

Four Myths

How well do we understand the impact of same-sex marriage?



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General Church Council of the Clergy Meetings
June 2017



“Hate has no home here.”



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“Hate has no home here.”

“All the delights of heaven flow from the delights of conjugal love, like sweet waters from a gushing spring.”

(Conjugal Love 229)

“Hatreds of every kind gush forth from the love of adultery, both against God and against the neighbor, and in general against every good and truth of heaven and the church.” (Apocalypse Explained 993).

To start off I should say that I am not personally in any position to correct people’s views on this controversial topic. I have no special expertise or knowledge of the subject. My view, however, is that the Heavenly Doctrines are the source of a true perspective on the issue, and that they conflict with popular views.

The point of this paper is not to discuss what the church teaches about homosexual practices. A set of passages about it can be found in the appendix. Instead my thesis is that some commonly held understandings about same-sex relationships are contradicted in the Heavenly Doctrines. I am calling them four myths. I believe that these misunderstandings frame our thinking about it in a way that almost guarantees confusion and conflict. My hope is that reframing the issue in a way that is consistent with New Church teachings will be helpful.

While I don’t claim any special expertise or insight in this area, I imagine that I have had as much exposure to it as most people have, including gay friends, relatives and, years ago, a gay housemate for a year. I have no particular animus about it. My view is just that the Word’s teachings are true, and that the only way to happiness is to understand, believe and practice them.

Why even talk about this?



In my experience one of the most common responses to this discussion is to question even bringing it up. *“Why obsess over this one behavior instead of reaching out to help people in need?”* Or *“Why point the finger at hurting individuals? We need to look at our own shortcomings.”* Or *“Religion has always been obsessed with sex. This is why no one goes to church anymore.”* Or *“The church is a hospital for sinners. Judgment and shame have no place here.”*

There is truth in all of these responses. A focus on the specific behaviors of other people shifts the blame away from ourselves, and this is a symptom of the dominance of the *Ishmael rational* in the church. This is surely accurate.

However, the same could be said of any negative comment about people’s behaviors, including the suggestion that they are subject to the *Ishmael rational*. The deeply controversial nature of this topic intensifies the appeal of this response. No one wants to talk about it. But there is really no way of escaping the fact that a critique of moral and immoral behavior is one of religion’s primary roles.

Two teachings bring this into perspective. The first is the Writings’ emphasis on shunning evil:

“To refrain from and turn away from evils as sins is the essence of Christian religion.” Divine Providence 265

Pointing out evils is not the same thing as refraining from them, but we can’t shun evils we are unaware of.

The second is the emphasis on sexual immorality as the fundamental love of hell:

“The love of adultery is the fundamental love of all infernal and diabolical loves. The chaste love of marriage is the fundamental love of all heavenly and Divine loves.” Apocalypse Explained 981

*“The love of adultery is the fundamental love of all infernal loves, which are in themselves not loves, but hatreds. Consequently, hatreds of every kind gush forth from the love of adultery, both against God and against the neighbor, and in general against every good and truth of heaven and the church. **Therefore all unhappiness belongs to adultery.**” Apocalypse Explained 993*

These two teachings, which emphasize the vital importance of shunning evil and the dominant position of sexual immorality in the constellation of evils to be shunned, point to the necessity of facing this topic. They make it clear that there is no solution to society's pain and lack of peace apart from a decrease in the incidence of immoral behavior and the establishment of love truly conjugal. The goal is love and charity.

Beyond this, the topic of homosexuality is perhaps the most controversial and divisive issue that exists in Western Christianity. Intensely contentious issues like this one come to prominence because they pull together and embody numerous strands of conflicting beliefs and practices, and therefore they threaten cultural stability on many levels. There is value in looking at what some of these strands and conflicts are, some of which may not be obvious.

In short, my view is that coming to terms with this issue is key to easing the spiritual suffering that plagues the world that we live in. Just as "*all the delights of heaven flow from the delights of conjugal love, like sweet waters from a gushing spring*" (*Conjugal Love* 229), the inverse is also true (*Apocalypse Explained* 993). The slogan "*Hate has no home here*" is empty without a comprehension of the role that sexual immorality plays in producing it. "*Hatreds of every kind gush forth from the love of adultery*" (*Apocalypse Explained* 993). Homosexual behavior is just one of the many forms of this that the Heavenly Doctrines describe as causing more heartache than people realize.

Hate has no home here. A genuinely compassionate approach to the pain of our fellow human beings cannot ignore the causes of pain, even as it seeks to avoid judgment. Perpetuating myths is not helpful.

Four myths

There are different ways that the thesis of this paper could be organized. I am arranging it into four sections that discuss four myths about homosexual practice that are commonly believed, but which are contradicted by New Church teachings. Some of these myths may seem to be so obviously true that it is foolish to deny them, others are thought to be scientifically proven. Generally speaking, they are not matters of debate in Western society today, but are assumed to be true. I take a risk in questioning them. The aim here, though, is not to state my opinion but to contrast popular ideas with what the Heavenly Doctrines say.

Here are what I am calling the four myths, as I understand them:

- 1. Homosexuality springs from the fact that some people experience same-sex attraction, this being the opposite of heterosexual attraction.** This may appear to be too obvious to be worth stating, much less attempting to refute. But the Writings say something very different. According to them, sexual desire is not self-limiting, but has the potential to go in any direction with every person, though differently with each. The governing factors are not the desires themselves, but each person's experiences and what they believe to be allowable. Same-sex attraction is not the opposite of heterosexuality, as would appear to be the case, but something else entirely.
- 2. Homosexuality is genetically determined.** While many believe that this is a scientifically proven fact, mainstream science makes no such claim, although study continues. The Writings support the idea that every person is inclined by heredity to every evil, and to some more than others. But they do not suggest that these inherited tendencies are determinative. Instead they place sexual behaviors in the realm of human free will.
- 3. Homosexuality is an orientation that is common to a relatively fixed proportion of the population, so it is not contagious and therefore does not threaten heterosexual relationships.** While some demographic studies appear to confirm this idea, others do not, and objective data on the question is not especially reliable or easy to come by. But the Writings are unequivocal in stating that all evil is contagious.
- 4. A homosexual lifestyle can be stable, happy and fulfilling.** To all appearances this is undeniably true. Most of us today know individuals and couples who exemplify this statement, and it is a view that is regularly asserted and portrayed in popular culture. The same, for that matter, can be said about people

who in other ways may have wandered outside the lines of traditional sexual morality. We all know numerous individuals who have “transgressed” in one way or another, yet who are happy, productive, good people. Everyone has flaws, especially when it comes to intimate human relationships. Yet the Writings are specific about the ways that immorality inhibits happiness and peace in this central area of our lives.

These four statements and their descriptions may be reworded for better accuracy, or they may be refuted. The next few pages expand on what has been written above, demonstrating what I believe that the Writings teach about these topics.

1. Myth #1: Homosexuality springs from the fact that some people experience same-sex attraction, this being the opposite of heterosexual attraction.

The subjective appearance of what I am calling a myth here is the seemingly incontrovertible fact that some people are sexually attracted to members of their own sex. There is nothing controversial about this. It would seem that people are divided into two groups according to sexual orientation – heterosexual, homosexual, or something in between, like bisexual, asexual, etc. Or are they?

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are not opposites.

While the division into these two categories makes sense, and resonates in the popular imagination, the Writings emphasize a very different kind of division in human sexuality. Same-sex attraction is not the opposite of heterosexuality, as would appear to be the case, but something else entirely. **The opposites defined in the Writings are not hetero- versus homo-sexual, but rather the distinction between the chaste and the unchaste, or between conjugal love and licentiousness.** This division is emphasized in the two parts of the work *Conjugal Love*:

“The delights of licentious love are pleasures of insanity, whereas the delights of conjugal love are delights of wisdom.” *Conjugal Love* 442

Within the framework of this basic division the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual attraction is not even mentioned. Homosexuality comes up only as one among many possible variants of licentious behavior, or adultery, as can be seen in Appendix 1.

People often think that homosexuality threatens traditional sexuality, which is heterosexual. But the traditional approach is not so much about heterosexuality as it is about morality. **Christianity has always considered all sex outside of marriage to be wrong. The true dichotomy is between chaste morality and immorality.** Chaste morality restricts sexual expression. If this model is rejected a wide variety of possibilities come into play.

Once sex outside of marriage is seen as allowable, it is natural that there will be interest in different forms of its expression. Homosexual practice is just one of the many expressions that occur to people, or that they feel drawn to, springing from the well of desires that are common to everyone. This should be clear from the adoption of the “rainbow” symbol reflecting the diversity of the LGBTQ community. Also from the inclusion of many variants of sexual practice reflected in the initials LGBTQ. Not that everyone has specific inclinations to the many varieties of sexual practices that exist, but that everyone is inclined to evils of every kind (*True Christianity* 612). So people are attracted to one or another due to any number of factors.

The acceptance of homosexual behavior rests on a prior acceptance of sexual expression outside of marriage. Therefore it is not fundamentally the opposite of heterosexuality. Rather, it is a variety of the opposite of chaste morality. It doesn’t threaten heterosexuality, it threatens morality, marriage, and conjugal love.

Desires are shaped by hereditary inclinations, experiences, and what we believe to be allowable.

According to the Writings, the governing factors in our sexual desires are not the desires themselves, although this is the way that it appears to us. Natural desires are not self-limiting, although they spring

from innate inclinations. Instead they are shaped by our experiences and actions, and by what we consider to be allowable. The Writings place real emphasis on what we consider to be allowable.

Several passages describe how our desires grow and change according to our actions:

“As a person wills and does evil, he introduces himself more and more interiorly and also more and more deeply into societies in hell. As a consequence, his delight in evil also grows, and this so occupies his thoughts that at last he feels nothing to be sweeter ... That the delight of evil grows by increments is something people know from experience with thefts, robberies, lootings, retaliation and revenge, exercises of tyranny, the pursuit of material gains, and other evils. Who does not feel the heightening of delight in these in the measure of his successes in them and unrestrained practices of them?” Divine Providence 296.4

Natural desire is not self-limiting, nor can it ever be fully satisfied. “Nowhere does it set itself an end or limit. This desire lurks hidden in every person in a state of self-love” (True Christian Religion 400).

Desire is opportunistic, shaped by our experiences and by the opportunities and information that come our way. The following passage describes how a person’s desires are sparked, and then why they grow according to our behavior:

“When a person plunges himself into some evil - first because he gives in to it, then because he deliberately intends it, and finally because he loves and delights in it - the hell where that kind of evil reigns is opened; for evils and all their variations give rise to each distinction that marks off one hell from all the others. After it has been opened an influx from that hell also takes place. If a person embarks on evil in that way it clings to him, for the hell whose sphere now surrounds him finds in him the same delight as is their own when immersed in their own kind of evil. This being so, that hell does not give up but stubbornly persists in causing the person to think about that evil - first of all now and again, then as often as anything related comes along, till at length it becomes what governs him all the time.” Arcana Coelestia 6203

This process of spiritual immersion is not specifically about sexual behavior but applies generally to any evil. A similar process goes on in connection with the heavens with good behaviors and intentions. The major difference, of course, is that whereas connecting with heaven makes us free, the hells enslave us. Ironically, this enslavement is popularly called “liberation.”

Sexual liberation – the process of making sexual practice outside of marriage allowable.

In a sexually liberated society there is no shame, stigma or restraints attached to sexual behavior. According to the passage just quoted above, the effort to create this is the next step when a person becomes immersed in the practice of some evil. The passage continues:

“When this happens he looks around for ideas such as will support the notion that the thing is not an evil, until he becomes thoroughly convinced it is not. At this point he strives so far as he can to get rid of external restraints and to make it allowable and smart, and at length even attractive and honorable, to engage in adulterous practices, theft involving trickery and deceit, various forms of arrogance and boasting, contempt for others, insults, persecution carried on under a cloak of righteousness, and other things like these.” Arcana Coelestia 6203

We are all social creatures, so the opinion of the social group is important to everyone. In order for desires to take root and find free expression they have to meet with approval. They must also be legal. Some people are inclined to such things as theft and violence, but since everyone knows that they are wrong, harmful, and illegal they can only be done clandestinely. This limits their practice.

We have seen the fortunes of the campaign for a sexually liberated society rise and fall over the years. The fall of Christianity was clearly a major milestone. Factors converged in the 20th century to give sexual liberation a leg up in the Christian world, including the secularization of society, scientific advances in such things as birth control, and the sophisticated justifications of psychology and social theory. These led to battles to adjust legal

structures - from divorce laws, to abortion, to same-sex marriage. This is the formula articulated in AC 6203: “to get rid of external restraints and to make it allowable and smart, and at length even attractive and honorable to engage in adulterous practices...”

The point here is that social acceptance is a key aspect of the shaping of our desires. Therefore what we see as allowable is of tremendous spiritual importance. It is said to be perhaps the most important aspect of self-examination:

“Self-examination: if it searches out what the person regards or does not regard as sins, then it discovers all. For whatever people within themselves regard as allowable, that they do.” Charity 5

Curiously, the sincere belief that something is allowable is often thought by people in the New Church, even by some in the clergy, to excuse its practice. After all, the teaching is that everyone who lives according to their beliefs is saved.

The trouble is that this is *not* the teaching. **The teachings is that those who live in charity according to the precepts of their religion are saved** (*Apocalypse Explained* 452). **Those who live evil lives according to false ideas are not.** In fact, the conviction that sexually immoral acts are not evil is the very hallmark of licentiousness or scortation:

“What we mean by licentious love that is opposed to conjugal love is a love of adultery, when it is of such a nature that it is not regarded as a sin, nor even as something evil and dishonorable contrary to reason, but as something permissible, in accord with reason.” Conjugal Love 423

“Adulteries of the fourth degree are adulteries of the will, which are committed by people who make them allowable and pleasurable, and not of sufficient consequence to merit consulting the intellect in regard to them. Adulteries committed by such people are the most grave and are imputed to them as purposeful evils, and they become settled in them as culpable offenses.” Conjugal Love 478

Our opinion about what is allowable or not is so important that evils that we approve of are attached to us even if we do not do them:

“The evils that a person believes allowable, even if he does not do them, also become attached to him, for making them allowable in the thought springs from the will, the two being in accord. Consequently, when a person believes some evil allowable, he dissolves any internal bond against it, and is kept from doing it only by external bonds, which are fears.” Divine Providence 81

Another way to express this is to say that “consent is tantamount to the deed”:

“Lusts produce evils through their delights; but when the evils are believed allowable, which happens because of an agreement of the will and intellect, then the delights and the evils become one. People know that consent is tantamount to the deed; and this is also what the Lord says: ‘. . . if anyone looks at another's woman so as to lust for her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart’ (Matthew 5:28). It is the same with all other evils.” Divine Providence 111

This is why the opinion of society in general is so important, and why it is important to have a religion and to be associated with people who believe what is true. These help us to form true ideas about what is harmful and beneficial, allowable and forbidden, because we are not capable of discerning the evil in our own desires:

“A person is incapable of perceiving the lusts of his own evil. He perceives, indeed, their delights, but he also little reflects on them, for the delights beguile his thoughts and divert his reflections. Consequently, if he did not know from some other source that they are evil, he would call them good and, in freedom in accordance with reason of his thinking, would commit them. And when he does this, he makes them his. To the extent that he makes these allowable, he enlarges the court of his reigning love, which is his life's love. His lusts form its court, for they are, so to speak, its ministers and attendants, by which it governs the outer elements which constitute its kingdom.” Divine Providence 113

“To the extent that he makes these allowable, he enlarges the court of his reigning love.” That is, when one evil is seen as allowable it extends the limits of permissible behavior, and brings anything that challenges it into question. When the church is at its end all of its truths are brought into question. This eventually means that evils become less objectionable within the church’s culture than outside of it, as explained in this passage:

“Adulteries are less abhorrent with Christians than with the Gentiles, and even with some barbarous nations, for the reason that at present in the Christian world there is no marriage of good and truth, but a marriage of evil and falsity... From this origin, a desire and favor for adultery from hell flow in; and this is why adulteries are believed in the Christian world to be allowable, and are practiced without shame.” *Apocalypse Explained 1008.2*

In the current cultural atmosphere, traditional admonitions that appear to shame or judge misbehavior are likely to be the object of attack. Shame has no place in a world where formerly prohibited behaviors are declared to be allowable.

The phenomenon extends into many areas of life. For example, in our culture today people do not feel especially obligated to attend church services. A woman I know tells a story about a time when her husband was involved in a time-sensitive project at home and missed church. The pastor stopped by that afternoon to ask them about their absence. That was the 1960s. Today that kind of inquiry is unlikely to come from a General Church pastor, and most of us would consider it inappropriate. This indicates a significant change in the perception of boundaries around our social behavior.

These passages and examples demonstrate the powerful effect of the collective social understanding of the kinds of things that are allowable and those that deserve criticism and sanction. These concepts strongly affect our desires by guiding our feelings about what is possible, appropriate, and good.

While the clergy in no way controls what people see as allowable, nor should they, they do play a role in affirming or opposing people’s acceptance of behaviors within the church by preaching the Word, as in the internal sense of Revelation 13. For a discussion of the role that the issue of women in the clergy plays in this, see **Appendix 2**.

We are not born with fixed desires and interests that guide our lives. Rather, we are born with a universe of potential interests that compete for our attention. Depending on our circumstances, choices and behaviors some desires come to prominence and others do not. Our understanding of what is and is not OK or allowable is a significant part of this process. Yet our subjective experience is that we experience desires, and they are either ones that we can act on or ones that we need to suppress.

“Love of the sex” or “love of the opposite sex”?

“Love of the sex dwells with the natural person, but conjugal love with the spiritual.” *Conjugal Love 38*

In newer translations the word “*opposite*” is inserted to make the opening words in the quote above “*love of the opposite sex*.” This is what the Latin actually means, but I suspect that there is an aspect of the term that is describing our interest in sexual things period. A part of every person is interested in sexual activity without regard for its nature. Given the right circumstances almost anyone could develop an interest in any of a variety of sexual expressions. Evidence that these things are an aspect of everyone’s hereditary tendencies can be found in the widespread interest in pornography, which commonly depicts both sexes, and many different deviant behaviors.

Another aspect of this is the statement in *Conjugal Love 501* that talks about lusts that “*do not arise except in consequence of adulteries, being embraced after adulteries become tiresome.*” While I doubt that many people graduate to homosexuality after years of adulterous affairs, modern culture offers an equivalent in the ready availability of pornography. People quickly grow tired of this type of material, and they look for something ever more stimulating. Homosexual pornography is “edgier” than simple adultery. Homosexuality and other alternative sexual behaviors are inherent in the whole concept of pornography. It is a “*walk on the wild side*”

and as such holds an attraction for almost anyone who views pornography. Given how challenging it is to initiate and maintain romantic relationships in the culture of the fallen church, and how available pornography of all kinds is, it is surprising that more people are not attracted to homosexual behaviors.

Another aspect of this is that in the culture of the vastated church many people are also simply unkind, and anyone who does not seem to fit in can be the object of bullying. Since variations in typical masculine and feminine traits commonly become the object of cruel behavior in this scenario, especially among teens and young people, it is only natural that people look for a way to remove the stigma from those who have been victimized. The cultural narrative around gender stereotypes, gender identity, and sexual orientation seem to address this issue, preaching tolerance and acceptance. Slogans like *“Hate has no home here”* resonate with many people for a very good reason. When the church is at an end charity has grown cold.

An even uglier aspect of this phenomenon is that sexual assault and pedophilia are also prevalent in the culture of the fallen church, initiating people involuntarily into sexual practices and experiences that remain with them and do enormous harm. Victims of these terrible acts are affected throughout their lives, often with unwanted desires that they struggle to reconcile.

Once this thinking becomes widespread, efforts to address or suppress it become counterproductive, because people strenuously resist being compelled in matters of conscience. As we read:

“No one who is compelled to think that which is true and to do that which is good is reformed... as may also become clear from all the experience and lessons of life, which when learned prove two things - first, that human consciences will not allow themselves to be coerced, and second, that we strive after the forbidden.” Arcana Coelestia 1947

Few things are a more common and natural way of rebelling against an oppressive culture, or more inherently alluring, than “forbidden pleasures.”

So it is a myth that homosexuality springs from the fact that some people just happen to experience same-sex attraction. Our desires spring from our heredity and are shaped by our experiences, good and bad, and what we come to believe is allowable and good.

But what does it mean that they “spring from our heredity”? This is the topic of the next section.

2. Myth #2: Homosexuality is genetically determined.

Many believe that this is a scientifically proven fact. Mainstream science makes no such claim, although study continues. The Writings support the idea that every person is inclined by heredity to every evil, and to some evils more than others. But they do not suggest that these inherited tendencies are determinative, and instead place sexual behaviors in the realm of human free will.

What does science claim about this? I am not qualified to speak from much knowledge here. You might research and come to a different conclusion. As I understand it, science does not claim that sexual orientation is genetically determined. To quote briefly from *Wikipedia*, a source that generally keeps abreast of changes in current thinking, we have this statement:

“The relationship between biology and sexual orientation is a subject of research. A simple and singular determinant for sexual orientation has not been conclusively demonstrated; various studies point to different, even conflicting positions, but scientists hypothesize that a combination of genetic, hormonal, and social factors determine sexual orientation.” (wikipedia.org/wiki/Biology_and_sexual_orientation; April 10, 2017)

The statement that *“a combination of genetic, hormonal, and social factors determine sexual orientation”* would seem to agree with what the Heavenly Doctrines suggest.

Do we inherit inclinations to specific sexual behaviors?

The most common statement in the Writings about our inherited evils is that we are, from heredity, inclined to *“evils of every kind”*:

“We, the human race, have been born into evils of every kind. From birth onward we have tendencies toward things that come from hell. Unless we are born again or regenerated, we cannot come into heaven.” True Christianity 329

Numerous statements also make it clear that these tendencies to evil continually increase, unless they are checked by regeneration:

“The only thing that breaks the inclination and tendency toward evil that is passed on by parents to their offspring and descendants is the new birth from the Lord that is called regeneration. In the absence of rebirth, this inclination not only remains uninterrupted but even grows from one generation to the next and becomes a stronger tendency toward evil until it encompasses evils of every kind.” True Christianity 521

“Hereditary evils are derived, increased, and accumulated from parents and ancestors in a long backward series, and not as is believed, from the first man's eating of the tree of knowledge (n. 313, 494, 2910, 3469, 3701, 4317, 8550). Therefore, hereditary evils are at this day more malignant than formerly (n. 2122). Infants who die such, and are educated in heaven, are from heredity nothing but evils (n. 2307, 2308, 4563). Hence they are of various dispositions and inclinations (n. 2300). Every man's interior evils are from the father, and the exterior from the mother (n. 1815, 3701).” New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 83

The Writings are also explicit in stating that the specific practices that parents engage in are passed on as inclinations to their children:

*“In addition to all this, young children vary in their nature and disposition. They do so because of their heredity derived from parents and by succession from grandparents and great grandparents; for **any action which has been confirmed in parents through habitual practice acquires a natural disposition to it and is implanted through heredity in young children.** And this is how they come to possess varying inclinations.” Arcana Coelestia 2300*

“Qualities that have become matters of one's love and consequent life are passed on hereditarily to offspring. People know that a person is born into evil, and that he acquires this state hereditarily from his parents. Some also believe that he acquires it not from his parents, but through his parents from Adam, but this is an erroneous supposition. A person acquires the state from his father, from whom he has his soul, which is clothed with a body in the mother. For the sperm which comes from the father is the first vessel receptive of life—a vessel, however, of such a character as it was in the father, being in the form of his love, and everyone's love in the greatest and least of its forms is the same. The sperm moreover carries within it an endeavor toward the human form, into which it also gradually develops. It follows therefore that evils we call hereditary come from fathers, and so from grandfathers and great-grandfathers, being transmitted in succession from them into their offspring.” Divine Love and Wisdom 269

*“Hereditary evil derives its origin from every one's parents and parents' parents, or from grandparents and ancestors successively. **Every evil which they have acquired by actual life, even so that by frequent use or habit it has become like a nature, is derived into the children, and becomes hereditary to them,** together with that which had been implanted in the parents from grandparents and ancestors. The hereditary evil from the father is more inward, and the hereditary evil from the mother is more outward. The former cannot be easily rooted out, but the latter can. When one is being regenerated, the hereditary evil inrooted from his nearest parents is plucked up by the roots; but with those who are not being regenerated, or who cannot be regenerated, it remains. This then is hereditary evil (see also n. 313, 494, 2122, 2910, 3518, 3701). This is also evident to everyone who reflects, and also from the fact that every family has some peculiar evil or good by which it is distinguished from other families; and that this is from parents and ancestors is down. It is similar with the Jewish nation remaining at this day, which is evidently distinct from other nations, and is known from them, not only by its peculiar genius, but also by manners, speech, and face.” Arcana Coelestia 4317.4*

These passages suggest that all of our inclinations, even inclinations towards specific sexual behaviors, are inherited. As the passage immediately above states, everyone knows that families exhibit common tendencies and behaviors.

These tendencies, then, are the evident starting point of our perceived desires. They make us sensitive and receptive to experiences influencing us in the direction of particular behaviors. They make us feel different from other people, who do not feel the same way that we do. They are part of the identity that distinguishes us from everyone else.

Why does it matter if it is genetically determined?

The reason that this matters is that if homosexuality is biologically determined, and therefore immutable, it changes the way that the issue is viewed. The following section from the same Wikipedia article quoted above makes the point:

“Whether genetic or other physiological determinants form the basis of sexual orientation is a highly-politicized issue. The Advocate, a U.S. gay and lesbian newsmagazine, reported in 1996 that 61% of its readers believed that “it would mostly help gay and lesbian rights if homosexuality were found to be biologically determined”.[90] A cross-national study in the United States, the Philippines, and Sweden found that those who believed that “homosexuals are born that way” held significantly more positive attitudes toward homosexuality than those who believed that “homosexuals choose to be that way” or “learn to be that way”.

Equal protection analysis in U.S. law determines when government requirements create a “suspect classification” of groups and therefore eligible for heightened scrutiny based on several factors, one of which is immutability.

Evidence that sexual orientation is biologically determined (and therefore perhaps immutable in the legal sense) would strengthen the legal case for heightened scrutiny of laws discriminating on that basis.” (wikipedia.org/wiki/Biology_and_sexual_orientation; April 10, 2017)

That is, if sexual orientation is biologically determined then the entire issue changes from being a question of sexual morality and becomes a question of fairness. It then centers on the discrimination that has long been carried out against people for a condition that is not their fault and over which they have no control. It becomes a question of civil rights, and those who oppose it are viewed in the same category as racists and anti-Semites.

This situation is well known, and the majority of Americans, and most likely the majority of General Church members, accept the argument that sexual orientation is biologically determined. This means that even within the General Church discussion of the topic risks the label “homophobic” and is categorized with bigotry, racism, sexism and anti-Semitism.

Hereditary evil is not determinative

The key difference between the genetic or biological determination of sexual orientation, and the inherited tendencies described in the Writings, is that while the former are considered to be immutable, hereditary evil is only a tendency. While it disposes a person to behave in certain ways, every person is free to adopt or reject these inclinations.

“We are not born with actual evils but only with a tendency toward them. We may have a greater or a lesser tendency to a specific evil. Therefore after death no one is judged on the basis of his or her inherited evil; we are judged only on the basis of our actual evils, the evils we ourselves have committed. This is clear from the following commandment of the Lord: ‘Parents will not be put to death for their children; children will not be put to death for their parents. Each will die for her or his own sins’ (Deuteronomy 24:16). I have become certain of this from my experience in the spiritual world of little children who had died. They have an inclination toward evils and will them, but they do not do them, because they are brought up under the Lord's supervision and are saved. [3] The only thing that breaks the inclination and tendency toward evil

that is passed on by parents to their offspring and descendants is the new birth from the Lord that is called regeneration.” True Christianity 521

This is consistent, I believe, with the current understanding of the scientific community on this question, that “*a combination of genetic, hormonal, and social factors determine sexual orientation.*” While this statement does not explicitly include “free will”, the suggestion of a multiplicity of factors is as close as science comes to the idea. “Free will” is not a scientific characteristic, because everything in science is determined by the laws of nature, including randomness. But free will is taught in the Writings. In fact, they teach that “*nothing becomes attached to a person except what he does in freedom in accordance with his reason*” (*Divine Providence 138*).

So according to the Heavenly Doctrines our heredity disposes us to act in certain ways, but in the end we are free to choose whether to act on those tendencies or to reject them. The subjective appearance is that we have little to no control over the way that we feel, but the Writings assert that this is not the reality.

3. Myth #3 - Homosexuality is an orientation that is common to a relatively fixed proportion of the population, so it is not contagious and therefore does not threaten heterosexual relationships.

If sexual orientation is biologically determined, as opposed to being freely chosen, then it would follow that the percent of a human population with same-sex orientation should be relatively stable. While some demographic studies appear to confirm this, others do not. Unfortunately, objective data on the question is not especially reliable. The subject is too highly-politicized. But the Writings are unequivocal in stating that all evil is contagious.

Again, this is a theological study relying on the truth of what is written in the Heavenly Doctrines, and not a source of information about social science. So, again, I quote Wikipedia:

“In general, most research agrees that the number of people who have had multiple same-gender sexual experiences is fewer than the number of people who have had a single such experience, and that the number of people who identify themselves as exclusively homosexual is fewer than the number of people who have had multiple homosexual experiences.

In addition, shifts can occur in reports of the prevalence of homosexuality. For example, the Hamburg Institute for Sexual Research conducted a survey over the sexual behavior of young people in 1970 and repeated it in 1990. Whereas in 1970 18% of the boys ages 16 and 17 reported to have had at least one same-sex sexual experience, the number had dropped to 2% by 1990.

Data from the General Social Survey shows that the percentage of Americans reporting predominately same-sex partners remained stable between 1991 and 2010. In contrast, the percentage who reported ever having a same-sex partner increased, especially among women. By contrast, the National Survey of Family Growth has found an increase in the share of men and women who self-report a bisexual orientation in their 2011–2013 study compared to previous surveys. Likewise, in the Second Australian Study of Health and Relationships, whose data was collected in 2012 and 2013, researchers noticed significant growth in the share of women who report bisexual orientation and attraction, and the share of men who report exclusive homosexual attraction, compared to the results of the First Australian Study of Health and Relationships, executed in 2001. (wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_sexual_orientation; April 13, 2017)

Articles such as this one discuss the difficulty of gathering this data and applying consistent standards to it. Still, it demonstrates that a great deal of statistical information has been brought together on the topic from all over the world.

For my purpose here, the most relevant information is that there is no agreement on the question of whether the incidence of homosexual practice and orientation changes over time. If anything, there is agreement that it varies considerably both from place to place and over time. But again, the highly-politicized nature of the question makes it hard to draw firm conclusions from the data.

No people believe this!

All evils are contagious

The absence of conclusive data on this topic stands in contrast to the teachings of the Writings about it, which are unequivocal.

"All evils are contagious. They are like a plague you become infected with just by breathing in and out. They are like cancer and gangrene that spread and corrupt nearby areas, then more and more remote areas, until the whole body dies. The cause: from birth we all enjoy evil." True Christianity 120

That is, since everyone is born into inclinations to "evils of every kind" we are all vulnerable to their allurements. This kind of spreading is what is meant by the concept of "uncleanness" in the Mosaic Law:

"By these uncleannesses are meant various kinds of evils and consequent falsities coming from hell, which have been imparted, conveyed, and received. Each particular uncleanness means some specific evil; for evils are what render a person unclean, because they infect his soul. Also the evils in their hearts gush out of evil spirits and genii, and - depending on how convincing the false ideas accompanying evil are - they infect those who are present. This contagious influence is what is meant by touching uncleannesses." Arcana Coelestia 10130

These laws provide tangible representations of the way that evils spread, and also how to avoid them. Yet at the time of the end of the church truths are falsified or in dispute, so there is little agreement about how to avoid harmful evils. This is called the "fourth state" of the church:

"The fourth state (of a church) is a state when there is no love nor consequently any light, which is its 'night'. This is so because evils increase daily; and to the extent that they increase, one person like a contagious disease infects another, especially parents their children. Furthermore hereditary evils are intensified by each succeeding generation and in that condition passed down." Arcana Coelestia 10134

This is the process that causes the hells to grow at the time of the end of the church:

*"Hells made up of people like this are growing immensely larger at the present day; and what is astounding, such people come mainly from among those within the Church on account of all the guile, trickery, hatred, revenge, and adultery that flourish there more than anywhere else. For in the Church of today guile is reckoned to be cleverness, and **adultery to be honorable behavior; and those who think anything different are laughed at.** Since this is the situation at the present day within the Church, it is a sign that its last days are at hand, for according to the Lord's words recorded in Matthew 24:22, unless it came to an end 'no flesh would be saved'. Indeed, all evil is infectious and like rottenness contaminates the whole, thus everyone in the end."* Arcana Coelestia 6666

Are we at the end of the church? Surely, not! These passages shouldn't apply.

"Adultery is considered to be honorable behavior, and those who think anything different are laughed at."

More than this, they are actively persecuted. And since the evil of the behavior is aggressively denied, any measures by parents or groups to avoid interaction are labelled as bigotry. Accordingly, there have been controversial legal and political disputes around the exclusion of any aspect of the LGBT community from such things as parades, activities, facilities, schools, etc. The entire classification of sexual orientation has been successfully linked with racial prejudice and misogyny, making those who discriminate or distance themselves no different from sexists, racists, and anti-Semites.

So most people accept, and even enthusiastically promote, this kind of diversity. Yet religion teaches that sexual behavior is a moral choice, not an immutable identity. The effect of seeing the behavior as allowable will inevitably be its increase:

"Interaction with evil people has this contagious effect, as you can clearly see from the following similar situations: As you spend time with thieves or pirates you eventually become like them. As you live among adulterous men and promiscuous women, eventually you think nothing of adultery. If you join a rebel group, eventually you think nothing of doing violence to anyone." True Christianity 120

I know what he's going for, but not my experience. People don't want to destroy a marriage.

The Law of Unintended Consequences

“In the social sciences, unintended consequences are outcomes that are not the ones foreseen and intended by a purposeful action. The term was popularized in the twentieth century by American sociologist Robert K. Merton.” (Wikipedia)

The campaign to legitimize same-sex relationships has been enormously successful over the past twenty-five years in the West. A recent article in a British newspaper says the “*revolution in attitudes to homosexuality is the biggest change in a generation*”:

“Almost two thirds of the British public opposed same-sex relationships because they believed they were morally “wrong” 25 years ago. But, according to the latest British Social Attitudes survey, only one in five people now disapproves of gay or lesbian relationships in principle.” (Revolution in attitudes to homosexuality is biggest change in generation, The Telegraph, Tuesday 11 April 2017)

Although the numbers vary from country to country, the phenomenon is similar throughout all Western countries, and few would dispute the characterization here. We have seen enormous changes in our lifetimes.

But the largest effects, in my view, are not about same-sex relationships. The vigorous campaign to, in the words of *Arcana Coelestia* 6203, “*get rid of external restraints and to make it allowable and smart, and at length even attractive and honorable*” has had a bigger effect on heterosexual relationship.

Estimates of the prevalence of same-sex relationships vary, but none of them include a very large portion of the population. By contrast, heterosexual relationships include the vast majority.

An unintended consequence of the campaign is that it has also legitimized departure from standards in heterosexual relationships. Adolescent sexual activity is no longer stigmatized or criticized. Cohabitation before marriage is extremely common. These attitudes strongly affect students both inside and outside of the New Church. Homosexuality does not threaten heterosexuality, it threatens sexual morality. Tough!

Causation is naturally hard to establish here. The causation may work the other way, for example, as suggested earlier, with increased acceptance of same-sex relationships being a consequence of sexual liberation in general.

There are other possible links. For example, the *Pew Research Center* reports that:

“By 2016, the median age at first marriage had reached its highest point on record: 29.5 years for men and 27.4 years for women.” (pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/13/5-facts-about-love-and-marriage/; April 13, 2017)

Up until the 1990’s the age at first marriage had been relatively stable since the 1890’s, hovering in the low 20s. What has happened in the past twenty-five years that could account for this dramatic change? The social acceptance of sex outside of marriage and cohabitation surely play a role here. Another consequence is a marked decrease in childbirth, as people delay having children until they are married, and of course there are then fewer children. The number of weddings of church couples in Bryn Athyn, for example, has declined significantly in the last twenty years.

Taking this speculation even further, these things have the effect of alienating people from religions of every kind, since every religion traditionally teaches against them. The number of young people aligning themselves with churches of almost every denomination has dramatically declined since the acceptance of homosexual relationships has become the majority view.

The main point here is that even though the acceptance of same-sex relationships involves relatively few people, the effects are greater than we realize.

The most important effects, though, go beyond any of these things. We have shown in this section that while the research is not consistent about the stability or increase in same-sex sexual behavior, the Heavenly Doctrines are unwavering in asserting the contagious nature of sexual immorality. The real question, though, is what happens then. Are we a happier nation as a result of these changes?

4. Myth #4 - A homosexual lifestyle can be stable, happy and fulfilling.

The declared purpose of the campaign urging acceptance of same-sex relationships is to ease people's pain, to foster loving connections, reduce bigotry and discrimination, and promote happiness. One slogan is simply "*Love wins.*"

Love absolutely wins. The Writings are clear about this (*Arcana Coelestia* 1950). The question is whether, according to the Doctrines, the campaign's purpose can be fulfilled. Is this a lifestyle that can be stable, happy, and fulfilling?

In the eyes of many people it is ridiculous and hurtful to question this. Many of us today know individuals and couples who exemplify this stability and happiness. It is a view that is regularly asserted and portrayed in popular culture.

The same, for that matter, can be said about people who in other ways may have wandered from traditional sexual morality. Everyone knows more than a few individuals who have colored outside the lines in one way or another, yet who are happy, productive, good people. Everyone has flaws, especially when it comes to the rocky shores of intimate human relationships.

Yet the Writings are specific about the ways that immorality inhibits happiness and peace.

One of the hypocrisies of Western Christianity in dealing with the issue of same-sex relationships is the extremity of the stigma that has been attached to it. It has not been viewed as just another form of illicit sex, but as a singularly repellent one calling for extreme measures, from emasculation to execution. The brutality of this treatment, which continues today in some parts of the world, is surely one of the factors exacerbating the issue and motivating the energetic campaign for acceptance. The Heavenly Doctrines, however, while not ignoring the gravity of the issue, do not separate it from the many other possible sexual behaviors that are spiritually harmful and which trouble the human race.

According to the Writings, it is not that what is called "*sexual freedom*" is discouraged by religion because the Lord hates it, or because He hates its practitioners. He loves everyone. It is discouraged because it is inherently harmful. It robs people of happiness. Far from increasing love and joy, the unfettered pursuit of our sexual interests is ultimately unsatisfying and painful.

This applies to some extent to most people, because most people have experienced issues of their own making of one kind or another when it comes to romantic and sexual relationships. The fact that most people enjoy apparently healthy and loving relationships does not mean that they do not also experience the pains that so often accompany this challenging area of life. We are not able to judge the quality of other people's relationship with much accuracy. As we read:

"There are marriages in which conjugal love is not apparent and yet exists, and there are marriages in which conjugal love appears to exist and yet does not." *Conjugal Love* 531

In light of this, here are five sadly painful reasons from the Heavenly Doctrines why, despite the appearance to many, homosexual relationships are unlikely to be happy ones.

1. Painful reality #1 - According to the Writings, conjugal love is the precious jewel of human life, and it is only possible between one man and one woman.

New Church members have sometimes thought that the only issue with same-sex relationships is that they can't have conjugal love, as if conjugal love is a special extra gift conferred on some select relationships. Its lack would then only mean that the relationship is ordinary, not special in a uniquely New Church way. But this isn't the way that the Writings describe it.

New Church teachings portray conjugal love as an essential ingredient, not an optional luxury:

"To the degree that a person's conjugal love wanes and is lost, his character approaches that of an animal. The reason is that the more a person is in a state of conjugal love, the more spiritual he is; and the more spiritual he is, the more human he is." *Conjugal Love* 230

That is, according to this, there is not an acceptable second option to conjugal love. There is no happiness or heaven without this precious jewel of human life. Many passages state that heaven and the church do not exist with anyone except with those who are in true conjugal love:

*“Heaven and the church are with **all who are in true conjugal love and with no others**. For heaven and the church is the marriage of good and truth, from which is conjugal love. And this is why through conjugal love man has peace, which is inmost joy of heart from a complete safety from the hells and a protection from infestations of the evil and falsity therefrom.”* *Apocalypse Explained* 999

*“The church, with its truths and goods, **can by no means exist with any others than those who live in truly conjugal love**; for the marriage of good and truth is the church with man.”* *CORONIS* 44.6

*“**Marriage is heaven itself, because all there live in a state of conjugal love**, each in his own degree. That that love is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven, because by it an angel becomes an embodiment of love, because those who are there possess a marriage of good and truth. And that therefore heaven is likened to marriage and a wedding, and hell to adultery and licentious liaisons.”* *Last Judgment (posthumous)* 346

*“Heaven is formed upon love truly conjugal, inasmuch as conjugal love is from the conjunction of good and truth, and therefore is of heaven and of the essence of heaven; which [essence] is that conjunction. Wherefore, **they who do not possess the fundamental constituent of heaven**, because they have perceived delight in adulteries, **are not able to love their married partner, nor, consequently, to receive heaven**.”* *Spiritual Experiences* 5538

These passages point out that conjugal love is a requirement for entering heaven, which means that there is no real happiness without it.

Other passages explain further that conjugal love is only possible between one man and one woman:

“The law of Divine order (is) that it is not marriage unless it is a marriage of one man to one wife.” *Arcana Coelestia* 1907

“Genuine conjugal love is not possible except between two married to each other, that is, within the marriage of one man and one wife.” *Arcana Coelestia* 2740

“Chastity is ascribed only to monogamous marriages, or to marriages of one man with one wife.” *Conjugal Love* 138

“Only a Christian conjugal relationship is chaste. This is because truly conjugal love advances in a person in the same degree as the state of the church in him and because that love is from the Lord... By a Christian conjugal relationship we mean a marriage of one man with one wife.” *Conjugal Love* 142

“This union of souls is possible only in monogamous marriages or marriages of one man with one wife.” *Conjugal Love* 482

“True conjugal love is impossible except between couples, that is, in the marriage of one man with one wife.” *De Conjugio* 119

If only people who have conjugal love can be in heaven, whether their union is achieved in this world or in the next, and if conjugal love is only possible between one man and one woman, this argues against the likelihood of genuinely stable, happy, same-sex sexual unions.

2. Painful reality #2 – According to the Writings, same-sex romantic relationships are ultimately unsatisfying because they cannot unite two people interiorly.

This reason follows from the previous one. Same-sex friendships can be deep, beautiful, valuable, loving, even intimate, among both men and women. They are important, and an essential ingredient of a happy

community. The love between men and the love between women is real and good. But whereas the romantic love between a man and a woman has the potential to unite them into one angel in a deeply satisfying and loving marriage, the same is not possible in any same-sex relationship, according to the Writings:

“These loves, namely, the love between two men and the love between two women, do not enter deeply into their hearts, but remain outside and only touch. Thus these loves do not unite the two of them interiorly.” Conjugal Love 55

“They do not unite them interiorly.” Even though men can experience “falling in love” with other men, and women can do the same, the implication of this teaching is that the resulting relationship will inevitably be unsatisfying in the long run. While this may also be true for many heterosexual relationships, this passage asserts it clearly with same-sex relationships.

This means that same-sex romantic relationships are more likely to be short-lived than heterosexual ones. The result is that someone in this situation is likely to have a hard time finding someone to love for an extended period, more likely to be hurt by infidelities, and more likely to experience heartbreak and loneliness.

3. Painful reality #3 – According to the Writings, illicit sexual activity associates you with unkind and cruel people.

Many passages in the Heavenly Doctrines describe a remarkable and terrible connection between illicit sexual activity and a proclivity for unkind and cruel behavior. See Appendix 3 for an extended treatment of the subject summarized here.

“It is a surprising fact that people who have been cruel during their lifetime have also been the worst adulterers.” Arcana Coelestia 824

The Writings assert that the negative aspects of sex and violence are fundamentally the same thing. According to many passages, one leads to the other. *“The spheres of adultery and cruelty are one. This I know from experience.”* (Spiritual Experiences 3319). One passage makes the statement that *“the result of a single adulterous act is a proneness to cruelty”* (Spiritual Experiences 3598).

This relationship between illicit sexuality and cruelty is mentioned many times in the Writings:

“Those who do not regard adulteries as criminal, but delight in them, are also cruel in the highest degree. For they are opposed to conjugal love, hence to true love, and therefore are smitten with self-love. They hold others in hatred unless they adore them, and they desire to practice cruelty upon them.” Spiritual Experiences 2666

“There are those who not only practice cruelty, but also delight in adulteries, so that nothing is more pleasant to them. They are wholly contrary to conjugal love, for they delight in adulteries, and hence are contrary to love of the neighbor, for one follows from the other: wherefore they are cruel.” Spiritual Experiences 2656

“Those who are in the love of self...at last love to rage against their neighbor; and the same, if they are also adulterers, become cruel.” Arcana Coelestia 7370

“Therefore, also, they are adulterers and at the same time are cruel, cruelty thus conjoins itself with such conjugal love. In a word, the spheres of adulteries and cruelties are one, together with such lasciviousness as appears to be conjugal love. This I know from experience.” Spiritual Experiences 3319

Why should there be this connection between sexuality and cruelty? The following passage, which describes the delight of adultery, offers this explanation:

“It is the delight of hatred which, becoming a fire in the extremes and being injected into the lusting flesh, becomes for the moment the delight of adultery - the soul in which the hatred lies concealed then withdrawing itself. It is for this reason that hell is called adultery, and also that adulterers are desperately unmerciful, savage and cruel. This, then, is the infernal marriage.” Apocalypse Explained 991

These might not be assertions that many people would take seriously today. In an era and culture where successful intimate relationships are increasingly challenging to find, where marriages are often unhappy and short, and where sexual behavior outside of marriage is common, most people know many who are technically adulterers in this sense. These friends do not appear to be any more prone to cruelty than anyone else. If anything, many of the cruelest people would appear to be the self-righteous individuals who may be technically blameless but who are insensitive, self-centered, and judgmental.

Nevertheless, the Writings assert that unkindness and cruelty go hand-in-hand with illicit sexual behavior, and that it is common in the Christian world:

“Indeed the world called, Christian, is in this respect worse than the antediluvian, that it accounts adulteries as nothing. When adulteries are accounted as nothing, it follows that they have nothing which savors of love, and that they wish to destroy societies because they are contrary to them. Hence too they become cruel, which is inseparable from adulteries; for the result of a single adulterous act is a proneness to cruelty.” *Spiritual Experiences* 3598

The sad implication of these passages is that happiness and stability of sexual relationships is found only in a faithful marriage between a man and a woman. It suggests that unhappy experiences will be common in all forms of adulterous relationships, that potential partners will often be thoughtless and unkind, that the search for a loving, intimate connection will be difficult and frustrating.

The greater implication of the passages for everyone living in this post-Christian world is that this dynamic is the cause of much of the unkind behavior that many people experience every day. Hence the popular appeal of slogans such as “*Love wins*” and “*Hate has no home here.*”

4. Painful reality #4 – According to the Writings, illicit sexual love is not actually love.

Love truly does win, and hate ought to have no home here. But when it comes to the fulfillment of our desires, and the pursuit of the objects of our affection, love can be hard to recognize, and hatred and anger often lie beneath the surface. There is almost nothing that can set people off like romance gone wrong. Intense rage, violent actions, deep depression, suicide, murder, and every form of abuse can be sparked by the frustrations and conflicts of intimate relationships. According to the Writings, this is especially true of illicit, or adulterous, sexual ones:

*“The love of adultery is the fundamental love of all infernal loves, which are in themselves not loves, but hatreds. Consequently, hatreds of every kind gush forth from the love of adultery, both against God and against the neighbor, and in general against every good and truth of heaven and the church. **Therefore all unhappiness belongs to adultery.**”* *Apocalypse Explained* 993

Building a marriage can be challenging under any circumstances. But the message of the Heavenly Doctrines is that intimate relationships are much more challenging when people depart from the teachings of the church, follow their own ideas and desires, and engage in relationships not supported by the teachings of the Word. The result, according to these teachings, is unhappiness.

The nature of these relationships can follow a pattern similar to the one described in this passage about men who look for pleasure in a succession of many different women:

*“The lust (of variety) involves a love for the opposite sex and at the same time a loathing for it. It involves a love for the opposite sex because the opposite sex provides the variety, and it involves a loathing for the sex because once men of this character have tasted any of them they cast them away and go lusting after others. **This obscene lust burns for a new woman, but after its heat is spent grows cold to her; and the coldness is loathing.**”* *Conjugial Love* 508

This pattern is a common one when it comes to natural desires, because natural desires are temporary by their very nature. They quickly grow tired of one thing and move on to another, caring nothing for what they were so recently eager for. No one viewing pornography is satisfied with one picture. There is no actual love there.

This suggests that illicit relationships will often be temporary, and even if they are not the question of boredom and the desire to move on will never be far from the surface. Beyond this, the potential for unpleasant interactions, and even violence, is also suggested in these passages.

5. Painful reality #5 – According to the Writings, immorality leads to impotence.

Recent articles in American newspapers discuss a decline in sexual activity in the United States:

R“Millennials are having less sex than any generation in 60 years.” *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2016

“It’s not just you. Americans are having less sex” *New York Times*, March 8, 2017

“The paper, published in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, showed a drop across gender, race, region, education level and work status. One factor is the higher percentage now of unpartnered people, who tend to have less sex than partnered ones. But a major driver is a steady fall in the rate of sexual activity for people who are married or living with partners.” (“Americans are having less sex than they once did” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2017)

There are many possible reasons for this kind of thing. It would seem to be a surprising development in a world often seen as being awash in sexuality. But there is a curious teaching of the Writings, not well-known in the church, which may offer an explanation, whether these particular reports represent an actual trend or not.

Earlier in this paper we referenced *Divine Providence 296*, which describes the way that desires increase in the measure of their practice. Interestingly, the passage states that illicit sex is an exception to this rule:

“That the delight of evil grows by increments is something people know from experience with thefts, robberies, lootings, retaliation and revenge, exercises of tyranny, the pursuit of material gains, and other evils... **The same would be the case with adulterous affairs if it had not been provided that that evil decrease in potency in the measure of the abuse.** But still there remains with many the delight of thinking and talking about such affairs, and if nothing more, still the lust to touch.” *Divine Providence 296*

That is, **whereas most evils become more exciting and interesting as we repeat them, the opposite is the case with illicit sex. Instead, it has been “provided that that evil decrease in potency in the measure of the abuse.” In other words, it becomes less and less stimulating.** Eventually, according to the Writings, the result is impotence.

“**Those who persist in polygamy in course of time become so weak and impotent that they become disgusted with marriage, for this is the effect of lasciviousness.**” *De Conjugio 47*

“This is the effect of lasciviousness.” That is, this is the effect of every form of sexual activity that is not consistent with conjugal love. A number passages describe this, especially as people’s lot in the next life:

“The excellence of a person's life depends on his conjugal love... But because not a particle of conjugal love remains in people of the character described here, and so nothing of the inmost element of life, therefore their lot after death is a miserable one.... They told me that they loathe the opposite sex in consequence of their having become impotent.” *Conjugal Love 510*

“Take care, therefore, not to boast any further of your licentiousness, thinking that in this you are a man more manly than others. I predict to you that you will become impotent, even so that you scarcely know where your masculinity lies.” *Conjugal Love 477*

“Their final lot is that from the extreme impotence to which they are at length reduced they become emptied of all the fire and light of life.” *Apocalypse Explained 1003*

“Men, however, whose aim in marriage was adultery, and who subsequently lived with adulteresses, form such a distaste for their wives that they run away from them. They eventually become impotent and their thought and speech become lifeless in the company of wives, and each one especially in the company of his own wife.” *De Conjugio 9*

These passages seem especially to be speaking about impotence in the next life. The same principle would affect people in this world as well, but differently with each person, since many physical and psychological factors are also involved.

Clearly this is speaking most directly about men, but the same phenomenon affects women in their own specific ways. Both men and women can become bored with sex in the absence of true love, leading either to a search for greater stimulation or to disillusionment with the whole game. In either case, there is the potential for a great deal of unhappiness and pain.

Is this a lifestyle that can be stable, happy, and fulfilling?

As said above, in the eyes of many people it is ridiculous and hurtful to question this. Many of us today know individuals and couples who exemplify this stability and happiness, and it is a view that is regularly asserted and portrayed in popular culture. Yet in the passages above, and in many others, the Writings are specific about the ways that sexual behaviors and desires that are not consistent with conjugal love inhibit people's happiness and peace. The five ways that they ruin our lives observed above are only a few of the many that could be listed.

These passages are not specifically about homosexual behaviors. They are about behaviors covering a wide array of sexual practices, behaviors that most people, good and bad, have either engaged in at one time or lusted after. These passages apply to all of us, as most people will acknowledge. Homosexuality is just a subset of these behaviors. Homosexuality is not the opposite of heterosexuality. It is one of the many practices that are the opposite of chaste morality or conjugal love.

Same-sex behaviors are the topic here, not because they should be singled out for special disapproval, but only because so many people assert that they are not immoral or harmful, and further, that those who do not accept this are no better than racists and bigots.

The goal here is to demonstrate what the Heavenly Doctrines say, in order to help people to avoid pain and suffering, and to urge us to repent of these things in our lives. Everyone has flaws and there is no flaw that can't be forgiven when a person repents.

Social commentary often takes note of the pain that exists with the LGBTQ community, leading to symptoms of isolation and depression, to addiction, to violent persecution and to suicide. The popular solution to address this pain advocates acceptance and integration. This combines a social campaign for public acceptance with a legal campaign to change laws and make discrimination an offense. But if the pain is actually inherent in all of the many varieties of what the Writings call "licentious love" then the campaign for an inclusive society in this respect will have the opposite effect. The pain will increase.

Conclusion

I am not personally in any position to correct people's views on this controversial topic. I have no special expertise or knowledge of the subject. My view, however, is that the Heavenly Doctrines are the source of a true perspective on the issue, and I believe that they conflict with popular views.

The point here has not been to discuss what the church teaches about homosexual practices. A set of passages about it can be found in the appendix in the following pages. Instead my thesis has been that there are a number of commonly held understandings about same-sex relationships that are contradicted in the Heavenly Doctrines. I believe that these misunderstandings frame our thinking in a way that guarantees confusion and conflict. My hope is that reframing the issue in a way that is consistent with New Church teachings will be helpful. Perpetuating myths is not.

Hate has no home here. A genuinely compassionate approach to the pain of our fellow human beings cannot ignore the causes of pain, even as it looks to avoid judgment.

Appendix 1: Passages about homosexuality

1. Christianity has long relied on a few Biblical references to support the idea that homosexuality is wrong.

There are quite a few Bible passages that touch on the subject of homosexuality, but a few in particular have been commonly referenced by Christians:

Leviticus 18:22 “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.”

Genesis 19:4 “The men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. 5 And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.’”

1 Corinthians 6:9 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Timothy 1:9 “The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers.”

Romans 1:26 “...vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

Although most Christians have found these references, plus a few others, to be convincing, they are explained away, and even mocked, by people who disagree that homosexuality is wrong. These arguments can easily be found on the internet by searching on words such as “homosexuality” and “Bible.”

Do the teachings of the New Church shed light on this? This article discusses passages in the Writings from such books as *Conjugal Love* and the *Arcana Coelestia* on this topic.

2. Homosexuality is not mentioned explicitly in *Conjugal Love*

The chapter in *Conjugal Love* on adultery (478-500) does not mention homosexuality, but dwells on the kinds of things that are more common roadblocks to conjugal love. People sometimes think that this omission means that homosexuality is not a form of adultery, and that it is not mentioned in the Writings.

In one sense the term *adultery* describes only “*lust with the wife or husband of another*” (CL 444). Other sexual disorders are given other names, such as fornication and debauchery (CL 444). In a wider sense, however, adultery describes all the practices, and even the thoughts and desires, that are opposed to conjugal love. The explanation of the sixth commandment in True Christian Religion states that, “*In the natural sense, this commandment means not only not to commit adultery, but it refers also to willing and doing obscene things and thinking and speaking about lascivious things*” (TCR 313). The word *adultery* is therefore used to describe any sexual evil, whether it is child sexual abuse, bestiality, or any of the many sexual sins that are common in our world. In an even wider sense, all evils relate to adultery, since adultery is the fundamental love of hell, just as the love of marriage is the fundamental love of heaven (AE 981.2). Where does homosexuality fit here?

3. The Writings seem to call homosexuality “*sodomy*,” and link it with the incident at Sodom.

“*Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them.*” Genesis 19
“*Although in the following chapter it seems as if the evil of the worst adultery is meant by ‘Sodom,’ in the internal sense nothing else is meant than evil from the love of self...In the Word the abominations that well forth from the love of self are depicted by adulteries of various kinds.*” Arcana Coelestia 2220

“*They who apprehend the Word according to the sense of the letter alone, may suppose that by “Sodom” is*

meant a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature; but in the internal sense by “Sodom” is signified the evil of the love of self.” Arcana Coelestia 2322

Some have been misled by the wording of the above two passages into thinking that sodomy is not being condemned here. The passages simply say, however, that although you would expect the internal sense to treat of homosexuality, it actually treats of the love of self. This in no way exonerates homosexuality, since the passages call it “*the worst adultery*” and “*a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature.*” People are often unaware that the Latin superlative, used here, (*malum pessimi adulterii* - *evil of the worst adultery*), is different than the English superlative, meaning simply a very, very bad form of adultery, and not the worst possible form of adultery. There is no such thing as the absolute worst form of adultery, since evils can be indefinitely compounded. In the internal sense this corresponds to the love of dominion from the love of self, a correspondence that may indicate that homosexuality is more common in cultures that struggle with issues having to do with authority, control, and persecution. This is speculation, but it may suggest that a real solution to this problem would need to deal with these underlying issues and not just their sexual manifestation.

Many passages speak of sodomy and sodomites:

Spiritual Experiences 1977: “It was said to me that (those who share wives and husbands) were not far from being Sodomites, wherefore let those who are conscious to themselves of such a course of life beware, for they are not spared in the other life.”

Spiritual Experiences 2675: “CONCERNING SODOMY: There are those in the other life who have committed the sin of Sodom during life. In the other life they are treated most miserably. They are punished with infernal torments, which are so terrible that they can scarcely be described. Moreover they inhabit the region of the tail, where the feces are, because they are manure, and dwell in outhouses.”

Spiritual Experiences 3768: “These sexual acts were much more abominable than those of the Sodomites.”

Spiritual Experiences 3796: “They craftily suggested that they still had children, even though they shared wives. It was answered that Sodomites also have children; but how abominable this was, they knew full well.”

Spiritual Experiences 5939: “All degrees of criminality correspond to such things as are spiritual sins...Those who are in the love of self, and whose love is to rule over others, are Sodomites.

Spiritual Experiences 6096:” The following things correspond to the acts of adulteries in the next life:..Those in the highest degree of the love of ruling from the love of self, and not for the sake of use, are in Sodom.”

Apocalypse Explained 1006.2: “There are sodomitic hells for those who were in evils from a love of ruling over others from mere delight in ruling, and who were in no delight of use.”

TCR additions 9.12: “The hell of robbers and pirates smells like the carcasses of cows and sheep; the hell of murderers and assassins like a human corpse; likewise the hell of the Sodomites.”

De Conjugio 86 speaks of “adultery such as there was at Sodom; which is why they demanded the angels from Lot’s house.”

Last Judgment Posthumous 135 and Spiritual Experiences 4932 recount stories similar to Genesis 19, using the word “adultery” to describe what happened.

4. Is it possible that the word “sodomy” does not refer to consensual homosexuality, but only to homosexual rape?

The Writings clearly label what happened at Sodom as a form of adultery - “*adultery such as there was at Sodom; which is why they demanded the angels from Lot’s house*” (*De Conjugio 86*). A further question, however, is whether what happened at Sodom can be equated with homosexuality, since it seems that it would be more accurately described as attempted homosexual rape. Is it possible that when Swedenborg refers to sodomy and sodomites he is only speaking of those who commit homosexual rape? Is it possible that when Swedenborg speaks of the evil of Sodom as being “*the worst form of adultery*” (*AC 2220*) and “*a certain kind of foul behavior that is totally unnatural*” (*AC 2322*), he is referring to rape rather than the practice of homosexuality?

It is certainly possible to interpret these passages that way, but it is an unlikely interpretation. “*Sodomy*” and “*the sin of Sodom*” are terms that have universally been used to refer to homosexual practices, as much in

Swedenborg's day as today. The wealth of current literature on the subject of homosexuality shows that what we call "homosexuality" was normally called "sodomy" in eighteenth century England. For example:

- Quote from a book review: "Randolph Trumbach posits significant changes in sexual mores during the eighteenth century. His focus is on London. He argues that changes in male sexual behaviour were due to the rise of a perceived '*sodomite identity*' in urban locales during the early eighteenth century... The early eighteenth century saw the rise of a distinctive 'molly' subculture of men who defined themselves by their sexual interaction with other adult males like themselves and were perceived as a third, transgressive, gender. The imputation of being a *sodomite* came to be regarded as a deleterious slur upon manly reputation." (*Review of Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, by Randolph Trumbach. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.)
- Quote from 18th century newspaper account: "T R Y A L EXAMINATION and CONVICTION Of several Notorious Persons call'd *SODOMITES*, At GUILD-HALL on Monday the 20th of October, 1707. With a List of the Names of those that were Try'd & Convicted. On Monday the 20th of October, 1707, the Tryals of Will. Marriot, Ben. Buttler [sic], Thomas Lane, William Hubbins, John Williams, & W—H—d, & others who were upon Bail, came on at the Queens-Bench Bar at Guild-hall; where their several Indictments were Read, setting forth the Loathsomness [sic] of their Wicked Crimes of *Un-natural [sic] Leudness* with their own Sex, contrary to the order of Humane Nature, & that not having the Fear of God before their Eyes, did Commit, or attempt to Commit, *very filthy & unseemly Actions, not fit to be named in a Civilized Nation*; to which Indictments most of them pleaded not Guilty, and thereupon put them selves upon their Tryal.
- Accounts like the above are common in 18th century English news sources. Many examples can be found on the internet at a site titled: Rictor Norton (Ed.), *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. Updated 7 December 2008 <<http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/>>.

5. The Writings confirm the statement of Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13: "You shall not lie with a male as with a female. It is an abomination."

Other passages confirm that consensual homosexuality is a form of adultery, not relying on any reference to the Sodom story. Passages about what are called the "forbidden degrees", including Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13, say that the adulteries that these chapters and verses describe correspond to forms of the adulteration of good and truth, and call them "*foul conjunctions*", "*foul adulteries*", "*unmentionable sexual unions*", and "*abominable copulations*" (Apocalypse Explained 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, Arcana Coelestia 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, and Conjugal Love 519).

6. The passages about "secret evils not to be named" in Conjugal Love almost certainly refer to homosexuality.

"In some men the love of the sex cannot without harmful effects, be totally restrained from going out into fornication. In their case it gives rise to the origins of certain physical maladies and mental illnesses, **not to mention secret evils which are too unspeakable to be named.**" *Conjugal Love* 450

"By (limited fornication) adulteries are likewise guarded against, which are illicit affairs with married women, and also debaucheries, which are violations of virgins; **not to mention criminal acts too villainous to name.**" *Conjugal Love* 459.5

Homosexuality was commonly called the "*sin that cannot be named.*"

- Sir Edward Coke, famous English jurist (died 1634) called homosexuality "a detestable and abominable *sin among Christians not to be named*" (quoted in *Fletcher's Moral Responsibility*, Phila., 1967, p. 96).
- William Blackstone, in his "*Commentaries on the Laws of England*" wrote that sodomy is "*an offense of so dark a nature, the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature, a crime not fit to be named.*" (vol 4, 1769).
- "Few if any other major cultures have made homosexuality the primary and singular moral taboo it has long

been in western society: ‘*the sin that cannot be named,*’ ‘*the unmentionable vice,*’ ‘*the love that dare not speak its name.*’” *Same Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, by John Boswell, Random House, 1994, p. xxiii

- “‘In the whole world I believe there are no two sins more abominable than those that prevail among the Florentines’ commented Pope Gregory XI in 1376. ‘The first is their usury and infidelity... The second is *so abominable that I dare not mention it.*’ The sin the pope deftly avoided naming, using a standard euphemism for what the late medieval church deemed the most evil and dangerous of carnal vices, was, of course, the ‘*unspeakable*’ practice of sodomy.” *Forbidden Friendships – Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, by Michael Rocke, Oxford University Press, 1996, page 3
- The language of Victorian England was rife with “ridiculous euphemisms, evasions and circumlocutions, like ‘*the love that cannot speak its name* (homosexuality).’” *The Pleasures of the Past*, by David Cannadine, Norton, 1989, page 226
- “Even more than male sodomy, sodomy between females was ‘*the sin that cannot be named.*’” *Immodest Acts*, by Judith C. Brown, Oxford University Press, 1986 page 19
- “GABRIEL LAWRENCE was indicted for committing, with Thomas Newton, aged thirty Years, the heinous and detestable Sin of Sodomy, *not to be named among Christians*, July 20, 1725.” (*Select Trials at the Sessions-House, in the Old-Bailey, London, 1742, vol. 2, pp. 362-4.*)

7. Although passages about sodomy seem to refer exclusively to male homosexual relationships, other passages apparently refer to lesbian relationships.

“*Certain female spirits...removed themselves to the rear, saying they neither had had nor wished to have anything to do with men, but that they had lived among themselves without men...seeking a place where they might be alone by themselves, receding at length to the bounds of the universe... When they came to the bounds of the universe from behind, they then spoke with each other [saying], that there were no men present and that they might begin. But their obscenities were not shown me, except that there was a woman appareled like a man. There they were delighting themselves in abominable lewdness... What they at length become in the other life was also shown. They appear as bony skeletons. It was said that they thus lose everything vital.*” *Spiritual Experiences* 3895-3900

8. “The Christian conjugal alone is chaste.” Conjugal Love 142

Even if there were no specific passages about homosexuality in the Writings, it would be easy to conclude that it is contrary to order because of the overwhelming emphasis that the Writings give to conjugal love. No sex outside of marriage is consistent with order, and no marriage is possible except between two of the opposite sex (*Arcana Coelestia* 2740; *Conjugal Love* 48, 55, 423; *De Conjugio* 119). A desire for sex without the purpose of marriage and offspring is condemned (*Arcana Coelestia* 828; *Spiritual Experiences* 1202, 1976, 2704, 3924). Huge sections of the Writings are devoted to carefully defining the masculine and the feminine and the principles behind their union (*Arcana Coelestia* 2727-2758, *Heaven and Hell* 366-386, *Conjugal Love* 57-138, 156-183). No one but married pairs are permitted in heaven. Even sincere celibates are unable to enter heaven, but remain on its borders, because “*the sphere of perpetual celibacy infests the sphere of the love of marriage, which is the very sphere of heaven*” (*Conjugal Love* 54).

The testimony of the Writings is that supreme happiness resides in marriage, and everything that opposes marriage is condemned, because “*Conjugal love is the fundamental love of all loves* (*Arcana Coelestia* 3021, 3960, 5053, 9960; *Apocalypse Explained* 981, 993, 997; *Conjugal Love* 57, 58, 65, 67, 68, 71, 143, 203, 240, 457; *De Conjugio* 19), and “*Conjugal love is the precious treasure of human life*” (*Conjugal Love* 457).

As we have seen above, the Writings describe homosexuality as a form of adultery (*Arcana Coelestia* 2220, 2322, etc). But even without that description, conjugal love is by its own definition restricted to the union of two of the opposite sex (*Conjugal Love* 48, 55). Sexual unions between two of the same sex would fall outside of that definition. The idea that there is both a feminine and masculine aspect to each sex, suggesting a possible union between these in members of the same sex, is refuted, for “*nothing in the two sexes is the same, although there is nevertheless a capacity for conjunction in every detail. Indeed, masculinity in the male is masculine in*

every part, even in the least part of his body, and also in every idea of his thought, and in every bit of his affection. So, too, with femininity in the female” (Conjugal Love 33).

The point is that the prohibition of homosexuality does not rely on a few passages, but on the entire body of teachings about conjugal love. Conjugal love is heaven itself. Loves that lie outside of it also lie outside of heaven. According to the Writings, conjugal love is an essential part of what it means to be human (*Conjugal Love 230; Spiritual Experiences 2675*).

Judge not

Iwould add that homosexual sex acts are only one of many issues that people can be caught up in. It has not historically been among the most common forms of adultery in most cultures and as such receives no major attention in the Writings. Other forms of adultery pose a more likely threat to most marriages. Homosexuality is not a special class of evil, but a part of what many people in this day and age are subject to for a variety of reasons. The practices can be less grievous or more grievous depending on many factors. People are lured or even forced into these practices, sometimes from an early age, as is true with many evils. People have hereditary inclinations to them, just as all people do to a whole host of problematic predilections. The point of calling homosexuality evil is not to blame or condemn, but to point out the unhappiness that is inherent in it. This unhappiness is perpetuated when the practices are justified, and so it is mainly those attempts at justification that I am addressing. The Writings are clear that homosexuality does not offer eternal happiness, but rather unhappiness, to those who practice it.

Summary

To summarize, do the Writings speak of homosexuality? The answer depends on how you view thirty passages in the Writings that make reference to

- a. "sodomy" (*Spiritual Experiences 2675*);
- b. "sodomites" (*Spiritual Experiences 1977, 3768, 3796, 5939, 6096; Apocalypse Explained 1006.2; True Christian Religion additions 9.12*);
- c. "adultery such as there was at Sodom" (*De Conjugio 86; Last Judgment (post.) 135 and Spiritual Experiences 4932*);
- d. "evil of the worst adultery meant by Sodom" (*Arcana Coelestia 2220*);
- e. "a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature" (*Arcana Coelestia 2322*);
- f. "secret evils which are too unspeakable to be named" (*Conjugal Love 450, 459.5; Spiritual Experiences 1354, 4763*);
- g. "women delighting themselves in abominable lewdness" (*Spiritual Experiences 3895-3900*);
- h. The "forbidden degrees" of Leviticus 18, calling them "foul conjunctions", "foul adulteries", "unmentionable sexual unions", and "abominable copulations." (*Apocalypse Explained 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, Arcana Coelestia 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, and Conjugal Love 519*).

In addition to those passages, the answer also rests on many more passages that show that:

1. Conjugal love is required for entrance into heaven:

*“Heaven and the church are with **all who are in true conjugal love and with no others**. For heaven and the church is the marriage of good and truth, from which is conjugal love. And this is why through conjugal love man has peace, which is inmost joy of heart from a complete safety from the hells and a protection from infestations of the evil and falsity therefrom.” *Apocalypse Explained 999**

*“The church, with its truths and goods, **can by no means exist with any others than those who live in truly conjugal love**; for the marriage of good and truth is the church with man.” *CORONIS 44.6**

*“**Marriage is heaven itself, because all there live in a state of conjugal love, each in his own degree. That that love is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven, because by it an angel becomes an embodiment of love, because those who are there possess a marriage of good and truth. And that therefore heaven is***

likened to marriage and a wedding, and hell to adultery and licentious liaisons.” Last Judgment (posthumous) 346

*“Heaven is formed upon love truly conjugal, inasmuch as conjugal love is from the conjunction of good and truth, and therefore is of heaven and of the essence of heaven; which [essence] is that conjunction. Wherefore, **they who do not possess the fundamental constituent of heaven, because they have perceived delight in adulteries, are not able to love their married partner, nor, consequently, to receive heaven.**” Spiritual Experiences 5538*

“All the blessings of heaven flow from the delights of conjugal love, like sweet waters from a sweetly gushing spring.” Conjugal Love 316

“The atmosphere of conjugal love is the essential atmosphere of heaven. The atmosphere of conjugal love is the essential atmosphere of heaven because it descends from the heavenly marriage of the Lord and the church.” Conjugal Love 54

2. And that this love is only possible between one man and one woman:

“The law of Divine order (is) that it is not marriage unless it is a marriage of one man to one wife.” Arcana Coelestia 1907

“Genuine conjugal love is not possible except between two married to each other, that is, within the marriage of one man and one wife.” Arcana Coelestia 2740

“But no others come into that love and no others can be in it but those who go to the Lord and love the truths of the church and do the good things it teaches. No others come into this love but those who go to the Lord, because monogamous marriages, which are marriages of one man with one wife, correspond to the marriage of the Lord and the church, and they have their origin from the marriage between goodness and truth.” Conjugal Love 70

“Chastity is ascribed only to monogamous marriages, or to marriages of one man with one wife.” Conjugal Love 138

“Only a Christian conjugal relationship is chaste. This is because truly conjugal love advances in a person in the same degree as the state of the church in him and because that love is from the Lord... By a Christian conjugal relationship we mean a marriage of one man with one wife.” Conjugal Love 142

“This union of souls is possible only in monogamous marriages or marriages of one man with one wife.” Conjugal Love 482

“True conjugal love is impossible except between couples, that is, in the marriage of one man with one wife.” De Conjugio 119

If conjugal love is required in heaven, and if it is only possible between one man and one woman, then there is no homosexuality in heaven, and therefore no long-lasting happiness in homosexuality.

Appendix 2: One Effect of a Female Clergy

A look at the effect of a female clergy on church teaching.

A good example of how a female clergy would affect the General Church is given in a 2011 study for the Church Research Institute titled “*Female Clergy as Agents of Religious Change*” by Kati Niemelä (www.mdpi.com/journal/religions). She writes:

“I argue that the adoption of female clergy is one of the main factors that cause the Church to change its practices, policies and theological orientation... The research shows that clergywomen are changing the Church in a clearly more liberal direction. They do it in various areas of church life: they change the perception of faith and dogma, the policies of the Church as well as daily practices in parishes. Clergymen are notably more traditional in their orientation, even young clergymen. Therefore it is especially the female clergy who serve as agents of religious change in the Church.”

Many people in the General Church might welcome religious change, and especially a liberalizing of church teachings. Numerous studies confirm that female clergy are far more liberal than their male counterparts (*for example: Clergy and the Politics of Gender, by Melissa M. Deckman, Sue E. S. Crawford, Laura R. Olson and John C. Green, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Dec., 2003), pp. 621-631*).

But what does the liberalization of church teachings mean?

The concept of liberalization comes into play especially when there are socially controversial issues. Many teachings in any church will exist in tension with the changing social, moral and spiritual thinking of popular culture. In America today these tensions especially surround the areas of sex and marriage, and they are also common in other areas of thought. Within a church, liberalism typically advocates in favor of newer or more popular thinking, and against traditional religious ideas. This means that religious liberals are skeptical of traditional biblical thought, and favor current popular or scholarly thought in areas such as sex, marriage, and social justice. Sometimes these liberal ideas are beneficial and lead to positive change and reform. But in the culture of the fallen church the trends bearing on spiritual things will usually conflict with New Church teachings. They often promote the acceptance of behaviors that are traditionally prohibited. These trends also focus attention on objections to religious teachings as outmoded, discriminatory, harsh and unfair.

It follows that these tensions would surround particular New Church teachings. For example, there are differences of opinion about topics such as those named in the following list. Views often diverge along conservative/liberal lines with respect to each of these topics:

1. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage
2. Divorce and remarriage
3. Premarital sex, virginity, and cohabitation prior to marriage
4. Marriages between people of different religions
5. The validity of the teachings in the second part of Conjugal Love
6. Is a person's soul from the father?
7. Should God be portrayed as male?
8. The eternity of hell
9. Just wars
10. The death penalty
11. The accuracy of statements about the spiritual state of the peoples of various cultures and religions

Some of these issues are similar to ones existing in other churches, others are peculiar to the New Church. Some are more controversial than others. The difference, though, is that whereas most Christians rely on statements from the Old and New Testaments, or on didactic church tradition and doctrine, the New Church relies on the Heavenly Doctrines, which are more specific and explanatory. There are explicit teachings about all of these issues. Although there are differences of opinion about them even within the clergy, I expect that the General Church clergy would be fairly united about most of them.

How do female clergy in the New Church respond to these issues? The evidence that I am aware of, from discussions online, the statements and articles of General Church women who have sought ordination in the General Church and have subsequently been ordained in other churches, and from personal conversations, indicates that the experience in the New Church would be consistent with that of other churches mentioned above. Women would be a liberalizing force in the clergy.

I believe that this is the overall message of passages in the Writings that are critical of women's involvement in doctrinal leadership. It is not that women lack any abilities, that their sermons and research are inferior, or that they cannot perform any particular aspect of ministry as well as or better than men can. It is simply that female clergy consistently take liberal positions on controversial issues, and this has a significant effect on every area of church practice.

Most of these hot-button issues are seldom if ever discussed in sermons and classes, since they tend to polarize and offend people. But the thinking and reasoning that are behind them affect everything. Most especially they challenge our willingness to be guided by the Word when its teachings are hard to accept. They challenge the core General Church principle that the Writings are the Word of God and our authority in all spiritual issues.

Some General Church members have voiced frustration that although the General Church clergy seems to be in substantial agreement that the Writings do not support women in the clergy, there seems to be little agreement as to exactly what the issue is. I think that this is it.

Do the Writings describe female theologians as liberal theologians?

Arcana Coelestia 266, 568, 8994, Conjugal Love 125, Spiritual Experiences 436, 4940, and 5936, and other passages as well, use surprisingly sharp language to indicate that there are issues surrounding women's doctrinal leadership in the church. But what are these issues?

I believe that these passages say that a female clergy has a stronger tendency than a male clergy to take liberal positions on doctrinal issues in defiance of the Word's teachings. Women ministers are more sensitive to people's needs and popular thought, and less sensitive to the need to adhere stringently to what the Writings teach. They are readier to de-emphasize strictly Scriptural texts in favor of ideas founded on information that is more accessible, tangible and appealing. This has a definite upside, and women can help ministers in this area. They are indispensable team members in all areas of ministry. But as preachers and pastors, according to *Spiritual Experiences* 5936, women ministers would lead the church to be "*sensual in the last degree,*" believing little except what can be empirically demonstrated, or what is popularly accepted.

This line of thought begins in the assertion that "*the female disposition and make-up is such that the will or desire reigns rather than understanding. Every one of their fibres runs in that direction; and it is their very nature*" (*Arcana Coelestia* 568). Many passages make similar statements.

This is what is noted in *Spiritual Experiences* 436:

"those who let themselves be led along by their desires, and even though they see and acknowledge truths, nevertheless go back on them, drawn by their yearnings. Thus they go forth into the field of understanding and recognize [truth], but being drawn by their desire, fall back into opposing it. This is especially applicable to women, in whom desires normally take precedence, when they join in like men in matters regarding the doctrines of faith."

There is not a problem of understanding. They understand the truth perfectly well, but are attracted to more intuitive alternatives. Both men and women do this, but the passage goes out of its way to single out women.

This same issue is the one noted in *Arcana Coelestia* 8994:

"Those who are spiritually perceptive have a liking for women with an affection for truths, but not for women who concentrate on gaining knowledge. For it is in keeping with Divine order for men to know things and for women purely to have an affection for them.... This also is why those of old said that women

must keep silent in the Church.”

This makes it sound like there is a problem with women’s ability to grasp religious knowledge, which is the topic here. It has nothing to do with that, but is rather about their disinclination to view it dispassionately. This is normally a strength, not a weakness, but “*spiritually perceptive*” people understand that people who concentrate on gaining religious knowledge need to keep a balanced view of it.

The reason behind this issue is explained in this passage:

*“It is masculine to perceive from the intellect, and feminine to perceive from love. Moreover, the intellect also perceives those sorts of matters which transcend the body and the world - it being the nature of intellectual and spiritual sight to move in that direction - while **love does not perceive beyond what it feels**. When it does, its perception draws on its union with the intellect of a man, a union established from creation. For the intellect has to do with light, and love with warmth...”* *Conjugial Love 168*

This points to the importance of husbands and wives being a team, and the effect that men and women have on each other generally. The Writings say quite a bit about masculine and feminine abilities.

Higher light and higher warmth

The comments that the Writings make about women and doctrine are also explained in *Conjugial Love 175*, when it says that “*Some people also suppose that women can raise the sight of their understanding into the same realm of light that men can and see things on the same high level.*”

Most people assume that by “*higher light*” the Writings, in passages like this one and CL 188, mean greater intellectual ability. This makes it appear that the Writings say that men are smarter than women. By contrast the “*higher warmth*” that they assign to women does not seem especially valuable, because it just seems to mean something like “stronger desire”, which can be taken any number of ways, many of which are negative.

But the terms “*higher light*” and “*higher warmth*” are terms that have specific meanings that are used throughout the Writings. It is not about intellectual ability or strong desires. The meanings are defined in *Conjugial Love 188*, but I think that other passages give them more clarity.

For example, *Conjugial Love 57* makes it clear that the issue is not intellectual capacity but separation from the will. The passage states that the sight of a person’s judgment is raised “*by withdrawing this sight from the senses and elevating it into a higher light*” (*Conjugial Love 57*).

Apocalypse Explained 1170 and *True Christianity 79* explain it this way:

*“The fact is this, that nothing except the will destroys the understanding... The understanding is destroyed by the will in those who are in evils of life when the two act as one, and not when they do not act as one. They act as one when people think by themselves from their love, but they do not act as one when they are with others. When they are with others they conceal and thus set aside their will's own love; and **when this is set aside the understanding is raised up into higher light.**”* *Apocalypse Explained 1170*

“Our intellects are capable of being in that angelic light as long as our physical loves are removed - loves that belong to the physical world and favor it and its nature, and loves that belong to the body and favor it and its sense of self.” *True Christianity 79; cf. Divine Love and Wisdom 267*

The understanding is raised into higher light when people “*set aside their will's own love*” or “*as long as our physical loves are removed.*”

What *Conjugial Love 175* calls men’s ability to raise their understanding into “*higher light*” is basically just a greater inclination to deal with information dispassionately, looking at the facts apart from their own opinion. The “*higher warmth*” that women possess is a complementary inclination, described in *Conjugial Love 211*:

“A person becomes wise as the inner perceptions of their mind are opened, because by their opening the thoughts of their understanding are raised into a higher light and the affections of their will into a higher

warmth - the higher light being wisdom, and the higher warmth a love for wisdom.” Conjugal Love 211

This is saying that whereas the “*higher light*” becomes wisdom, because it is removed from a person’s own will, the “*higher warmth*” is a greater recognition and appreciation for this quality. These two qualities are shared by both men and women, but the one is more pronounced in men and other in women.

Men are not smarter than women, as everyone knows nowadays. They are simply more inclined than women are to deal with information dispassionately. This is a quality that women appreciate in men, and men appreciate the inverse quality in women. This is one of the things that makes living and working in community with the opposite sex so satisfying and functional, and one of the reasons why each sex needs the other.

Sensual in the last degree

*“Women who think in the way men do on religious subjects, and talk much about them, and still more if they preach in meetings, do away with the feminine nature... They also begin to develop a tendency, as regards the thoughts, to take up with crazes; which takes place because the affection, being then destroyed, causes the intellectual to be crazy....**In a word, they become sensual in the last degree.**”* *Spiritual Experiences 5936*

The idea that “*women who preach*” become “*sensual in the last degree*” is counterintuitive to almost everyone. Why would anyone whose goal is to preach the Word of God become “*sensual*”? Yet it is consistent with the idea that female clergy are a strongly liberalizing force within the church. The Writings teach in many places that the church, and Christianity in general, has moved, and continues to move, away from what the Word teaches, placing its faith in empirical science and other forms of social research instead. This is what it means to become “*sensual in the last degree*” as in this passage:

*“Those who become bones, when they argue, scarcely dispute any otherwise than whether a thing is, or is not. It is hence plain, that the greatest part of the learned, within the Church, become bones. **They are those who are sensual in the last degree;** and in this state also, at the present day, is the Church. Hence its end.”* *Spiritual Experiences 5141*

This is saying that the church is at an end in part because it is skeptical about Divine Revelation as a source of valid information. Instead people base their thinking on sources of information grounded in scientific and social research, as well as on popular thought. These sources of information, however, have little to say about spirituality or conjugal love.

This is not to say that a liberal clergy would oppose marriage or promote adultery. What it is saying is that skepticism about the teachings of divine revelation, and resistance to its plain teachings about marriage and sexuality, have the effect of loosening the societal bonds governing sexual behavior. And we read:

“It is wisdom to restrain one’s love for the opposite sex, and madness to let it go unchecked.” *Conjugal Love 446*

It is madness to let it go unchecked because immorality has a corrosive effect on society, and, ironically, women are the primary victims. Declining morality means that intimate relationships are harder to find and sustain, people become isolated and lonely, more children grow up in unstable and unhappy families, pornography increases, women are treated as sexual objects, child abuse increases, and there is less respect for the genuine contributions of women to society.

Marriage is by no means the only thing impacted by these trends. A diminished emphasis on divine revelation has an effect on every aspect of religious teaching. In an effort to appeal to current sensibilities, church leaders will look for programs, ideas and practices that are more in line with popular thinking and cultural norms, and move away from teachings from the Word. The overall effect is to minimize language and teaching that is critical of immorality, and increase the acceptance of behaviors that the Word does not accept as allowable.

Accepting behaviors as allowable that are prohibited in the Word

The point here is that the current trend in Western Christianity advocating the equality of women in the priesthood has an inherent connection to the acceptance of immoral sexual practices. The reason is that

female clergy members consistently take positions on controversial issues that are more liberal than most male clergy members do. These positions include the acceptance of immoral behaviors related to sex and marriage - from divorce, to virginity before marriage, to homosexuality. This would vitiate the core General Church principle that the Writings are the Word. It would lead us to accept behaviors that the Word prohibits, rejecting or minimizing what the Writings teach, and embracing popular and scholarly views that appear to be more inclusive and compassionate.

Appendix 3: Sex and Violence

The remarkable connection between adultery and cruelty

It is a surprising fact that people who have been cruel during their lifetime have also been the worst adulterers. Arcana Coelestia 824

When King David took Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, Nathan the prophet told him that because of it “*the sword shall never depart from your house*” (II Samuel 12.10). After that, David’s household experienced one violent and cruel incident after another – Amnon’s rape of Tamar, his murder by Absalom, and Absalom’s civil war against David. Nathan’s words indicate that these incidents sprang from David’s adultery. The Writings make it clear that, although most people don’t realize it, this same causal connection can affect the life of anyone.

Sex and violence. The words are often used together, but few realize how interconnected they really are. A remarkable assertion of the Writings is that the negative aspects of sex and violence are fundamentally the same thing. Furthermore, according to the Writings, one leads to the other. “*In a word, the spheres of adultery and cruelty are one. This I know from experience.*” (Spiritual Experiences 3319).

The words “*sex and violence*” are not synonymous with “*adultery and cruelty.*” Sexual love within marriage carries with it the highest use and the greatest delight (Conjugal Love 68). Violence also has its place when employed defensively for protection against an attacking enemy (Divine Providence 252). Adultery and cruelty, however, are exclusively negative. They describe precisely what people fear in sex and violence: that depicting sexual things or practicing sex outside of marriage is harmful to marriage, and that depicting or engaging in violence leads to cruel attitudes and behaviors – attitudes and behaviors that hurt people.

My reason for writing this is that I have been struck by the implications of passages in the Heavenly Doctrines that link adultery and cruelty. One passage, for example, makes the statement that “*the result of a single adulterous act is a proneness to cruelty*” (Spiritual Experiences 3598).

What does it mean that adulterous acts make a person more prone to cruelty? It follows that there is an unkindness and cruelty inherent in adultery because the adulterer must know that it is hurtful to their spouse and family. The more a person practices and justifies adultery, the less they may seem to care about its effects on their loved ones. The passage has the added meaning, however, that a person who commits adultery becomes increasingly prone to act generally in ways that are hurtful to others. This is not an obvious result of adultery, and it is a remarkable concept.

Consider what this teaching means. It implies that the forms of adultery that creep into our lives can have a profound effect on us. By adultery we mean not just extramarital sex but all sexual things that are opposed to conjugal love (Conjugal Love 425), especially when they are justified as something permissible (Conjugal Love 423). The implication is that to the extent that these things are present in our lives, a tendency to unkind and hurtful behavior will also be present. The truth is that all evils are related, just as all goods are related – but the relationships frequently are not apparent to our worldly eyes.

The relationship between adultery and cruelty

The relationship between adultery and cruelty is mentioned many times in the Writings:

Those who do not regard adulteries as criminal, but delight in them, are also cruel in the highest degree. For they are opposed to conjugal love, hence to true love, and therefore are smitten with self-love. They hold others in hatred unless they adore them, and they desire to practice cruelty upon them. Spiritual Experiences 2666

There are those who not only practice cruelty, but also delight in adulteries, so that nothing is more pleasant to them. They are wholly contrary to conjugal love, for they delight in adulteries, and hence are contrary to love of the neighbor, for one follows from the other: wherefore they are cruel. Spiritual Experiences 2656

Those who are in the love of self...at last love to rage against their neighbor; and the same, if they are also adulterers, become cruel. Arcana Coelestia 7370

Therefore, also, they are adulterers and at the same time are cruel, cruelty thus conjoins itself with such conjugal love. In a word, the spheres of adulteries and cruelties are one, together with such lasciviousness as appears to be conjugal love. This I know from experience. Spiritual Experiences 3319

Why should there be such a connection between adultery and cruelty? The following passage, which describes the delight of adultery, explains it in no uncertain terms:

It is the delight of hatred which, becoming a fire in the extremes and being injected into the lusting flesh, becomes for the moment the delight of adultery-the soul in which the hatred lies concealed then withdrawing itself. It is for this reason that hell is called adultery, and also that adulterers are desperately unmerciful, savage and cruel. This, then, is the infernal marriage. Apocalypse Explained 991

According to this passage, the delight of hatred is the essence of the delight of adultery. It follows from this that any form of adultery would also involve a tendency to various kinds of hateful behavior. This is even more clear from the consideration that, just as conjugal love is the fundamental of all heavenly loves, adultery is the foundation of hell itself.

The love of adultery is the fundamental love of all infernal loves, which are in themselves not loves, but hatreds. Consequently hatreds of every kind gush forth from the love of adultery, both against God and against the neighbor, and in general against every good and truth of heaven and the church. Therefore all unhappiness belongs to adultery. Apocalypse Explained 993

Passages like this perhaps explain why many religious people are willing to make such an issue of sexual indiscretions that are routinely accepted in western culture. The truth is that the harm that adultery causes is not limited to the obvious hurt and embarrassment of those directly affected. The Writings state that those who are adulterers at heart (as opposed to those who may have committed foolish acts that they regret and do not repeat), also at heart wish to destroy society, a wish they are unlikely even to be aware of:

Adulterers are in the desire of destroying society. Many of them are cruel, and thus in heart they are opposed to charity and mercy; laughing at the miseries of others; wishing to take away from everyone what is theirs; and doing this as far as they dare. Arcana Coelestia 2747

Adultery and cruelty are not rare

We would hope that people like this are rare. Unfortunately, the Writings assert that people like this are common in the Christian world:

Indeed the world called, Christian, is in, this respect worse than the antediluvian, that it accounts adulteries as nothing. When adulteries are accounted as nothing, it follows that they have nothing which savors of love, and that they wish to destroy societies because they are contrary to them. Hence too they become cruel, which is inseparable from adulteries; for the result of a single adulterous act is a proneness to cruelty. Spiritual Experiences 3598

Today this hell is growing, chiefly from persons who belong to the so-called Christian world and who have found all the joy of life in committing adultery, and who too are for the most part cruel people.
Arcana Coelestia 824; also Spiritual Experiences 2643

One passage states that the delight in cruelty and adultery is “*today so common as to extend to children*” (*Spiritual Experiences 2622*). That is, even children today take delight in cruelty and adulterous things. This, of course, is exactly what people fear who are concerned about the sex and violence that children are exposed to.

There are other things said in the Writings about those who are adulterous and cruel. In the other life they desire more than others to return to this world and to possess people in this world (*Arcana Coelestia 5990; Spiritual Experiences 2665, 3716*). In the next life they are delighted with excrement (*Arcana Coelestia 5394; Spiritual Experiences 2843*). King David of the Old Testament is said to be a leader of cruel adulterers (*Spiritual Experiences 2621, 2656, 3682*). Adultery and cruelty are said to be the result of being “*devoid of conscience*” (*Spiritual Experiences 4038*).

Implications

What are some of the implications of these statements? Some would say that the world today is a harsh one, in which loneliness and isolation are all too common. If this is so, these passages would point to the idea that an origin of this condition is a lack of conjugal love, a lack of morality, and the consequent prevalence of adultery.

Implications for Dating: The connection between adultery and cruelty underlines the value of chastity and innocence in the friendships with the opposite sex that precede marriage. Immorality and promiscuity are an invitation to cruel behavior. To the extent that disorders enter into these relationships, to the same extent unkind and hurtful behavior is also likely to occur. The message is that a lack of respect for marriage can be a serious cause of social pain. The reverse of this, however, is that innocent relationships are also likely to be happy relationships. If a person can avoid immoral behavior the chances are good that they will find lasting friendships with people who are kind and decent.

Implications for sexual violence and abuse: Why does violence express itself in sexual ways? The reason is that cruelty and adultery are linked with one another. Adulterous situations are likely to result in cruel behavior. Cruel and violent behavior is often likely to take a sexual form.

Implications for bullying among children and young people: If it is true that cruelty leads to adultery, it should not be unexpected that when children treat each other cruelly, as happens all too frequently, there are sometimes sexual aspects to it. The cruel behavior of bullies may have a sexual aspect to it that is hidden from adults. While everybody knows that this happens, and may even remember it from their own childhood, it is easy to be unaware of the pattern of causation involved. This underscores the importance of dealing effectively with bullies, and that in teaching children to be kind to each other we are also helping them to avoid immorality.

Implications for homosexuality: Is it possible for a homosexual lifestyle to be a happy one? Many have described it as a sad and difficult way of life. The Writings refer to homosexuality as one of many forms of adultery (*Arcana Coelestia 2220, De Conjugio 86*). The implication is that a person who has become involved in homosexuality is likely to be exposed to people who will treat them unkindly. It is well known that people who oppose homosexuality treat homosexuals badly, but how homosexuals treat each other is not so well known.

The broader implications of these teachings, however, have to do with the welfare of society in general and the happiness of each individual. I believe that they tell us that immorality is incompatible with a peaceful life. A peaceful and happy “free love” society is not really possible, because the desires associated with immoral behavior eventually and inevitably lead to unkind actions. The teachings on this subject describe how important it is for the life and peace of a community to guard marriage and to teach children to respect marriage. More importantly, they point out how vital it is for everyone to shun adulteries. It is not that adultery is the only source of cruel behavior - for many things contribute to it, and many apparently moral people are not at all kind. We emphasize it here because its effects are not always obvious, and so they can be overlooked and forgotten.

Morality and kindness

The relationship between adultery and cruelty can form a vicious circle that is difficult to break, the one leading to the other in an unhappy spiral. The good news, however, is that everything that is said about the relationship between adultery and cruelty has its opposite in the happy relationship between the life of charity and conjugal love. A moral life leads to kindness, a life of kindness leads to happiness in marriage, and the love of the opposite sex can soften the harshest of souls. This is why it is said that conjugal love is the fundamental of all the loves of heaven (*Conjugal Love 57*).

This is how valuable it is to live a moral life. Conjugal love brings happiness to a person's life in amazing ways. Its opposite brings discord and unhappiness in ways that the average person would never expect.