

Report of the  
**Homosexuality Study Group**

Introduction

1.1 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.”

1.2 The members of the Homosexuality Study Group are Dr Geoffrey Bentley, Rev Gillian Gordon, Mrs Hilda Johnson, Philippa Peacock and Rev Brian Talbot. The majority of the members met twice in London, but most of our deliberations have been done by email. This report was written largely by Rev Brian Talbot. (Any “I” is Brian’s personal opinions, which may or not represent the group’s opinions.) The recommendations section is the work of the group. (See section 5) Previous drafts were sent to members of the Group for consultation and to stimulate discussion. Philippa Peacock has sent regular emails outlining news reports of related stories from the media and exploration of homosexual Christian web-sites.

1.3 Through our research we have learnt that there are some Christian denominations which are in favour of homosexual partnerships and homosexual ministers, such as The Christian Community Church, which caters especially for gay and lesbian Christians, and denominations such as Quakers, Unitarians and The Uniting Church of Australia, which consists of Methodists, some Presbyterians and some Congregationalists. The world-wide Anglican Church has been discussing this issue, as has been reported in the press. It began with a Canadian province blessing homosexual partnerships, and then a diocese in the United States ordaining a practising homosexual man as a bishop. Here in the United Kingdom, an Anglican Dean, Dr Jeffrey John, was pressurised into stepping down from being appointed as a bishop, because of his sexuality. He and his partner have recently legalised their relationship. Local congregations can be accepting of the sexuality of their priest, despite national policies. In the New Church world the Swedenborgian Church of North America, which is also known as The Church of the New Jerusalem has ordained practising homosexuals as ministers, and several of its ministers have conducted ‘wedding’ blessings for homosexual couples. Ministers or members of other New Church denominations, such as the General Church of the New Jerusalem with its headquarters in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, our own General Conference of the New Church, and The New Church in Australia, have produced articles which tend to be opposed to homosexual orientation and practice.

1.4 To summarise both the pro-homosexual and anti-homosexual factions within Christianity and the New Jerusalem Church, I would suggest that the former adopts a

more dynamic, “by their fruits you will recognise them” approach, which involves looking for and nurturing any manifestation of the Divine in the lives of other people, whether heterosexual or homosexual, openly acknowledging the tentativeness and the newness of the explorative ‘journey’. The anti-homosexual position is a more static one, which argues that all people, both male and female, have been created heterosexual, and homosexual practices are examples of adultery and must be resisted as sins or errors, in accordance with the Bible and the doctrines of the New Church.

1.5 Debate rages about the causes of homosexuality, whether genetic, environment, upbringing, or psychological, or combinations or permutations of all, and the number of homosexuals in our communities. According to psychologists Glenn Wilson and Gazi Rahman [2005], most men are strongly heterosexual but a minority are equally decisively gay. Women show more of a spectrum of sexuality but still with a skew towards heterosexuality. “Sexual orientation is stable and bimodal. If bisexuality exists it is rare, especially in males.” They quote figures of about 2.5-3.5% of the population are exclusively homosexual and about 0.5-1.5% of women are completely lesbian. They talk about a bi-modality of sexuality in men particularly, that the vast majority of men are either heterosexual or homosexual, mostly the former, rarely the latter.

1.6 The underlying purpose of the report is to represent all shades of New Church and Christian views on the subject of homosexuality. The structure of the report is to compare passages of like thought together and to contrast arguments in favour of homosexuality with arguments against the orientation or practice. So in the second section which outlines the anti-homosexual position, paragraphs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and so on, will contain the main arguments against the practice of homosexuality, while 2.1.1, 2.2.1 and so on will highlight what might be perceived as weaknesses in the logic or reasoning.

1.7 The rest of the report will have the following sub-sections:

2. The anti-homosexual position
3. The pro-homosexual position
4. Topics which arose in the course of our deliberations
5. recommendations or areas for further exploration.
6. Conclusion
7. Bibliography

## **2. The anti-homosexual position**

2.1 Some New Church people would argue that having homosexual inclinations rejects our inborn, God-given attraction to the opposite sex, because the souls of men and women intend a conjugal conjunction (CL 100; 302, 204; AC 2727):

“As regards love for the opposite sex, this is universal in all people, for it is

implanted from the moment of creation in a person's very soul, from which comes the essential nature of the whole person, and it is implanted for the sake of propagating the human race.” (CL 46 [Rogers])

2.1.1 Others would argue that this is yet another of Swedenborg's generalisations, which do not completely tally with daily experience. Liberal New Churchman would argue that Swedenborg's dogmatic or absolute statements are at best generalisations and may contain cultural bias or 18th century European thought. (e.g. HH 470; 141) For example, Rev Carl Yenetchi [1996] mentions Swedenborg's assertion 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 the appearance of some individuals. This brings up the issue of reflecting on our experiences. This is also a valid form of forming or justifying our beliefs.

Homosexuals would argue that they are attracted to members of their own sex, and that being attracted to members of the opposite sex is contrary to their nature. There are some heterosexual couples who do not seem to be interested in bearing children, although there are no biological reasons why they can't. There are homosexual couples who would like to bear their own children or adopt other people's children. People whose thinking is dominated by ‘proof-texting’ do not place as much on the idea of thinking “from experience, and indeed through reflecting on experience”

2.2 The ‘against Nature’ argument is further developed by reference to the alleged un-naturalness of anal intercourse. In referring to the incident of the male inhabitants of Sodom attempting to rape two angels who were visiting Lot, (Genesis 19) we read: “People who understand the Word purely from the sense of the letter may imagine that 'Sodom' is used to mean **a certain kind of foul behaviour that is totally unnatural**, but in the internal sense 'Sodom' means evil that springs from self-love.” (my emphasis) 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]

2.2.1 Others would argue that this is Swedenborg's opinion or reflects the thinking of the eighteenth century. According to one Anglican social scientist, one third of heterosexuals indulge in anal intercourse, while one third of homosexuals do not. As David Field [1982] pointed out, nobody can argue that anal intercourse is morally wrong of itself for homosexuals, if consenting heterosexual couples indulge in it. In my opinion the story of Sodom is about heterosexual men and boys, attempting to humiliate male angels by anally gang-raping them. After all 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”. Rev Lee woofenden, a minister

in Convention, argues that Genesis 19 does not teach any lesson about “consensual homosexual sex”.

2.3 Male homosexual practices, or at least anal intercourse, seem to be forbidden by Leviticus 18:22: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, that is detestable.” (*New International Version* [1984]) On the basis of Leviticus 18, the Writings for the New Church, define homosexuality as one of the “forbidden degrees [of sexual relations]”, calling them, depending on the translation, “foul liaisons”, “foul conjunctions”, “foul adulteries”, “unmentionable sexual unions”, and “abominable copulations.” which are “forbidden degrees of affinity”. The Writings teach therefore that homosexuality is a type of adultery. In *True Christian Religion*, we read: “In its *earthly meaning*, this commandment covers not only committing adultery but also wanting to do and doing things that are obscene, and also having wanton thoughts and expressing them.” In its parallel passage in the *Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning Life*, we read: “In the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, by committing adultery in the natural sense is to commit obscene acts, to speak lascivious words, and to think filthy thoughts.”

2.3.1 Is the definition of “obscene” up to the individual or church tradition? Black-and-white shunning of adultery messages, do not match reality or the gradual progression to heaven: “so far as he is not in adultery, he is in chastity”, “whenever he does not do evils, he does good”, because “lusts of evils close up the lower mind”. 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. 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.”

2.4 Another argument against male homosexuality is that of Heinrichs [1993] who argues for the sanctity of sperm 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.”

2.4.1 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 and dental dams could prevent sperm mixing with faeces.

2.5 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”.

2.5.1 Some people might not find this totally convincing, firstly because some couples who use condoms seem to be able to produce “spiritual offspring”. Does Sandström imply that single, celibate people cannot produce “spiritual offspring”? I find it dubious to deny a homosexual couple “spiritual fruits” when their relationship involves self-sacrifice, mutual giving and caring, especially when one partner is dying of AIDs. According to Swedenborg: “The spiritual offspring born of the Lord's marriage with the church are truths, the source of understanding, perception and every thought, and good deeds, the source of love, charity and every affection.” “The fruit

of the belly and the desires of the belly, signify, in the sense of the letter, natural offspring, but in the spiritual sense spiritual offspring, which is knowledge (scientia), intelligence, and wisdom, for into these man is re-born when he is regenerated.” Some New Church commentators might suggest that yet again, a General Church minister is filtering the Writings through the book *Conjugal Love*.

### **3. The pro-homosexual position**

3.1 Our denominations teachings on marriage are adapted to the homosexual partnership. Yenetchi [1996] 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.” He bases his argument on teachings that there is an “infinite variety” of conjugal love and human goodwill and actions are also of infinite variety, because they are shaped by each individual, unique soul. He further argues the universal sphere of conjugal love flowing from the Lord, can be expressed as the union, or even, “blending”, of two souls and two minds, who are not necessarily heterosexual.

3.1.1 Yenetchi assumes that CL 57 and 524 is talking about perpetual variation of sexuality not perpetual variation of heterosexual maleness and heterosexual femaleness. The vast majority of passages in the Writings for the New Church are overwhelmingly hetero-normative and are unashamedly, monogamously heterosexual in outlook. It “is inward union, the union of souls, which really makes a marriage” and “conjugal love which arises from the union of souls.”

3.2 “Risking on the Side of Compassion” by Lawrence [1996-1997] was essentially one minister’s journey to respond to homosexual couple’s request to bless “the commitment in fidelity of two people of the same sex.”, with the backing of ministers in Convention and the majority of his congregation in San Francisco. He “felt an overwhelming presence of the Lord confirming what we were doing”, as he talked to a couple whose lesbian daughter’s relationship had been blessed in his church. Lawrence believes that despite a few Biblical passages that “seem to condemn homosexual expression”, “there are big problems with all of them on the literal level” for Swedenborgians. “None of them are to me persuasive or in any way compellingly authoritative.” He believes that complementarity is everywhere in nature, and is “widespread – perhaps even universal” in the gay community. He wrote: “in real life I can find no genuinely persuasive differences in the spiritual conjugality in gays and heterosexuals. When you add the dramatic factor that the vast majority of gays have never had any other attraction dynamic within them, even as small children, and when you witness time and again gay relationships as being creative, giving, and supportive of the larger social fabric, then for me a very secure platform exists for conducting a ministry both supporting, affirming, and journeying with the gay community.”

3.2.1 Nobody is against individuality but wonder whether homosexuality is a type of adultery and so a human behaviour opposed by the Ten Commandments. In AC 1834:2 we read: “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.” Lawrence’s church is in San Francisco, which some view as a major centre for homosexual activity in the USA. Do such centres perpetuate myths of homosexuality? Lawrence’s argument is based partly on his own personal experiences which might be deceptive.

3.3 Possible teachings underlying this article are “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”, “By their fruit you will recognise them.” and “I desire mercy not sacrifice”, namely there are times when laws have to be laid aside in favour of spirituality.

3.3.1 Do such arguments undervalue the doing of the commandments? Jesus told the expert in the law that to inherit eternal life he must do the commandments, and told us that “Whoever has my commands and obeys them he is the one who loves me.” and “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love”.

#### **4. Topics which arose in the course of our deliberations**

During the course of our discussions several topics arose which need to be addressed

4.1 All you need is love

4.2 The issue of fairness and equality

4.3 The relationship between David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi as possible homosexual role models

4.4 How are we to interpret passages about eunuchs in the Bible?

4.5 The dangers of anal intercourse

4.6 Can homosexuals change their orientation?

**4.1 All you need is love** Some liberal Biblical commentators would simplify the message of Jesus to love: love your neighbours and your enemies. (matthew 5:43-44) The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbours, as being a summary of what all the Bible is about. (Matthew 22:27-40) Some would go so far as to say that we have to look after those who are marginalised by society, as Jesus did for foreigners, such as Samaritans or Phoenicians, or the poor, or the disabled

4.1.1 If we are to love our Lord Jesus, we must do what he commands. (John 14:15) The love only argument has merit, but some would counter that love without truth is not love, but mere sentimentality without limits or moral framework, (AC 5194:2; AE 1009:1) or “spurious charity” (Charity 54; TCR 374:2; 421; 450-451; 457) Any group in society can view themselves as marginalised and thereby “victimised”, which is why we need to look at the spiritual meaning to decide whom the Lord is seeking to identify by the poor and needy. 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.

4.1.2 Giving to the needy is laudable, but it requires discernment, (TCR 428; AC 9210:1) because sometimes we help evil-doers. (AC 8120 = HD 100) It also falls into the trap set by people like Patricia Klock Rose [1993] who would retort “Is it not general knowledge in the church that everyone in evil calls his/her evil good? (See DP 216, AR 908, TCR 38.)” we have to consider seriously this “reverse discrimination”. Doctrinal concepts like “spurious charity” or “spurious conscience” spring to mind. Biblical

literalists “believe too that none but the poor, the wretched, and those who have suffered persecution can enter heaven, when in fact both the wealthy and the powerful who have led lives of charity and faith in the Lord have their place in heaven.” We need to “exercise discrimination” or discernment when we try to help people. (AC 2425:3; 3688:3-4; 3820:2; 5008:2; 5028:2; 5132:3; 8120; etc.)

**4.2 The issue of fairness and equality:** Homosexuals in the United Kingdom now have the same rights as straight people. The reasoning behind the UK government’s latest anti-discrimination legislation is that public buildings and public-funded institutions should be equally accessible by homosexual and heterosexual people.

4.2.1 do homosexuals want monogamy and the rights associated with married couples? Some obviously do. They have been faithful to each other over some years, and have taken advantage of civil partnerships, as soon as they were legally available. *Counterfeit Marriage: How ‘civil partnerships’ devalue the currency of marriage* (Christian Institute) would argue that according to Government-sponsored research, homosexual men had on average seven partners per year and that most long-term relationships were ‘open’ or adulterous. National Statistics show that just 0.2 % of households are headed by a cohabiting same-sex couple. In this booklet these authors question why other sections of society do not 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? To determine what is just and fair is not as spiritual as to behave according to what our consciences dictate or what our intuition moves us to, although it does not negate its presence within these virtues. (cf. AC 2831:2-4; 4167; 4988:3; 5145:4; HD 140e)

### **4.3 The relationship between David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi as possible homosexual role models**

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.

#### **4.4 How are we to interpret passages about eunuchs in the Bible?**

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 traditional, eastern role of the eunuch as guardian of his master’s harem is mentioned in CL 369.) The assumption of homosexual Christians is that such eunuchs are homosexual, or that metaphorically they are eunuchs, as people incapable of reproducing children. 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.”)

4.4.1 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.

Swedenborg interprets these three categories in Matthew 19:12, 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 [Chadwick]) 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.

#### **4.5 The dangers of anal intercourse**

From the web-site of the Christian Medical Fellowship () CMF File 20  
“Homosexuality” [2003]

“The most common high-risk sexual behaviours include oral-genital contact,

mutual masturbation of the penis and anus and anal intercourse. While the vagina and the muscles within a woman's pelvis are well designed for sexual intercourse, this is not the case for the anatomy of the anus and rectum. Anal sex can lead to ulcers, inflammation, tearing of the muscles around the anus, and disruption in the rectum. This can cause incontinence and increase the risk of getting an infection.

Consequently male homosexuals have a much higher incidence of sexually-related disease, regardless of whether or not condoms are used. These include syphilis, shigella, salmonella, amoebiasis, giardiasis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, campylobacter, and scabies and viral infections such as, herpes, hepatitis A and B and HIV. [23] Many sexually transmitted infectious agents, including human papillomavirus, are also strongly linked to anal cancer. [24] Consistently using condoms can reduce the risk, but condoms do not protect against physical damage."

23. Schmidt T. *Straight and narrow? Compassion and clarity in the homosexuality debate*, IVP 1995. Ch 6

24. Frisch M et al. *New England Journal of Medicine* 1997, 337: 1350-1358

#### **4.6 Can homosexuals change their orientation?**

There seems a difference of opinion in the world of psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors. Most would argue that homosexuals cannot change their orientation. Dr Joseph Nicolosi, an American psychiatrist, argues that gay activists have conspired with a silent psychological community, to allow unhappy homosexual men to be oppressed. He argues that homosexuals can change their orientation. () There are several Christian organisations, usually Evangelical, which also say that it is possible. Does not believing that people can change their sexual orientation contradict the church's teachings about reformation? Why does it appear that no heterosexual wants to become a homosexual?

### **5. Recommendations**

#### A multi-pronged New Church response

I am glad that the world-wide New Church has responded to the issue of homosexual people in different ways. Firstly, it keeps everybody on their doctrinal, biblical and pastoral 'toes', and maintains the freshness of the discussions. Secondly, I believe that by offering different responses we respect individual differences of opinion and 'comfort zones'. This is the most charitable - or to use an Americanism, the 'most neighbourly' response.

"In this case 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. (AC 1799:4)

“But although there are so many variations and differences in matters of doctrine, or so many derivatives, nevertheless they all together form one Church when everyone acknowledges charity to be the essential thing of the Church, or what amounts to the same, when everyone regards life as the end in view of doctrine - that is, when everyone asks, How does a member of the Church live? rather than, What does he think? For in the next life everyone is allotted a place by the Lord that accords with the good constituting his life, not with the truth he knows from doctrine separated from that good.” (AC 3241:3e)

The question is whether homosexuality is an example of adultery, and therefore does it contradict one of the essentials of the Judaeo-Christian tradition?

“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)

On another tack, after death good and bad people ask angels what they have to do and believe to go to heaven. Angels reply, “They are told that they should do and believe whatever they like; but they should realize that in hell people do not do anything that is good or believe anything that is true, only in heaven.” (DP 179 [Dole]) “In the spiritual world where we all arrive after death, no one asks what our faith has been or what our beliefs have been, only what our life has been whether we are one kind of person or another. They know that the quality of our faith and the quality of our beliefs depend on the quality of our life, because life constructs a belief system for itself and constructs a faith or itself.” (DP 101:3e [Dole])

## **Pastoral and congregational recommendations:**

### 5.1 Can a homosexual be cured?

The majority of the group believed that some people who have adopted homosexual lifestyles can go on to lead heterosexual lifestyles and that most people pass through a homosexual phase in life. The majority also believed that people who are born homosexual cannot become heterosexual. One member believed that some, not most, people pass through a homosexual phase, and that **some** people who are born homosexual can become heterosexual, if they choose and have the necessary support and counselling.

### 5.2 Whether to allow male homosexuals to share the common cup;

The group believed that heterosexuals and homosexuals should be allowed to share the common cup. Some churches prefer to use individual cups, however, and some members of the group thought this seemed a more hygienic approach.

### 5.3 Whether to allow homosexuals to be members of the congregation or Conference;

The group believed that homosexuals should not be barred from being members of the congregation or Conference. Neither heterosexuals or homosexuals should use their

membership to espouse personal, political or sexual issues.

5.4 If a young person were to turn to you in confidence, whether a minister or a lay person, and admits that they think they are homosexual;

The group believed that anybody requesting counselling regarding sexuality should be referred to a specialist counsellor.

5.5 Whether to allow homosexuals to teach in Sunday Schools;

The group believed that homosexuals should be allowed to teach in Sunday Schools provided the usual Criminal Records Checks were done. They also believed that when children were taken to the toilet they should be accompanied by more than one adult, whether that adult was heterosexual or homosexual.

5.6 Whether to allow homosexuals to be on Church Committees;

The group believed that homosexuals should be allowed to be on Church Committees and that this had been the case in the past. Neither heterosexuals or homosexuals should use their membership to espouse personal, political or sexual issues

5.7 Whether to allow homosexuals to have relationships blessed in churches of the General Conference;

The majority of the group believed that homosexuals should not have their relationships blessed in church. They did not believe that civil partnerships conformed to the principles of conjugal marriage and they did not wish to be seen as condoning homosexual relationships. They did, however, feel that prayers could be said for the future welfare of the couple and that they could bless the couple as individuals but not as a couple in a civil partnership. One member thought that this was inadequate and that homosexuals would want to celebrate their partnership in church.

5.8 Whether to allow homosexuals to be ordained ministers or priests of the General Conference;

The group believed that there had been homosexual ministers in the past and that there was no reason to ban homosexual ministers or priests of the General Conference in the future. All applicants for ministry should be considered individually and would be required to adhere as far as possible to the Ministerial Guidelines.

5.9. whether homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt.

The group believed that it would be better for children to be adopted by a gay couple than for children to go into care but that an adopting heterosexual couple would be the best option.

## 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 an individual, 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