

THE LORD'S COMING IN CONJUGIAL LOVE

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We sometimes forget that the dramatic and mysterious visions of John in the Book of Revelation were not dreams. He was actually seeing things in the other world, and almost the whole book describes what he saw. And what he saw symbolized the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

Think of the drama of the Lord coming with clouds, the warning messages to the seven churches, the four beasts, the Book sealed with seven seals and the opening of them, the great plagues that follow, the angel with the key of the bottomless pit, the woman clothed with the sun, and the great red dragon ready to devour her child. Later, John witnesses the opening of the book of life, and finally a new heaven and a new earth, with the heavenly Jerusalem, the river of the water of life, and the tree of life with its twelve fruits. And then, speaking of the Lord, the telling phrase: "They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:4).

All twenty-two chapters of Revelation lead to this idea of a loving and approachable God who is visible to the eyes of our mind. And it is no accident that His relationship with those who freely choose to respond to His infinite love is compared to a loving marriage. The Lord is the Bridegroom, and the church—made up of people the world over who, in their own way, return His love—is the bride.

This relationship between the Lord and those He creates is perfected to eternity. It is the source of all true happiness and fulfillment. And this mutual love—between the Lord and those who truly worship Him—is reflected in the love between a husband and his wife who, having lived in the world, shunned evil and made the choice for good, have eventually become angels in heaven.

It also applies to people who may not have been married in this world or who married the wrong person. If they have at least taken the first steps on the path to heaven—if there has been the beginning of a “wedding” within them—then they will certainly find their true love after death. That is the Lord’s promise. The two go together—a marriage of true principle and the love that gives it vitality. That’s why we have bread *and* wine when we celebrate the Holy Supper.

This responsive love for the Lord, embodied as a bride, is said to come down out of heaven: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). We think of a bride as one about to be married or having just been married. There is the idea of a new state.

But John, his spiritual eyes opened, also saw this love for the Lord as a holy city—a place to live. Here’s the connection:

Jerusalem had been a center for worship since ancient times. No doubt even the tableland on which the city was built—one of the highest points in Palestine—had been a place of worship since before recorded history. But more than that, a beautiful city—with its centers of government and learning, with its avenues of communication and peaceful gardens—also represents the inner beauty and order of what the Lord teaches through His Word. Such wonderfully structured teachings—like a garden city—are designed to be a spiritual haven in which His people can dwell in peace.

And so John saw a “New” Jerusalem—a new vision of what loving the Lord means—as it comes down into the minds and hearts of receptive people in the world. And the effects of it are described in the verses that follow: There will be no more tears, no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying—no more pain. For the Lord will make all things new (Rev. 21: 4-5).

Later, almost the same image is repeated. A mighty angel comes to John and says: “Come, I will show you the bride, the

Lamb's wife" (ibid. 9).

Now, through John's eyes, we see the bride as the Lamb's wife, the Lamb symbolizing the Lord as the Source of the wise innocence of the highest angels. Their heaven is indeed built on the great and high mountain of love to the Lord: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God..." (ibid. 10).

This celestial heaven, as it is called, is where angel couples have lived together in the most wonderful conjugal unions—in some cases for thousands of years. It is their sphere that affects all people on earth who are stirred to seek a happy marriage that looks to the Lord for its inspiration.

We read earlier that the states of mind produced by conjugal love are innocence, peace, tranquility, inmost friendship, complete trust, and a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good. (*Conjugal Love* 180)

Here also, there is a descent—from innocence, or simply willingness to be led by the Lord, down to action—"to do the other every good."

And so the Writings say that the reason for listing them in this way is that innocence and peace have to do with the highest part of the mind (ibid.). This gives rise to a feeling of tranquility as the couple turn to each other, stirred by inmost friendship. There is complete trust in their heart, a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good.

Too idealistic? Not really. It's something to work for.

Marriage is sometimes made to look insignificant by people with other priorities. "Who wants to be permanently bound to another person?" they say. But this misses one of the essential characteristics of a happy marriage—a total commitment to one's partner, in which both look to the Lord. It is based on a love of truth—but the kind of guiding truth that leads to good and useful action—the wisdom that will increasingly become

part of their life together.

So when John saw the vision of the New Church “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” he was also seeing an embodiment of the affection of that truth in people’s minds, beautifully clothed with teaching from the Word and prepared for the Lord’s coming.

We can see then, that a true marriage stands on the foundation of true principles that the Lord has revealed to us in the Writings. That’s one reason these principles are called the Heavenly Doctrine—revealed “out of heaven” (See *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 7e).

Clearly though, marriages go through many intermediate stages. And so, as the partners gradually progress in their spiritual life, their marriage too, in a sense, awaits the coming of the Lord in fullness.

In the same way, although we celebrate the second coming of the Lord as He is newly revealed in the Writings—and the beginning of the New Church in people’s hearts and minds—we also think of His coming as a *future* thing. For the Lord first prepares us –wraps us about, so to speak—with the stunning new concepts that are woven into the Writings. He presents us with wonderful ideals of marriage and family life, thrilling new visions of how people live in heaven and how all this can begin here and now in our everyday life. And then, little by little, He leads us to be receptive to His second advent in our actual life.

This is why, in the last chapter in the Book of Revelation, we have those familiar words, used in our reading earlier: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come,” speaking of the second coming of the Lord. The Writings explain that “the Spirit” in the highest sense is the Lord Himself – the Bridegroom. It is also His Spirit that breathes life into the new heaven (made up initially of angelic spirits)—and that “the bride” stands for all people who are in the truths of faith and long for His coming (*Apocalypse Revealed* 955, *Apocalypse Explained* 1189). Thus the Spirit and

the bride are two corresponding levels of response to the Lord's coming—in heaven and on earth.

And so we are all called to celebrate *life* and new beginnings—to gain a new and joyful vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the special love in marriage that flows from Him. For the Lord says:

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Rev. 22:16-17) *Amen.*

Lessons: Isaiah 52:1, 7-9; Revelation 21: 1-12, 22: 16-17;
Arcana Coelestia 4145: 2, 3 parts:

One who is being regenerated is perfected by degrees

Take...as an example conjugal love: the good which precedes and initiates is beauty, or agreement of manners, or an outward adaptation of the one to the other, or equality of condition, or a desired condition. These goods are the first mediate goods of conjugal love. Afterwards comes conjunction of minds, wherein the one wills as the other, and perceives delight in doing that which pleases the other. This is the second state; and then the former things, though still present, are no longer regarded. Finally there follows a union in respect to celestial good and spiritual truth, in that the one believes as the other, and the one is affected by the same good as the other. When this state comes, both are together in the heavenly marriage, which is that of good and truth, and thus are in conjugal love—for conjugal love is nothing else—and the Lord then flows into the affections of both as into one affection. This is the good that flows in directly; but the former goods, which flowed in indirectly, served as means of introduction to this.