity resides.", and we live chastely with our wives. (AE 803:2(5); 949:3; TCR 330:iv; cf. DLW 419; Life 75; SE 5954) Apparently, "so far as he is an adulterer, so far is he blind in spiritual things, and so far is inwardly a devil." (SD 6051) A very challenging series of questions occurs in AE 981:2 - "Who is there at this day capable of believing that the delight of adultery is hell with man, and that the delight of marriage is heaven with him; consequently, that so far as a man is in the one delight, so far he is not in the other; because so far as a man is in hell, so far he is not in heaven? Who is there at this day who is capable of believing that the love of adultery is the fundamental love of all hellish and devilish loves, and that the chaste love of marriage is the fundamental love of all loves, heavenly and Divine; consequently, that so far as a man is in the love of adultery, so far he is in every evil love, if not in act, yet in endeavour? On the other hand, so far as a man is in the chaste love of marriage, so far he is in every good love, if not in act, yet in endeavour? Who is there at this day who is capable of believing that he who is in the love of

adultery has no belief at all in the Word, consequently, none in the church, indeed, that in his heart he denies God? And, on the other hand, that he who is in the chaste love of marriage is in charity and faith and in love to God? Or who is capable of believing that the chastity of marriage makes one with religion, and the lasciviousness of adultery makes one with naturalism?" If we don't shun adulteries inwardly because they are opposed by spiritual law, but because of fearing to lose our reputation, or being "beaten by servants", or contracting a sexually transmitted disease, then we will become adulterers in the next life. (TCR 316)

Because of this teaching, we need to remember that to judge clearly matters of sexual morality, we need to make distinctions between more or less chaste (or faithful) actions and motives, from less and more unchaste ones. (CL 444a [Acton] = 444r [Rogers] = 444bis [Chadwick]) As Rev John Odhner [1993] wrote: "a person with discernment can distinguish many shades of grey, while condemnation and prejudice involve only black and white." (462)

8. A spiritual versus celestial approach to morality

We also need to recall teaching on the different approaches to morality: "Or take this example: All delight, blessedness, and happiness belong wholly to love, but the nature of the love determines that of the delight, blessedness, and happiness. The spiritual man fixes his mind on the question whether this is true and whether delight, blessedness, and happiness may not spring from some other source, such as from mixing with others, talking to others, meditation, or learning, and also whether they reside in possessions, position, reputation, and the glory resulting from these. As long as he is asking such questions he does not confirm himself in the truth that none of these accomplishes anything, only the affection born of love which is present within them and making them what they are. The celestial man however does not remain rooted in such preliminary questionings but immediately asserts that the thing is true. Consequently he is interested in the end in view and the realization of this, that is, he is governed by the very affections born of love which are countless, and in each one of which there are things beyond description, involving variations of delight, blessedness, and happiness that have no end." (AC 2718:4. **See other sub-paragraphs!**)

Just as there are people who are motivated by "good" and those motivated by "truth", (AC 4788:3) there are people of the "internal Church" and those of the "external Church":

"The member of the internal Church makes worship of the Lord from charity - and especially internal worship - the essential, and external worship not so essential. The member of the external Church makes external worship the essential. He does not know what internal worship is, even though he has it. Consequently the member of the internal Church believes that he is acting contrary to conscience if he does not worship the Lord from what is internal, whereas the member of the external Church believes he is acting contrary to conscience if he does not reverently observe external rites. The conscience of the member of the internal Church contains more things because he knows more things from the internal sense of the Word, whereas the conscience of the

member of the external Church contains fewer because he knows few things from the internal sense of the Word.” (AC 1089)

How do we tell whether a particular view of homosexuality is of “the internal Church” or “the external Church”? Do people of the internal Church rely less on what is literally written in revelation?

9. The role of our experience in our decision-making

What role will **experience** play in our decision-making? If we have a relative or friend who is homosexual, particularly if we are close to them, how will that colour our theological thinking? Sometimes we can be so obsessed with a particular opinion or belief, such as we are totally depraved or that our sins have been completely washed away from us, that no amount of arguments or experiences, will convince us otherwise. (cf. AC 2694:4; AE 478:1; 897:1; DP 79:2) In heaven sometimes other experiences over-write or improve our understanding of reality. (cf. TCR 614:1)

10. Alternating between pro- and anti-homosexuality positions

It is perfectly natural for our views to alternate between being pro-homosexual to anti-homosexual, and vice versa. This is all part of the process of spiritual growth. (AC 933:2-4; 935:1-2; 6110:3; 6315; 7193:3; 8431; 8487:3; 9213:1; 9278:2; AE 644:6; 747; DP 223:2) Sometimes Swedenborg talks of the affirmative versus the negative attitude or principle. (AC 2568:2-4; 2588:2-5) People, who oscillate between opinions, could be showing signs of regeneration. (AC 2338; 2568:6; 2588:3; 4096:6; 5135:2; 7313) Being able to give concrete examples of religion being practised in everyday life, can protect affirmative people against “those who from a negative attitude argue about the truth of every single thing, 2568, 2588.” (AC 3394:3) “When however the person grows older, when he starts to think for himself and not, as previously, simply in the way his parents or teachers do, he brings back to mind and so to speak chews over what he has learned and believed before, and then he either endorses it, has doubts about it, or refuses to accept it. If he endorses it, this is an indication that he is governed by good, but if he refuses to accept it, that is an indication that he is governed by evil. If however he has doubts about what he has learned and believed before, it is an indication that he will move subsequently either into an affirmative attitude of mind or else into a negative one.” (AC 5135:2e) If only it were easy to determine what is true and what is not true! Swedenborg makes it sound so easy at times.

To confirm what is true

- compare passage which contain similar or the same ideas (e.g. AC 6222:3,5; 7233:3)
- “a person should not use what is his own to confirm God's truth but what is the Lord's with him” (AC 9166:8)

11. The relationship between spiritual and natural adultery

Swedenborg argues that so far as anyone finds pleasure in adultery, “so far is he in every evil love, if not in practice at least in endeavour”. (AE 981 [Chadwick]) A cheating spouse or a pornography-addict will lie to cover up his or her indiscretions, and can

think up any number of reasons to justify their actions. In SD 6051 we read: “(10) That with preachers in hell, there is a doctrinal adultery, which differs from natural adultery - of which anon. (11) The reason why wisdom increases according to chastity, is because the origin thereof is the marriage of good and truth, and the marriage of the Lord with the Church. This is its cause wherefore, nobody who is an adulterer can be wise in spiritual things. Hence, so far as he is an adulterer, so far is he blind in spiritual things, and so far is inwardly a devil.” A Christian polygamist - could this refer to branches of the Latter Day Saints or bigamists? - commits natural and spiritual adultery. (CL 142; 332(6); 339; 465) According to Life 74, “whoever is in natural adultery is also in spiritual adultery, and conversely.” Swedenborg asked an angel about the people in hell whom he called “spiritual and natural adulterers”, and why he didn’t call them “criminals and unbelievers”. The angel replied, “‘Because,’ he replied, ‘all who think nothing of committing adultery, all, that is, who commit these acts in the firm belief that they are not sins and with deliberate purpose, are at heart criminals and unbelievers.’” (CL 80:2) I find some truth in CL 520 [Chadwick]: “Since the natural and the spiritual in each individual are closely connected like the soul and the body (for without the spiritual flowing in and enlivening the natural a person is not human), it follows that one who lives in the spiritual marriage also lives in a happy natural marriage; and, by contraries, one who lives in spiritual adultery also lives in natural adultery, and vice versa. Now since all in hell live in the pairing of evil and falsity, a state which is spiritual adultery itself, and all in heaven in the marriage of good and truth, a state which is marriage itself, the whole of hell is therefore called an adultery, and the whole of heaven a marriage.” However, this is should be understood correspondentially. (CL 76:5)

All the quotations so far, imply that someone with a Christian, and some might argue a religious or philosophical, belief against adultery, commits adultery knowingly and willingly. But we need to recall teaching about spiritual blindness. In Jesus’ own words: “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” (John 9:41) Blindness is used in the Scriptures in two senses: that of ignorance for someone outside Christianity, and therefore other religions, and that of falsity for someone within Christianity, (AC 2383:3) while those who see are “those who imagine themselves to be more intelligent than everybody else”. (AC 3863:13) We are not guilty for hereditary evils, or our self-centred or misunderstood or misapplied ‘programming’ from parents or teachers or ministers, but only that which we have reflected on and thought through. (AC 9069) We are not responsible for our sins if we are ignorant or do not understand, or if our church does not teach us about a particular topic. (AR 210) Polygamy is not a sin for those whose religion allows it - such as branches of the Latter Day Saints, (CL 348) neither is worshipping the sun or the moon for pagans. (DP 254:5) In *True Christian Religion* §107 Swedenborg writes: “But those who do not know anything about the Lord, like those in two of the three continents, Asia and Africa, not to mention the Indies, if they believe in one God, and live in accordance with the commandments of their own religion, are saved by their faith and their life. Sin is imputed to those who know, not to those who are ignorant, just as blind people who knock into things are not blamed.”

Some might find that it is easier to form judgements on the issue of homosexuality than the issues of bisexuality, transsexuality, and transvestism.

B. Different views of Homosexuality

Here is a list of possible views on homosexuality, which have appeared as we have read up on the topic:

1. Homosexuality is a sin against the way God created human beings, and as such, should be shunned and avoided. Homosexual people, therefore, like adulterers, should receive all the pastoral support available, but be left in no uncertain terms, that same-sex attraction and relationships are morally and ethically wrong. Homosexuals should not be priests or ministers, and should not have positions of leadership within congregations. Holders of this view believe that some or all homosexuals could, with sensitive, psychological or psychiatric or counselling help, re-orientate themselves back to heterosexuality. Charis Cole [1994] wrote that: "A number of homosexual therapy groups have been successful, and the Annenberg Society has videos showing many former homosexuals talking about how they were helped." Anonymous² [1993], as I have called him in the Bibliography, is a General Church man who believes that the Lord is helping him turn away from his homosexual feelings and become heterosexual, but he has only been able to do this through counselling from New Church and non-New Church sources, New Church spiritual growth groups, prayer and the support of friends with whom he has been able to share his homosexual feelings, and been able to see "it in the perspective of their lives and struggles." Following this letter in the *Theta Alpha Journal* of September 1993, mention is made by the Editor of an organization called Regeneration, a non-profit Christian ministry associated with Exodus International. They 'seek to bring God's healing to homosexuals and to help ... in reaching out to those caught in homosexuality.'" The Roman Catholic Church would regard homosexuality as "intrinsically evil", and the Vatican has recently (BBC Teletext 24/9/05) confirmed that homosexual men are not to be encouraged to train as priests.
2. Homosexual people, for whatever cause or reason, are attracted to people of the same gender. As followers of Jesus Christ, who have proved themselves to be competent ministers of the Gospel, they are free to be priests and ministers, but must remain celibate, that is, not express their sexuality in physical ways or sexual relationships. (This is the traditional Church of England stance.)
3. People involved in long-term (if not, life-long), monogamous, faithful, same-sex relationships are suitable to be ministers or priests, members of congregations and hold positions of leadership in congregations. (This is the position of the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches in North America.)
4. People involved in short-term, monogamous, faithful, same-sex relationships, like cohabiting, heterosexual couples should be accepted as members of congregations, but not ministers or priests.

Possibly some people might find truth in each of these positions. It also raises questions about which heterosexual people, actual or potential, are suitable for positions of leadership, whether ordained or lay in any church organisation.

C. Humanity

Some might argue, that in the spiritual psychology revealed to Emanuel Swedenborg the vast majority of passages referring to spiritual development and processes within our hearts and minds are asexual and applicable to people of both genders. A helpful introduction to this area of doctrine might be Rev Brian Talbot's two-part article: "Swedenborg and Women in the Priesthood?" in *The New-Church Magazine* No.27 (May 1998) 3-13 and No. 28 (July 1998) 8-28. It might help people understand why some people hold different opinions about controversial issues.

"external people are hardly aware of anything except knowledge which they call intelligence and wisdom, and even faith" (AC 111)

D. Sexuality

Swedenborg says: "sexual love is not the same in one person as in another" (CL 47e) Swedenborg seems to limit true conjugal love to that of married partners, (CL 44:6) although some Swedenborgians, have acknowledged that this Divine gift could also be given to people who are co-habiting in a long-term, loving relationship. All passages referring to sexual attraction refer to heterosexual male attraction towards females, either faithful or lustful: (CL 22 = TCR 749; CL 44:4; 93) Heterosexuality mirrors the marriage of good and truth. (CL 92) Compare the phrase "love for the opposite sex" (CL 48; 58; 93) True heterosexual attractions are

- "chaste" (CL 22) and usually called "conjugal love" (CL 38)
- "mutual and reciprocal" (CL 37e)
- "necessary for the continuance of the human race" (CL 46)
- "internal" primarily (CL 97) "This [heavenly] form does not admit sexual love, but only the love of one of the opposite sex; with her he can be united down to the most intimate level, which contains heaven and its happiness, and this union is the product of conjugal love." (CL 93)

Some might argue that this rules out homosexual relationships. In CL 83(6); 94 we read: "A love for the opposite sex is a love of the external or natural man, and is therefore common to every animal." Some people would argue that some animals are known to indulge in homosexual behaviour as well.

Swedenborg often in his book *Conjugal Love* talks about the heterosexual love of angel couples being sexual and spiritual, 'physical' and inwardly uniting, which increases perpetually. (CL 38; cf CL 44:4,6) Males in heaven seem to be ever-virulent, (cf. CL 105) except possibly during their evening states.

Women can be promiscuous (CL 469; 488:2; SE 3307) Promiscuity is not permitted in hell. (AR 153:10 = TCR 281:11; CL 54(a))

Swedenborg says little about female sexuality. Disappointment was expressed by a writer in *Connections II* about this.

“(x) Wives do not share the arousal which men feel, but they have a state of readiness to receive.” (CL 209(10))

Women seem to have an innate desire for marriage. (CL 217) Women love only one member of the opposite sex. (CL 296) “if she is chaste” (CL 330:3)

“pleasures of the body” (CL 37)

As Rev John Odhner [1993] reminded us, moral and chaste [or faithful] people can hide impure loves. (CL 71)

Billings [1996], like so many New Church and other Christians argues, that heterosexual relationship mirror the “*one* Divine wisdom and *one* Divine love ... united in deep attraction, same u the completed glory that is the one living, *incredible* God.” (49) Billings then goes on to talk about Divine love and wisdom being “distinguishably one”; i.e., they form a perfect and total unity but without losing distinctness between them. This is extremely important, and relates directly to the sexes and our sexuality. ... This is the spiritual origin of the sexes that cause them to be different physically and psychologically, and to relate to the Lord in fundamentally different ways.” (52) Paul Mickey talks about it being dipolar.

E. Passages from the Bible

We are taught that the Word of the Lord is like a clothed man, and that the passages that we can believe literally are the “face” and the “hands”. In AE 778:6 we read: “Therefore it is possible that, from the sense of the letter of the Word, the doctrine of genuine good and of genuine truth may be seen by those who are enlightened by the Lord, and may be confirmed by those who are not so enlightened.” Such passages “These things in the Word are serviceable for the doctrine of the church, because they are in themselves spiritual truths on a natural plane. Consequently it can be seen that there is nothing to prevent a person from finding and seeing naked truths even in the literal sense of the Word.” (De Verbo 10:7 [Rogers]) The “face” and “hands” are “All things that concern man's life, and consequently his salvation.” (SS 55) or “Everything needed for a person's faith and life, and so everything needed for his salvation.” (TCR 229) So we will all need enlightenment to discern which passages in the Bible we can take literally and which we can't. Unfortunately Swedenborg doesn't tell us in general, which is which. An example does occur in AC 9349:3-4. The laws, statutes and judgments of Exodus 20:20-23 are divided into “those which have been abrogated so far as practices by the Church are concerned, those which it may practise if it so wishes, and those which must be altogether observed and carried out are all equally holy by virtue of their inner and holy content.” (AC 9349:3) As an example, one could ask whether sorcery [or even spiritualism?], bestiality and pagan worship really deserve the death penalty? (Exodus 22:18-20)

Problems arise when interpreting the Old Testament, because it has to be asked whether revelation was adapted or accommodated specifically to the people of Israel, or whether some passages are relevant to all peoples in every age. In AC 10453:3 we read: “the literal sense of the Word would have been different if the Word had been written among another people, or if the character of the Israelite people had not been

such as it was.” (cf. Ezekiel 20:25) Without being anti-Semitic, see Rev Dr Friedemann Horn’s presentation to the New Church College on this topic, “Because the Jews were, more than others, in the love of self and in the falsities from that love, they wished well to none but themselves, consequently not to the Gentiles. “ (AE 401:36; cf. AC 5897:6e; 9320:2; 10396:2; 10453:3; 10698; HD 248; MI 10) Israelites were allowed to have concubines, because they were representative of a church. (AC 8995:5) Their facilities for worship such as the tent of meeting and its utensils “were similar to the ones in the lowest heaven”. (AC 10276:5) “the representative signs in the Church among the Israelite nation were forms of truth on the last and lowest level of order.” (AC 10728) Most of the Israelites viewed God as a violent, vindictive deity and were afraid of Him. (AE 696:23) “the Israelites and Jews were natural and not spiritual, and those who are completely natural are also hard in heart, because they are not in conjugal love, but in lascivious love, such as is that of adultery.” (AE 710:27; cf. AR 775:3; CO 51:2) If we understand the Word too literally, then we are like the Jews of the Old Testament, who only accepted God’s word “in a very crude and materialistic way.” (AC 680:2) “With the Jewish nation there was only the external of the church, because it was in external representative worship ... because they were in external and in no internal worship, for they were inwardly evil, and since external worship without internal is no worship, and with the evil is evil worship, therefore with them there was nothing of natural good.” (AE 403:20)

Our understanding of what is true in the Old Testament particularly, needs to take into account issues of

- a patriarchal society in which women and girls were men’s property (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21), so Lot was entitled to use his daughters to satisfy the lust of the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:8) and the Levite satisfying the lust of the Gibeonites with his concubine and the old Ephraimite with his virgin daughter. (Judges 19:24) If a young daughter made a vow to God, the father could over-rule it, and a husband can over-rule a wife’s vow to God. (Numbers 30:5,8,12) If you conquered your enemy, you could take any female captive as a wife after a month, and let her go if she is not happy, despite the fact that you have used her sexually. (Deuteronomy 21:10-14) Swedenborg makes the following comment on Genesis 3:16, which is echoed by 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:22 - “Seeing that every law and every precept arises out of what is celestial and spiritual as its true source this law which has to do with marriages therefore does so too, it 'being a law which requires a wife, because she acts not so much from reason, as her husband does, but from desire which belongs to the proprium, to defer to her husband's better judgement (prudential).” (AC 266; cf. AC 568:2) Is this prescriptive, namely, that sometimes a husband’s assessment of a situation is better than his wife, and at other times the wife’s view is superior, or descriptive of every situation? Is this an example of an 18th century Christian view of women, or cultural conditioning?
- the Israelites’ belief in CHEREM or the total destruction of an enemy’s city, including the slaughter of wives, children, animals and possessions. The Israelites believed that they “were allowed to consign [enemies] to slaughter and to kill with impunity.” (AC 9256:1) This is diametrically opposed to being a lion during battle and a lamb after it. (CH 164) Like other countries of the time, they hadn’t heard about the Geneva Convention of the treatment of captives in war, and so they cut off their thumbs and big toes. (Judges 1:6,7; AC 10062:4) Swedenborg’s talks about

the hatred towards and the mistreatment of enemies in AC 4903:2, by referring to leaving the carcasses of defeated soldiers out in the open for wild animals to devour. (cf. 2 Samuel 12:31) They were ‘commanded’ to kill married women but allow virgins to live. (Deuteronomy 21:11-13; AE 555:16) Some Israelites could see beyond the victory songs about the defeat of enemies to their spiritual meaning. (AC 8261:3) All these incidents were permitted because they could represent a process within the spirit of human beings. It was to destroy the idolatry of the Canaanites, that the Lord permitted the Israelites to destroy them: “But when they turned representative worship - the worship of the Ancient Church - into idolatrous worship, and in so doing falsified truths and adulterated forms of good, 8317, the command came for them to be given to utter destruction, not only people but also cities and what was in them.” (AC 9193:2e) “People like this [the Israelites] are allowed to destroy, kill, and consign to slaughter and complete destruction. But people who are interested in outward forms and at the same time in their inner substance are not allowed to do those things, since their actions must be governed by good, and good comes from the Lord.” (AC 9320:2)

- slavery, the treatment of female slaves in particular; (cf. e.g. AC 2567:7-8; 8974:2-3) suggests narrow tribalism not open universalism. In the New Testament Jesus never preached against slavery, even though his and other writers’ words are concealed by more friendly words such as “servants”. It needs to be recalled that a literal understanding of the slavery laws in the Bible supported the suppression of the political and social aspirations of Afro-Caribbean people in the United States and apartheid in South Africa. It was based on the assumptions that the curse of Canaan (Genesis 9:25-27) referred to his descendants who had emigrated to Africa. Slavery seems to contradict Galatians 3:28 - “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”, or does this teach that even slaves can be Christians? If slavery does in fact dehumanise a person created in the image of God, as most believe, then the laws in the Bible regarding slavery, do not apply today. Possibly passages relating to the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt or the good news of Jesus, can be applied literally to all people, (cf. Amos 5:21-24; Isaiah 61; Luke 4:18-19) as well as those enslaved by addictive or compulsive behaviour, or other spiritual diseases. Liberals would argue that, because of the slavery issue, the Christian Church “eventually realised that the Bible could not be considered as a totally reliable guide on civil and moral topics and yet it still reverts to the Bible on the question of homosexuality.”
- concubinage; polygamy: “Moses for the hardness of their hearts suffered them to put away a wife for every cause, because the Israelites and Jews were natural and not spiritual, and those who are completely natural are also hard in heart, because they are not in conjugal love, but in lascivious love, such as is that of adultery.” (AE 710:27)
- priests. Very few priests don’t have foreign blood in their last 10 generations (Deuteronomy 23:2); are not allowed to marry divorcees (Leviticus 21:7-9); have beards whose corners they will not cut (Leviticus 21:5); do not have a physical defect or blemish or disability (Leviticus 21:17-21); or be a non-Israelite. (Ezekiel 44:9)

Very few if any Christians and Jews would take such issues as being applicable to our times. Is it fair to say that the Old Testament presents a patriarchal society with

heterosexual overtones? (See Bishop John Shelby Spong's *Living in Sin* for discussions of sexuality laws in the Old Testament.)

1. Genesis 1-2

In Genesis 1:27-28 God created people male and female and commanded them to procreate. Some Christians would view this as ruling out homosexual relationships, because children, or at least the potential for children, is absent, and therefore homosexuals are self-indulgent. However, if one partner in a heterosexual relationship is infertile, this also rules out the chances of children. Are they selfish? If a heterosexual couple chooses not to have children for career or other reasons, does this also mean that they are “indulging without responsibility”? (Anne M. York [1993]) Rev Erik E. Sandström argues on the basis of SE 1202 and 1203, that homosexuals (and presumably any heterosexual couple who uses contraception) are “damnable” or guilty of committing “a very harmful thing”, because they want “to make love without any desire for children, thus cutting themselves off from the very central and deepest aspect of” of true marriage love.” (SE 1202) “Since this is a very harmful thing, they are separated from heaven for just as long.” (SE 1203) But looking carefully at the latter passage, we see that the heterosexual partners being referred to, aren't looking to give pleasure to or express their love for their spouse, but have “that profane passion for having sex only for the sake of lust by itself, without any longing for children”. Heinrichs [1993] uses SE 3697 to support this as “adulteries are diabolical” because “anything that destroys or corrupts marriages, and thus destroys propagation, is diabolical.” Again, this passage might be used as a reason against contraception.

Other weaknesses with this argument, are that even adulterers can argue that adultery “too gives rise to children ... and that by their means the procreation of the human race is advanced.” (AE 982:5 [Chadwick], cf. AC 2243:1; AE 988:6; CL 500:3; DP 144:2) Some adulteresses that Swedenborg met weren't not bothered in the least, whether they bore illegitimate children. (De Conjugio 9) However, only truly heavenly marriages with children mirror the procreation of true spiritual offspring. (AE 991:3-4) Also, there are parents who have children for purely selfish reasons, and obsessed with the likeness to them despite them being satans. (CL 405-406; cf. SD 4855a) “Spiritual parents love their children for their spiritual intelligence and their moral way of life, in other words from their fear of God and piety realised in deeds and life, together with their affection and devotion to purposes of use to the community, that is, their virtues and good behaviour. It is the love of these qualities which chiefly makes them care for and supply necessities. If therefore they do not see these qualities in them, they set their minds against them and only do what they feel obliged to do for them.” (CL 405 [Chadwick]) Even adulterers can “caress the children” of wives, with whom they want to have sexual relations. (AC 5060:3 [Potts] = De Conjugio 110) Promiscuous wives can have children and love them. (CL 409e; 469(c)) Why can't a homosexual couple be spiritual parents to children? Yes, it might be ideal for the foster to child to have a male and a female parent, but this on its own doesn't rule out them being dysfunctional parents.

Sandström sees teaching about the reception of sperm by the wife during sexual intercourse, (CL 198; 172) as important, for mutually uniting husband to wife, and to produce “spiritual offspring”. (CL 44; 51; 65) Consequently he believes that

homosexuals are unable to bear “spiritual offspring”. Heinrichs [1993] also argues for the sanctity of sperm (see AE 1005:2; *Divine Wisdom* §76) by saying: “in male homosexual behaviour, human seed, containing the rudiment of a new soul, is very commonly commingled with faeces or is corrupted and destroyed in some other deplorable fashion.” Some New Church people will find this conclusion difficult to square with their understanding of doctrine and their personal experience. The wide availability of condoms or dental barriers would prevent sperm mixing with faeces. Some could point to the compassion shown by homosexual men to partners dying of AIDs.

Sandström then mentions the teaching that “there is a universal sphere of marriage which proceeds from the Lord, pervading the universe from first to last, and so from angels right down to worms. The reason such a sphere of the marriage of good and truth proceeds from the Lord is that it is equally a sphere of propagation, that is, of reproduction and fruitfulness; and this is the same as the Divine providence which keeps the universe in being by a succession of generations.” (CL 92 [Chadwick]) Even creation mirrors the procreativity of human beings. (DLW 61) Heinrichs [1993] would add, that marriages are holy because they “are nurseries of the human race, and hence also the nurseries of the heavenly kingdom”. (AC 2733) As Anonymous asked in 1993, “The biggest challenge that a gay New Church person faces is how to understand the teachings about marriage and the conjunction of male and female corresponding to the marriage of good and truth. Where does that leave us?” Some might answer in increasingly greater compassionate and wise actions.

Some commentators would see the use of the word “helper” (Genesis 2:18,20) as an indication of an intimate, emotional and sexual relationship, and the fact that males leave parents and become united to their future wife, (Genesis 2:24) would rule out the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. Homosexuals might argue that they can still experience intimacy and emotional support in their relationships, and despite not being able to bear physical children, they could still adopt, and still be compassionate and kind people, and produce ‘spiritual children’, (cf. CL 44:9; 51; 53; 65e; 115:5e; 143f) as help the Lord produce future citizens of heaven.

2. The people of Sodom (Genesis 19; cf. Judges 19; LJ(C) 26; LJ(P) 135; SE 4932)

As early as 1993 in *New Church Periodicals*, it was suggested that Genesis 19 was “the most misapplied passage” in the Bible. “When the angels visited Lot, the men of Sodom wished to practice gang rape on the visitors. The sin of Sodom was dominating through violence. In Ezekiel 16:49-50, the sin of Sodom is described as failure to care for the poor. In Luke 10:10-12, Jesus equates the sin of Sodom with inhospitality of those cities who would not receive the disciples.” (Anonymous) Rev John Odhner [1993] argues that the Sodomites were guilty of rape, incest and group sex. He is not sure of the degree of adultery, but when the Sodomites ask, who is Lot to judge them, he wonders whether it might be adultery of the fourth degree, or the most serious. Odhner also points out that rape is one of the four lusts, which are “most destructive of conjugal love” (CL 459) and is increased by the degree of refusal on the part of the victim. (CL 511) Rev Arne Bau-Madsen [1999] argues that whatever other sins the men of Sodom committed, “the one of homosexuality certainly is

manifestly exhibited in the sense of the letter, and that it is condemnable and adulterous may also be seen from AE 434:16, where the evil or abomination of lying with a man as with a woman (Lev. 18:22) is characterized as an adulterous relationship, (See also Lev. 20:13.)” [369] Patricia Rose [1999²] finds it difficult to equate homosexuality with the men of Sodom. Rev Lee Woofenden argues that the Sodom story talks about homosexual, gang rape not “*consensual* homosexual sex.” One could actually go further and say that the men of Sodom were heterosexual, because there were “both young and old” involved in the attempted pack rape (Genesis 19:4,11; cf. SD 3796), and the “young” does imply they were fathered by the “old”. So we could in fact have a story of heterosexual gang rape as well as “sexual perversion”, as opposed to “sexual inversion”, that is, heterosexual men behaving like homosexuals to dominate and humiliate visitors, rather than homosexual men going cottaging. Lot’s son-in-laws were presumably involved, (Genesis 19:14) which makes the behaviour of the men of Sodom even worse, but might explain why they didn’t take up Lot’s offer of his two daughters. Spong [1988] suggests that it was only a few of the men of Sodom who would have abused the strangers, while the rest watched and cheered, as their intention was to humiliate the strangers and re-enforce the vulnerability of their position as strangers. (140) This might have been the case - there is insufficient evidence - however in the story in Judges 19, the Benjamites raped and abused the concubine all night, and left her for dead. It doesn’t sound like a few men, which raises doubts about Spong’s theory.

Swedenborg seems to have observed angels having to face situations like their colleagues did in Sodom. (LJ(C) 26; LJ(P) 135; SE 4932) Heinrichs [1993] argues that Rudberg tried to homosexually rape Swedenborg’s spirit in SE 4836. (442-443; cf. SE 4888; 4225)

3. Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18 (The commandment not to commit adultery)

In the Writings for the New Church, homosexuality is categorised as a type of adultery. (see AC 2220; *De Conjugio* 86) Adultery, on the basis of Matthew 5:27,28 covers the sins of entertaining “filthy thoughts about marriage” or “to speak lasciviously and to do obscene things” and to “harbour filthy thoughts” (AE 902:4; 935:2; 1083:5; SS 67:3; Life 74; 78) or “to regard marriage as undelightful”. (AE 935:2) (Do anti-homosexual heterosexuals demonise homosexuals into hating marriage?) But what are the “obscene things” we should not do? In AC 2322 we read: “‘Sodom’ is used to mean a certain kind of foul behaviour that is totally unnatural.” Is this Swedenborg’s opinion or is this revelation? In AC 6348:2 we read about the “foul liaisons - which are called the forbidden degrees [of sexual relations], dealt with in Lev. 18:6-24 - mean various kinds of profanation.” Some would argue that since homosexuality seems to be mentioned in Leviticus 18:22, it is forbidden. Swedenborg mentions “the unrecognised evils which may not even be named” or “little-known evils which are too unspeakable to be named”, (CL 450 [Chadwick & Rogers respectively]) and “criminal acts not to be named”. (CL 459:5) In SE 3922 Swedenborg mentions lewd men who “engage in lewd activities outside of those which they have with their wives, which they practice in shameful ways and thus pervert and carry into lewd indulgence those females who would otherwise become good wives.” In SE 3447 a preacher who believes in life alone and hates anything to do with faith, indulged in

“filthy portrayals of shameful nakedness, which is not permitted to mention.” In AC 2468:15 we read: “the foul kinds of adultery meant by ‘taking one’s father’s wife’ and ‘violating one’s father’s skirt’”. How “foul” is “foul”, if we all have to be purified of our “foul desires”? (AC 1986)

Rev Willard Heinrichs [1993] wrote: “While urging that we should apply the doctrine regarding the degrees of adultery to homosexuality, we would do well not to minimize the evil of homosexual activity or the behaviour itself. The Lord in His Word, when referring to these activities or behaviours, speaks in the most pejorative terms. They are called ‘abominations,’ ‘foul conjunctions,’ ‘foul adulteries,’ a ‘foulness that is contrary to the order of nature,’ ‘abominable lewdness,’ ‘obscenities,’ ‘things so atrociously obscene that ... nothing could be more so,’ and ‘most abandoned iniquitous and obscene acts.’” (*We shall deal with the degrees of adultery in section F4.*)

In AC 5722 we read of “There are others who during their lifetime were utterly foul; that foulness was such that it must be passed over in silence here.” and in AC 4632 we read of “the kind of shameful acts and nasty practices that go with adultery”. Swedenborg seems to have discovered people who believed in wife-sharing or open marriages or ‘swinging’ in the world of spirits. (cf. SE 3440, 3450-3451) Such circumspection (cf. also AC 824; 2125) might be viewed as “false modesty” amongst some quarters of society in the 21st century. I am told that some heterosexual couples indulge in oral and anal sexual intercourse. (Field [1979] 14, 25) Do such activities come under the banner of “obscene things”, or do they only in the case of homosexuals? “Moses for the hardness of their hearts suffered them to put away a wife for every cause, because the Israelites and Jews were natural and not spiritual, and those who are completely natural are also hard in heart, because they are not in conjugal love, but in lascivious love, such as is that of adultery.” (AE 710:27)

People who don’t take such teachings seriously are in danger of hell according to Revelation 22: 15: “[verse 15] ‘For outside are dogs, and enchanter, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone loving and doing a lie’ signifies that no one is received into the New Jerusalem who makes the precepts of the Decalogue of no account, and does not flee from any evils there named as sins, and therefore lives in them.” (AR 952) “Dogs, sorcerers, and fornicators’ stands for those who falsify the good and truth of faith. They are said ‘to be outside’ when they are outside heaven or the Church.” (AC 9231:4) “Since all adultery is contrary to conjugal love, adulterers cannot be with angels in heaven. Another reason why they cannot be with them there is that things contrary to good and truth exist in them and so not the heavenly marriage; and a further reason is that they have none but filthy ideas regarding marriage. At the mere mention of marriage, or the occurrence of the idea, things that are licentious, obscene, and indeed unspeakable instantly enter their ideas.” (AC 2747; cf. AC 4327) Sodomitic hells are mentioned in the Writings. (cf. Revelation 11:8; AE 655:2.) In AE 1006:2 we read “Sodomitic hells are formed of those who were in evils from the love of ruling over others from sole delight in ruling who find no delight in use.” This type of hell might reflect the domineering heterosexual who indulges in homosexual rape, rather than a homosexual in a long-term, loving relationship with someone of the same sex. Kirsten Synnestvedt [1992] feels “that many homosexuals and lesbians go to heaven, but they may spend a considerable

period of time in the world of spirits first, learning about and adapting to the idea of real marriage.”

In the Writings for the New Church Swedenborg spends far more time describing the symbolism of this commandment as

- in the internal sense, “being forbidden to falsify what is true” (AC 7089:1) or “that what belongs to teachings about faith and charity must not be perverted, thus that the Word must not be used to lend support to falsities and evils also that the laws of order must not be turned upside down.” (AC 8903; cf. AC 8904) or “adulterations of good and perversions of truth.” (AC 8904:12) or “an angel of the spiritual kingdom, for committing adultery, understands falsifying the truths of the Word, and adulterating the goods thereof” (AE 1083:5) or “A spiritual angel understands to adulterate the goods of the Word, and falsify its truths.” (SS 67:3)
- “in the internal representative sense it means worshipping idols and other gods by means of the kinds of things the Church possesses, consequently acts outwardly and inwardly idolatrous” (AC 8904:12)
- “an angel of the celestial kingdom, for committing adultery, understands blasphemy against the Lord, heaven, and the church.” (AE 1083:5) or “And a celestial angel understands to deny the Lord's Divinity and to profane the Word.” (SS 67:3)
- “in the supreme sense, by committing adultery is meant to deny the Lord's Divinity and to profane the Word” (Life 74)

“All this shows plainly why it is that adulterous actions are intrinsically disgusting and called abominations; that is to say, they are such because they correspond to the marriage of evil and falsity, which is the hellish marriage. It also shows conversely why genuine marriages are holy - that they are such because they correspond to the marriage of goodness and truth, which is the heavenly marriage. Indeed genuine conjugal love descends from the marriage of goodness and truth, and so from heaven, that is, from the Lord by way of heaven. But adulterous love springs from the marriage of falsity and evil, and so from hell, that is, from the devil.” (AC 8904:12)

“He who shuns and is averse to adultery, from a fear that it is against the Lord, against heaven, and contrary to the spiritual life, which is the ground of eternal felicity, such a one loves chastity, and also his conjugal partner: because love truly conjugal is chastity itself.” (AE 790:7) A person can keep the commandments “of himself; and also, that he can also desist from them because they are sins. But still he cannot desist from them of himself, but from God. When, however, a man, from God, desists from them, he still thinks that he wills to desist from them because they are sins, and thus he desists from them as of himself. And when this is the case, then because he calls adultery sin, he lives in chastity and loves chastity, and this also as of himself.” (AE 802:5)

The only way to shake off the desire to commit adultery or any other sin, is “by refusing to will to commit them for the reason that they are sins, that is, because they are infernal and devilish.” (Life 91) “No one can shun evils as sins, so as to hold them inwardly in aversion, except by combats against them. ... Every one knows from the Word and from doctrine thence derived, that the proprium of man is evil from birth; and consequently from innate lust he loves evils, and is borne along into them, from

the desire to revenge, to defraud, to defame, and to commit adultery. Moreover, if he does not think that these evils are sins, and does not resist them on that account, he commits them as often as occasion presents itself and his reputation and interest are not endangered. Further, if a man has no religious principles, he commits these evils from a feeling of delight.” (Life 92) So far as one is in the delight of marriage, which is heaven, he is not in the delight of adultery, which is hell, and vice versa. Because “the love of adultery is the fundamental love of all hellish and devilish loves”, “so far as a man is in every evil love, if not in act, yet in endeavour”, and “has no belief at all in the Word, consequently, none in the church, indeed, that in his heart he denies God. Because “the chaste love of marriage is the fundamental love of all loves, heavenly and Divine”, “so far as a man is in the chaste love of marriage, so far he is in every good love, if not in act, yet in endeavour”, and “is in charity and faith and in love to God.” The “chastity of marriage makes one with religion, and the lasciviousness of adultery makes one with naturalism”. (AE 981:2) Marital faithfulness doesn’t imply spirituality, and neither does adultery imply paganism. “There are marriages which seem to lack conjugal love, though it is present, and there are marriages which seem to have conjugal love, though it is absent.” (CL 531 [Chadwick]) When “the church is at its end, and devastated as to truth and good; ... the man of the church, by influx from hell, comes into the persuasion that adulteries are neither detestable nor abominations. And hence also he comes into the belief that marriages and adulteries do not differ in their essence, but only as to order, when, nevertheless, the difference between them is such as that between heaven and hell.” (AE 981:3) Anti-homosexuals will see pro-lobby as failing to heed this warning.

4. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

In *The New International Version* Leviticus 18:22 reads: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” and Leviticus 20:13 reads: “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.” By analogy, women are not allowed to sleep with other women. If some interpreters object to analogising, it has been argued that Romans 1:26 argues that lesbianism is wrong. Heinrichs [1993] argues that “in female homosexual activity, human seed is wholly absent. In both cases sexual delights are sought in a context which precludes any conjunction of interior loves (see CL 55) and any possibility of the procreation of human offspring and a heaven from them. Surely behaviour so contrary to the Lord’s Divinely Human end and order must have harmful results to the individual who engages in it.”

However the context of these laws is that of ritual and custom, and so some commentators argue that they are not applicable to Christians in the 21st century. More liberal Biblical commentators argue that ritual prostitution is being talked about, (cf. Deuteronomy 23:18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46) because it was “the detestable customs practised” by the Canaanites, that were to be avoided, such as sacrificing children or bestiality. (Leviticus 18:21,23) Similarly, they would argue that the death penalty for such crimes as being disrespectful to parents, adultery, incest, bestiality or spiritualism, (Leviticus 20:9,10-12,14-17,27) are not applicable today, as is the death penalty for homosexuals.

In 1993 a female homosexual in the General Church suggested, following many liberal Bible commentators, that if we don't follow commandments like putting to death children who curse their parents or "having relations with a woman during her menstrual period", how can we take Leviticus 18:22 literally? However, Patricia Klock Rose [1993] retorted "Is it not general knowledge in the church that everyone in evil calls his/her evil good? (See DP 216, AR 908, TCR 38.)" Carmond Odhner [1993] listed all the passages in the doctrines which discuss the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18 and 20, which by implication label homosexuality as a type of adultery, namely, CL 519; AE 141:16; 410:11; 434:16; AC 3703:17; 6348:2; HD 172e, as does Heinrichs [1993] who adds AC 2220; 2322; AE 1006:2,3; MA 86 and SE 6096:29. (401-406). Pat Johnson [1994] follows the anonymous General Church lesbian's arguments and talks about other laws which are detestable, such as wearing clothing made from two kinds of material. (cf. Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:11) He mischievously wonders whether wearing trousers of 3 kinds of material is a stage worse or is all right?

"'abominations' in the Word signify in general the evils that are named in the last six precepts of the Decalogue" (AR 890) "In the Word also the dreadful things that well up out of self-love are represented by various kinds of adultery." (AC 2220:1) What does Swedenborg mean by "foul acts of adultery and unmentionable sexual unions" in the following passage: "As regards those however who are meant in the Word by 'Babylon', they likewise look in a similar way on the internal truths of the Church; yet because they have a knowledge of internal things, and in addition acknowledge these during childhood but in adult life refuse to do so, they are described in the Word by means of foul acts of adultery and unmentionable sexual unions; for they are forms of profanation." (AC 4868:6e) Profanation only involves deliberate sin. (CL 255; 339) Some would argue the homosexual and incestuous acts mentioned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. "(Lev. xviii. 24, 25, 28). In AC 6348:2 we read: "But foul liaisons - which are called the forbidden degrees [of sexual relations], dealt with in Lev. 18:6-24 - mean various kinds of profanation." In CL 519 we read: "The Word is violated by those in the Christian church who adulterate its good and its truths. They do this if they separate truth from good, and good from truth. Also, if they take appearances of truth and fallacies for real truths and confirm them. Also, if they know the truths taught from the Word, but live wicked lives; and others who behave in similar ways. These violations of the Word and the church correspond to the forbidden degrees listed in Leviticus, chapter 18." When Swedenborg talks about the symbolism of Reuben sleeping with his father's concubine, he writes: "Because you went up to your father's bed' means because when separated from the good of charity faith is involved in a foul liaison." (AC 6341; cf. AC 6348:1-2; HD 172e) "unless polygamy had been permitted, ... oriental peoples would, more than Europeans, have been fired with lust for foul adulteries, and would have perished." (CL 342:4e) In CL 465e we read: "It is obvious from these considerations, that having a concubine in addition to a wife and sharing a bed with either is foul polygamy." Sirens utter "foul things" (SE 3728) In SE 5067 we read: "There are also many who have cared nothing for the doctrine of the Church, but only for the Word in the letter, which they bend to whatever opinion, and to the favouring of whatever evils, they wish. Those who, in the life of the body, placed merit in works, when the goods of charity inflow into them from heaven, turn the influx into foul adulteries with daughters-in-law. Such things are signified by adulteries with daughters-in-law; and, because the Jews were of such a character,

therefore their origin is described from adultery with a daughter-in-law.” An example might be those who justify adultery. (cf. AE 981:3 on page 19)

“The Marriage Laws requiring marriages to be contracted within the tribe and the family, and also the Inheritance Laws forbidding the transfer of inheritances from one tribe to another, which are written in the Word, also had the same origins, that is to say, in the celestial and spiritual marriage in the Lord's kingdom, or the marriage of good and truth, which are meant by 'father and mother'. The same applies to the laws laid down relating to the permissible and the forbidden degrees of affinity. Each law in the Word concerning those matters has reference inwardly to the law of the affiliation and joining together of good and truth in heaven, and to the affiliations of evil and falsity in hell, which are separated from the former.” (AC 3703:17; cf. AC 4434:10)

By the subject here treated of is meant all kinds of adulteries, by which, in the spiritual sense, are meant all kinds of adulterations of good and falsifications of truth, or profanations; and because evils and goods, as also falsities of evil and truths of good, cannot be together, but are cast out, therefore it is said that the land, that is the church, has vomited them out.” (AE 235:8e) “Conjunctions of truth with affections merely natural, correspond to whoredoms and adulteries of various kinds, and are also meant in the spiritual sense of the Word by the varieties of whoredoms and the degrees of adulteries; there are conjunctions of the truths of the Word with the love of self and the love of the world, which correspond to these things.” (AE 511:2e) Knowing what should be done or what should not be done, and then misapplying it because of mere expediency, or fickleness seems to be being spoken of. “the love of adultery is the fundamental of all infernal loves, which are intrinsically not loves, but hatreds; consequently, that from the love of adultery flow hatreds of every kind, both against God and the neighbour, in general, against every good and truth of heaven and the church; therefore every kind of infelicity is associated with it. For, as before said, from adulteries a man becomes a form of hell, and from the love thereof he becomes an image of the devil.” (AE 993:3) But we need to recall that there are limits to scortatory or licentious love. (CL 423)

5. David and Jonathan (e.g. 2 Samuel 1:26)

Homosexual Jews and Christians turn to the story of David and Jonathan (amongst others) for role models for male homosexuality. When David the poet, writes in his eulogy for his friend Jonathan, that Jonathan's love for him was “more wonderful than that of women”, if you want them to be homosexual, you take 2 Samuel 1:26 literally, and if you want them to be heterosexual, you take it poetically. If we take David loving Jonathan “as he loved himself” (1 Samuel 20:17; cf. 20:41), does this mean that David was self-obsessed or that he rated his closeness to Jonathan very highly? We need to recall, that because of his sexual attraction to Bathsheba, he had her husband killed. (2 Samuel 11-12) Are these the actions of a homosexual man? It also needs to be remembered that David had 10 wives and concubines. Did he really have time or energy for a homosexual relationship with Jonathan? (1 Chronicles 3:6-9; 14:3-4; 2 Samuel 5:13-14) Jonathan was also married and had a crippled son Mephibosheth, (2 Samuel 4:4; 9:6,8,10-13; 16:14; 19:24-25,30; 21:7-8) who was also known as Merib-Baal. (1

Chronicles 8:34; 10:40) Yes, it could be argued that some homosexual men disguise their true sexuality by marrying.

Some homosexual Jews and Christians have also argued that in the book of Ruth, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi were lesbians, and that Martha and Mary weren't blood sisters, but lesbian 'sisters'. Other examples occasionally given are the centurion having a *παῖς* or "slave boy". (Luke 7) The primary meaning of this Greek word is "boy", not slave boy, and even if it implied a sexual relationship, it would be an example of pederasty not a homosexual relationship between equals. Even arguing that Paul was a homosexual because he had male friends, such as Timothy, Barnabbas and Silas, requires more evidence. Similarly, the speculation that Jesus had a gay relationship with Lazarus, or with the disciples that he "loved", or with the 'Rich Young Man', (John 13:23; 19:26-27; 21:20; Mark 10:21) would not convince many. While such examples could be placed in the category of "special pleading" or even desperation, the Greek word for "love" in the last couple of examples does not support a sexual interpretation. A different word should have been used to carry such a meaning.

6. Isaiah 56:3-4 and Matthew 19:12

Gay and lesbian Christians use the promise of Isaiah 56:3-4 to refer to themselves as being acceptable to God. Essentially the Lord's promise is that righteous eunuchs, who were originally excluded from entering the temple, whether lay or priestly, (Deuteronomy 23:1; Leviticus 21:20) would now be favoured by God. The assumption of homosexual Christians is that such eunuchs are homosexual, or that metaphorically they are eunuchs, as people incapable of reproducing children. Of course, there is a 'eunuch' in each one of us, whether we are married or unmarried outwardly, (AE 710:28) because a eunuch symbolises "the good of the natural man", or those outside Christianity who are "governed by good". (AC 5801:2) In CL 151 Swedenborg gives an example of people "born eunuchs" as "those who from birth lack the lowest level of love" or who doubt that true conjugal love can be expressed in a faithful, life-long marriage, or long-term relationship. (See what has been said in §A5 above.)

Gay and Lesbian Christians assume Matthew 19:12 talks about homosexuals ("eunuchs born that way"); "castrated males" ("eunuchs ... made that way by men") and "celibates" ("eunuchs ... have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven.") Swedenborg interprets these three categories, as referring to people "with whom the heavenly marriage exists" ... 'Eunuchs born from the womb' are like celestial angels, 'those made so by men' are like spiritual angels, 'those who have made themselves eunuchs' are like angelic spirits, who are moved not so much by charity as by obedience." (AC 394) "Eunuchs who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of God's kingdom' means spiritual eunuchs, those who in the married state refrain from the evils of promiscuity. It is evident that Italian castrati are not meant." (CL 156) The traditional, eastern role of the eunuch as guardian of his master's harem is mentioned in CL 369. In TCR 342:2 Swedenborg mentions the Ethiopian eunuch's confession of Jesus as God, which is "the leading point" of the Christian faith. (cf. Acts 8:37) So for New Church people passages about eunuchs refer to the spiritual state of someone, not their ability or inability to reproduce children.

7. Acts 11

Some homosexual Biblical commentators argue that Peter's dream in Acts 11:9: 'It is not for you to call profane what God counts clean', means that God counts homosexuals clean as he created them that way. The same argument is used of Romans 14:14 - "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean". [RSV.] However, Peter and Paul are not talking about sexuality but Jewish dietary laws (Romans 14:2-3,6,15,20) as Jesus did in Mark 7:19 and Peter in Acts 10:15. In the early Christian Church there was a major controversy about whether Christian converts were allowed to eat pig-meat, for example.

8. Romans 1:24-27

Anne M. York [1993] believes that the "Epistles (not part of the Word) ... simply reflect social customs of the time." Kirsten Synnestvedt replied that "Anne M. York ... seems to lack the knowledge that the *Writings* themselves quote from the Epistles *numerous* times, and also recommend them as good books for the Church to read. The Epistles do not 'simply reflect the customs of the time.' It is quite prevalent today to toss out moral teachings, saying they are outdated." (BMT: see AE 815:2; Letter to Beyer, April 15, 1766) Spong [1988] wonders why Paul would regard homosexuality as a punishment for idolatry. (149) Similarly, he would explain 1 Timothy as only applying to people who are in an exploitative relationship.

9. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

In this passage Paul lists groups of people who will not go to heaven, which includes "adulterers", "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders". He then says that members of his Corinthian correspondents were members of each category, but "were washed" and "sanctified". Does this imply that homosexuals can change? Some would argue that in the Writings for the New Church, we are taught that Conjugal love is required for entrance into heaven (*Conjugal Love* 316, *Apocalypse Explained* 999, *Coronis* 44, *Last Judgment* (posthumous) 346, *Spiritual Experiences* 5538); and this love is only possible between one man and one woman (*Conjugal Love* 37, 55, 112, 180, 316). (But see G4 for a different Convention understanding.) Some might see these principles as the most general which need filling with particulars. In AC 4345:4 we read: "For as a person advances in years he introduces the particular ideas into general ones acquired in early childhood, and after that specific notions into the particular ideas; for he advances gradually towards more interior things, filling what is the general with the particular, and the particular with the specific."

10. 1 Timothy 1:9,10

11. Revelation 21:8; 22:15

12. Other sheep (John 10:16)

F. Passages from the theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg

Referring to *Conjugal Love*, Julia Robinson [1993] wrote: “In light of the 100 pages written about marriage and the 100 pages written about adultery, the 5 or so pages of obscure and unrelated numbers that refer to the subject of homosexuality do not seem to constitute a clear doctrinal exegesis on the subject. Furthermore, we know that the attitudes of the day toward homosexuality, as well as many other issues, were not fully enlightened, and that these would have influenced Swedenborg’s writing.”

A question needs to be raised about the book *Conjugal Love*. Is the book male-orientated, or heterosexually male-orientated, or too marriage-orientated? It is certainly heterosexually orientated. Does this reflect the cultural conditioning of Swedenborg’s day, or is the Divinely established norm, apart from a few exceptions, such as celibacy for a few Christians and polygamy for a minority of Muslims and other non-Christians? To give one example, premarital sex seems to be worse for women than it is for men. (CL 503; 504, 459; 460) However, Swedenborg is not opposed to men taking a mistress or courtesan, if they are not ready to be married. He regards such actions as immoral but not adultery. (CL 449; 444a; 445; cf. 482)

1. Does CL 55:6 talk about homosexual love?

Some New Church commentators do not find the reference to platonic, same-sex friendships in Married Love 55:6, as referring to loving, faithful homosexual relationships. The passage in question reads: “These loves, those between two men or two women, do not sink far into the breast, but stay outside, making merely superficial contact and not leading to any inner union of the two”. [Chadwick’s translation] I assume that homosexual people can have friends, who they do not regard as partners. I personally would be in favour of applying this teaching to the former, but struggle with applying it to the latter. Having a concubine is a natural love. (CL 475:3)

2. The worst adultery? (AC 2220) an “abominable” practice (SD 3796; LJ(C) 26 = LJ(P) 136 = SD 4932)

Swedenborg writes that Sodom symbolises “every evil that stems from self-love”, but in the context of Genesis 19, the gross misbehaviour of the men of Sodom he calls “the evil that consists in the worst adultery” (AC 2220), or an “abominable” practice. (SD 3796; LJ(C) 26 = LJ(P) 136 = SD 4932) Heinrichs [1993] suggests that homosexuality is only “in some instances the worst adultery”. (450) This is also implied by Rev John Odhner [1993] when he wrote: “A person who has a one-time homosexual experience as an ignorant teenager or in a drunken stupor is many levels of gray away from the people of Sodom, whose intentions included rape, incest and promiscuity. ... The worst degrees of adultery are those which involve the worst intentions, whether they are committed in act or not (see CL 494).” (462)

But is the behaviour of homosexuals really as wicked as the rituals of wife-sharing among some women who were Quakers during their earthly lives? (SD 3768; 3784-3785; 3790; 3793-3815) In Swedenborg’s opinion “these cohabitations were much more abominable than those of the Sodomites”. (SD 3796) The latest translation by Rev Dr J. Durban Odhner reads: “Therefore their sexual intercourse is far more abominable

than that of the Sodomites.” (As Rev Ian Johnson wrote in the March 2005 *Lifeline*, these Quakers are not to be confused with the Society of Friends. Their founder William Penn was “good” according to Swedenborg (SD 3790; LJ(C) 84; SD 3814 = LJ(P) 58; cf. SD 3771) and was not like them. (SD 3814) The translator of *Spiritual Diary* even felt a need to make a comment on the amount of negative descriptions of Quakers in this book. (Cf. SD 3790e footnote.) In AC 824 Swedenborg mentions “people who have been cruel during their lifetime have also been the worst adulterers.” Swedenborg mentions there “is a hell called Gehenna where there are shameless women who have centred all their joy in committing adultery, and have imagined committing adultery to be not only permissible but also honourable. And under the pretence of what is honourable they have seduced guiltless and innocent people into such practices.” (AC 825)

Swedenborg met sirens who “when left to themselves they were borne away into things so atrociously obscene that nothing, as I heard, could be more so” or “into the most abandoned, iniquitous, and obscene acts.” (SD 3714; cf. SD 3999) Swedenborg met some promiscuous men and women who regarded sex within marriage as impure, and so they “were not far from being Sodomites”. (SD 1977; cf. 1976) There is nothing in the description of cruel people in hell, who were “the worst adulterers” to limit them to homosexuals. (AC 824; cf. MA 39(24)) Are homosexuals as bad as parents who abuse their own children? There are triple adulteries according to Swedenborg. (ML 484; 490-496)

Even taking *Married Love* chapters 11 & 12 into account, could a loveless heterosexual marriage, which is seemingly a farce, and exists solely to maintain the aura of respectability and avoid the stigma of divorce, be ‘better’ than a seemingly loving, faithful, homosexual relationship?

3. The “evil that stems from self-love” (AC 2220)

AC 2220 begins: “That ‘Sodom’ is every evil that stems from self-love is clear from the meaning of ‘Sodom’ in the Word. Although in the next chapter it seems as if Sodom means the evil that consists in the worst form of adultery, nevertheless nothing else is meant by it in the internal sense than evil that stems from self-love. In the Word also the dreadful things that well up out of self-love are represented by various kinds of adultery.” Even this passage suggests that the normally heterosexual men of Sodom - they seemed to have children (Genesis 19:14; cf. SD 3796) - who attempted to homosexually rape the two angels, were absorbed and obsessed by their own desire to dominate and exploit. The question arises is the “evil of self-love” or is the homosexual rape by heterosexual men, “the worst form of adultery”? When Isaiah (1:10-17) compares Judah to Sodom and Gomorrah, he mentions meaningless, overdone sacrifices, insincere prayers, and evil deeds. In Jeremiah 23:14 adultery is mentioned, but also insincerity, wrong-doing and lack of repentance. When Ezekiel compares Jerusalem to Sodom, he does say they “Copied . . . detestable practices” (16:47), but they were also “arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me.” (Ezekiel 16:49-50) But notice homosexuality is not specifically mentioned. Homosexuals have rightly questioned whether Genesis 19 is just about homosexuality, or attempted homosexual gang-rape by heterosexuals.

However, notice that Swedenborg is emphasising “the evil that stems from self-love”. Rev Lee Woofenden, a minister in the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches, in a letter to the *New Church Life* in 1999 would argue this way, especially, as already said, when he links the Sodom incident with homosexual rape. If we examine what Swedenborg says about the symbolism of Sodom, then it can apply to everybody, e.g. “evils in general” (AC 2324:2; 2393) to manipulative people, (AC 2141; SD 6096:29) to evil Christians, (AC 2314; 2324:2) to selfish non-Christians. (AC 7418:2) I wonder whether a too simplistic approach to passages like SD 5939 and AE 1006:2, encourage some New Church people to associate the cause of homosexuality with self-absorption and a desire to dominate, because all of the people named are self-obsessed and desire to exploit others.

We believe that there is some truth in the teaching that “one who lives in the spiritual marriage also lives in a happy natural marriage; and, by contraries, one who lives in spiritual adultery also lives in natural adultery, and vice versa.” (ML 520; cf. Life 74) I can be pretty self-centred at times, but it doesn’t mean I go and have a homosexual affair with anyone or rape a woman. I have met quite a few lovely, unmarried Christians of either sex, who seem to me to be seeking to follow the Lord, and seeking the right balance of heart and mind in their everyday lives, but whose spirituality is not expressed in a physical marriage. I also think of two good Christian people who mistakenly marry the wrong partner. I believe they should be allowed to divorce and remarry. I also think of some branches of Latter Day Saints who still practise polygamy, seem to be happy. I don’t see ML 520 as the whole truth. I would agree that there is some truth in the statement that “all those who falsify the Word in order to confirm evils of life and falsities of doctrine, account adulteries as allowable and are led into them.” (LJ(P) 136e) Taking ML 520 too literally, or too descriptive instead of prescriptive, a faithful spouse who has an unfaithful partner doesn’t guarantee a happy marriage for the former, yet the former can have conjugal love! (CL 209(xvi); 226; 531; cf. CL 191) Or an aggressive, dogmatic, ex-Christian atheist, who belittles and ridicules Christians, doesn’t necessarily have to be having an affair. Maybe Swedenborg meant that spiritual adulterers were more likely to be physical adulterers?

4. Different degrees of adultery

In assessing what is adultery and what is not, we need to take into account what is written in *Marriage Love* or *Conjugal Love* § 478:3 about the three kinds of adultery and the four degrees of adultery. Paraphrasing this sub-paragraph so that it relates to homosexuality - if this is justifiable? -: Simple adultery occurs between an unmarried person and a married person of the same gender. Double adultery occurs when two married people engage in same-sex sexual activities. Triple adultery occurs when “close blood relatives” indulge in homosexual activities. Homosexuality of the first degree is done out of ignorance and spontaneity without consulting one’s “intellect”, which is a mild form of adultery. Adultery of the second degree is when people commit homosexual acts out of lust, and are imputable to them depending on their reasons for engaging in such activities. Adulteries of the third degree are committed by people, who have intellectually persuaded “themselves that they are not sinful evils.” These “are grave and are imputed to them in accordance with their persuasions.” Adulteries of the fourth degree are done from the heart are “the most

grave”, because the person justifies them and lusts after them, which “render a person natural, sensual and carnal.” But Rev John Odhner [1993] also says, on the basis that fornication and premarital sex may not be adultery (see CL 449, 445; 444a; cf. 482), that “homosexuality before marriage is not as harmful as homosexuality after marriage. To indiscriminately label all homosexuality as adultery might cause us to overlook this important distinction.” He then suggests that homosexuality is not as harmful as homosexuality after marriage. To indiscriminately label all homosexuality as adultery might cause us to overlook this important distinction.”(458)

This teaching could be taken further. According to various paragraphs in *Conjugal Love* (CL 462:2(1),(5)-(12); 467-476), a married man may take a mistress provided it is for “lawful, just and truly weighty reasons”, (CL 462(5); 467) if he no longer has sexual relations with his wife, because, for example, his wife was unfaithful, or mentally impaired or addicted to drugs, or other reasons, (CL 252) or suffered a physically impairment, such as leprosy, sexually transmitted disease, gangrene, paralysis, motor neurone disease, epilepsy and so on. (CL 253; 470) A married person might replace his sexual relationship with his wife with a homosexual relationship with a same-sex lover, and this could be viewed as immoral but not adulterous. Although such analogising might be going too far for some people.

People could quote passages like Luke 6:41-42 about seeing the sawdust in another person’s eyes, when we have a plank in our own. Taken at face value this could mean that we shouldn’t judge others, although the context talks about hypocrisy. However Swedenborg would suggest that there is a bit more to this issue. Heinrichs [1993] writes “In trying to determine the extent of one’s own guilt, a person could reflect on teachings about the four degrees of adultery in *Conjugal Love* (nos. 485-497) When it comes to assessing other people, we should be guided by CL 523. While it is necessary for the protection of society to make judgements about the moral and civil life of others, specific spiritual judgments are prohibited. (See also *Spiritual Diary* 1220, 2459)” Another passage with these sentiments is *De Verbo* V: “Nor is there any prohibition of judging one’s companion or neighbour as regards his natural life, for this is in society’s interest; but the prohibition is on judging him as regards his spiritual life, for this is known to none but the Lord.” (SS(P) 5:3 [Chadwick]) Appealing to John 7:24, Swedenborg writes: “Without doctrine anyone could be induced to assert that we must not judge wicked people to be wicked; but doctrine tells us we may judge, so long as we do so justly.” (TCR 226:5 [Chadwick] = SS 51) We are allowed to disapprove of evil and falsity, but not good and truth. (AE 629:14) But as the parallel passage to CL 523, CL 453 [Chadwick] says, angels “view everyone from the point of view of their plan, intention and aim, making this the means of discriminating”, and so can distinguish the sinners from the innocent among those who are “wearing fine clothes, dining sumptuously, making profits from business like others, going to the theatre, making rather indecent jokes about sex, and much else of the same sort”. These rather minor misdemeanours could probably be extrapolated to more serious ones, because the title of CL 453 is “The lust for fornicating is serious, so far as it has adultery in view.” [Chadwick]

Rev John Odhner [1993] also raises the degrees of homosexual adultery, and, appealing to AC 4172, reminds us that if a person is not inwardly persuaded of evil, evil only remains in externals and so good can come through it. He then quotes AC

3993:8 to suggest that “hatred, cruelty, revenge and contempt cannot be mixed with good”, but “If a person is homosexual but is not cruel, vengeful or hateful, then his evil could possibly be mixed with good.”

5. SD 2675 - homosexuals who do not believe in heaven or hell

I find it difficult to believe that because you indulge in homosexual acts, means that you don't believe in an after-life. I assume that members of the Gay and Lesbian Christian Movement believe in an after-life, especially as they minister to lovers or friends dying of AIDs. Is this passage to be taken descriptively or a particular group, or prescriptively of every single homosexual person? Heinrichs [1993] argues that SD 2675 refers “to those confirmed in more serious degrees of this adultery.” In CL 527:3 we are told that angels judge the person's actions on the basis of what is in their heart and mind, so that some people sins are excused and the same done outwardly by others is not. (cf. CL 453; 489)

6. SD 3895-3900 - descriptive of some lesbians or prescriptive of all.

Carmond Odhner [1993] wrote: “Lesbian activity and their lot is described in the *Spiritual Diary* 3895-3900. “... their obscenities were not shown to me, except ... a woman apparelled like a man. ... they were delighting themselves in abominable lewdness.” (SD 3897). In SD 3899: “... being captivated by such *base delights* they care nothing for, but loathe, the men and thus all natural modes of connection, whence also they loathe and nauseate matrimonies ... [which move them to] no pleasure, ... conjugal love [being lost] with them and turned into loathing ... (emphasis mine) See SD 3712-18; AC 2045:1.” I would suggest that this passage talks about some lesbians not all lesbians. Why should all lesbians loathe men and marriage? If they are perfectly content with their relationship, how relevant is the relationship of another couple? AE 1010:4 suggests adulterers, visitors to prostitutes, deflowers of virgins loathe marriage. (cf. CL 423:1; 441; cf. SE 1992; 3946) Some adulterers feel “dislike for marriage”. (AE 935:2 [Chadwick]) Similarly conjugal love is held in disgust by Christians taking concubines, (CL 464; MA 5) and also by certain wife-swapping, lewd husbands. (SE 3453:2; cf. SE 3440; 3450) So it is not just this group of female homosexuals who hate marriages.

Rev John Odhner [1993] admits to not knowing whether homosexuality is worse psychologically and spiritually for men or for women. He does imply that unprotected sex between men can be potentially more physically harmful than for women, and does point out that the teachings for the New Church suggest that premarital sex is worse for women than it is for men. (see CL 503; 504; 459; 460) Does this apply to Swedenborg's time or now?

G. Philosophical, psychological and Theological arguments

- 1. Sexual sins are not as bad as moral ones (Matthew 8:12; 10:15; 11:24; Luke 10:12) Knowing sins versus unknowing ones. (AC 7418:2; AE 653:8-9; cf. John 8:41; 15:22, 24)**

Field [1979] argues that sexual sins are not as bad as moral ones. Rev Willard Heinrichs [1993] acknowledges that “If each one of us is honest with ourselves, we will discover in ourselves powerful orientations to subtly or openly disregard and dismiss one or more of the Lord’s commandments.”

2. Spong: “non exploitative, non destructive, non-predatory, non-promiscuous” relationships should be acceptable to Christians.

Bishop John Shelby Spong, now retired, is one of the most liberal Episcopalian (Church of England) bishops in the United States. In his book *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988, 1990), he proposed that “non exploitative, non destructive, non-predatory, non-promiscuous” relationships should be acceptable to Christians. Is this type of morality appealing to the lowest common denominator of society, or inspired by true charity or tolerance? Is this showing support for the lowering of moral standards, or merely the acceptance of what is happening in society? His presuppositions are that 10% of the population is homosexual, and that homosexuality is an “an unchangeable sexual predisposition toward those of their own sex.” (67, 154) Field [1979] assumes 5% of British society is homosexual. (8)

3. Johnson and Talbot: is there a homosexual heaven?

In *Lifeline* (January 1994) (7a), Patrick Johnson suggested that there was a homosexual heaven “on the fringes of heaven” for “sincerely motivated homosexuals”, based on Rev John Odhner’s 1993 article on homosexuality and its section on comparing it with polygamy. Odhner wrote: “Apparently the Lord is very tolerant with human weakness and lust with people who are trying to be good.” (460-461) Three years later in speculative article in *Lifeline*, Rev Brian Talbot repeated this suggestion that there might be heavens for monogamous, God-fearing, neighbour-loving homosexuals “on the outskirts of the predominately monogamous and heterosexual heavens.” He suggested that this might be so, because Swedenborg revealed very little about heaven and hell (LJ 27), but did reveal that there are heavens for Muslim and other non-Christian polygamists (ML 343; TCR 832) and heavens for celibates (ML 54; 155), which repel and disturb the vast majority of heavenly communities which are monogamous and heterosexual. (CL 54:5; 352; cf. TCR 834) Influenced by Bishop John Shelby Spong’s definition of sexual sin in his book *A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988, 1990), Talbot assumes that “the bare minimum or lowest common denominator of all heavenly relationships” is “loving, sexual relationships, which ‘aren’t exploitative or destructive or predatory or promiscuous’”. I suppose in the case of polygamists they are consensually promiscuous, but are to prevent worse adulteries. (CL 342:4; 345)

Some New Church commentators might object to Talbot’s use of passages about polygamist heavens arguing that there is no permanent, polygamous Muslim heaven, giving priority to teaching in *Divine Providence* 255 in which it is said that in the lowest Muslim heaven people are being “initiated” into monogamy. Rev Robert Jungé, a General Church minister, adopted this interpretation in his article “The Mohammedan Religion” in the *New Church Life* (August 1961) 365-367. He further

supports this view of a temporary, polygamous, Muslim heaven by two “rather obscure passages in the *Spiritual Diary*”, to use his own words. In SE 344 and 345 there are Muslim spirits with Muhammad not angels, whose numbers are decreasing, because many are moving to another heaven to be instructed by angels. Muslim children are educated in heaven, so are presumably monogamous after they reach adulthood. Also Jungé quotes the passage in *Marriage* 47-48, which teaches that Muslim polygamists become feeble and impotent. Possibly this last passage is descriptive of some Muslims not prescriptive of all, because impotence “is the fate that awaits those who boast of the prowess of their licentiousness.” (CL 477:8; cf. CL 510:3; 514:3e; MA 9)

Those who disagree with Jungé’s position, believe that the views expressed in Swedenborg’s later works, such as *True Christian Religion*, should be given greater weight and authority than earlier works, would still maintain a permanent, polygamous, Muslim heaven. Another way of countering Jungé’s views is to consider CL 348 [Rogers], in which we read that Muslim polygamists are natural, and who are content with polygamy “do not know that there is anything evil, not even anything lecherous, in polygamy. ... Since polygamy cannot indict them of sin, therefore they have their own heavens after death (nos. 342, 343); and they experience joys there in accordance with their life”. Possibly if a person wants to believe in a homosexual heaven, he would believe in permanent heavens for polygamists and celibates, that is, non-monogamists, while those wanting a purely monogamous heaven would support a temporary, polygamous, Muslim heaven?

Rev John Odhner [1993] mentions some angels who fall from heaven when they *think* about polygamy, (MA 43) people from the Golden Age who were exiled for thinking about polygamy (CL 75) “and even people of the Copper Age cannot tolerate the presence of polygamists (CL 78).” He asks, “Can we have distinction without prejudice, discernment without condemnation? I suspect that part of the answer lies in the fact that a person with discernment can distinguish many shades of gray, while condemnation and prejudice involve only black and white.” (461-462)

In some heavens there are servants and princes. (CL 11; 14; 19; 20:3 = TCR 740; 742; 746:4)
In some heavens there is a prince and a high priest. (TCR 661:13-15 = CL 266)

Conjugal love is both of the spirit and of the body. (AC 995:2-3)

4. Lawrence: blessing homosexual unions?

In 1995 the council of ministers in the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches in North America voted to recommend that “the blessing of same sex unions be left to the conscience and discretion of the individual minister, asking only that the church be consulted and give permission for any such ceremonies conducted in the church building.” (Woofenden [1996])

In 1996, Rev Dr James Lawrence, a minister in the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches in North America, wrote an article in the denomination’s monthly periodical, *The Messenger*, called “Risking on the Side of Compassion”. He described the process whereby the congregation’s two ministers, Rev Dr Rachel

Rivers and he, consulted the full membership of the San Francisco congregation, about, “at the discretion of the ministers - celebrating ceremonies in our sanctuary whose fundamental purpose would be to bless the commitment in fidelity of two people of the same sex ... consonant with our theology and our pastoral judgment.” Up to 1996 20 such ceremonies had been conducted. Lawrence argues that there are only “a tiny few passages” in the Bible which seem to “condemn homosexual expression, but for a Swedenborgian, there are big problems with all of them on the literal level.” Lawrence finds none of these “persuasive or in any way compellingly authoritative.” He believes “the more powerful biblical witness lies upon deeper principles of truth that emerge within larger themes”, and within these he is “discovering confidence in a growing support for the possibility of gay love being rooted in divine love.” Lawrence does see the “complementarity between masculine and feminine principles” in the gay community. He then adds: “when you witness time and again gay relationships as being creative, giving, and supportive of the larger social fabric,” the Lawrence believes that for him, “a very secure platform exists for conducting a ministry both supporting, affirming, and journeying with the gay community.” He continues “to pray for guidance as we all together seek insight and wisdom into the full nature of conjugal love.”

Nancy Evans was the first letter of reply, and she merely questioned why Lawrence had not consulted the whole denomination, because Lawrence’s “journey is part of our journey too”, and an “informed consensus” of all Swedenborgians should have taken place before any action happened. She feels that Convention members have not been “fully informed of this issue and all the accompanying repercussions, positive as well as negative.” Jim Lawrence sensitively replied that in the “radical democracy” of Convention, an individual congregation, can decide to do whatever its membership decides without recourse to its local association or the national body. Ann Graber Westermann believed that gay marriages in her own thinking was once “anathema”, but thinks that the actions of the San Francisco ministers are “courageous”, and shows “visionary leadership that invites member participation in policy shaping.” She believes that homosexuals can’t change, and so believes that God “must love diversity or he would not have made us so colourfully different, yet each one of us unique.” Westermann believes, on reflection, that when she has “risked on the side of compassion’ on any controversial issue”, she has “come closer to felling the Lord’s presence than when” she “has ‘cast the first stone.’” Rev Dr Reuben Bell believes that Lawrence’s and Rivers’ actions represent the fourth state of profanation, “when good and truth are made profane (AC 3754).” He believes that Lawrence’s “logic is dead wrong.” Quoting AC 3755 and 3402, Bell points out that mixing “spiritual truths with falsity” leads to eternal death, because hell is behind it, and because we convince ourselves that “evil is good and falsity is truth”. He then quotes Isaiah 5:20-21,24 to support his point. Bell sincerely prays “that ‘Risking on the Side of Compassion’ represents an aberration within the spiritual thinking of” his “many friends in the General Convention of the New Jerusalem.” Dr Perry Martin congratulates Lawrence for his courage, and writes: “We call ourselves ‘The New Church,’ and it is gratifying to see one of our ministers taking a stand of compassion and support for those whose expression of their sexuality is not yet accepted by mainstream America.” Carol Lawson thanks Lawrence and the San Francisco congregation “for risking on the side of charity”. She believes that such a decision is a congregational one and “must be judged by each person in his or her heart in

prayerful dialogue with the Lord. Such decision-making is surely part of an individual's path toward regeneration." Lorraine Sando wrote that "celebrating ceremonies of commitment between same-sex partners in your sanctuary is deeply meaningful. The more we as human beings love, honour, respect, and accept each other's differences, the more divine love and wisdom is manifest in our world. Thanks for risking with compassion."

Duane Beougher wrote that *Conjugal Love* talks about counterfeit marriages, whether polygamous, adulterous relationships and counterfeit marriages, held together for materialistic reasons. (CL 278; 284) He argues that "the possibility exists that a real spiritual marriage can take place because the *complementary* aspects of masculine and feminine are present." While he accepts that "aspects of the masculine and feminine exist within each of us", he doesn't find support for complementarity of same-sex couples in Swedenborg or the Bible. Just because some people argue that homosexuality is genetically inherited or based, as indeed some of "our inclinations and dispositions", doesn't make it "part of divine order". Referring to AC 1661:2, to "surrender to the various inclinations of our nature", and "to maintain that it does not need to be resisted, runs counter to the huge body of religious tradition." He asks Lawrence to point out passages in the Bible which allow homosexuality. He believes that churches should minister to both the physical and spiritual needs of people, so while "perhaps the church should in some way recognize a solemn commitment made between" two homosexual people, he argues that "the teachings of the church should be clear about what does and what does not constitute the possibility of a true conjugal union and that the term marriage be applied only where that possibility exists."

Anne Nielson believes that it is "sacrilege" to say that "gay love" can be "rooted in Divine love". She believes Leviticus 18:22-30 "makes it loud and clear" that homosexuality is an "abomination". She suggests Lawrence read "Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love* for enlightenment."

Steve Koke believes that homosexuals "simply discover themselves to be that way" and that it is therefore not a sin. Lawrence's ceremonies of "gay blessings" have been confused with "a full-fledged wedding" by some correspondents. He suggests that Swedenborgians need to be totally candid and honest with homosexual couples, "about our need to honour three things, all at the same time: real feelings and their personal significance, our teachings about the special nature of heterosexual marriage, and our ignorance of what homosexuality really is." He suggests that that "kind of honesty usually turns out to be acceptable."

Penny Pietras Goldstein, a member of the San Francisco congregation, admits to being a theological lightweight, but voted for "gay blessings", because of several "wonderful, generous gay men" who "have been and continue to be members of our congregation." She couldn't possibly say to such men that despite their support for their church, that they would have to "celebrate this commitment before God" in the "City Hall" rather than "the place that has become such a meaningful part" of their lives.

Jenn Tafel admits to being a young adult in the church with many questions about it. She wonders how the church can grow, if it is critical of anybody who is different, and when so “many people instantly judge one another and don’t even bother to find out about the person. She quotes John 13:34; Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 7:1-5, about loving others and not judging them. She agrees we should “take risks on the side of compassion.”

Hunter J. Jones, though confessing not to be “formally a New Churchman”, is a reader of Swedenborg and the Bible, and is in his “own monogamous gay ‘marriage’ of 13 years”, which “is based upon ‘love of person’ not ‘love of pelvis.’” He views that story of Jonathan and David’s “relationship as a homosexual love affair”. (cf. 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:30-31,41-42; 2 Samuel 1:26) (see section 5:5)

Lawrence replied to some of the points brought up in the 12 letters in response to his first article. He doesn’t believe that the writings of Swedenborg are “the last word for Swedenborgians on this issue”. He believes that Swedenborg was not “infallible on all matters, because there are ways in which he seems clearly limited by the horizons of human knowledge and suppositions of his day.” He lists *Earths in the Universe*, and his lack of knowledge of Buddhism or Hinduism, whose Scriptures had not been translated into European languages during his lifetime. As inspired and capable as Swedenborg was, Lawrence does not “look to the writings as the ultimate determinant for my theological position on the nature of homosexuality. Outwardly gay people were as nonexistent as Hindus in Swedenborg’s Stockholm. There is simply not enough careful consideration with the subject in Swedenborg for me to be comfortable with limiting my theological position to what I find in his writings, and I even feel it is irresponsible to do so.” He writes: “I am well aware that the few lines which can be culled from the Bible and from Swedenborg indicate, in their most obvious literal sense, that homosexual expression is disorderly and even immoral. I simply am unconvinced by that meagre testimony in the face of personal and modern social experience with what I consider to be in many ways a very beautiful part of the human community.” Lawrence admits to working toward “a new theological framework”, hopes to be part of further discussion on the issue, and admits to being honest enough to admit he was wrong, if he is shown to be wrong. He feels that a same-sex relationship which is “not obviously destructive or unhealthy, any more than unhealthy destructiveness often characterizes heterosexuality”, should be judged by the dictum “By their fruits you shall know them.” (cf. Matthew 7:16) His experience tells him that the gay community is making “an immensely creative and positive contribution, which makes for a stronger, more productive *maximus homo*.” He sees that with greater freedom, the “basic building block for the conjugal attraction” of *Conjugal Love* 32, is expressed in more complex ways amongst billions of heterosexual people, let alone homosexual people. He finishes by saying that “I remain open to further discussion and inquiry, but in my experience with real people, I now believe that gay love, as is also true of heterosexual love, is profaned or made sacred by the integrity of the individuals involved. That is why I am willing to bless gay marriage commitments. It’s as simple (and complex) as that.”

5. What are the causes of homosexuality? Biological, psychological, or social, or a combination of these?

Patricia Rose [1999] argues that “One common argument that some give to justify homosexual feelings is that of having been attracted to the same sex for most of their lives. To New Churchmen this is inadequate reasoning because we know that all of us are born with tendencies to evils of every kind. A tendency to lie, to steal, or to be selfish isn’t justified because we are born with it, and neither is homosexuality. Because homosexual feelings seem like love, the hells, who are adept at making evil *seem* good, have real power over the person having them.” She then goes on to write: “Let’s give some thought to homosexuality’s being the opposite of the *good* man/man relationship and the *good* woman/woman relationship as mentioned in CL 55.” (276-277)

Rev Willard Heinrichs [1993] lists physical abnormality, ranging from a mild hormonal imbalance to the extreme in which the body of a male or female possesses obvious and significant characteristics of the opposite sex.” Hereditary may play a part, because “a person is more prone to one kind of evil than another because it has prevailed in parents, grandparents, etc. (For example, see *Spiritual Diary* 2424-26, 2453-54.)” A person’s environment may play a part, which is supported by *True Christian Religion* 120:2 in which Swedenborg teaches, that if you hang around pirates, thieves, adulterers, harlots, because “evils are contagious”, some of it will rub off on you. “A person’s environment can encourage and especially sustain homosexual tendencies in yet another respect.” Spirits who are unconsciously with us, when we are doing a particular activity, could make us not enjoy something that is dissimilar. Free choice may be another cause, which may be deliberate or spontaneous. Rev John Odhner [1993] reminds us of teaching in AC 4171 about two sources of actual evil. The first is when he draws from “the ocean of evils” which is his heredity, and the second, when he deliberately engineers wrong-doing himself.

6. Is conjugal love restricted to married couples?

Some passages in the Writings for the New Church suggest that an individual, whether male or female, receives conjugal love from the Lord (CL 57 vii; 70; 102; 116 x xi; 122; 130-131; 141-143; 161:1,3; 183:3,6,8; 211; 238-241), whereas other passages suggest that a male receives conjugal love from the Lord through his wife. (CL 161; 223; cf. also CL 160; 188; 224; 393; SD 6055:2; MA 34; “not a particle of married love, not even of love for the opposite sex, reside in them ‘male spirits’, but only in wives and women.” (CL 161:2))

I would suggest that Swedenborg uses the phrase “conjugal love” to mean (1) the heart and mind of an individual, working together, having been influenced by God; and (2) the way this spiritual condition expresses itself between married individuals. Every individual is capable of experiencing the marriage of good and truth:

“The conjugal love of good and truth, which is here signified by 'Zebulon', is the conjugal love of the Lord and the Church. The Lord is the Good Itself of Love, and He grants that the Church may be the truth out of that good; and cohabitation comes about when the man of the Church receives good from the Lord in truths, whereupon with the man there is effected a marriage of good and truth, which is the Church itself, and he becomes a heaven, It is on this account that the kingdom of God, that is, heaven and the Church, is in the Word so many times compared to a marriage.” (AR 359)

“It should be recognized therefore that by conjugal love all celestial and spiritual love is meant, because truly conjugal love, as has been shown above, is fundamental to all other kinds of love. People therefore in whom that fundamental love is present have all other loves belonging to heaven and the Church present in them; for as has been stated, it descends from the marriage of good and truth in the heavens, the marriage that makes heaven. This also explains why heaven is compared in the Word to a marriage, and is also actually called a marriage.” (AC 9961:6; cf. AC 3021:3; 3960:3; 4280:4; AE 993:2; 997:4; CL 65; 67; 68; 180; 203; 240; MA 19; 44; SD 3795)

“conjugal love is the fundamental love of all loves for, when man becomes a form of love, he becomes an image of the Lord” (SD 6051:6)

This spiritual relationship with the Lord expresses itself in a marriage. (AC 2728; 3132:2; CL 38; 65; 67; 68; 180; 203; 355:3; 482; SD 6051:2) Presumably in an intimate marriage, another dimension is added, whereby the Lord operating in two individuals, enhances the spirituality of both. This point could be implied by the following quotation: “A young woman becomes or is made a wife, because a wife possesses elements taken from her husband and so additional, which she did not have before as an unmarried young woman. A young man becomes or is made a husband, because a husband possesses elements taken from his wife, which increase his ability to receive love and wisdom; these he did not have as a young man. These effects take place in the case of those who enjoy truly conjugal love.” (CL 199:1)

When Swedenborg says that married people don't necessarily have conjugal love. (CL 54:2; 209(4),(16)-(17); 225; 226; 278; 531; cf. CL 191) I would suggest that this could mean that the individuals in the marriage have the conjugal love that is “the marriage of good and truth”, (AC 2524:1) but not the conjugal love that is “the union of minds”. (AC 2728; 10168; CL 42:5; 55:7; 156(xx); 179(xx); 214; 252; 333; MA 112) I would suggest that people who aren't married, who are in a long-term relationship, might well be able to have “conjugal love” of both sorts. People can be “in the marriage of goodness and truth or Divine marriage”, and not be married. (SD(M) 4643) When Swedenborg talks about celibates, he mentions the fact that if they are “spiritual”, they remain unmarried “on the fringe of heaven”. (CL 54(c)(d)(e)) This suggests that they have a spiritual relationship with the Lord, but it has no ultimate expression in a monogamous relationship. Among celibates “those alone are chaste who previously cherished a love for a truly conjugal life, or acquired it subsequently and retained it”. (CL 155:2) This seems to suggest that monks or nuns have the more interior form of conjugal love and the potential for the latter. Angels told Swedenborg that some nuns who wanted to remain celibate, “they feel the sphere of conjugal love in heaven, they become depressed and worried”. (CL 155:3)

Unmarried people can have conjugal love of the first sort, but I wonder whether they can have conjugal love of the second sort, except in potential? Similarly with homosexuals, although in section G4 Lawrence might argue differently. Possibly through significant members of the opposite in the family or at church or in other situations, individual people can gain some access to the outer, relational, complementarity side of conjugal love.

Rev Carl Yenetchi [1996], a minister in the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches of North America, argues that homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality are different modes “whereby the universal conjugal sphere from the Lord may find its way into human life and aid in regeneration.” This is based on:

- despite CL § 32 describing males as love clothed with wisdom and females as wisdom clothed with love, Yenetchi argues that CL § 524:1-2, argues that every individual human being has a unique character and face, and this will be perpetually so.
- the use of the “infinite variety” of conjugal love (CL 57) to suggest “the possibility, within Divine order, of souls where the ‘male’ wisdom and ‘female’ love are more fully balanced or are perhaps even blended.” (65)
- teaching that the individual soul shapes the character and body of a person, and human goodwill and actions are of infinite variety, (CL 101; 191; 310; ISB 12; TCR 374) Yenetchi concludes, that “we are not limited to a single form such as heterosexuality to express our experience of the conjugal love.” (66-67)
- conjugal love is basically the union of two souls and two minds, and that expressing love sexually comes from the universal conjugal sphere flowing from the Lord. (CL 158; 92)
- Swedenborg’s use of absolute statements to express generalisations, which may contain cultural bias (e.g. HH 470; 141) especially when he talks about gender, asserting that all women have “soft voices, attractive faces and soft bodies”, while all men have “a harder, less attractive face, a heavier voice and a harder body”, (HH 368) which seems to be contradicted by some individuals.

Yenetchi then goes on to argue that ministers should exercise as much care as possible “to celebrate the presence of the universal conjugal sphere in people’s lives”, which may mean blessing the relationship of a same-sex couple.

This of course, assumes that homosexuality is innate and not a learned behaviour. Secondly, he assumes that CL 57 and 524 is talking about perpetual variation of sexuality not perpetual variation of heterosexual maleness and heterosexual femaleness. Thirdly, some could argue that the Lord has to work through human shortcomings, but it doesn’t mean that the shortcomings are as God intended. Fourthly, it assumes that the statements that Yenetchi have taken to be generalisations are in fact generalisations. Fifthly, Yenetchi hasn’t explained why what he is advocating is not a half-way house, which might serve some homosexual and heterosexuals, for one of their relationships, before they move on to another one. Sixthly, the Writings for the New Church are unashamedly, monogamously heterosexual in outlook. For example, in *Conjugal Love* §316:4, we read: “the wise man ... went on to say that the conjugal principle is present in the tiniest details of each human being, both male and female, but still it is different in the male and in the female. The male’s conjugal principle is designed to be linked with the female’s and vice versa, even in the tiniest details. He proved this by the marriage of the will and the intellect in each individual, the two of which act together on the smallest details of both mind and body. This enables it to be seen that every substance, even the smallest, contains this conjugal principle, as is evident from compound substances made out of simple ones; or from the fact that we have two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two cheeks, two lips, two arms and hands, two hips, two feet; and inside the

body two hemispheres in the brain, two ventricles in the heart, two lobes in the lungs, two kidneys, two testicles; and where there are not two, the organ is none the less divided into two parts. The reason for this duality is that one belongs to the will, and the other to the intellect, and they work together so wonderfully that they act as one. So the two eyes produce single vision, the two ears single hearing, the two nostrils one sense of smell, the two lips one speech, the two hands one piece of work, the two feet one step, the two hemispheres of the brain one seat of the mind; the two chambers of the heart one life-giving action to the body by means of the blood; the two lobes of the lungs one act of breathing, and so on. But the male and the female, when united by truly conjugal love, make one fully human life.” An angel husband from the Silver Age told Swedenborg and his angelic companion: “‘There is,’ said the husband, ‘a correspondence between the spiritual marriage, that is, of truth with good, and the natural marriage, that is, of a man with one wife. Being students of correspondences, we saw that the church with its kinds of truth and good could not possibly exist except among those who live in truly conjugal love with one wife. For the marriage of good and truth makes the church in the individual. All of us, therefore, who are here now, assert that the husband is truth and the wife the truth’s own good. Good cannot love any truth but its own, nor can truth return that love to any but its own good. In other circumstances the inner marriage which makes the church would be lost, and the marriage would become merely outward; and it is not the church, but idolatry, to which this corresponds. We therefore call marriage with one wife a sacrament; but if it happened in our community with more than one, we should call that a sacrilege.’” (CL 76:5 = Coronis 44:6)

Conjugal love is both of the spirit and of the body. (AC 995:2-3)

7. CL 138 (xiv): “The married state is preferable to the celibate.”

Some would argue that marriage is preferable to being homosexual. Some would even argue that because homosexuality is a type of adultery, it threatens marriage. In 1993 Carmond Odhner wrote: “To hell, the homosexuality movement is only a stepping-stone to the destruction of legitimate marriage. ‘Legalizing’ homosexuality paves the way for the elimination of matrimonial bonds, whereby the ‘living together arrangements’ of society, the *other side* of the devils’ homosexuality ‘coin’, become accepted practice. Why not; every sensual reason demands it, loves it and immerses itself in its total folly.” However, Anne M. York [1993] wrote: “homosexuality is not a hatred of marriage and does not in fact threaten it.” (40)

8. Men taking courtesans (Rogers) or mistresses (Acton, Chadwick)

CL 444r; 459, 460: “(13) In men who are not yet able for various reasons to enter into marriage, and because of their salaciousness cannot contain their lusts, this conjugal ideal may be preserved if their promiscuous love for the opposite sex becomes restricted to a single courtesan.

(14) Resorting to a courtesan is preferable to promiscuous lust, provided that the arrangement is not made with more than one, or with a virgin or untouched woman, or with a married woman, and that it is kept separate from conjugal love.”

9. Men having a concubine (CL 468)

10. A man's soul is in his semen (CL 483:2)

11. Marriage in the Bible:

“those men of old had concubines in addition to a wife, as not only Abraham and Jacob did, but also their descendants, such as Gideon... were permitted to do so because they were the kind of men with whom conjugal love did not exist; so that to them marriage was not marriage but merely copulation for the sake of begetting off-spring. With such persons those permissions were possible without any harm being done to love or consequently to the conjugal covenant. But such permissions are never possible among people with whom good and truth are present and who are internal people, or potentially so. For as soon as good and truth, and internal things, exist with the human being, such permissions come to an end. This is why Christians are not allowed, as the Jews were, to take a concubine in addition to a wife, and why such is adultery.” (AC 3246:4; cf. AC 9002:3)

12. Who's oppressing whom?

It is sometimes argued that homosexuals are oppressed by society. They are subject to ridicule and assault, just because they are different. All Christians would be against name-calling and violence. To say that Jesus is on the side of the oppressed and marginalised, and so on the side of homosexuals, is a bit of a simplification, since our Lord is really on the side of those who are spiritual oppressed by self-obsessing feelings and thoughts from hell. Why can't some homosexuals also be the bad guys, the Pharisees of the New Testament? (e.g. Matthew 23) Joseph Nicolosi, an American, Roman Catholic psychiatrist argues that gay activists have conspired with a silent psychological community, to allow unhappy homosexual men to be oppressed. (<http://www.catholicsocialscientists.org/Symposium2--Nicolosi-mss.htm>) In a booklet called *Counterfeit Marriage: How 'civil partnerships' devalue the currency of marriage* by Colin Hart, Simon Calvert, Humphrey Dobson and Rachel Woodward (Christian Institute, 2002), these authors question why other sections of society don't have inheritance rights, such as those for in-laws looking after deceased spouse's parents or siblings, one of whom is married, living together, or platonic friends living together?

H. Pastoral and congregational issues:

1. can a homosexual be cured?

Debate rages about whether a homosexual can be cured. Joseph Nicolosi, who has just been mentioned, argues that they can. There are several Christian organisations, usually Evangelical, which also say that it is possible.

2. whether to allow male homosexuals to share the common cup;
3. whether to allow homosexuals to be members of the congregation or Conference;

4. if a young person turns to you in confidence, whether a minister or a lay person, and admits that they think they are homosexual
5. whether to allow homosexuals to teach in Sunday Schools;
6. whether to allow homosexuals to be on Church Committees;
7. whether to allow homosexuals to have relationships blessed in churches of the General Conference;

In a booklet called *Counterfeit Marriage: How 'civil partnerships' devalue the currency of marriage* by Colin Hart, Simon Calvert, Humphrey Dobson and Rachel Woodward (Christian Institute, 2002) same-sex couples only make up 0.2% of households in the UK, and many of these are not monogamous. In fact, most male homosexuals have on average 7 partners a year. (pg 3, 12) In this booklet these authors question why other sections of society don't have inheritance rights, such as those for in-laws looking after deceased spouse's parents or siblings, one of whom is married, living together, or platonic friends living together?

8. whether to allow homosexuals to be ordained ministers or priest of the General Conference;

In 1993 Julia Robinson, a member of the General Church, wrote: "we as a church should welcome homosexuals as fully participating members of our church, and create a noncondemnatory setting for this group of people that makes it possible for them to receive the equal respect that they are due as fellow members of the Lord's New Church."

I. Bibliography

1. Articles in New Church periodicals
2. Christian books
3. Other books or articles

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to make you, the reader, aware of as many different Christian and New Church views of homosexual or same-sex relationships, as possible.

All New Church people will agree that

- we must search the inspired books of the Bible and the revelation given to Emanuel Swedenborg to formulate our church's teaching about homosexuality, or any other topic (cf. AC 6047:2)
- we must seek the Lord's guidance and enlightenment, as well as His compassion and humility, to wisely and lovingly approach this difficult topic and the pastoral situations which might occur
- we must shun what we personally or corporately identify as evils as sins, such as hypocrisy, fear, ignorance and so on.
- we all need the Lord's assistance to be withheld from greater selfishness, foolishness, ignorance and carelessness
- we need to offer friendship and fellowship to practising homosexuals

- a long-term, monogamous, faithful homosexual partnership is not as morally wrong as promiscuous ones.
- what might be wrong for me, might not be as obviously wrong to somebody else

Despite being guided by the Church's teaching and the Lord Himself, there will be differences which we hope will be shared honestly, openly, humbly and tolerantly. Some of these disagreements might be:

- the interpretation of particular passages in the Bible or the Writings
- whether there could be heavenly communities for homosexuals
- whether homosexual New Church people could be ordained ministers or hold positions of leadership in congregations, or have their long-term, monogamous relationship blessed in one of our churches.
- whether homosexuality is an alternate lifestyle or a half-way house to heterosexuality
- whether homosexuality can be 'cured'
- whether there is a homosexual heaven, along the lines of celibate or polygamous heavens, where those who follow the Lord and love their partner but cannot consider life without their partner

“An anonymous reader” does not regard himself as gay because I also have some attraction to women” ([1993] 40)