

Marriage and True Morality

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In Hosea it is said: “And I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, and in lovingkindness and in mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord” (Hosea 2:19-20). On interior levels, this refers to the marriage of the Lord and the church, and the marriage of good and truth within the human heart (see *Arcana Coelestia* 9182:6). From these comes conjugal love (see *Conjugal Love* 60, 62, 64) and so this poetry in Hosea speaks directly of the conjugal.

Conjugal love is the gift the Lord offers to the New Church. In it, potentially, is found the sweetness of human life. If it is received, it is a love that is to last forever, and in it husband and wife will find the Lord. This is why it is said in Hosea, “I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.”

The teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church on the nature of conjugal love are not only appealing, but they contain within them, in their very context, a strong challenge. The plain statement is that conjugal love is “celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean above every love which is from the Lord with the angels of heaven and the people of the church” (*Conjugal Love* 64). This love excels all others in its use (*Conjugal Love* 68). It is the “chief among the essentials of human life” (*Posthumous Theological Works*, Vol. II, Swedenborg Foundation, 1928, First Index on Marriage, under Conjugiale, p.493). This love is likened to a parent, and all other loves to its offspring (*Conjugal Love* 65. It is called the “inmost of all loves” (*Spiritual Experiences* 4405).

Conjugal love is the “chief among the essentials of human life”. This is something that we know emotionally in the first states of falling in love and in later states of marriage when the perception is given. But doctrinally it is a teaching that we may underestimate. That is, affectionally we know that conjugal love is vital—but is it held in the same respect in our reflective thinking? If conjugal love is not held as “above every love,” then we will probably fail in truly applying this doctrine to the problems of life.

Morality in premarital states and morality in marriage are under attack as never before. The revealed truth concerning the value of virginity before marriage is often regarded as a quaint and Victorian idea. The sphere of pornography, of exploiting the sexual relationship to satisfy the selfish proprium, comes at us in many forms. Numerous movies and novels are full of explicit sexual pandering, without the redeeming factor of genuine affection. More and more, adultery is made not only permissible, but is presented as containing within it real love, and therefore real innocence. This attack upon genuine love, or conjugal love, is not universal—if it were our civilization would fall. There is still some perception of what love is. But those who hold on to this insight are working against a powerful tide. The existential arguments against virginity before marriage and against the sanctity of marriage itself, are dominantly strong in the world around us. Practice speaks louder than words, and the practice of premarital sex and of adultery

is widespread. The most powerful argument for adultery is often simply to let the delight speak for itself.

The greatest challenge to the New Church today is this attack on conjugal love and the frightening danger that within our church conjugal love will be undermined and then lost. Outwardly, this challenge comes because of the thinking in the world around us. This challenge is more subtle than areas of attack in the past; it is not directly a doctrinal or religious attack. It is rather a life issue that can undermine both religion and doctrine.

What defenses do we have? None, unless we go directly to the Lord—in prayer to shun the things that oppose marriage and in His Word. In the Heavenly Doctrine there are teachings from the Lord of inestimable aid in protecting the conjugal—positive teachings on its priority and beauty, teachings which show that conjugal love is potentially present on every level of the heart and mind, even to the soul, in the heaven of human internals. There are also powerful truths on the nature and quality of adultery. A good can be known fully only by seeing its opposite clearly; when the qualities within an evil can be known, that evil loses some of its disguises and power. If only the affirmative sides of conjugal love are learned, then the danger is that what is so real will be turned into what is only sentimental. Then what is sentimental can so easily be twisted into what is falsely sweet; the hells love this, for false sweetness betrays real qualities.

In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created (Genesis 5:1-2).

“He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’.... So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate (Matthew 19:4-6).

The promise is made that when a young man and woman look to the Lord and pray for conjugal love and at the same time shun what is lascivious, they will be led to each other—to the discovery of the beginning of conjugal love (*Conjugal Love* 49e). There is the miracle of falling in love! And this love develops in the springtime state of betrothal.

*The mind or spirit of the one is prepared by betrothal for union with the mind or spirit of the other.... Upon love truly conjugal this order is inscribed... it ascends and descends; it ascends progressively upwards from its first heat towards the souls, with an effort to conjunction there, and this by openings of the minds continually more interior; and there is no love that more intensely labors for these openings, or which more powerfully and easily opens the interiors of the minds than conjugal love, for the soul of each intends it. But at the same moments when that love is ascending towards the soul, it is descending also towards the body, and is thereby clothing itself (*Conjugal Love* 302).*

This marriage of the spirit, with its springtime happiness, is to take place before the marriage of the body—before the wedding. During betrothal, we are taught in the Heavenly Doctrine that “it is not permissible to be bodily conjoined” (*Conjugal Love* 305). This prohibition is made by the Lord not out of lack of compassion, but so that the chief of all loves can be established deeply in the heart—so that it may descend chastely and last eternally. There are at least two passages which speak of permissions in premarital states (*Conjugal Love* 460; *Arcana Coelestia* 9182), and they still allow for conjugal love to be discovered. But permissions are just that: permissions. If they are incorrectly emphasized as the genuine order, they will undermine the conjugal in the New Church. It is fidelity to the ideal that establishes conjugal love. Permissiveness to lust can destroy all hope.

The Heavenly Doctrine speaks realistically about states after marriage—about how first love is so often lost. But it also says that the first states of marriage can be the beginning of a deeper and deeper relationship (*Conjugal Love* 58, 59). It is the proprium that undermines marriage, and in the Word, Divine truths are given that expose the subtle nature of the proprium to a person, and enable him to shun its devastating effects on marriage. As long as the ruling evil of selfishness is shunned, the conjugal will stay within a marriage, even though at times it may seem lost. Regeneration, after all, has to be gone through! But, in time, the conjugal in interiors, and then the conjugal fully felt, will come to a man and woman—they will come as the permanent delight of delights and as the use of uses (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 2039:1, 3952e, 4606:2, 3961; *Apocalypse Revealed* 359; *Conjugal Love* 68, 305).

Knowing the deceits hell uses to make adultery seem good can help conjugal love to grow. By adultery is meant the term in its widest sense—all that is lascivious and contrary to marriage. The devils of hell use deceit as their favorite weapon and love to appear innocent. Evil spirits know that if evil can be made to appear innocent, then the good can be enticed and led to yield to it. In many ways today adultery is made to seem innocent—as touching, moving, compellingly sweet. But the Heavenly Doctrine reveals a secret: behind adultery is not love, but hate! Adultery is an expression of hate and domination, very subtly masked. Adultery counterfeits love, while actually within it is a hate “above every hate.” The cold sphere of adultery comes from the inmost level of the fallen will (*Conjugal Love* 270de). In the revelation given through Emanuel Swedenborg, we read,

It has been granted me to see...love [of adultery] in its essence, and it was such that within it was deadly hatred, while without it appeared like a fire from burning.... And as that fire with its delight burnt out, so by degrees the life of mutual discourse and intercourse expired, and hatred came forth, manifested first as contempt, afterwards as aversion, then as rejection... (Apocalypse Explained 991).

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that “No one can be in conjugal love unless he becomes spiritual by combat against evils and their falsities, and unless he acknowledges the Lord and His Divine”

(*De Conj.* 31). What can then flow into a person, secretly and inmostly, is conjugal innocence. It is revealed that Conjugal love “is innocence itself” and also that “conjugal love is love to the Lord” (*De Conj.* 6-7). This is because the Lord is with a husband and wife in the conjugal. What is good in each person is not really theirs, but the Lord’s in them, and this they love deeply in the other. In loving this, they love the Lord. This comes to fruition in uses, where each contributes an essential part.

As a person shuns adultery, the Lord comes to him with all the power of His glorified Divine Human. The truth is that “no one can be reformed unless he shuns adulteries as infernal and loves marriages as heavenly. In this and in no other way is hereditary evil broken and rendered milder in the offspring” (*Apocalypse Explained* 989). If adultery is so shunned in the secret chambers of the mind, then in the church, the song we sing can come true: “Within thine inmost shrine, that holy dove, the sweet pure spirit of conjugal love, shall dwell forever and increase thine innocence and peace.”