

## COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

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# MARRIAGE AND THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

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**Reading:** *Conjugal Love* 125

The connection between marriage and the church is more fully revealed in the doctrine of the New Church than anywhere else. Marriage is not just a social institution which is sanctioned and blessed by the church, but makes one with the church.

The reason is that the essence of marriage is the joining together of good and truth, and this is the essence of religion also. So the teachings about how the marriage of a husband and wife develops should apply more generally to how the church develops, also.

“The church is first implanted in the man and through the man in his wife; for the man receives its truth in his understanding, and the wife receives it from the man” (*Conjugal Love* 125).

Note that this does *not* say that the wife is incapable of understanding the truth that forms the church on her own. But it says that the most *orderly* way for the church to develop with a married pair is for the man to receive its truth in his understanding, and for her to then receive it from him.

Since many are not married, the Lord must also provide in other ways for the establishment of the church with people. There is a masculine sphere and a feminine sphere in the world which affect everyone.

But one clear lesson to be drawn from this teaching is that *men have a responsibility (placed upon them by the Lord, as part of their very nature) to acquire the truths from which the church grows—or, from which a marriage grows (it’s really the same thing).*

The most important element of the church is the good of charity, but in the order of the church’s development, truth comes first (*Conjugal Love* 126). The truths which the Lord has revealed in His Word are like seeds, from which the church, like a “garden,” grows in a person’s mind.

No seeds, no garden. No truths, no church. The weakened state so many churches find themselves in is due to a lack of truth. This lack is why so many churches have trouble holding the interest of men. The unusual degree of male involvement in the New Church is because this church offers something of interest to the male mind—namely, the truths of doctrine.

This is good for women, too, because the most essential thing they are looking for in men is *wisdom*. The wisdom we’re speaking of is rational, moral wisdom; in a word, it is to shun evils as sins (*Conjugal Love* 130.4, 195).

When we read that “the church is...implanted...through the man in his wife,” we see that the question is not what men and women *can* do, but the order in which they do it (that is, receive the church in their lives).

There is very little that a man can do that a woman can't do, and vice versa, and yet, in His infinite wisdom, the Lord has created us so that each sex has a special ability of its own to bring to the uses of human life (Cf. *Conjugal Love* 175).

If this were not the case, men and women would not need each other nearly so completely as they do, and the world would be a much less interesting and exciting place than it is.

The reason the church should be implanted first with the man is because *the male mind is especially adapted to the investigation of truth*—the inmost love in a male being the love of wisdom.

Women also have an innate love of wisdom, but it is less general. It is directed toward the specific form truth takes in the mind of a man. He loves wisdom, she loves *his* wisdom especially. It is the conjugal sphere emanating from the Lord that inspires women with this love (See *Conjugal Love* 32, 33; cf. 193).

A woman's interest is not so much in theory, but in *what good* a truth is. And especially, she sees the good, which is contained potentially, like fruit in a seed, in the wisdom of one particular man. She sees the life in it, the possibilities in it, the use of it.

In this way, she sees the man, not just as he is, but as what he can *become*. She sees a good in him that he himself is not even aware of. The way she looks at him, the way she speaks to him, the subtle way she relates to him—this has a very powerful effect on him. It awakens the truth which has been implanted in him.

In her, he discovers himself, as he was created to be. In fact, they each find themselves in the other—not the selves they had separately before, but the new self they have together.

The potential of the truth which has been implanted in his mind is fulfilled when it is *transplanted* in his wife's mind, where it is clothed with good. (This process is repeated on the natural plane in the conception, gestation and birth of offspring).

From the conjugal love which is their special gift, women have a perception regarding the states of their husbands which enables them to take wisdom from them (*if only there is some for them to find!*) and conjoin it with good. Then it becomes real and living.

And in that, of course, is a man's salvation; without it, he would never really possess any truth, because truth apart from good is only a fantasy.

It is because he loves wisdom that he loves his wife, because he perceives (even if it's unconsciously) that whatever truth has been implanted in his mind becomes actual *wisdom* when she receives it in hers.

This wisdom of life, from truth joined with good—the product of husband and wife together, and something more perfect than what either of them alone contributes—is the church with them.

This is all very idealistic, but it is a real ideal, toward which we can strive even in this far from perfect world.

I would like to leave you with a comparison (involving a plant) that I think gives a good picture of how a husband and wife work together. Like all illustrations it is very limited and inadequate, but...

Imagine a tender green plant climbing up a trellis. Without the trellis, that plant could not rise into the sunlight and air. The trellis, on the other hand, without the plant, would have no purpose, no beauty, no fruit, no life. The trellis is male wisdom, the plant is female wisdom. Neither is complete without the other.

“Nothing whatever in them is alike, and yet in every part of their being there is that which unites them” (*Conjugal Love* 33). *Amen.*