

**There is no deficiency, only
blessing.**

**An argument in favor of ordaining women in the
General Church
by Shada Sullivan**

Introduction

When engaging in evaluating doctrine, when engaging in any search for truth, it is critical that our thoughts always return to universal principles. With universal principles as our guiding stars, we can ask the important questions about doctrine. We can ask: *Does this doctrine reflect universal principles? How does this doctrine reflect universal principles? Is this doctrine balanced? Is there something I am missing? Are universal truths being reflected on all levels? Are we emphasizing one level of truth at the expense of another? Are we allowing the whole truth to manifest itself?*

Heaven and Hell 356 outlines five spiritual ideas that give us idea of what universal principles might look like, principles that are essential to being able to understand truths on a spiritual level:

1. Everything in the universe goes back to the good and the true and their union in order to be anything-that is, to love and faith and their union.
2. People have discernment and volition: discernment is the receptacle of what is true, and volition the receptacle of what is good. Everything in us goes back to these two and to their union just as everything [in the universe] goes back to the good and the true and their union.
3. There is an inner and an outer person, as distinct from each other as heaven and the world; yet they must become one if the person is to be truly human.
4. Heaven's light is the light the inner person is in, and the world's light is the light the outer person is in. Heaven's light is what is essentially divine and true, the source of all intelligence.
5. There is a responsiveness between the things in the inner person and those in the outer, so that things from either side appear in a different guise on the other side-so different that they cannot be identified without a knowledge of correspondences.

These are some of the over-arching spiritual ideas that are returned to again and again in the Writings. They are universally true for all people, men and women. All doctrine must be traceable back to these principles like the way branches of a tree make their way back to the trunk. From these universal principles, this paper will argue that three main points:

1. Each person is completely male or female, and completely human at the same time.
2. The marriage relationship gains its power from a correspondence with the marriage of good and truth within an individual and from the marriage of good and truth within the Lord, and therefore, a proper separation of levels of degree implies that it is not appropriate to apply marriage principles to forms outside of marriage, and to use marriage principles to be prescriptive about what individuals should or shouldn't do.
3. From universal principles, women should be allowed to be clergy in the General Church.

In terms of audience, this paper is written for clergy and laypeople alike. In order to establish an argument from universal principles, several ideas have been traced back to their foundation. Many people very familiar with the Writings might consider this unnecessary, but it is integral to creating a theology of ministry that makes sense. The ordination of women an issue that must engage the whole of the church, one that we must wrestle with together. It is my hope that this paper will be a gateway to conversation.

Establishing universal principles

What is God like?

In Exodus, Moses asks who God is and is told: "I am that I am." Some translators believe that the more accurate translation is "I will be what I will be." God simply is. God is essential reality. God is uncreated and infinite; He is omnipotent and omnipresent; he is inmost life and love itself. This Divine Love at God's inmost is inherently a creative and connective force. It yearns to manifest itself, to reach out to something that is other than itself. To do so, it must have a form, and this form is Divine Wisdom. It is inconceivable that Divine Love should not be able to express itself, so Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are completely united in God. The distinctiveness of the two concepts arises from their potential for separation outside of God but in God they are always one.

However, there is a problem. What is there for God to connect to? He must, impossibly, create something outside of Himself. This something cannot also be infinite - that would just be more of Himself and God does not yearn to love Himself. This something else must be finite, outside of God somehow. How can God create something outside of Himself if all things come from an infinite God and are essentially a part of Him?

God's plan is genius. He creates beings from Himself that do not have any awareness of what is infinite within them. These necessarily finite beings, humans, live as if all things come from within themselves. In this way, God has created instant potential for relationship. Out of the freedom that comes from the feeling of human selfhood, those who wish to connect with God can do so, and they will receive the blessings of connection with Divine Love. Those who actively choose not to connect with God will experience the illusion of separation from Him. Human freedom to choose is therefore the lynchpin of our creation; there is no reason for us to exist without it. For this reason, *Divine Providence* 97(8) says that the Lord guards freedom in humans, as we might guard the "apple of our eye."

In creating human beings, God worked with what he had: Himself. We are human because God is human. *Divine Love and Wisdom* 11 states:

God is supremely human. Throughout the heavens one finds no other idea of God than the idea of a person...It is because God is human that all angels and all spirits are human beings in perfect form.

All things are created out of a striving for the human form. It is this human-ness that connects us to each other and to God. We are all made out of the same essential blueprint.

What is the mechanism of connection between God and humans?

The most important feature of the way that God connects with us is that our freedom and rationality, our ability to be “other” than God and make our own choices, must be preserved (DP 82). And this means that we must have a method of reciprocating God’s love with our own love, if we so choose. God reaches out, we reach back. This is the regenerative cycle, or the process of regeneration.

The reaching-out of love creates the potential for conjunction, and this is God’s most essential definition of goodness - that which creates potential for conjunction (DLW 47). The expression of the wise way in which conjunction happens is truth. Truth derives its essential nature from the fact that it is good, that it leads toward conjunction with God. Anything true that is not also good is an appearance, or an emptiness, because God does not dwell within (DLW 149, NJHD 24). So, God reaches out to humans through the wise ways of Divine Truth from the ultimate creative force - Divine Good. He does this generally through the forms of creation itself, and specifically through the Living Word - Jesus - and the accommodated Word - our sacred scripture. The Word, which is God reaching out to us, becomes the means by which connection between God and people occurs (TCR 234).

These forms of truth are presented to us by God in ways that allow us to decline His offering. There is no coercion involved. But He certainly is invested in whether or not we can find Him. So, God provides for all of us an internal affection for truth, a kind of homing beacon (AC 2577, 1997). He has stacked the deck in His/our favor, left a trail of breadcrumbs for us to follow, installed in us an eternal yearning to look for Him, to seek his forms of truth. And when we find Him, we know (DP 168).

And then it is our turn. We take the truth that we have recognized and understood and we strive to turn it back into something good, something infused with Divine Love as we understand it. When we do this, when we form something good out of our understanding of truth, we are loving God, we are bringing the connection back full circle (DLW 316).

This regenerative cycle looks like this:

Good -----> Truth -----> Good

and it functions in the same way for all people. It is a universal principle.

Masculinity and Femininity: image and likeness

The regenerative cycle can be divided into two parts: truth coming from good (God reaching out) and good resulting from truth (us reaching back).

This first reaching out is how God presents Himself to us. This is what we “see” of the Lord; this is what we look for in our search for truth, this is His image. The heavenly doctrines (in *Marriage Love 90*) reveal to us that this truth-from-good principle is called the masculine (G---->T). For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to this principle as the masculine principle.

In the second part, God has designed the cycle to be brought back to him in a way that reveals something about his essential nature, or His likeness, which is love. We, human beings, connect with God by participating in that which is most essential about Him: truth being transformed into good. Thus, the second half of the cycle, the good-from-truth principle, tells us about what the Lord is “like”, and is called the feminine (T---->G). For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to this principle as the feminine principle.

As part of our regenerative process, each human being equally participates in and embodies both the masculine and feminine principles, because each human is made in the Lord’s image and likeness. From *True Christianity 65*:

Human beings were created as forms of the divine design. We have been created as forms of the divine design because we have been created as images and likenesses of God, and since God is the design itself, we have therefore been created as images and likenesses of that design.

The divine design originally took shape, and it continues to exist, from two sources: divine love and divine wisdom. We human beings have been created as vessels for these two things. Therefore the design that divine love and wisdom follow in acting upon the universe, and especially upon the angelic heaven, has been built into us.

We experience a God-given affection for truth, we seek truth, when we find truth it resonates within our consciences as something with the potential to lead to good, and then we work to actuate that potential in our lives by loving the Lord and the neighbor. This cycle is self-perpetuating, building upon itself endlessly as, through the Lord’s mercy, we work to allow his blessings to manifest.

Men and Women

We have established from universal principles that men and women are human beings equally able to participate in the regenerative cycle. The Writings teach us further that the cycle of connection between God and humans, which in itself is the relationship between the masculine and feminine principles, can also be represented in the marriage of a man and woman. So, on one level, men and women are each forms of the entire regenerative cycle. On another level, they are forms of the masculine and feminine principles respectively. As discrete levels of degree, these levels are distinct, each one existing unto itself. Yet they are linked by the similarity of their dynamic and thus their representation of the heavenly marriage (DLW 184).

The husband embodies the masculine principle of good seeking to make itself a form of truth (G---->T). The wife embodies the feminine principle of truth seeking to express itself through that which is good (T---->G). In the marriage relationship, these forms complete their representation of the regenerative cycle. When the wife encounters her husband's truth, which is his individual and unique manifestation of how he chooses to put form to the love in his heart, when it resonates with her own innate and wise choices about what she perceives these forms should be, and she loves him for it - this is marriage as a representation of the regenerative cycle, as a representation of the original love story between us and God. The spiritual power of the marriage relationship is born out of its correspondence to the relationship between the Lord and humanity (or the church), and between love and wisdom itself. This is called the heavenly marriage.

Secrets of Heaven 10366 The heavenly marriage is the conjunction of good and truth with a man of the church and an angel of heaven, and in the supreme sense the union of the Divine Itself in the Human of the Lord.

So, from universal principles, we can now see that human beings have the potential to represent the loving and wise nature of God on two levels at the same time: individual and relational. This representation is full and complete on both levels. One level does not supersede or replace the other at any time, as they represent discrete degrees of operation. How can our finite human minds hold this idea in a practical way? The truth is, we often have great difficulty. Without a heavenly understanding, our minds sometimes vacillate between ideas, or allow them to collapse in upon each other, leading us to confuse the operations of one degree with another.

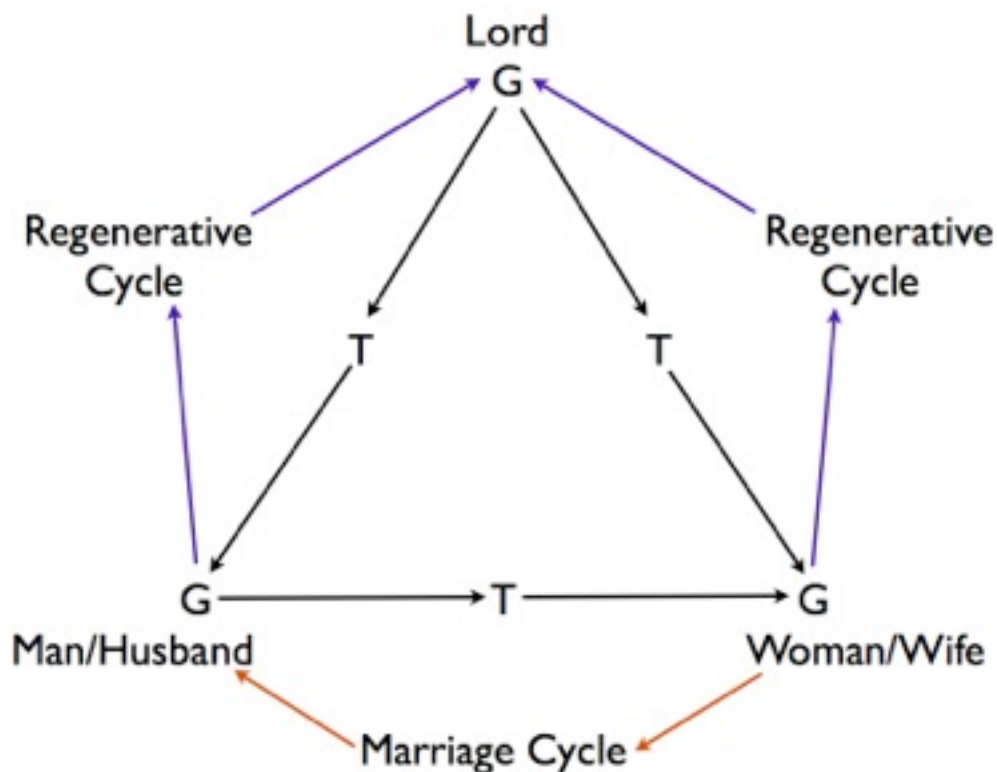
So, The Writings give us some help. *Marriage Love 125* tells us that a husband and wife should only consciously represent the Lord and the church on the day of the wedding. For the rest of the marriage, husbands and wives should consider themselves to be part of the church together.

125 (6) A husband does not represent the Lord and his wife the church, because husbands and their wives both together form the church. It is a common saying in the church that as the Lord is the head of the church, so the husband is the head of the wife. If this were true, it would follow that the

husband represents the Lord and the wife the church. But the truth is that, whereas the Lord is the head of the church, people - both men and women - are the church, and still more so husbands and wives together.

So, while there are two cycles working at the same time, *Marriage Love* 125 tells us that the regenerative cycle is primary: that men and women both form the church and therefore we are to act as if this were so. Men and women are all brides of Christ. It makes sense that we would be advised in this manner. The power of the regenerative cycle is not some remote reality; a marriage is built upon the integrity of the relationship between a each individual and God.

The representation between husband/wife and the Lord/church cannot really “end” after the wedding day but *Marriage Love* 125 tells us where to place our emphasis. As much as we can, we must be aware of both cycles, but our default approach must be to concentrate on our similarities as members of the church together. What we see then, is complementary cycles that build upon each other to created a blessed spiritual life on two separate but interdependent levels.



The functioning of the regenerative cycle rests upon the idea of our freedom. Each person, man or woman, is a full and complete representation of the Lord's love and

wisdom, and thus, from universal principles, the potential must exist for them to be able to regenerate independently. And yet, thrillingly, there is another level we get to participate in - marriage - where we are encouraged to explore interdependence. Two fully complete levels, born out of God's mercy and love.

So then, what is the church?

The church is the manifestation of God's connection with people in this world, it is our reaching back to Him. It is the enlivening of truth:

Apocalypse Explained 998[4] ...as truth turns itself to good so truth becomes living.

It is the striving to convert that which is true into a form of goodness in our lives and the lives of others. This is how we love God. In true freedom, we resonate with with slivers of God we see in this world and we make choices which multiply His love. It is the completion of the regenerative cycle (T--->G) both small and large. This truth-being-made-into-goodness can take many many forms. Wherever we see truth, we can make a church. There is the church of our own lives, and the myriad forms of our own personal regenerative processes. There is the church of our relationships, with marriage being the most perfect resonant form. There is the church that we build together, pooling our efforts organizationally, loving the Lord together. Church is important; it is one half of the love story. And because of its truly integral nature to the connective fabric of the universe, the church is everywhere. We can take a piece of it and call it ours, we can own our own efforts to love the Lord. But we must understand that church is elemental and beyond our grasp to control. We may argue about whether or not the church can be considered divine, but it is, at the very least, part of a divinely inspired process, one that we were created into, born to be a part of, something that will always be bigger than us.

Secrets of Heaven 6637(2) It should also be realized that everyone who leads a good life, in charity and faith, is a Church, and is a kingdom of the Lord.

True Christianity 510 The church consists of all the people who have the church within them.

Summary

The gift of the doctrine of degrees allows us to understand the beautiful multi-layered and connected aspects of the Lord's creation. But it also requires attention to universal principles in order to prevent unwarranted concentration on one level at the expense of another. The marriage principles in the Writings are so beautiful and meaningful that one is tempted to make them the be all and end all of everything - but we must remember that they derive their beauty from the relationship of good and truth in an individual and the relationship of good and truth in the Lord. Therefore, the symmetry of New Church theology demands that each level be treated as full and complete in its

own right, and any prescriptions derived from one level that limit freedom on another should be avoided.

Common arguments against ordaining women

We will now look at some of the common arguments against allowing women to be ordained. By no means do all people against an inclusive priesthood subscribe to, or agree with, all of these arguments. However, these arguments have all been presented at some time or other, and therefore deserve attention. (For a discussion on the representation of the priesthood, see *Examining the policy of a male-only clergy in the General Church*). Before we examine them, it is important to establish what we already know from universal principles.

1. We know that women, as well as men, are born with an affection for knowing truth, understanding truth, and becoming wise by applying that truth to life. This is one level: the regenerative cycle.
2. We also know that women are born with a love for conjoining themselves to the affection expressed as wisdom of their husbands. This is the marriage cycle. Both are occurring at the same time. But often it is very hard to talk about both at the same time.
3. The majority of the Writings treat of the regenerative cycle as it pertains to human beings. Marriage Love treats specifically of the dynamics of the marriage cycle. The statements about how the marriage cycle works should not abrogate the statements about how the regenerative cycle works. Both cycles are fully true and operational at the same time.

Arguments centered around masculine and feminine wisdom

The feminine is created from the masculine

Marriage Love 193 [2] It follows from this that woman was created from man by a transmission and replication of his distinctive wisdom, which is formed from natural truth, and that man's love for this wisdom was transferred to woman so as to become conjugal love; moreover, that the purpose of this was to replace love of self in man with love for his wife, who, from a nature innate in her, cannot help but turn the love of self in man to his love for her...

[3] Once this secret of the creation of woman from man has been understood, it can be seen that in marriage a woman is similarly created or formed, so to speak, from her husband, and that this transformation is brought about by the wife - or rather, through the wife by the Lord, who infuses into women the inclination to achieve it. For a wife receives into her an image of her husband by assimilating his affections into her by uniting the internal will of her husband with hers and also by incorporating into her the propagations of his soul...

This argument, from passages such as these, hinges on the idea of dependence (“woman was created from man by a transmission and replication of his distinctive wisdom...”) It holds that the masculine principle was created first, and that makes the feminine principle dependent upon the masculine, and by representation, women dependent upon men.

What does it mean when we say that the masculine principle is the first in time? If we must, from our limited human minds, settle on something that is “first” in relation to a God that has always existed, then the beginning of all created things is the moment that God reached out and created them. He reached out via the masculine principle, so the masculine principle was “first.” But the feminine principle represents God’s essential nature, His likeness. This has always existed. The feminine principle was “created from” the masculine principle in that God’s reaching out for us created the need for a way for us to reach back.

The entire regenerative cycle was created out of God’s love for us. And as a result, the feminine principle exists for the purpose of people loving God. All people. The feminine principle was created for us, men and women, out of God’s existing nature, for all of us to participate in equally, just as we must all participate in our masculine natures in order find and recognize God at all.

So even though, by creation, the feminine principle came into existence “second,” it does not necessarily follow to say that women are dependent on men overall because, as always, the regenerative and marriage cycles are occurring simultaneously.

Marriage Love 32 The inmost quality in masculinity is love, and its veil wisdom, or in other words, it is love veiled over with wisdom, while the inmost quality in femininity is *that same* wisdom, the wisdom of masculinity, and its veil the love resulting from it.

The feminine principle has a very specific purpose - that of conjunction, or the completion of the cycle. What “*that same*” means will depend on what cycle is being completed. For conjunction in marriage it needs to be “that same wisdom” of the husband, or else who are wives conjoining themselves to? Within the regenerative cycle, “that same wisdom” is the Lord’s wisdom, for both men and women. The reason that the temporal dependence of the feminine principle upon the masculine principle does not extend to total intellectual dependence of women upon men is that the regenerative cycle is operating within all of us. Within that context, from universal principles, men have within them a feminine principle that is seeking to be joined to “that same wisdom” - the Lord’s wisdom - and women have a masculine principle within them that is capable of finding such wisdom directly from the Lord.

The church is implanted in the husband, and through the husband in the wife

There are several passages in *Marriage Love* that talk about the way in which the church is formed within the marriage relationship.

Marriage Love 63. ...the way in which the church is formed by the Lord in two married partners, and through it conjugal love...the church is formed by the Lord in the man, and through the man in his wife. And after it has been formed in the two together, the church is complete, for then a full conjunction of good and truth takes place, and the conjunction of good and truth is the church.

And further:

Marriage Love 125. (6) A husband does not represent the Lord and his wife the church, because husbands and their wives both together form the church. It is a common saying in the church that as the Lord is the head of the church, so the husband is the head of the wife. If this were true, it would follow that the husband represents the Lord and the wife the church. But the truth is that, whereas the Lord is the head of the church, people - both men and women - are the church, and still more so husbands and wives together. In the case of married couples, the church is implanted first in the man, and through the man in his wife, because the man with his understanding acquires the truth that the church teaches, and the wife acquires it from the man. But if the reverse takes place, it is not according to order.

From these passages, arguments have been made that men need to take the lead when it comes to earthly church business. At one time, these passages were used to argue for men leading the day to day business of the church, now they are used primarily to say that men should lead in the business of theology: the ministry.

What we see here in these passages, is an attempt by Swedenborg to express the realities of the two separate cycles. *Marriage Love 63* is talking about the marriage cycle exclusively. *Marriage Love 125* starts out by talking about how the regenerative cycle is primary, and then (at "in the case of married couples") returns to talking about the marriage cycle.

The "church" is being formed wherever good and truth are conjoined, and here the church is being formed simultaneously on two levels. Each individual person is tasked with forming the church within their own lives and their own regenerative process (TCR 510). And, by the same principles, a church - good and truth conjoined - is also formed within the marriage relationship. This church has nothing to do with an earthly organization and everything to do with becoming a representation of the heavenly marriage.

The reference to order is a reference to the mechanics of conjunction and how the marriage relationship reflects the heavenly marriage. This is a personal experience

between couples, and again, has nothing to do with church as an organization that teaches doctrine. A wife must draw on the personal intellect of her husband because when he expresses what he believes about truth and how it relates to himself, their relationship and the greater world, it is that which attracts her and impels her to complete the marriage cycle with love. A wife cannot love a husband if she doesn't truly know what is essential about him. In this way, the marriage relationship is dependent on the husband being willing, being vulnerable enough, not to "teach" the wife, but to reveal his cherished thoughts about truth. Only then can a wife truly love him, her husband.

But we must be careful not to take the dynamics of this relational cycle, a cycle that very specifically conjoins one husband and one wife, and mistake the levels, turning the marriage cycle into a scenario in which the husband becomes the intercessor for God in the wife's regenerative process.

Divine Providence 328(5) Only God is love and wisdom. We are created to be recipients of both, so that our volition may be a recipient of divine love and our discernment a recipient of divine wisdom. (Dole)

And, as Marriage Love 125 reminds us, from our day-to-day experience we can see that husbands can benefit from their wife's understanding as they interact as human beings together, both becoming part of forming God's church on earth together. Two levels, many blessings.

Male and female are not capable of each other's wisdom

Marriage Love 168. (10) This perception is a wisdom that the wife has. A man is not capable of it, neither is a wife capable of her husband's intellectual wisdom. This follows from the difference that exists between masculinity and femininity. It is masculine to perceive from the intellect, and feminine to perceive from love...It is apparent from this that, because of the universal difference which exists between masculinity and femininity, a husband is not capable of his wife's wisdom, nor is a wife capable of her husband's wisdom. Women are not even capable of a man's moral wisdom to the extent that it springs from his intellectual wisdom.

This passage forms the basis for the argument that men and women have a special wisdom that the other is not capable of, and since that special wisdom in men is intellectual, then women are not qualified to be priests.

First, this argument is taking a principle from the marriage cycle and overlaying it on the level of the regenerative cycle as if the regenerative cycle doesn't exist. In the interplay of marriage, the husband cannot play the part of the wife and the wife cannot play the part of the husband. The husband must reveal his unique thoughts about truth in order for the wife to have something to conjoin herself to. But this wisdom is "special" in that it

is “personal.” A wife cannot manufacture it herself, for in that case there would be no one to be in relationship with.

But in a broader sense, this passage is speaking to the differences in trajectory with the masculine and feminine principles. To perceive means to recognize, discern, envision or understand; we see what we are facing towards. Out of love, the masculine principle (G---->T) seeks to frame everything that it perceives within the realm of truth; this is what it is heading towards. From wisdom, the feminine principle (T---->G) seeks to frame everything that it perceives within the realm of goodness; this is what it is heading towards. From universal principles, the perceiving itself is not limited. And we must remember, the masculine and feminine principles are operative in both men and women: this is the paradox - we are both human and gendered.

Higher Light, Higher Warmth

Marriage Love 188. (4) In men the mind is elevated into a higher light, and in women the mind is elevated into a higher warmth; moreover, a woman feels the delights of her warmth in the light of a man. By the light into which men are elevated we mean intelligence and wisdom...by the warmth into which women are elevated we mean conjugal love...

[2] We call it an elevation into a higher light and warmth, because it is an elevation into the light and warmth in which angels of the higher heavens are. It is also an actual ascent, as though from a mist into open air...Therefore the elevation into a higher light in men is an elevation into higher intelligence and from this into wisdom, in which there is possible a still higher and higher ascent. And on the other hand, the elevation into a higher warmth in women is an elevation into a more and more chaste and pure conjugal love...

[3] Regarded in themselves, these elevations are openings of the mind...as it is opened in men by wisdom, and in women by truly conjugal love.

This passage is used to argue that men have access to a special, higher wisdom than women, and women a higher quality of love. They each have something that is, quite literally, out of reach to the other. In the case of ordaining women, since the priesthood requires the teaching of truth and men have an spiritual wisdom that women don't have, therefore, women are not qualified to be priests.

It is very tempting to identify strongly with the idea that we are special, that we have some special quality that someone else doesn't have. But, can we look at this passage via universal principles? This passage is talking about the elevation of the mind; in both cases a higher elevation, in both cases a peak experience. The process of regeneration, for both sexes, depends upon this higher elevation, depends upon the new will dragging the intellect upwards (TCR 604). We know that women are capable of regenerating as fully as men, independently. We also know that we are born to operate *inter*dependently with each other. This passage is speaking to the dynamics of

our interdependence, how men and women, from equal elevations, from equal “openings of the mind,” frame things differently.

But note how *Marriage Love 211* characterizes the phenomenon from a more holistic perspective:

Marriage Love 211 It follows from this that people who are possessed of this love [the love of growing wise] love nothing better than to become wise. For a person becomes wise as the inner perceptions of his mind are opened, because by their opening the thoughts of his understanding are raised into a higher light and the affections of his will into a higher warmth - the higher light being wisdom, and the higher warmth a love for wisdom. Spiritual delights joined to natural delights - as is the case in people in a state of truly conjugal love - bring about an amenability to and therefore a capacity for becoming wise.

Or note *True Christianity 602*, when it speaks of the process of regeneration for all people:

It is important to note however, that our intellect can rise up almost into the light that the angels of heaven have...

These two passages are about the experience of people, both male and female. The higher light and higher warmth are both a human and gendered experience. The differences in our peak spiritual experiences create a beautiful interplay within the marriage relationship. The similarities of our peak spiritual experiences make us human. The Lord helps us, we help each other.

Feminine or masculine in every part

Marriage Love 38 Furthermore, because interior qualities form the exterior ones to their likeness, and the masculine form is a form of the intellect while the feminine form is a form of the love of the intellect, therefore the male has a different look, a different sound, and a different physique...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. And because one cannot as a consequence be converted into the other, it follows that after death a male is still male, and that a female is still female.

This passage is used to downplay the shared human experience of men and women within the regenerative cycle. Men and women are reduced specifically to feminine and masculine traits, allowing for marriage dynamics to be primary.

It is true that God designed the regenerative cycle very specifically. From creation, literally and functionally, the masculine and the feminine cannot perform the other's function - they are not interchangeable. However, from universal principles, we know there are two levels at work here. Clearly, even though the masculine and feminine principles must be operative in every person, we are not part male and part female. We are completely male or female, AND completely human at the same time.

Let us remember the point Swedenborg is trying to make here. The common idea at the time that he wrote was that marriage did not occur in heaven, and that gender with angels was not experienced in the same way in heaven as on earth. Swedenborg is trying to make sure that his readers understand that gender is retained in heaven, and that it is created, not chosen.

Women who concentrate on gaining knowledge

Secrets of Heaven 8994 [3] The difference between those imbued with truth devoid of affection, who were represented by the male slaves, and those imbued with an affection for truth, who were represented by the female slaves, is akin to the difference between knowing truth and willing truth. Knowing truth belongs solely to the understanding part of the mind, whereas willing truth belongs to the will part; consequently the difference is akin to that between knowledge and affection. Those imbued with a knowledge of truth and good, meant by male slaves or the men in the representative sense, have no affection for truth and good, only for the knowledge of them; consequently they are delighted with truths for the sake of knowing them. But those imbued with an affection for truth and good, meant by female slaves or the women in the representative sense, have no affection for the knowledge of truth and good, only for truths and forms of good themselves, as they hear and perceive them from others. This kind of affection exists generally with good women, but the affection for knowledge of truth exists generally with men.

[4] So it is that 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, so the women do not love themselves because of their knowledge but love men; and from this springs the desire for marriage.

This passage is used to argue that, since the priesthood is an vocation that actively concentrates on gaining theological knowledge, that women priests would not be liked by those who are "spiritually perceptive." And since being "spiritually perceptive" is generally considered to be good thing, then that would indicate that it is not an optimal activity for women.

When Swedenborg uses the term "gaining knowledge," many times it is not in a positive context. Gaining knowledge for the sake of gaining knowledge itself, rather than from

an affection for truth, is something of a dead end spiritually. This distinction becomes clear when we pay attention to earlier parts of the passage:

The difference between those imbued with truth devoid of affection, who were represented by the male slaves, and those imbued with an affection for truth, who were represented by the female slaves, is akin to the difference between knowing truth and willing truth.

The problem here is clearly “truth devoid of affection” which is what is meant by “gaining knowledges.” Another example of this usage is in *Divine Providence 151*, where gaining knowledge is described as only the first step in a process:

The inner self is not reformed simply by gaining knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, not, that is, simply by thinking. We are reformed inwardly by intending to do what our knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom tell us.

From common sense and experience, we know that both men and women, due to our shared humanity, do have some affection for gaining knowledges, otherwise women would have no interest in formal education, and no starting point in the formation of their faith. We see in *Secrets of Heaven 10490*, “In the case of a person, in the first state he learns things that must compose his faith...” But as *Divine Providence 151* points out, gaining knowledges is simply an entry point. “Having no affection for the knowledge of truth and good” really is about not having an affection *only* for the knowledge of truth and good.

We can all see how “truth devoid of affection” would be a problem for anyone, and also that it would be intuitively disliked by spiritually inclined people. However, even though the work of the priesthood does indeed involve seeking out knowledge of spiritual truth, no one would say that it is the job of the priesthood to seek out truth that is devoid of affection. Gaining knowledge must be followed by an endeavor to put that knowledge to use. The priesthood is tasked with “teaching truth and leading to the good of life.” This is impossible from a place of “truth devoid of affection,” and indeed, priests that “who teach, but do not guide people to lead good lives” are characterized as “bad shepherds” (NJHD 315)

Further, we can see that the context for this spiritual principle is marriage (“...from this springs the desire for marriage.”) Imagine that a wife were to motivated to simply “gain knowledge” about her husband and his personal take on the truth? How might she be motivated to use that knowledge if she did not have an innate affection to conjoin herself to his personal truths, but instead “loved herself on account of that knowledge?” Would a husband feel motivated to share his truths with a wife such as this? Probably not. This feels like a violation of the sanctity of the marriage relationship and rightly so.

In a human sense, no one is served by the simple gaining of knowledge. But in the context of marriage in particular, which is a give and take relationship, it simply does not

work for the wife to focus on gaining knowledge of her husband for whatever purpose, otherwise the conjugal dynamic would stop dead. For conjunction to proceed the wife must be motivated by an affection for her husband's truth.

Universal principles dictate then, that simply gaining knowledge as an end in itself is bad for anyone and would prevent a priest of either gender from doing their job properly. And in marriage specifically, a wife simply gaining knowledge of her husband's affections without reciprocating out of love is a non-starter. But it doesn't make sense in this context to equate "gaining knowledge" with the priesthood's main thrust, or to assume that marital dynamics play out in the use of the priesthood.

Arguments centered around the relationship of the will and intellect

A male is born intellect-oriented and a female is born will-oriented.

Marriage Love 33. It is owing to this original formation that a male is born intellect-oriented and that a female is born will-oriented, or in other words, that a male is born with an affection for knowing, understanding and becoming wise, while a female is born with a love for joining herself to that affection in the male.

Marriage Love 168 (10) 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.

These passages can be used to argue that being will-oriented means that women will not have the necessary intellect for priestly work, and further, that due to a lesser separation between the feminine will and intellect, that feelings, rather than logic, will guide their conclusions.

Let us examine these passages by asking three questions: Which level are these passages talking about? What does orientation mean? What is objectivity?

Which level?

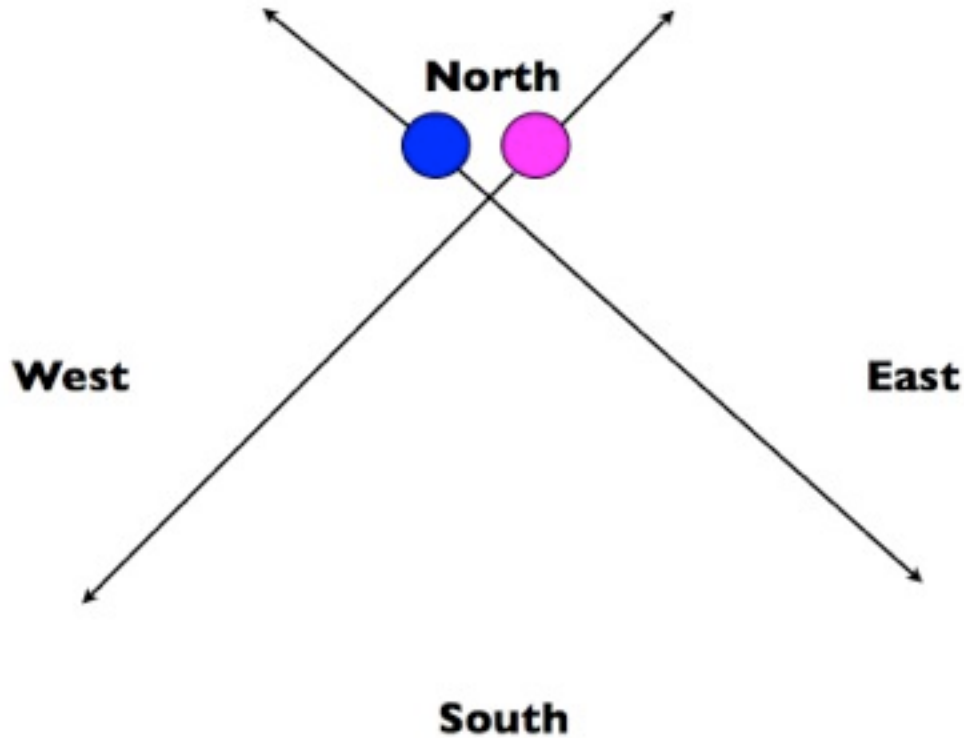
What dynamic are these passages talking about? We know from universal principles that a woman has a will and understanding separate enough to allow her to regenerate independently. So these passages cannot be giving us any information about the individual regenerative process. If they were, then we must conclude from *Marriage Love 168* that a woman cannot perceive anything at all beyond what she feels without a man. There is no freedom in that scenario. Freedom is the "apple of the Lord's eye," so clearly, these passages must be talking exclusively about marriage, indeed, a "union established from creation."

Marriage Love 168 begins by alluding to the masculine and feminine principles, at work both in the regenerative and marriage cycles. Remember, the masculine principle, (G----->T) is about the reaching out, as God reaches out to us, the “moving in the direction of the world,” putting one’s truth out there in order to be found. The feminine principle (T----->G) is about the pulling back in towards conjunction and the conjoining, grounding impulse that is born from how the truth makes us feel. In the marriage relationship, either participant can cause a bottleneck in the progression of the relationship. However, inception of the cycle itself will be an outward offering of “intellectual and spiritual sight” from the husband, a courageous and deeply personal offering. Without this offering, there is nothing for the wife to conjoin herself to, and in this way she must “draw on his intellect.” The nature of pure love is toward conjunction, and indeed, it cannot know or want anything else. Luckily, women are not pure love. Women are forms of love in the marriage cycle, and also, from universal principles, are human beings with intellects that can choose to evaluate their loves.

What is orientation?

Marriage Love 33 introduces the question of orientation and how that affects gender perspectives. Orientation means the direction that you are facing. When talking about men being intellect-oriented and women being will-oriented, it is easy to imagine them facing outward with their back to one another, with nothing of their experience in common. This idea is perpetuated the more we emphasize the marriage cycle over the regenerative cycle. Couples are led, erroneously, to believe that they are each half of a person that requires their spouse to be complete. Instead, paradoxically, they are two fully complete human beings entering into an interdependent relationship that will lead them to distinct oneness, based on the distinct oneness of love and wisdom in the Lord.

So, imagine instead that men and women begin their orientation from a common place, let us say the “north” of common humanity. And let us imagine further that the masculine orientation was northwest, and the feminine orientation was northeast. The perspectives are singular in part and are overlapping in part. Imagining orientation in this manner leaves room for both common experience and distinctive gender viewpoints. In addition, the specific angle at which each person is facing also leaves room for the variances of personality within each individual marriage. Some couples may experience more overlap and some less, but no one person holds all the will “cards” or all the intellect “cards”.



Additionally, when we are dealing with the idea of orientation is very easy to only think about what we are facing. But what about the thing that is driving us? We can see that the masculine principle (G---->T) is oriented toward truth, but that it is driven by good, or rather, is intellect driven by will. Conversely, we can see that the feminine principle (T---->G) is goodness driven by truth, love driven by wisdom. This becomes an important distinction when we talk about our third question, the “purity of doctrine” and the idea of objectivity.

What is objectivity?

Arguments are sometimes made that the willing and understanding in women is not as separate as in men, and therefore an all male priesthood will protect the purity of the church’s doctrine because they are intellect-oriented and less likely to be swayed by what they want. In other words, the fidelity of male priests will be to what *is* true, but the fidelity of female priests will be to what they *want* to be true. Therefore, it would be dangerous for women to be ordained because they cannot not allow their intellect enough space from their will.

Unfortunately, the protective aspects of a male priesthood is an illusion. A comforting one perhaps, but still an illusion.

Divine Providence 61 Every person's spirit is a form of affection and of its resulting thought, and because every affection is a property of love, and thought a property of the intellect, every spirit is an embodiment of his love and of his consequent intellect. That is the reason that when a person is thinking by himself from his spirit, which he does when meditating to himself at home, he thinks from an affection which belongs to his love.

Every person is a form of affection and its resulting thought, even men. The ability to be objective is not necessarily a function of how separate our will and intellect are. Our will and intellect can never be truly separate. The real question is whether we have an awareness of what will is guiding our intellect - our higher will or our lower will. Our higher will is motivated by love. Repentance is possible because of the higher will guiding the intellect in the search for truth, and allowing it to see the lower will for what it really is (TCR 604). Therefore, since the will is always guiding, for better or for worse, it behooves our regenerative process to understand as much as possible about our will and its attendant emotions.

This understanding of the will is integral to understanding objectivity. The main distinction actually has less to do with *separation* and more to do with *access*. In terms of women and men, the question of will-orientation might have something to do with the fact that women often seem very adept at accessing and identifying their emotions, and men, less so (remembering of course, that generalizations have limited usefulness and people exist on a spectrum of ability). Access does not imply more or less emotion, but rather an awareness of it. This awareness can lead to an evaluation of an emotion's usefulness, and a desire to ask the Lord to enhance or diminish it. Our relationship with our will depends on awareness. Emotion is at the heart of thought, even when one is not specifically aware of it. And if we are not aware of our emotions, we cannot evaluate them and they will drive our thought regardless.

Greater *experience* of emotion, in and of itself, does not change the nature of thought. A hardly-felt emotion will produce the same thought as a greatly-felt emotion. What a greater experience of emotion might do is motivate someone to express their thoughts more strongly. An example might be the intensity of emotion that some women experience during their cycle. Accessing or feeling intense emotion during a pre-menstrual state does not create new or different patterns of thought due to the fact of the intensity. There is a tendency (for men in particular) to imagine that conclusions reached during a pre-menstrual state are artifacts of the excess of emotion, and may be universally dismissed. However, the truth is that thoughts or opinions that were true (or false) at other times of a woman's cycle are still true (or false) during a pre-menstrual state, but the undercurrent of attendant emotion is more apparent. And experiencing this intensity is not always enjoyable. But what one gets is a truer picture of what is really going on. Emotion is always driving thought for everyone and sometimes, for varying reasons, people are gifted with an uncovering, or a lifting of the veil. So, one way to characterize the feminine perspective is that it is looking towards love, driven by a wisdom about how the will and intellect work together (T---->G).

And so what might it mean that men are intellect-oriented? The masculine principle is looking towards truth, but driven by love or affection (G---->T). Looking towards intellect means that perhaps the relationship between the motivating emotion and the resultant thought will be more obscure. And maybe the gift of the obscurity is an ability to focus, as the intense experience of emotion can be exhausting. However, the concurrent danger of being intellect-oriented is imagining that the lack of access to emotion means that emotion is not present, and not driving thought at all.

So, one might characterize orientation thusly: for both men and women the will drives thought, but for men the challenge is accessing and identifying their emotions and for women the challenge is regulating their access to emotion. For both, the object is awareness of emotion in order to reach true objectivity. True objectivity is not about separating the will and the intellect, which is not really possible. True objectivity comes from a real understanding about how the will and the intellect relate to each other.

The truth is there has been plenty of questionable doctrine perpetrated in both the universal and the New Church, historically most of it by men. Upton Sinclair wrote that "It's hard to get a man to understand something if his paycheck depends upon him not understanding it." The lack of true objectivity is a *human* problem, not a specifically female one. The human intellect will always be guided by the will. A devout person will do their very best to make sure that their will is good. But "maleness" is not a talisman that will protect the church's doctrine. The only thing that will protect the church's doctrine is the sincere effort to bring our wills into integrity with God's will, and women are equally capable of this, otherwise they would not be able to regenerate at all. (For a further treatment of this topic in regard to General Church preaching hermeneutics and the "Hazards of Ministry", see *Examining the Policy of a male-only clergy in the General Church*).

Character is determined by that which predominates

Heaven and Hell 369 talks further about the differences between men and women:

Everyone, whether man or woman, possesses understanding and will; but with the man the understanding predominates, and with the woman the will predominates, and the character is determined by that which predominates. Yet in heavenly marriages there is no predominance; for the will of the wife is also the husband's will, and the understanding of the husband is also the wife's understanding, since each loves to will and to think like the other, that is mutually and reciprocally. Thus are they conjoined into one. This conjunction is actual conjunction, for the will of the wife enters into the understanding of the husband, and the understanding of the husband into the will of the wife...

This passage is also used, firstly, to argue that if women have a character that is dominated by their will, then they will be led to arrive at doctrinal conclusions based on emotions rather than intellect. And secondly, that with the "entering of the understanding of the husband into the will of the wife", any doctrinal conclusions

reached by a (married) female priest would rightly belong to the husband and this feels like a deception of some kind.

This invites the question, what is it that forms character? Character is defined as the aggregate of features or traits that form the individual nature or quality of something. The phrase “character is determined by that which predominates,” sounds as if all of a person’s traits were competing in a race and some lost the right to be expressed. Yet an aggregate of features must include all parts of a person’s humanity as well as their gender. Certainly we all know men who exhibit strong will characteristics or women who exhibit strong intellectual characteristics. Could it possibly be more accurate to imagine that character is *colored* by that which predominates? That, instead, each gender looks through a lens that colors their perception. The quality of discernment (or love) is equal, the shading allows for nuance.

As for the second conclusion, this is an issue of misplaced emphasis, a confusion of levels. It is not appropriate to take principles from the marriage cycle and apply them to the regenerative level as if the regenerative cycle doesn’t exist. This argument also perpetuates the half-person idea, when instead we are dealing with whole human beings. From universal principles, in the regenerative cycle, an individual woman is capable of reaching her own intellectual conclusions without dependence on her husband or other men. In marriage, a wife draws upon her husband’s intellect so that it becomes more and more her own, and not in the manner of a parasite or a strange pet, but in the same way that angels who acknowledge the Lord feel more and more themselves. When a husband draws upon his wife’s love, it does not remain foreign to him, something to adore but remain other. It becomes his own. In neither case is this a submission. It is an integration. Neither is it required to bring only half of ourselves to the relationship - our pre-existing human loves and understandings are enriched. It manifests a personal connection between husband and wife that reflects the regenerative process, but does not supplant it.

Women who preach like men...

Spiritual Experiences is one of the few places that Swedenborg writes explicitly about women who preach. It first must be noted that, as an unpublished work, *Spiritual Experiences* is not universally considered canonical by the New Church. I think that all will concede that unpublished works must be treated more cautiously than published works, and that any information from them must be in accord with universal principles.

It is a common assertion by those who advocate for an all-male clergy, that passages from *Spiritual Experiences* such as 5936 are useful in creating a policy for the priesthood because what they say is consistent with what the rest of the Writings say. This assertion needs to be challenged. At most, the passages are consistent with *examples* that Swedenborg gives to illustrate the differences between men and women. They are not consistent with universal principles, most specifically with the doctrines of freedom, regeneration and self-determination.

Spiritual Diary 5936. WOMEN WHO PREACH.

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, which is affectional; owing to which they must be with married men: they also become material, so that affection perishes and their interiors are closed. 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 outward form, indeed, they are still able to appear like other women. In a word, they become sensual in the last degree. Woman belongs to the home; and she [becomes] of a different nature where [she engages in] preaching.

Let us examine this passage in detail. First of all, there is the phrase “in the way men do.” One can approach this phrase both existentially and culturally. The first approach asks “*can* women preach in the way men do?” and the second approach asks “should they be *allowed* to?”

The first approach invites us to think of women preaching “as men do” as a technical impossibility, because women will think, talk and preach in the way women do, or in a feminine way. This is a valuable perspective because it speaks to a faith in the wisdom our creation. Men and women express the beauty of love and wisdom in the Lord on both the human and gendered level in a balanced and blessed way. However, we must be careful that this idea does not lead us to being prescriptive about what masculine and feminine “ways” mean. People exist on a spectrum, with both masculine and feminine principles operating to greater and lesser extents within them, all viewed through natural gender perspectives. What we will get from that reality is a wide variety of approaches. On a human level, we are all searching for truth. Can we leave behind the “as men do” and “as women do” in preference for “as an individual will do?” The masculine and feminine principles are powerful and integral; we can trust in them to manifest balance through the good-willed seeking of each individual to serve the Lord to the best of their ability.

But the context of the phrase “as men do” invites us to consider whether this existential interpretation is really what Swedenborg meant. The “*still more*,” implies that preaching is only the final and worst manifestation of a woman thinking and talking too much about religion at all. So, it could also be that Swedenborg means for the preaching to be an extension of the other faults. This presents a problem: how are women supposed to know when they are *thinking* as men do? Do we not all just think as *ourselves*? For the sake of argument, what would “thinking as a man” look like? Thinking about religion abstractedly apart from use? Being motivated by the masculine principle (G---->T) to search for and evaluate truth in any way? And if there are dire spiritual consequences for a woman thinking too much like man, are there dire spiritual consequences for a man thinking too much “like a woman?” What would that look like? Are we now all supposed to curate our thoughts beyond whether they are good or evil, to also include whether they are too male or too female?

Further, we must examine the principles behind the supposed effects of women preaching. The passage claims that it “does away” with the feminine nature, makes a woman material and closes her interiors. Does this make sense given universal regenerative principles? Is it possible that one particular natural act can excise something as elemental and integral as the feminine principle within a human being? Or that worse still, that a woman’s feminine nature can apparently be done away with without the knowledge or acquiescence of the woman in question? This a not a likely scenario given the universal principles of regeneration.

Here is the apparent set-up: a woman, with completely good intentions, could be preaching to her best understanding of God’s truth, and without her consent, this action could destroy her femininity (T----->G), completely destroy any desire that she has to live a good life and essentially “close off her spiritual interiors.” The regenerative process, and the notion of our spiritual freedom, requires that the destruction of spiritual capacities within us must be accompanied by a concomitant desire for such capacities to be destroyed; this is the heart of our doctrine of hell. No one is in hell who doesn’t want to be. There are no actions that can condemn us without our desire to be distanced from God. Except for the case of women preaching? We read in *Secrets of Heaven* 9293:

...for deeds are nothing other than witness-bearers to such things as compose the will. They also derive their soul or life from the will. Therefore something similar may be said of deeds as of movements, namely that nothing in deeds has life apart from the will, just as nothing in movements has life apart from endeavor. Mankind also knows this to be so, for someone endowed with intelligence pays no attention to a person's deeds, only to his will, the source, the means, and the reason for the deeds. Indeed someone endowed with wisdom scarcely notices the deeds but rather sees in the deeds what his will is like and how great it is.

This passage makes clear the proper ordering of cause and effect, that our actions derive their soul from the will. Preaching (or simply talking too much about doctrine) cannot make the will evil; this is a reversal of the divine precept that the external cannot flow into the internal (AC 2577).

When we take the ideas in this passage to their logical conclusions, we can see that they don’t make sense in light of universal principles. Arguments for a male-only clergy concede the lack of explicit mention of a prohibition on female priests in the published works, and admit passages from *Spiritual Experiences* are outliers that can only be considered due to the fact of their apparent consistency with the rest of the Writings. However, close examination shows that they are *not* consistent with the universal principles of New Church theology. Proponents of an inclusive clergy challenge the passages from *Spiritual Experiences* not because of hurt feelings, but because they don’t make sense.

Conclusion

We read in *Heaven and Hell* 435:

...This is why we, unlike animals, can be raised up by the Lord toward himself, as far as all the deeper levels of our mind and character are concerned. This is why we can believe in him, be moved by love for him, and therefore see him. It is why we can receive intelligence and wisdom, and talk rationally. It is also why we live forever.

It is time to focus on the “we.” The differences between men and women are truly beautiful, but they are only useful when they are used in ways that serve our freedom and rationality, not take it away.

The prohibition on women’s ordination implies an ontological inferiority on the part of women, even if this idea is never stated outright. In fact, no amount of reverence, appreciation or encouragement about “women’s uses” can overcome that. The implication will still stand because ideas have logical consequences. Policies have consequences. As a church we need to own the consequences of our doctrinal ideas, and if we see that the consequences are not optimal, then we must ask ourselves “is there something we are missing?” Have we mistaken our emphasis? For the sake of our all-important freedom and rationality, our fidelity must be to universal principles, first and foremost.

From universal principles, we know that women *do* have an affection for knowing, understanding and becoming wise; human beings are all endowed with this quality. We know that women *can* separate their will and intellect, otherwise they would not be able to regenerate. And we know that the regenerative and marriage cycles occur at the same time, to full effect, so that we may experience both spiritual independence and interdependence. The marriage cycle is specifically talking about the way in which a husband and a wife become conjoined, and draws its structure from the regenerative cycle. The fact that the marriage cycle might be occurring does not mean that the regenerative cycle stops occurring. We must hold both ideas in our minds at the same time, as separate and discrete levels of degree. This is the glory of the way God has designed the connective principles of the universe - with multiple redundancies! Yes, he loves us *that* much! There is no dependence, only interdependence. There is no deficiency, only blessing. We are all born to be “mirrors that reflect the Lord.”

True Christianity 508[6] Afterward I saw someone like a young child overhead, holding a piece of paper in his hand. As he came nearer to me, he grew into a person of medium height. He was an angel from the third heaven, where all the inhabitants appear from a distance like little children. When he was in my presence, he handed me the piece of paper. Because it was written in the curved letters they use in that heaven, however, I handed it back and asked that they express the meaning of the message in words adapted to the ideas in my thinking. He replied, "What is written there is this: **'From now on, explore the**

mysteries of the Word, which was formerly closed up. All of its individual truths are mirrors that reflect the Lord."