

Appendix 1

An appendix to the paper “The Last Judgment and the Sexual Revolution”

The Heavenly Doctrine and Homosexuality

*Are alternatives to traditional marriage wrong? Does the Heavenly Doctrine even speak of homosexuality?
Three answers that summarize the teachings.*

Rev. Jeremy Simons - General Church Council of the Clergy, June 2022



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The Heavenly Doctrine and Homosexuality One-Page Summary

Three points about same sex relations, explained more fully below and in the following pages:

1. Most broadly, sex is to be reserved for marriage, defined as the union of one man and one woman.
 2. Also very broadly, everyone in heaven is married, so no one can be a homosexual in heaven.
 3. More specifically, homosexuality is spoken about in 30 passages.
1. **Most broadly**, the Heavenly Doctrine points out in many passages that **sexual activity is to be reserved for marriage**. Sex outside of marriage is either fornication or adultery, homosexual relations being just one of many possible varieties. Fornication is light to the extent that it looks towards marriage and prefers it, and grievous to the extent that it does not (*Conjugal Love* 452). The Doctrine defines marriage as between one man and one woman (*Arcana Coelestia* 162, *Conjugal Love* 223), which would limit the possibility that homosexual activity can be a light form of fornication.
 2. **Also very broadly**, scores of passages describe **the life of heaven as synonymous with conjugal love**. “*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). Since this love is only possible between one man and one woman there can be no homosexuals in heaven. While some suggest that there may be some special arrangement, such as appears to exist for sincere celibates and Muslim polygamists (*Conjugal Love* 54, 332), neither of these arrangements tell us that celibacy or polygamy are good or are paths to the happiness of heaven. Nor do there appear to be similar arrangements for those involved in other sexual practices.
 3. The above two major doctrines make it clear that alternatives to traditional marriage do not lead either to heaven or happiness, without mentioning homosexuality directly. But there are **other passages that do address homosexuality specifically**. The passages below, read **in context and with an understanding of how they were used in Swedenborg’s day**, confirm that homosexual behavior is prohibited.
 1. Homosexuality is referred to as "the evil of the worst adultery" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2220).
 2. Homosexuality is referred to as "a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2322). This was a standard euphemism for sodomy.
 3. Homosexual sex is called "the sin of sodomy" (*Spiritual Experiences* 2675).
 4. Homosexuals are called "sodomites" (*Spiritual Experiences* 1977, 3768, 3796, 5939, 6096; *Apocalypse Explained* 1006.2; *True Christian Religion additions* 9.12).
 5. There are references to "adultery such as there was at Sodom" (*De Conjugio* 86; *Last Judgment* (post.) 135, *Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment (or Supplements)* 26, and *Spiritual Experiences* 4932).
 6. Homosexual practices are called "evils too unspeakable to be named" (*Conjugal Love* 450, 459.5; *Spiritual Experiences* 1354, 4763). This was a standard legal euphemism for sodomy, used especially in the court system.
 7. One story apparently refers to lesbians: "Their obscenities were not shown me, except that there was a woman appareled like a man. There they were delighting themselves in abominable lewdness" (*Spiritual Experiences* 3895-3900).
 8. The "*forbidden degrees*" of Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13: “*You shall not lie with a male as with a female. It is an abomination*” are discussed. These passages affirm that these acts are wrong, some describing them as "foul conjunctions", "foul adulteries", "unmentionable sexual unions", or "abominable copulations." (*Apocalypse Explained* 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, *Arcana Coelestia* 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, *New Jerusalem* 172, and *Conjugal Love* 519).

The Lord is merciful to all, and His love goes out to every person. The point of this paper is purely to demonstrate what the Writings teach about homosexuality. It is not an effort to offer pastoral advice or comfort to those who struggle – something that is important and necessary. But many people deny that the Heavenly Doctrine gives clear teachings on this topic, so that is the topic here. There is no doubt that Swedenborg was aware of this particular evil and addressed it intentionally, as I show in the following pages.

Introduction

Christianity has traditionally relied on several Biblical references to support the prohibition of homosexual relations. There has always been a basis in the Word for views on this topic.

There are quite a few Bible passages that touch on this subject, but several 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 house⁵ 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 sodomites¹⁰ 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.²⁷Likewise 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 Christians have traditionally found these references, plus a few others, to be convincing, they are explained away, and even mocked, by people who disagree that sexual activity between people of the same sex is wrong. These arguments can easily be found on the internet by searching on words such as “*homosexuality*” and “*Bible*.” I quote them here to show that there has always been a basis for Christian views on this topic.

Do the teachings of the New Church shed light on this? This paper discusses passages in the Writings, from both the published and posthumous works, on this topic, explaining the three points listed on page one.

1. According to the Heavenly Doctrine, sexual activity is to be reserved for marriage, so homosexual sex is wrong.

Most broadly, the Heavenly Doctrine points out in many passages that **sexual activity is to be reserved for marriage**. Sex outside of marriage is either fornication or adultery. It is light to the extent that it looks towards marriage and prefers it, and grievous to the extent that it does not (*Conjugal Love* 452). The Doctrine defines marriage as between one man and one woman (*Arcana Coelestia* 162, *Conjugal Love* 223), which would limit the possibility that homosexual activity can be a light form of fornication. Same sex relations are just one of many alternatives to traditional marriage.

- a. Swedenborg calls pre-marital and extra-marital sex fornication and adultery. Sexual activity is to be reserved for marriage, and the Writings define marriage as being 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).
- b. Several passages denounce the desire for sex without the purpose of marriage and family (*Arcana Coelestia* 828; *Spiritual Experiences* 1202, 1976).
- c. All those in heaven, except for children, are married. 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). While Muslims are described in

Conjugal Love as having a form of heaven, “a lower heaven,” for those who are unable to give up polygamy (*Conjugal Love* 343), in *De Conjugio* this is described as a temporary situation (*De Conjugio* 46).

- d. The testimony of the Writings is that supreme happiness resides in marriage, and that sexual practices outside of marriage lead to unhappiness, 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 “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*
- e. Fornication (between unmarried people) is distinguished from adultery (when one or both are married). Both are wrong, but adultery is more serious. “*A lust to fornicate is light in the measure that it looks to conjugal love and prefers it, (but) serious in the measure that it looks to adultery, or to a lust for variety or toward a lust to deflower... Care must be exercised to prevent conjugal love from being lost as a result of excessive and unrestrained fornications. (Conjugal Love 444r). Even for those intending to marry “it is not lawful for them to be joined physically (before their marriage). For if they are the order engraved on conjugal love perishes (Conjugal Love 305).*
- f. 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, polygamy, rape, etc. 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. This is why sodomy is called “the evil of the worst adultery” in AC 2220, as discussed below. 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).*
- g. Recognizing that some people are unable to restrain their sexual urges, Swedenborg points out ways of reducing its damage. *Conjugal Love* contains several chapters dealing with what happens when a person, for example, takes a mistress (see *Conjugal Love 432-462*). The point of these passages is not to condone these behaviors, but to suggest lesser evils that can keep a person from destroying the path to chaste marriage. The goal is to avoid licentiousness and preserve conjugal love.
- h. The main distinction in the Writings with respect to marriage is between conjugal love and licentiousness. Licentiousness “*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).*

2. According to the Heavenly Doctrine, conjugal love is required for entrance into heaven and this is only possible between one man and one woman.

Also very broadly, scores of passages describe **the life of heaven as synonymous with conjugal love.** “*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).* Since this love is only possible between one man and one woman there can be no homosexuals in heaven.

Swedenborgians often think of conjugal love as a kind of extra ingredient on top of a happy marriage, but the Writings say that there is actually no heaven without it. Two points:

a. 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

*“**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

*“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 the human race.”* *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

“The holiness of heaven is based on conjugal love and on innocence.” *Arcana Coelestia* 828

*“It should be recognized therefore that by conjugal love all celestial and spiritual love is meant, because truly conjugal love, as has been shown above, is fundamental to all other kinds of love. **People therefore in whom that fundamental love is present have all other loves belonging to heaven and the Church present in them**; for as has been stated, it descends from the marriage of good and truth in the heavens, the marriage that makes heaven.”* *Arcana Coelestia* 9961

*“Especially does a love for the opposite sex remain, and **in the case of people coming into heaven, namely, people who become spiritual on earth, conjugal love.**”* *Conjugal Love* 37

*“Regarded in its essence, conjugal love is the fundamental love of all loves in heaven and the church, because it originates from the marriage between good and truth, and **from this marriage spring all the loves which form heaven and the church in a person.**”* *Conjugal Love* 65

*“**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. For human beings are born for life after death, and they attain it because of their having in them a spiritual soul, to which they can be elevated through the faculty of their intellect. If, by the power likewise granted to it, a person's will is then elevated at the same time, after death the person lives the life of heaven.”* *Conjugal Love* 230

*“In a word, heaven portrays itself in marriage love because **heaven for angels is the union of the good and the true, and it is this union that constitutes marriage love.**”* *Heaven and Hell* 382

b. Conjugal love, or married love, is only possible between one man and one woman:

“As every law of truth and right descends from celestial beginnings, or from the order of life of the celestial man, so in an especial manner does the law of marriages. It is the celestial (or heavenly) marriage from

and according to which all marriages on earth must be derived; and this marriage is such that there is one Lord and one heaven, or one church whose head is the Lord. **The law of marriages thence derived is that there shall be one husband and one wife**, and when this is the case they represent the celestial marriage and are an exemplar of the celestial man.” Arcana Coelestia 162

“The male is a form of the wisdom of love, and the female is a form of the love of that wisdom. Therefore from creation there was implanted in both male and female a love of uniting into one.” Conjugal Love 32

“Male and female were created to be the very image of the marriage between good and truth.... Implanted in both from their inmost beings is an inclination to conjunction into one. **Thus, the two together form a single image, which imitates the conjugal model of good and truth.**” Conjugal Love 100

“This sphere [of conjugal love] is received by the female sex and communicated through it to the male sex. The male sex does not have any conjugal love inherent in it, but conjugal love is inherent only in the female sex and is transmitted to the male sex from it.... It is supported also by the following argument, that the masculine form is an intellect-oriented one and the feminine form a will-oriented one; and an intellect-oriented form does not have the capacity to develop a conjugal warmth on its own but can do so only from the associated warmth of another in whom this has been implanted from creation. **Consequently, the masculine form cannot receive conjugal love except by having adjoined to it the will-oriented form of a woman.**” Conjugal Love 223:1

“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 homosexuality does not exist in heaven, and therefore it does not offer lasting happiness in this world either.

3. Many passages in the Writings do discuss homosexual practices directly.

The first two points so far make it clear that alternatives to traditional marriage do not lead either to heaven or happiness, without mentioning homosexuality directly. But there are **other passages that do address homosexuality specifically**. The passages below, read **in context and with an understanding of how they were used in Swedenborg’s day**, confirm that homosexual behavior is prohibited.

1. Homosexuality is referred to as "the evil of the worst adultery" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2220).
2. Homosexuality is referred to as "a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2322). This was a standard euphemism for sodomy.
3. Homosexual sex is called "the sin of sodomy" (*Spiritual Experiences* 2675).
4. Homosexuals are called "sodomites" (*Spiritual Experiences* 1977, 3768, 3796, 5939, 6096; *Apocalypse Explained* 1006.2; *True Christian Religion additions* 9.12).
5. There are references to "adultery such as there was at Sodom" (*De Conjugio* 86; *Last Judgment* (post.) 135, *Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment (or Supplements)* 26, and *Spiritual Experiences* 4932).
6. Homosexual practices are called "evils too unspeakable to be named" (*Conjugal Love* 450, 459.5; *Spiritual Experiences* 1354, 4763). This was a standard legal euphemism for sodomy, used especially in the court system.
7. One story apparently refers to lesbians: "Their obscenities were not shown me, except that there was a woman appareled like a man. There they were delighting themselves in abominable lewdness" (*Spiritual Experiences* 3895-3900).
8. The "*forbidden degrees*" of Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13: "You shall not lie with a male as with a female. It is an abomination" are discussed. These passages affirm that these acts are wrong, some describing them as "foul conjunctions", "foul adulteries", "unmentionable sexual unions", or "abominable copulations." (*Apocalypse Explained* 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, *Arcana Coelestia* 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, *New Jerusalem* 172, and *Conjugal Love* 519).

Some have found reasons to question each of these passages, claiming that none of them describe what we know of as homosexuality. Even if that reasoning is accepted, the broader teachings about marriage noted above still militate against homosexuality. But there is no doubt that Swedenborg was aware of this particular evil and addressed it intentionally. Below are explanations of each of these eight sets of passages, showing their context and giving evidence about what they mean.

“Evil of the worst adultery” and “a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature”

1. Homosexuality is referred to as "*the evil of the worst adultery*" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2220).
2. Homosexuality is referred to as "*a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature*" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2322). This was a standard euphemism for sodomy.

These two are explained together because they are both part of the discussion of the story of Sodom in Genesis 19. Here they are with a little more context:

*“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*

These two passages say that the meaning of this well-known story is not about sodomy but about the love of self. The reader would expect that the internal sense would be about sodomy, since that is what the story has universally been associated with. In these passages, therefore, this expectation is noted by the words “*it seems as if*” and “*they who apprehend the Word according to the sense of the letter alone may suppose.*” Readers everywhere, even in Old Testament times, have associated the Sodom story with sodomy. Hence the name. Instead, although you would expect the meaning of the Sodom story to treat of sodomy, it actually treats of the love of self.

Other passages describing the meaning of the Sodom story explain that this story reflects the pattern in the Word of portraying the evils of the love of self as forms of adultery: *“The evils that well up from the love of self are in the Word called ‘adulteries’ and are described as such”* (Arcana Coelestia 2322). So *“the sin of Sodom”* is a sexual evil, a form of adultery.

Curiously, Swedenborg never uses the word *“sodomy”* in any of his published works, although he uses it elsewhere. It was not a polite term, as is frequently noted when it is discussed in contemporary sources. For example, William Blackstone, in his *“Commentaries on the Laws of England”* wrote that *“the very mention of it is a disgrace to human nature. It will be more eligible to imitate in this respect the delicacy of our English law, which treats it, in its very indictments, as a crime not fit to be named; ‘peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nomnandum [that horrible crime not to be named among Christians]’* (Colonial America: The Age of Sodomitical Sin; OutHistory.org) July 22, 2020).

Scholarly works of that era generally used circumlocutions like this to refer to sodomy. This would explain why Swedenborg replaces the word with two common euphemisms, calling it *“the worst adultery”* and *“a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature.”* The reader is expected to understand that he is using those terms to refer to sodomy, a practice that was well known, universally condemned, and universally associated with the Sodom story in 18th century Europe. It was a crime. These terms make it clear how Swedenborg views the subject, which might not have been the case had he simply used the term *“sodomy.”*

The term *“worst adultery”* can be confusing. Unlike *“a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature”* it does not seem to have been a very common way of referring to homosexual practice. But it may have been. For the modern reader it can seem like a doubtful reference, since many forms of adultery are surely worse than homosexuality, such as rape or child abuse. Substitute terms, or euphemisms, however, are not always literally accurate, and rely on the reader’s contextual understanding of their meaning, which in this case is that he is referring to sodomy by calling it a very bad form of sexual practice.

The phrase *“a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature”* is explained in this article from Wikipedia under the title *“crime against nature”*:

“For much of modern history, a ‘crime against nature’ was understood by courts to be synonymous to ‘buggery’, and to include anal sex (copulation per anum) and bestiality. Early court decisions agreed that fellatio (copulation per os) was not included, though mainly because that practice was virtually unknown when the common-law definition was established (it remained so rare that first attempted fellatio prosecutions under the ‘crime against nature’ statute date to 1817 in England and 1893 in the United States. Likewise, sexual activities between two women were not covered. Over time, particularly starting in the early 20th century, some jurisdictions started enacting statutes or developing precedents the extended the scope of the crime to include fellatio and, sometimes, other sexual activities. The term ‘crime against nature’ is closely related to, and was often used interchangeably with, the term sodomy. This varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Sometimes the two terms were understood to be synonymous; sometimes sodomy was limited to sexual activities between two humans; and sometimes sodomy was taken to include anal sex or bestiality, whereas crime against nature also included fellatio...Historically, the offense was usually referred to by its longer name, ‘the detestable and abominable crime against nature, committed with mankind or beast.’ This phrase originates in Buggery Act 1533... Specific acts included under this heading were typically deemed too detestable to list them explicitly...” (Wikipedia *“crime against nature.”*)

So even though the topic of this story in the internal sense is not about sexual activity, the sexual activity that the reader is expected to associate with this story is condemned by Swedenborg’s words.

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?

This interpretation makes sense if we are looking strictly at what happened in the story, which is about attempted homosexual rape. It also makes sense that this kind of violence would be called “*the worst form of adultery*”, since violence is worse than what happens by mutual consent. There are two reasons why this is unlikely:

1. “*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. When Swedenborg addresses the reader’s expectations in both of these passages this is clearly what is referred to, regardless of what literally happened in the story.
2. In both of these passages Swedenborg is using euphemisms or circumlocutions to avoid naming the evil associated with Sodom. This is made obvious by the fact that he uses different ones in the two passages. This was the customary practice with sodomy. Had he been referring to rape he would have said so. Rape, unlike sodomy, is named directly in many passages, including a whole section in *Conjugal Love* (*Conjugal Love 511, 512*). This doesn’t explain why rape could be named directly, but not homosexuality, but it does convey how repugnant homosexuality was considered to be. This point is made even more strongly in the discussion of “*evils not to be named*” below.

For these reasons it makes sense that Swedenborg is talking about, but avoiding naming, the commonly understood practice of sodomy, and not rape. While rape is terrible it is not the action most commonly associated with Sodom, nor is it one that Swedenborg and others would avoid naming.

Sodomy – continued:

3. Homosexual sex is called “the sin of sodomy” (*Spiritual Experiences 2675*).
4. Homosexuals are called “sodomites” (*Spiritual Experiences 1977, 3768, 3796, 5939, 6096; Apocalypse Explained 1006.2; True Christian Religion additions 9.12*).
5. There are references to “adultery such as there was at Sodom” (*De Conjugio 86; Last Judgment (post.) 135, Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment (or Supplements) 26, and Spiritual Experiences 4932*).

As noted above, Swedenborg never uses the word “*sodomy*” in his published works, although he uses it elsewhere. It was not a polite term, occurring in the daily papers but not usually in serious published works. However, eleven passages in the unpublished works, and one in a published work (*Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment, or Supplements 26*), in addition to those two from the *Arcana Coelestia* discussed above, do speak of sodomy and sodomites, or refer to what happened in the Sodom story:

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.”

Sometimes people point out what Ezekiel said about “*the sin of Sodom*”: Ezekiel 16:48–50: “*This was the iniquity (or sin) of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.*” That is, that the “*sin of Sodom*” is pride. SE 2675, however, definitively links “*sodomy*” and “*the sin of Sodom*” clarifying the fact that it is a sexual evil.

Here are other passages that use this term:

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 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.”

Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment (or Supplements) 26: “But the crowds were so stirred up by their leaders that they hurled insults at the angels and charged at them, trying to drag them into the public square and torment them in all kinds of unspeakable ways. What happened there was like what happened in **Sodom**.”

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

What did Swedenborg mean by sodomy?

Some question what Swedenborg meant by the term “sodomy”, suggesting that the term was ambiguous and could refer to other practices besides homosexual relations. The wealth of current literature on LGBTQIA+ topics provides substantial evidence about the history of these practices and the terms associated with them. It is not hard to demonstrate that what we call “*homosexuality*” (a term that was not invented until 1892) was normally called “*sodomy*” in eighteenth century Europe. 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, including hundreds of contemporary newspaper accounts, at a site titled: Rictor Norton (Ed.), *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. Updated 22 July 2020
<<http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/>>.

18th Century Definitions of Sodomy

To demonstrate this even more clearly, the Rictor Norton website noted just above includes definitions from eight 18th century English and Latin dictionaries:

- **Introduction to Homosexuality in Eighteenth Century England:** “During the eighteenth century, the most common words relating to homosexuality are "sodomy" and "buggery", which of course is no surprise. I think we can safely assume that "buggery" is widely understood as meaning anal intercourse between males, but the word "sodomy" seems to have a rather broader meaning, i.e. sex of any sort between males. Indeed, in Cocker's English dictionary of 1724 sodomy is defined simply as "male venery", which is really as abstract as the modern synonym "male homosexuality". (rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/)
- **1719 - Glossographia Anglicana Nova:** Or, A Dictionary, Interpreting Such Hard Words of whatever Language, as are at present used in the English Tongue, with their Etymologies, Definition, &c., Second Edition, London, 1719

Catamite, a Boy kept for Sodomy.

Sodomite, a Person given to Sodomy or Buggery, the Sin of Sodom, the chief of the five Cities in Palestine, which was destroy'd by fire from Heaven; the Territory where it stood being swallowed up in the Brimstone Lake, commonly called the Dead Sea.

- **1724 - Cocker's English Dictionary**, by Edward Cocker, 3rd edition, London, 1724:
Sodomy, Male-Venery, for which Sodom was destroyed.
- **1731 - A New English Dictionary:** Or, A Compleat Collection Of the Most Proper and Significant Words and Terms of Art, Commonly used in the Language, Third Edition, By. J. K. [Kersey], London, 1731:
A Sodomite, one that commits Sodomy, i.e. Buggery, a heinous Crime, so called because the Inhabitants of Sodom were notoriously guilty of it.
- **1735 - A New English Dictionary**, Containing a Collection of Words in the English Language, Properly Explain'd and Alphabetically Dispos'd, By B. N. Defoe, Gent. [Benjamin Defoe], Westminster: 1735:
SODOMITE, one who commits the Sin of Sodomy, a Buggerer. SODOMITICAL, belonging to Sodomy. SODOMY, a Sin of the Flesh against Nature, Buggery.
- **1763 - The New Royal and Universal English Dictionary**, By J. Johnson, London, 1763:
CATAMITE, n. s. a sodomite.
- **1783 - Encyclopædia Britannica;** Or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, &c., Second Edition, Vol. X, Edinburgh, 1783:
SODOM, formerly a town of Palestine in Asia, famous in scripture for the wickedness of its inhabitants, and their destruction by fire from heaven on account of that wickedness. The place where it stood is now covered by the waters of the Dead Sea, or the Lake Asphaltites.
SODOMY, the unnatural crime of buggery, thus called from the city of sodom, which was destroyed by fire for the same. See BUGGERY.

- **Latin – 1716 - A Dictionary, English-Latin, and Latin-English**, by Elisha Coles, 8th edition, London, 1716:
To Bugger, Pædicar.
A Buggerer, Pæderastes.
Buggery, Pæderastia.
Sodomy, Sodomia, pæderastia, peccatum sodomiticum.
A Sodomite, Sodomita, pæderastes.
- **Latin – 1771 - The New Latin and English Dictionary**, Designed for the use of Grammar Schools, and Private Education, by John Entick, London, 1771:
To bugger, pædicor.
A buggerer, pædicator.
Buggery, pæderastia.
A sodomite, sodomita.
Sodomy, sodomia.

These definitions show that the primary definitions of sodomy in the 18th century, both in English and Latin, had to do with homosexual acts. These dictionaries are all listed by Rictor Norton, but any google search, or the Wikipedia entry about the history of sodomy, will confirm this. While other sources do show that in legal terms other sexual acts, such as bestiality, were sometimes added to sodomy laws as they developed, the primary meaning related to homosexuality. The many 18th century newspaper accounts mentioning sodomy which appear on the Rictor Norton site would therefore not be misunderstood or seem ambiguous to their readers, nor are Swedenborg's references to it.

“Evils too unspeakable to be named.”

6. Homosexual practices are called "*evils too unspeakable to be named*" (*Conjugal Love* 450, 459.5; *Spiritual Experiences* 1354, 4763). This was a standard legal euphemism for sodomy, used especially in the court system.

Four passages refer to these “unspeakable” evils:

*“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

*“CONCERNING CHARLES XII... He constantly desired to become greatest of all; but when this was denied him, he determined to destroy the name of the Lord, by atheistic doctrines; and then he began to love persons of such a character, or atheists, from his heart, and to look out that he might have such at hand when he should annihilate religion; and then, also, **he rushed into abominable things, that ought not to be named (dog)*, and similar atrocities.**”* *Spiritual Experiences* 4763

**“Dog” is a biblical euphemism for a homosexual or male prostitute.*

Similarly, speaking of Charles XII: *“They who wish to kill all, and are bloodthirsty, nor are ever touched with any compassion, and are proud in the highest degree - these copulate with swine; others with other brutes. (Charles XII)”* *Spiritual Experiences* 4857

*“These spirits come craftily to the region...and there at the junction, the two join together, and **in a manner not to be mentioned they join themselves and copulate.** Thus joined together they go away, and sit; but later they are separated. (The way they sit joined together, and are separated, is **not to be mentioned, being***

profane.)” Spiritual Experiences 1354

Although modern Americans and Europeans might think that child abuse or some other sexual evil would be a more likely candidate for an unmentionable sin, in the 18th century this was a very common way of referring to homosexual practices. Homosexuality was commonly called the “***sin that cannot be named***”, “***a crime not to be named among Christians***”. The meaning here is not that no one knew what to call it, or knew what it was, but rather that it was considered impolite to talk about it. This designation appeared frequently in newspapers and commentaries, where its meaning is unambiguous, as the examples below make clear. There were other sins that were also too terrible to name and talk about as well, and they occasionally appear in the literature, but with nothing like the frequency of homosexuality, a crime routinely reported in the newspapers. Of the examples below, the most important are probably the first two, since Coke and Blackstone were instrumental in forming English common law, an influence felt throughout Europe.

- 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*). Coke is best known in modern times for his Institutes, described by John Rutledge as “*almost the foundations of our law*”, and his Reports, which have been called “perhaps the single most influential series of named reports”. (*Wikipedia*)
- 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). Blackstone and Coke are together regarded as primary influences in the development of English common law. The fourth book of his *Commentaries* contains a section on the “*crime against nature, committed either with man or beast*”. He says: “*I will not act so disagreeable a part, to my readers as well as myself, as to dwell any longer upon a subject, the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature. It will be more eligible to imitate in this respect the delicacy of our English law, which treats it, in its very indictments, as a crime not fit to be named; peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nomnandum [that horrible crime not to be named among Christians].*” (*Colonial America: The Age of Sodomitical Sin; OutHistory.org*) July 22, 2020
- Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794) English historian, writer and Member of Parliament, called it an “***odious vice, of which modesty rejects the name, and nature abominates the idea.***” (*Love, Sex, and the Noose: The Emotions of Sodomy in 18th Century England; by Frances H.I. Henry, 2019, p. 70*)
- “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.*)
- “Sex between men was believed to be an 'unnatural offence' and a breach of moral and Christian codes – it was a crime '**not to be named among Christians**'.” (*Homosexual law reform - <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/homosexual-law-reform/homosexual-law-reform>*) July 22, 2020
- “No satisfactory reason occurs to the court why the lesser form of this crime against nature (anal sex) should be covered by our statute, and the greater (oral sex) excluded, when both are committed in a like unnatural manner, and when either might well be spoken of and understood as being “**the abominable crime not fit to be named among Christians**.” (*CaseBriefs.com - State v. Whitmarsh 1910*) July 22, 2020
- “In Europe, sodomy was called **the crime not to be named among Christians**; that is why Oscar Wilde’s lover Lord Alfred Douglas coined the phrase ‘*the love that dare not speak its name*’. In India, same-sex sexuality was never unspeakable.” (*HindustanTimes Jan 09, 2014*) July 22, 2020

These examples explain why Swedenborg would have used this term, as well as why he uses the circumlocutions or euphemisms in AC 2220 and 2322. Most notable, I think, is Blackstone’s statement, quoted above: “*It will be more eligible to imitate in this respect the delicacy of our English law, which treats it, in its very indictments, as a crime not fit to be named.*” That is, this was not just a commonly used euphemism, it was virtually the legal name for it, the one used in court.

Lesbians

7. One story apparently refers to lesbians:

*“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***

This set of passages is the only reference to female same-sex sexuality in the Writings that I am aware of. The term “lesbian” was not used to designate female homosexuals until the 20th century, so there was no existing term that Swedenborg could have used to describe them. Still, these passages show that Swedenborg was aware that this behavior existed.

“You shall not lie with a male as with a female. It is an abomination.”

8. The “*forbidden degrees*” of Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13: “*You shall not lie with a male as with a female. It is an abomination*” are discussed. These passages affirm that these acts are wrong, some describing them as “*foul conjunctions*”, “*foul adulteries*”, “*unmentionable sexual unions*”, or “*abominable copulations*.” (*Apocalypse Explained 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, Arcana Coelestia 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, New Jerusalem 172, and Conjugal Love 519*).

These passages say that the adulteries that these chapters and verses in Leviticus describe correspond to forms of the adulteration of good and truth, as well as profanation. Some of these passages merely refer to the “*forbidden degrees*” while others identify them as forms of adultery:

“In the internal sense of the Word instances of adultery mean adulterations of good, while instances of whoredom mean falsifications of truth, 2466, 3399. But foul liaisons - which are called the forbidden

degrees [of sexual relations], dealt with in Lev. 18:6-24 - mean various kinds of profanation.” Arcana Coelestia 6348.2

“The various kinds of adulteries and whoredoms (such as are enumerated in Leviticus 18:6-30), signify the various kinds of adulterations and falsifications of good and truth.” Apocalypse Explained 410.11

See also Arcana Coelestia 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868; New Jerusalem 172e; Apocalypse Explained 235.8, 434.16, and Conjugal Love 519).

These passages do not give us much information. What they do is confirm that what were called “*the forbidden degrees*” were not merely acts of ritual uncleanness but were forms of adultery. While not everything mentioned among the “*forbidden degrees*” would necessarily be viewed that way there is no question that homosexual practices would be included as “*foul conjunctions*”, “*foul adulteries*”, “*unmentionable sexual unions*”, and “*abominable copulations*.”

Judge not

I would add that sexual sins of all kinds are only a few of the many issues that people can be caught up in for a variety of reasons. Sexual evils can be less grievous or more grievous depending on many factors. People are lured or sometimes even forced into these practices, often 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. All evils have a genetic basis. The whole concept of “*hereditary evil*” describes this genetic basis, not as something that we have no control over, but as an explanation of the fact that we inherit tendencies to all evils, and to some more than others. People are not simply “*born that way*,” but they are born with strong inclinations, and these inclinations run in families. Homosexual desire is not an identity, but something that flows into people according to what is said in Divine Providence 320:

“If a person were to believe, as is the truth, that all goodness and truth originate from the Lord, and all evil and falsity from hell, he would not assign goodness to himself and make it deserving of merit, nor assign evil to himself and make himself guilty of it.”

The reason for calling alternatives to heterosexual marriage evil is not to blame or condemn, but to point out the unhappiness that is inherent in them. According to Swedenborg their joys are empty and unfulfilling. Many reports associate these practices with loneliness, depression, and suicidal thoughts. This unhappiness is perpetuated when the practices are justified, and so it is mainly those attempts at justification that I am addressing.

People behave immorally in all kinds of ways out of ignorance and mistaken thinking. The most serious forms of bad behavior, however, take place with people who have convinced themselves that what is wrong is not wrong. This is called adultery of the third and fourth degree (*Conjugal Love 490-492*). The point here is only that the Writings are clear that alternatives to heterosexual marriage do not offer eternal happiness, but rather unhappiness, to those who practice them. Heaven is not a place that we are either let into or cast out of, but a state of happiness that is inherent in what we do and what we love. The connection between heavenly happiness and conjugal love is a clear and basic emphasis found everywhere in the Heavenly Doctrine.

While every evil brings unhappiness into our lives, no single thing that we have done will keep us from experiencing the happiness of heaven. Murderers, thieves, and adulterers can repent and allow themselves to be led by the Lord to heaven. He knows that we struggle with every variety of self-centered evil, and homosexual desire is just one of many forms that afflict many people.