

Parents and Teachers:
A Partnership in New Church Education

by Jill H. Rogers

From infancy until childhood, and sometimes until early manhood, by instruction from his parents and teachers a man is imbued with goods and truths... (Arcana Coelestia 5 135:2).

There are more than twenty-five passages in the Heavenly Doctrines that use the phrase “parents and teachers” in describing the various types of instruction for infants, children and youths. These passages suggest that, ideally, the education of children and youth is a shared use. While the Heavenly Doctrines do not specifically direct that there should be a partnership between parents and teachers, they do imply the importance of such a partnership. Secular educational research also supports this idea by demonstrating the close relationship between involved parents and a child’s success in school. Both sources show that neither parents nor teachers need to feel alone in the work of instructing children in the most important lessons of life.

One of the most powerful experiences a teacher can have is a conversation with a parent who has confidence in his or her own parental perspectives and abilities, but at the same time respects the particular abilities and perspectives of the teacher. The teacher, in turn, has confidence in his or her own professional perspectives and also respects the unique understanding of the parent. Their communication is based on mutual trust and a shared love of educating the child.

The Heavenly Doctrines tell us that uses bond individuals and societies together. We are also told, “the primary duties which confederate, affiliate, and bring the souls and lives of two married partners together into one are those which involve their joint concern in bringing up (educating) children.” Although the relationship between a parent and a teacher is not the same as conjugal love, the shared use of educating children can create bonds between the home and the school that benefit the common good and especially the child. (See *Conjugal Love* 18 and 176.)

This bond that can exist between parents and teachers is called mutual love or reciprocal love which is formed from “every affection for use.” This love can be fostered when both parents and teachers look for the good that each can contribute to the child’s education and communicate that good. They make and receive suggestions, knowing that both the giver and the recipient desire to learn and grow in the use of educating the child. They feel delight in “being able to show kindness, and in being allowed to do so, and in the kindness being accepted” as they genuinely support each other. (See *Divine Love* 12:2 and *Arcana Coelestia* 3959.)

There is a general use of educating, and, more particularly, there is the use of educating (bringing up) one’s own children. New Church parents and teachers can both express the love of educating as they work together. However, the two loves, that of educating children in general and that of educating ones’ own children, are different. All parents do not have a general love of teaching, but they do have a desire to pass on their faith to their children and to fulfill the duties of parenting. Reciprocally, not all teachers have had children and experienced the powerful parental love that the Heavenly Doctrines call “storge.” And, even if they have children, teachers will not have a *parental* love for their students. A parent’s love is usually subjective, protective of the

child *as a part of the family*, and vigilant in providing for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, general education, and a loving environment. A teacher's love can be more objective, protective of the child *as a student*, and vigilant in caring for learning and instructional needs, while also providing a loving environment. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1272, 1832:3; *Conjugal Love* 406; *True Christian Religion* 431.)

Traditionally, New Church schools have tried not to enter into what may seem to be parental realms of education. Reasons for this include the ways *Conjugal Love* 176 has often been interpreted. This passage speaks of the responsibility of parents for the education of their children, the mother for a daughter until she is of marriageable age, and the father taking over the care of a son's education from the mother, after infancy. If this passage is translated as parents having the responsibility for "educating," we might wonder why we have New Church schools at all. However, if it is translated "the care of the education," then a different interpretation is possible. This latter translation is the one more often used by New Church translators. Rev. Jonathan Rose states his belief that "the emphasis is on the care or concern for the activity," rather than on the activity of instruction itself. So, when we read this passage in relation to other passages mentioning nurses, teachers, and priests as instructors, we can see that though parents have the "care of the education," they are not expected to do all of the teaching themselves.

It is important to note that *the Heavenly Doctrines do not say who is to teach what*. This determination has been left to the judgment of parents and teachers, demonstrating the usefulness and potential strength in a partnership between home and school, both of which have been given a charge by the Lord to educate children. The Heavenly Doctrines almost always include teachers when they talk about instructing children in civil, moral and spiritual concepts. For example, parents and teachers are both to teach children how to become good citizens by telling them what the laws require and how to live an honorable life. Children can learn these things in the home as they are expected to obey rules, treat family members fairly, and be honest and upright in their relationships with parents and siblings. When children carry these behaviors into the school, and the teachers foster them in the way they structure classroom management and instruction, everyone benefits.

What these passages suggest is that New Church schools have a legitimate role to play in very practical areas such as health, sex education, and drug and alcohol abuse education. What, exactly that role is can not be determined from revelation, but a strong partnership with parents and teachers studying the Word together could result in a clearer picture of how the school can be an integral and welcome part of a child's education. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5126:3; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 332; *Conjugal Love* 446, *True Christian Religion* 443; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 332.)

Another example of cooperation between home and school is giving children the chance to practice charity in external forms as they learn the associated truths. External charity can be practiced at home and in school in a variety of ways as children interact with friends, family and the community. Service learning has become a requirement in many school systems in North America. Students participate in community, school and family service such as peer-tutoring, building playgrounds, visiting and helping in homes for the elderly, and cleaning up roadsides. (See *True Christian Religion* 374.)

There are many levels of parental involvement that schools can encourage and parents can pursue. These range from help with school trips to making policy decisions. The greater the level of involvement, the more informed parents need to become. Though relatively few parents may have the time to become involved at all levels, schools can foster their participation when deciding when and how to teach the Lord's truths.

Ultimately, parents have the care of their children's education. Their participation in the schooling process is essential. In each society, teachers and parents must work together to determine what form of the homeschool relationship will work best for everyone. Teachers must look for ways to include parents in meaningful school uses. Conversely, parents must trust teachers as professionals who have been specifically trained for the use of instruction. From a person's birth until the close of earthly life, the Lord is continually working to bring that person to heaven. Together, parents and teachers have been given a charge by the Lord to instruct children in the knowledges essential for them to live good and useful lives that will lead to heaven. A partnership based on communication, mutual trust, and respect for the important role of each partner will lead to the very best possible New Church Education for the future of each child and of the church as a whole.