

Spiritual Offspring

by Rev. John L. Odhner

Sometimes it seems unfair that the angels in heaven cannot have children. Instead, we are told, they have spiritual offspring. “From marriages in the heavens, although married couples live together much as they do on earth, there are born not children, but goods and truths in their place” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1000). Goods and truths in place of children? What kind of picture does this present to our minds? Do we think of spiritual offspring the way many Christians think of spirits—that they are like a breath or a puff of wind or ether? Or is spiritual offspring some mental creation that we can hardly understand and not at all picture until we come into the other life?

Our idea of spiritual offspring may be more clear if we think in terms of the relationship between the married couple and the rest of society. Several passages indicate that the love a husband and wife have for other people is a product of their love for each other.

*Mutual love, such as there is in heaven, is not like conjugal love. Conjugal love consists in desiring to be in the other's life as a one; but mutual love consists in wishing better to another than to one's self, as is the case with the love of parents toward their children, and as is the love of those who are in the love of doing what is good, not for their sake, but because this is a joy to them. Such angelic love is derived from conjugal love, and is born from it as a child from its parent. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2738, emphasis added; see also *Heaven and Hell* 385; *Conjugal Love* 65).*

We have a whole chapter in *Conjugal Love* to tell us how love of offspring is born from conjugal love (385-414). However, as the above passage indicates, a couple's love for their children is only one of the forms that mutual love can take. The offspring of a true marriage includes all loves that are heavenly and spiritual. “Conjugal love is the fundamental love of *all* loves, celestial, spiritual, and therefore natural... Conjugal love then is as the parent and other loves as the offspring” (*Conjugal Love* 65, emphasis added; see also *Arcana Coelestia* 4277). Again, “From the marriage of good and truth in the heavens descend all loves, which are such as the love of parents toward their children, the love of brothers for one another, and the love for relatives, and so on, according to their degrees in their order “ (*Arcana Coelestia* 2739; cp 2738).

One form of mutual love is a chaste love of members of the opposite sex. The whole Word teaches that we should love our neighbors, and our neighbors are both men and women. Yet if a love of the other sex is to be truly spiritual, it must be free from any allurements. So we are told that for friendships between men and women outside of marriage, “the conjunctions of minds and not at the same time of bodies, or the effort toward this conjunction alone is a spiritual and

therefore a chaste love; and *this love they alone have who are in love truly conjugal* (*Conjugal Love* 55:7, emphasis added).

In general, these passages seem to indicate that a marriage which is spiritually productive will look not only inwards to the perfection of the marriage, but also outwards to loving and serving others. For instance, imagine the common case of the married man who has a woman colleague. She is his neighbor, and he should love her. Often this will be an occasion for an unchaste love to arise. But if the man is wise enough to flee from adultery, and if his wife lovingly nurtures and encourages that wisdom, then a chaste love can be born. Wisdom will be the father, love will be the mother, and the offspring will be a chaste love for his colleague—a love which (when truly chaste) can become sweeter than any other love except conjugal love (*Conjugal Love* 55:3).

There is also spiritual birth involved in raising children. In most ancient times, children loved their parents “not on account of their birth from them, but because of the instruction and wisdom received from them, which was a second birth, in itself spiritual, because it was the birth of their spirit” (*Divine Providence* 215). It is easy to see that even in a disordered world a child’s ideas and attitudes are the offspring of his parents’ relationship with each other.

Of course, the mutual love which springs from a true marriage can take many different forms. A man who has worked for years on a book will often dedicate it to his wife. Why? Because she played a part in bringing forth the book which no one else could have filled. The husband begins with an idea, a dream, a hope. His wife takes that idea and nourishes it, carries it in her mind, and gives inspiration and encouragement in hard times. After the book is born, she may continue to work on perfecting it, improving it, proofreading it, just as a mother chastens and educates her children, and just as the angels from spiritual parental love care for their spiritual offspring (see *Conjugal Love* 211). Any time a husband or wife accomplishes something good, and gratefully acknowledges, “I couldn’t have done it without you!”—can’t we say that that good thing has been born from their conjunction—a kind of spiritual offspring?

“The wisdom that is in men from the Lord feels nothing more delightful than to propagate its truths; and the love of wisdom which is in wives from the Lord feels nothing more delightful than to receive them, as in the womb, and so to conceive, carry, and bring them forth (*Conjugal Love* 115).