

# THE LOVE OF CHILDREN

Adapted from a Sermon by the Rev. K. R. Alden

In *Arcana Coelestia* 5051 we read of an experience which Emanuel Swedenborg once had:

*In a quiet dream, I saw some trees that were planted in a wooden receptacle. One of them was tall, another lower, and two were small. The lower trees delighted me most; and at the same time a most pleasant quiet, such as I cannot express, affected my mind. When I awoke, I spoke with the angelic spirits who had induced the dream. They told me what was signified by it, namely, Conjugal Love; the tall tree signifying the husband, the lower tree the wife, and the two small trees the children. They said further that the very pleasant quiet, which had affected my mind, indicated the pleasantness of peace, enjoyed in the other life by those who have lived together in genuine conjugal love.*

Swedenborg's beautiful vision, and the indescribably quiet peace that attended it, was a heavenly representation of the family unit consisting of father and mother and children. For we are taught that one of the sources of holiness and sanctity in marriage springs from the fact that it is the seedbed of the human race, and that which is the seedbed of the human race is also the seedbed of the angelic heavens. Conjugal Love, which is the love of loves with the angels and which is promised to the New Church, is knit together, purified, and established by means of the love of infants and children. In *Conjugal Love* 176 we read, "The education of offspring is the primary use requiring the cooperation of father and mother." There is a very real sense in which it is true that the Lord gives us children, not because the children need us as parents, but because we need the children, so that our own entrance into conjugal love may thereby be assured and made firm.

All responsibility brings delight with it. This is of the Divine Providence. A foretaste of the joy of a use is given at its beginning so that people may be inspired to undertake the great tasks and mighty responsibilities which make up life's journey through this world. This is seen in marriage, where the first state is one of almost open communication with the heavens and their innocence. When we apply this to the subject in hand, we find that the Lord inspires parents with a new delight—the love of infants—a delight which is second only to conjugal love itself. This great delight is given by the Lord in order that parents may be moved to undertake the great responsibilities connected with children, that they may assume them with happy, eager hearts, and that they may faithfully carry them through.

The Heavenly Doctrines tell us about the way in which this love of infants is inspired with parents. It is brought about through the sphere of innocence in which the Lord Himself is present. This state of innocence is imparted by the angels that are with all people, through their senses, affecting them with delight when they see infants—lifting their souls with joy when they hear the first innocent sounds of infant speech. It is especially conveyed by the sense of touch, for the touch of an infant seems to bring deep peace to the very soul. Thus, the innocence of an infant awakens the remains of innocence that are stored up in an adult. So "children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward." They bring with them a foretaste of heaven, and open to the husband and wife the delights of a new responsibility.