

Marriage and the New Church

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A Beautiful Vision

We are told that the New Church is the crown of all churches (TCR 787)! There is something aspirational about this statement. An invitation to a totally new and revolutionary approach to who the Lord is, what the Word is, how to get to heaven and of course, how to have a happy and eternal marriage. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that? But what makes the New Church "new"? What does it mean to be New Church?

As we were reading in our lessons today, the book of *Revelation* paints us a picture of what the Holy City will be like. A city of pure gold, walls adorned with precious stones, and the pearly gates. The beautiful image of an inviting city, with gates that never shut and where it is never night! There are so many amazing things about this city and the people inside—the many aspects of heavenly life that are supported by the New Church faith. Like: A useful life, worship of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth, innocence, forgiveness and the like. It's a life devoted to the Lord and others. But it's not only an invitation to the New Church in general; there's a beautiful reference to marriage—the entire city is likened to a bride adorned for her husband. This calls to mind a major promise the Lord makes in His Second Coming. It says: "He is reviving conjugal love as it was among the ancient peoples" (CL 81).

One of the enduring messages that the Lord choose to reveal, was that marriage can last forever (see CL 321)! We are told in the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church that "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" (CL 65).

We see, then, at the end of the book of *Revelation*, the Lord is inviting us into the New Church and into a pursuit of marriage as one of His most central blessings. The Lord isn't just offering people some church membership card; neither is He just offering people a guide on how to live their lives. He is also reviving conjugal love, and inviting us to see it as one of the fundamental ways He brings happiness to our lives. Not in some trite, or offhanded way, but in the deepest and most genuine sense. He is eternally looking out for how to make us happiest, and tells us what we need to do to get there. So too with marriage. That is why we are given instructions that "it is according to a law of Divine order that it is not marriage unless it is that of one man and one wife" (AC 1907). As well as, "Marriage goes hand in hand with religion at every step" (CL 80)! These teachings are given for *our* happiness, both now and to eternity.

Among the many beautiful descriptions of what Conjugal Love is like, the following quote has always stood out as a particularly heartwarming vision: "The states produced by this love are innocence, peace, tranquility, inmost friendship, complete trust, a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good" (CL 180). Those sound like really nice states to experience. They sound like what we all want to have. The New Church has a lot to offer! We could talk about many things related to the life that the Lord calls us to live. Today, because of

the emphasis on marriage in the very description of the Holy City we are focusing on the vision of marriage that the Lord offers and how to take Him up on it.

Accepting the Vision

In order to accept the Lord's invitation into the city, it requires cooperation with the Lord's goals. We now turn back to the description of the Holy City, to focus on some *seemingly* tough statements around marriage and those who oppose it. These statements may have come across as jarring, or out of place when describing the joy and peace that is in the city. During the depiction, we are told that "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination" (Rev. 21:27) and "outside are dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and idolaters" (Rev. 22:15).

These can *sound* harsh. But the message is clear that despite the gates being wide open, there are people who are outside. Why would an all loving God leave these people outside the gate? He wouldn't. He doesn't. What is being described is people who don't want to come in.

Think back to the gates. They are open. There are twelve of them—There are many ways for people to enter heaven, underscoring that it is the Lord's will to draw all people to Himself in heaven. Everyone is invited, and consistently at that! If we stray and try other paths, and return to the Lord in His Word, we will always discover open gates. That is why we are told in the Heavenly Doctrine that "it is we, not the Lord, who cast ourselves into hell" (HH 547; see also DP 324). Our life in this world matters. The hells do their very best to make sure that we choose hell and not heaven. They try to muddle and confuse us about what is right and wrong, saying that there is no difference. They do this until at last they try and persuade us that evil is actually good and good is really evil. But we don't have to listen to them!

In the *Arcana Coelestia*, we are told: "The reason why evil is appropriated to a person is that he believes and persuades himself that he thinks and does it from himself, and in this way makes it his own. If he believed as is really the case, then evil would not be appropriated to him" (AC 6206). The hells try and get us to believe that their evil influences are a part of us. The reality, is that all evil is from hell, but they want us to believe that the evil thoughts they send us, are our own. They want us to identify with our evils and make them a part of who we are. They want us to believe that we can't change, or reject their evil influence. In this way, we get trapped, tricked and blindsided into making evil permanent.

Divine Providence frightfully states that those who favor sins... "convince themselves that any evil that is a sin is not a sin, painting it over with fallacies and appearances, and thus hiding its enormity; and having done this they favor it, and make it their friend" (DP 278:4). Convincing ourselves of evil can have many forms—"anything that defiles," be it the sorcerers, murderers, or idolaters. But notice that even in this series, there is a focus on things that oppose marriage—*dogs* and *whoremongers*. The *dogs* have a bad correspondence focusing on unrestrained sexual activity (see AR 952:2). And the *whoremongers* are more generally all kinds of perversions that people can get trapped in that oppose or lead away from the Lord's vision of marriage between one man and one woman (see AR 892). Ultimately, if we make evil our friend, and fall prey to the tactics the hells employ, *we choose* to become the dogs, sorcerers and whoremongers. We choose to remain outside the city.

Essentials of the New Church

By considering the essentials of the New Church, we will see why some people are outside. Most especially, the hells are going to attack the things a person loves the most, and are the most important (see AC 1690:3, 8562). When we look at what is essential to the New Church, there are many things that could be said. However, consistently throughout the *Apocalypse Revealed*, we are given two: “the acknowledgment of the Lord, and a life according to the commandments of the Decalogue” (AR 485).

When the hells attack the New Church, they will attack these essentials. They will chip away at the truth and try and make us believe that following the 10 Commandments isn't necessary. Luckily, the Lord in the *True Christian Religion* tells us that: “The Ten Commandments are the most important thing in the Word” (TCR 283). In fact, in the explanation of what it means that “outside are dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and idolaters” (Rev. 22:15), we are told that each one of these represents one of the ten Commandments (see AR 892). In order to be New Church, we have to be living a life according to the ten Commandments.

Adultery and Conjugal Love

We return now to conjugal love and its opposites. Of those ten, we are focusing on the sixth commandment, because of the specific calling of this vision, or rather the things which oppose that vision. In revealing how sacred marriage is, the danger of adultery to conjugal love is addressed (see CL 255; Life 76). We are told, “As adulteries are contrary to conjugal love, adulterers cannot be in heaven with the angels” (AC 2747). Elsewhere, that “hell is a state of adultery” (CL 429).

There is a warning here, no doubt. When people make evil a part of their lives, it changes what they love. This is why *Divine Providence* challenges us to not only shun evils in action, but even in believing it's okay to commit them. It says: “The evils which a person believes to be allowable, even though he does not commit them, are also appropriated to him” (DP 81).

Mercifully, and to help us prepare, the Lord is giving us a forecast of the way things turn out in the next life. Those who choose things that the Lord forbids, even believing that evil is okay to persist in—and stubbornly remain in this pattern through justifications—may be among the people who refuse to walk through the open gates. Tragically they choose to remain outside the city. What was once a beautiful vision is no longer appealing. What was once a golden city, with the peaceful, tranquil aroma of conjugal love permeating throughout, is now seen as a pretentious, prudish and a suffocating prison. People choose to stay outside because heaven is no longer appealing. In fact, they can't even breath there (HH 235; AC 5057-5059)! This is how contrary adultery is to conjugal love.

Hope

But it doesn't have to be this way. The Lord really wants us to be in heaven. He never closes the gates. Another way of framing it, He never stops knocking. He is doing everything in His power to invite us to open the door and let Him come in (Rev. 3:20). It's our responsibility to take Him up on the offer, and actually grab the handle and open the door.

Without the Lord, we incline towards evils of every kind (Char. 2; DP 83). This is why it is so important to turn to the Word to guide us on how to live our lives. We are told that “A person’s life’s love is in hell and from hell, so long as he has not fought against evils that are in hell and from hell. Those evils stand written down in the Decalogue” (D. Wis 136). We begin to open the door to the Lord when we turn to Him in His Word and live according to the things it teaches (See AR 936). These especially are found in the Ten Commandments.

We are not helpless; the Lord gave us the Word so we can be healed (See AR 936). He didn’t give It to hurt us, in fact, He gave It so we won’t be hurt in the short run or over the course of our entire lives. We have a responsibility to ourselves, our neighbors and most importantly, to the Lord to help one another follow the 10 Commandments. This is why we are told in the Heavenly Doctrine: “From a love of uses, or from charity, a person can do good to an enemy or to a wicked person, but the uses he performs to them are uses to bring about their repentance or their reconciliation” (D. Wis 131:2; see also AC 5008:3). A true friend is someone who helps you on the path to happiness. Not earthly pleasure, or short-term comfort, but everlasting, eternal happiness. A true friend will help you get out of your evils, not stay in them.

As we consider all these teachings, we can be reminded that the Holy City New Jerusalem is a vision of all that the Lord offers by means of His New Church—all that He has revealed to us about the life that leads to heaven in the revelation of His Second Coming. Today we have focused on one important part of that vision, having to do with marriage. We do so because the Lord Himself emphasizes it in the vision itself, and chose to share with us in His revelation the many blessings He wishes to bestow. Wherever we may be on the path, whether married, single, or even in disorder, the Lord is always trying to bring us into a genuine marriage that can last to eternity. Thinking back to our final lesson to tie it all together, it was explained that “truly conjugal love ... comes solely from the Lord and is given to those who live according to His commandments. Thus it is given to those who are received into the Lord's New Church” (CL 534). The Holy City and the promise of Conjugal Love is offered to everyone.

As we leave today, we can take comfort in the knowledge that if we keep the commandments and shun adulteries as sins, that we can experience those states of peace in growing measure. We can choose to enter the city. The Lord gives us an image of marriage that is something sacred and holy—and attainable for all people—if not in this life then in the next. Let us hold onto the belief that there is a wonderful and reciprocal relationship that exists between a man and a woman who commit themselves to each other and to the Lord. There are things that are outside the city that we are wise to reject with the Lord’s help. But the gates are open and the invitation is before us all. As is so beautifully said in the work on marriage: “The conjugal union of one man with one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the repository of Christian religion” (CL 457).

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14)

Amen.