

# The Uses of Children for Marriage

By the Rev. K. R. Alden

*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate (Psalm 127:3-5).*

In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, we read of an experience which the revelator Emanuel Swedenborg once had:

*In a quiet dream, I saw some trees that were planted in a wooden receptacle. One of them was tall, another lower, and two were small. The lower trees delighted me most; and at the same time a most pleasant quiet, such as I cannot express, affected my mind. When I awoke, I spoke with the angelic spirits who had induced the dream. They told me what was signified by it, namely, Conjugal Love; the tall tree signifying the husband, the lower tree the wife, and the two small trees the children. They said further that the very pleasant quiet, which had affected my mind, indicated the pleasantness of peace, enjoyed in the other life by those who have lived together in genuine conjugal love (Arcana Coelestia 5051).*

## The First Use of Children

The first use of children in the Lord's Divine Plan is for the growth and development of Conjugal Love or true marriage love. Swedenborg's beautiful vision, and the indescribably quiet peace that attended it, was a heavenly representation of the family unit consisting of father and mother and children. One of the sources of holiness in marriage springs from the fact that it is the seedbed of the human race, and is also the seedbed of the angelic heavens. Conjugal Love (true marriage love) which is the love of loves with the angels and which is promised to the New Church, is knit together, purified, and established by means of the love of infants and children. In the Heavenly Doctrine we read, "The education of offspring is the primary use requiring the cooperation of father and mother" (*Conjugal Love* 176). In a very real sense, the Lord gives us children, not because the children need us as parents, but because we need the children, so that our own entrance into conjugal love may thereby be assured and made firm.

All responsibility brings with it delight. This is of the Divine Providence so that uses may be performed. And with every use there is a "loaned" sphere at its beginning so that people may be encouraged to enter into the use more fully and have the courage and endurance to undergo the temptations and difficulties which must be encountered before the work is finished. This is a universal law. It is seen in marriage, where the first state is one of almost open communication with the celestial heavens and their innocence. And it may be seen in the conception of any new project. There is always a supreme delight when the first vision of the completed work unfolds itself before the mind. And so a foretaste of the joy of a use is given at its beginning. If not for this universal law, people would never be inspired to undertake the great tasks and mighty responsibilities which make up life's journey through this world.

When we apply this universal doctrine to the subject at hand, we find that the Lord inspires parents with a new delight—the love of infants—a delight which is second only to conjugal love itself. This great delight is given by the Lord in order that parents may be moved to undertake the great responsibilities connected with children with happy, eager hearts, and may faithfully carry them through.

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us about the way in which this love of infants is inspired with parents. It is brought about through the sphere of innocence in which the Lord Himself is present. Innocence forms the nexus which connects and binds parents to their children. This state of innocence is imparted by the angels that are with all people, through their senses, affecting parents with delight when they see infants—lifting their souls with joy when they hear the first innocent sounds of infant speech. This innocence is especially conveyed by the sense of touch, for the touch of an infant seems to bring deep peace to the very soul. In these ways, the innocence of an infant awakens the remains of innocence stored up in an adult. In this heavenly Eden they meet and, as it were, sip the sweetness of eternal life. So “children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward.” They bring with them a foretaste of heaven and open to the husband and wife the delights of a new responsibility.

The first use of children, then, is to build up Conjugal Love. The second use is so that people may have a new inspiration for regenerating.

### **The Second Use of Children**

Let us think for the moment of the virtues that may be gained from our children. Children’s qualities include innocence, breathing forth its close touch with heaven; sweetness and purity, which are images of a regenerated (or reborn) will and understanding; trustfulness and humility, symbols of our regenerate relationship to the Lord God of heaven. And children require us to learn gentleness and forbearance—seeds of charity which can grow to be mighty forces of character. Last of all, there is the great lesson of forgiveness to be learned from our children. Only the forgiving heart can come into the kingdom of heaven. As the Lord’s Prayer says, “Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.” As the Heavenly Father forgives the trespasses of His children, so must we, as parents, cultivate the habit of forgiveness toward our own children. Much can be done by wise parents who love their children with a spiritual love, for their interactions are destined to impress their children to all eternity.

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that one of our greatest duties as parents is to instill the affirmative principle in our children. Hell is a monstrous negation. There God is denied, the sun of heaven is turned into darkness, the moon of faith does not give her light, and all the stars of the knowledge of heavenly things have fallen to the earth. All has been swallowed up in a terrible negation. We must fight against this sphere of denial. We must impart the affirmative attitude to the children entrusted to our care, for all heaven is one joyful affirmation of the Lord’s leading and guidance. All heaven chants “amen” to the glory of God, and angels are forever entering more and more deeply into the beauty and harmony and eternal truth of the revealed Divine Word.

Another thing the Heavenly Doctrine teaches us is that wise parents never identify their children with themselves. To do this is to love them *naturally*. The spiritual and natural love of children are contrasted in the following passage:

*Spiritual fathers and mothers, after they have tasted the sweetness of innocence in their children, love their children quite differently than do natural fathers and mothers. Spiritual parents love their children for their spiritual intelligence and moral life, loving them thus for their fear of God and for their piety of conduct or life, and at the same time for their affection for and application to useful endeavors of service to society, thus for the virtues and good habits in them. It is chiefly from the love of these things that they provide for and supply their needs. Consequently, if they do not see these things in them, they alienate their minds from them; and only care for them from a sense of obligation.*

*In natural fathers and mothers, a love of children springs, indeed, from innocence also, but when this innocence is received by them, it is wrapped around their own personal love.... [T]hey pay little or almost no attention to their [children's] inner affections and thus to any virtues and good habits, but only to their external qualities to which they are favorably disposed. It is to these latter qualities that they attach, faster and cement their love. Therefore they also close their eyes to their faults, excusing them and encouraging them (Conjugal Love 405).*

When we consider all the regenerating truths that can be learned from children, we can truly exclaim with Isaiah, “And a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). The Lord Himself could not have accomplished the work of redeeming and saving the world except through entering it as a little child: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God the might; Father of Eternity; Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Nor can we forget the part that children played in the Lord’s ministry: “Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14).

### **Eternal Values**

Children are given to us so that we may see the beauty of eternal values in this world. In heaven, we are told, no natural children are born, but in their place come spiritual offspring—truths of innocence. As we enter more deeply into the understanding of spiritual life, these spiritual “children” become more and more real to us. They are the fruits and rewards of the regenerate life; they are the signs of eternal salvation.

Consider for a moment the fact that at the age of one hundred Abraham had only two sons, yet at the time of the Exodus from Egypt his direct descendants numbered more than two million! This pictures the increase and extension of truths. One truth, conceived and made living in this world, may give birth to millions in the life to come.

In its internal meaning, then, Psalm 127 teaches about the joy and rewards of people who are willing to be instructed by the Lord in His truths. These truths are a heritage that is denied to no one, and they can bear fruit to eternal life.