

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

WHAT GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER

Three Chapel Talks on Conjugal Love

by the Rev. Douglas M. Taylor

CHAPEL TALK 1

One of the most notable aspects of the New Church meant by the New Jerusalem is that love truly conjugal is to be restored by means of it. To achieve this end, the Lord at His Second Coming has revealed copious details concerning this fundamental love.

The doctrine concerning conjugal love is both theoretical and practical. The theory explains the origin of conjugal love and its purpose, the way it operates, and its effects. The practical aspects of the doctrine point to the attitudes and actions that are necessary for achieving this precious love from the Lord, showing no clear line of demarcation between the two elements in the doctrine. For the most part, the theoretical aspect has practical implications.

It is fatally easy to abide in the theory and neglect the practice. This is what our natural man, generally speaking, inclines us to do. To this must be added the influence of the hells, which are determined to hold us as long as possible in a state of mere theoretical contemplation. The vision of love truly conjugal is so entrancing that we are frequently loathe to leave it and consider the means to acquiring this priceless pearl from the Lord.

We know from doctrine that love truly conjugal is not a natural love into which we are born, but a spiritual love into which we must be re-born by the Lord. In the Writings it is sharply distinguished from the merely natural love of the opposite sex, which is the inheritance of us all—regardless of our quality. Even when this general love of the opposite sex is confined and focused upon one of the opposite sex, it is still not necessarily love truly conjugal. It may well be the matrix for that love; but let us not mistake the matrix for the jewel itself.

Love truly conjugal is from the Lord alone. It is a celestial or spiritual love, given to each individual person “according to the state of the church” (CL 130) with that person. “The church is from the Lord, and is with those who come to Him and live according to His Commandments” (CL 129). In other words, conjugal love is given “according to the state of wisdom” (CL 130) with the person. Wisdom is not merely a matter of knowledge. We read that “there is knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom. Knowledge is of the things cognized, of reason, and of life; cognitions precede; through them reason is formed; and wisdom by both, and this when one lives rationally according to the verities that are cognitions. Wisdom therefore is at once of reason and of the life; and it is becoming wisdom while it is of reason and thence of life, and is wisdom when it has become of life and thence of reason” (CL 130).

As that passage indicates, it could be said that conjugal love is given according to the state of regeneration—no more, no less. But what are the practical implications of this?

One of the most obvious of these is that a young person can hardly begin to be in a state of love truly conjugal until he or she begins to think and act from his or her right and reason. When does this state of thinking from oneself begin? The Writings answer that it is “when a man attains the age of twenty years” (AC 10225). This is said to be the time when his faith begins. “Prior to this, faith was not his, but another’s in him, for his belief was in the person, not in the things” (AC 10225:5). Another number says of this twentieth year “from this year he begins to become rational” (AC 2280).

It would surely follow from this that love truly conjugal cannot even begin prior to the twentieth year. Prior to that age whatever a young person experiences it cannot be love truly conjugal, although it might well be a very good preparation for it. Conjugal love is not the same thing as what is usually called “romantic love”—the merely natural love of the opposite sex confined to one. Even an atheist can be in that natural love emulates it, and is sometimes hard to distinguish from it, especially since there is usually a borrowed state this time. But for love truly conjugal to exist in the mind the interiors must be opened toward heaven, which is also the beginning of regeneration.

Let us remember that love truly conjugal is from the Lord alone. It is God who joins together; and it is man (male and female) that puts asunder.

CHAPEL TALK 2

Last time we saw that love truly conjugal is given by the Lord alone – according to the state of the Church or the state of regeneration with each of the partners. In the work *Conjugal Love* there are beautiful passages to this effect. For example: “Love truly conjugal cannot exist otherwise than between two; nor between two except from the Lord alone. On this love heaven is inscribed with all its felicities” (CL: 332). “Those who are in love truly conjugal continually desire to be one man; but those who are not in conjugal love will to be two. In its essence conjugal love is nothing else than that two will to be one, that is, will that two lives shall become one life” (CL: 215). “The reasons why those who are in love truly conjugal look to the eternal is that there is eternity in that love; and its eternity is in the fact that this love with the wife and wisdom with the husband increase to eternity, and in their increase or progression married partners enter more and more deeply into the beatitudes of heaven, which their wisdom and its love at the same time store up within them. If therefore an idea of the eternal were eradicated, or if in any case it were to escape from their minds, it would be as if they were cast down from heaven” (CL 216).

From those passages alone it is manifest that it is God who joins together. But it is man (male and female) that puts asunder. It is human nature as it is in itself, the proprium of mankind, the things that be of man—the very same evils of the loves of self and of the world that we have to give up in order to receive celestial love and charity from the Lord—it is these evils, which vary from one individual to another and are the source of all human woes, it is these evils that put asunder and destroy love truly conjugal.

Certain falsities work against conjugal love—such as a denial of God, a consequent trust in one’s own powers, denial of the Lord’s Divinity, a denial of the eternity of marriage in general, and a lack of looking to the eternal in one’s particular marriage.

But of all the evils that cause coldness and the destruction of love truly conjugal, the worst is the love of dominion. A striving for domination between partners, or with one of the partners, casts out two of the essential goals of marriage—a union of wills, and from that, freedom of action (CL 248). “While this striving lasts,” the Writings say, “the spirit of the one never takes violence against the other” (CL 248). This striving for the upper hand is from the natural mind. The further teachings that “women conceal deeply within themselves the knowledge by which they understand how to subject men, if they will, to the yoke of their authority” (CL 292) places the wife in a situation of great temptation. On the other hand, it should be added that this same number goes on to give the excuses offered by some women who entered into the practice of this art, in these words: “They said they would not have entered into it if they had not foreseen supreme contempt and future rejection, and hence their ruin, if they were subjugated by their husbands; and so of necessity they took up these their arms” (*ibid*). From these and other quotations it can be readily seen how the love of dominion destroys the Lord’s work and puts asunder, no matter which partner exercises it.

Another cause of spiritual coldness in marriage, or the non-reception of conjugal love, is the lack of striving on the part of the husband to *grow* in wisdom, not merely to maintain the *status quo*, but to grow in wisdom. Wisdom, as we saw last time, is not to be confused with mere knowledge. However, knowledge of doctrine is the first step in the acquirement of wisdom, for wisdom is truth from good, truth that looks to use and comes from use. It is *moral* wisdom—all the moral virtues that could be listed, and the *spiritual* virtues, such as “love of religion, charity, truth, faith, conscience, innocence” (CL 164). With *this* kind of wisdom, which her husband has received from the Lord, the wife loves to conjoin herself. This is what she loves in her husband. We are clearly taught that conjugal love resides with the wife, but yet her love depends on her husband (CL 216b), and that the inclination to be united is inspired by the wife into the man, and is received by him according to wisdom (CL 161). It is clearly the duty of the husband, then, to strive to *grow* in wisdom and not rest content with what he has so far attained.

Another destroyer of love truly conjugal is the desire on the part of one or both the partners to live his or her own life, rather than to strive for a common life together. Such a desire is obviously from the proprium; so, too, are wandering lusts and all forms of lasciviousness. A complete listing of the internal and external causes of coldness in marriage is given in a chapter under that heading in the work *Conjugal Love*, numbers 234 to 260. But whether looked at in particular or in general they are clearly symptoms and expressions of the human proprium, which is ever striving to put asunder what God hath joined together.

CHAPEL TALK 3

In the two previous talks we have seen that it is the Lord who conjoins and mankind that puts asunder. Conjugal love is a spiritual love that is given by the Lord according to the state of regeneration, or, what is the same, according to the state of genuine wisdom. In the last talk we discussed some of the evils that, in particular, work against and destroy conjugal love. We now turn to the question: How does one prepare to receive conjugal love?

It is true that, if we are not yet married, we are to pray to the Lord for a suitable partner. But for our prayer or wish to be something more than a prayer of the lips certain actions are necessary. The first of these is to look to the Lord and shun evils as sins against Him. There is no other way by which the Lord may be present in our minds and lives.

The evils that are to be shunned as sins are, of course, those that we saw last time: the love of dominion or striving for pre-eminence; apathy towards the things of religion; the desire to live one's own life rather than sharing a common life with one's partner; the desire to *get* from marriage, rather than to give. But it is of no use to pray to the Lord for a suitable partner unless we shun wandering lusts as an offence to the nostrils (CL 49). They are forms of lasciviousness, which always involves blotting out everything spiritual and concentrating upon the body alone. This is plainly from the sphere of adultery, the direct opposite of love truly conjugal.

But, in addition to these things, all the evils forbidden in the Decalogue are to be shunned *as sins*, as being contrary to the Lord and His will. In the proportion that this is done, in the same proportion we do good things freely from the Lord.

These good actions done from a good motive enter into every area of our life. As a result we do the work of our occupation sincerely, justly, and faithfully. We are inspired to do voluntarily good, kind deeds for the benefit of others beyond the call of duty in our occupation. We cheerfully meet all obligations and duties imposed upon us; we rejoice in all forms of external worship as a means of giving thanks and praise to the Lord from the heart. We look upon our social life as a means of being refreshed and re-created for the sake of returning to our uses with renewed vigor.

To do all this is nothing else than to live the life of charity from the Lord. This is the greatest preparation for conjugal love, because, let us always remember, it is given according to the state of regeneration. This is easy to understand when we recollect that a regenerate mind is one in which there is a marriage of good and truth, a marriage of the will and understanding, a marriage of deed and creed. This is the heavenly marriage. In order to enter into heaven here or hereafter, heaven – the heavenly marriage – must enter into us; so also with marriage between one man and one woman. If we would enter into a genuine marriage – a marriage of love truly conjugal – the heavenly marriage must first enter into us, into both partners.

As a practical matter, whether we say the heavenly marriage or the life of charity, it comes to the same thing. It is charity received from the Lord that joins people together, and a lack of charity that puts them asunder. This is a general principle applying to *all* human relationships, but it has a special relevance in the most intimate of all relationships – the marriage covenant. Those who enter into marriage after some years of striving individually for the heavenly marriage or the life of charity have been well prepared. They are in the habit of looking to the Lord and shunning evils as sins - which is not only the first thing of charity but also the first thing of conjugal love. The closer each partner individually draws to the Lord, the closer will they draw to each other, for it is the Lord who joins together. “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt 19:6).

Text: Matthew 19:1-12