

Series on Worship, Week 5

Betrothal



The words which in the sense of the letter [in Genesis 24] treat of the betrothal and marriage of Rebekah with Isaac, in the internal sense treat of the initiation and conjunction of good and truth; for the initiation and conjunction of good and truth are spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage (Arcana Coelestia 3158).

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1. The Ancient Rite of Betrothal

Shalt thou not go to my land, and to my birth place; and take a woman for my son, for Isaac?

And [the servant] said, O Jehovah God of my lord Abraham, cause it to happen, I pray, before me today; and do mercy with my lord Abraham. Behold, I stand up by the fount of waters; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw waters. And it shall be, the maiden to whom I shall say, Incline thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, her hast Thou destined for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby I shall know that Thou hast done mercy with my lord. And it was that scarcely had he completed speaking, and behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, the brother of Abraham, with her pitcher on her shoulder....

And the servant brought out vessels of silver and vessels of gold, and garments, and gave to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. (Genesis 24: 4, 12-15, 53)

AC 3164 *And the servant brought forth vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments.* That this signifies truth and good, and their adornments, is evident from the signification of "vessels of silver, vessels of gold, and garments," in the internal sense. (That "silver" signifies truth, may be seen above, n. 1551, 2048; also that "gold" signifies good, n. 113, 1551, 1552.) "Vessels" of silver and "vessels" of gold are here mentioned, because they are predicated of the affection of truth, which here is "Rebekah;" for regarded in itself truth is but a vessel or recipient of good (n. 1496, 1832, 1900, 2063, 2261, 2269, 3068); "vessels of silver" specifically are memory-knowledges, for these are recipients of truth; "vessels of gold" specifically are truths, for these are recipients of good; and that "garments" denote adornments, is evident without explication. In ancient times such things were given to a virgin when she was betrothed, and this because of the representation and signification, in order that the betrothed virgin might represent the truth of the church that is to be conjoined with good.

AC 9182:4 Betrothals before marriage have been in use from ancient times, and represented the first conjunction, which is that of the internal man apart from the external. The subsequent marriages themselves represented the second conjunction, which is that of the internal man with the external; for during man's regeneration by means of the goods and truths of faith, the internal man is regenerated first, and afterward the external, because the external is regenerated by the internal (n. 3286, 3321, 3493, 3882, 8746).

AC 5317 *And Pharaoh took off his ring from upon his hand.* That this signifies a confirming of the power the natural previously had, is evident from the representation of Pharaoh, as being the natural... and from the signification of a "ring," as being that which confirms... and from the signification of the "hand," as being power (see n. 878, 3091, 3387, 4931-4937, 5296). From this it is plain that by his "taking off his ring from upon his

hand" is signified that the natural gave up the power it had before; and that by his "putting it upon Joseph's hand," as below, is signified that the natural yielded all the power to the celestial of the spiritual....

[T]his signification of a ring upon the hand is evident from the rites that have come down to us from ancient times, as from the rites of betrothals and unions, and also of inaugurations, in which rings are put upon the hand, and by them is signified confirmation of power.

Questions

1. Betrothals began in ancient times and are vestiges of a practice from the Ancient Church (see AC 3164). We read in Conjugal Love 81 that "conjugal love will be raised up anew by the Lord after His advent as it was with the ancients." What connections do you see between the ancient origins of betrothal and the raising up anew of conjugal love in the New Church?
2. Gold, silver and rings are mentioned in the readings as tokens given as part of a betrothal. What do you think is a good token of betrothal?
3. How does the explanation of a betrothal in AC 9182:4 apply to everyone whether married or not?

2. The Uses of Betrothal

And the man, marveling at her, was silent, to know whether Jehovah had prospered his way or not. And it was when the camels had completed drinking, that the man took a nose jewel of gold, its weight a half shekel, and two bracelets for her hands, ten of gold their weight.
(Genesis 24:21-22)

AC 3107 *Ten of gold their weight.* That this signifies what is full for initiation, is evident from the signification of "ten," as being a full state, like a "hundred" (see n. 1988, 2636); and from the signification of "gold," which is here a kind of coin from the weight of which the valuation was made; and from the signification of "weight," as being the state of a thing as to good (see above, n. 3104). Hence it is evident that "ten of gold their weight" signifies

a full state of what is estimated, as to good. That it is for initiation, is evident from the several particulars in this chapter in which initiation is treated of, that is, the betrothal.

CL 301 The reasons for betrothals are as follows:

1. That after them the two souls may mutually incline to each other.
2. That the universal love to the sex may be determined in each to one of the sex.
3. That the interior affections may be mutually known, and by applications may be conjoined in the inward cheerfulness of love.
4. That the spirits of the two may enter into marriage and be more and more consociated.
5. That conjugal love may thus rightly progress from its first heat to its nuptial flame.
6. Consequently, that conjugal love may proceed from its spiritual origin in just order and may take increase.

The state of betrothal may be likened to the state of spring before summer, and the internal amenities of that state to the blossoming of trees before fructification. Since the initiations and progressions of conjugal love proceed in order, to the end that they may flow into the effective love which commences from the wedding, therefore in the heavens also there are betrothals.

CL 302 VI. THAT BY BETROTHAL EACH IS PREPARED FOR CONJUGIAL LOVE. That by betrothal, the mind or spirit of the one is prepared for union with the mind or spirit of the other, or, what is the same thing, the love of the one with the love of the other, is evident from the arguments presented in the preceding article. It should be mentioned in addition, that on conjugal love is inscribed the following order: It ascends and descends. From its first heat it ascends progressively upwards towards their souls with an effort to conjunction there, and this by continually more interior openings of their minds—and there is no love which labors for these openings more intensely, or which opens the interiors of their minds more powerfully and easily, than conjugal love, inasmuch as the soul of each intends it; but by the same movements that this love ascends towards the soul, it also descends towards the body and thereby clothes itself.

[2] It should be known, however, that conjugal love is of the same nature in its descent as it is in the height to which it has ascended; if it is in its height, it descends chaste, and if not in its height it descends unchaste. The reason is because the lower parts of the mind are unchaste, but its higher parts chaste; for the lower parts of the mind cleave to the body, while its higher parts separate themselves from the lower. But on this subject more may be seen below (no. 305). From these few considerations, it can be seen that by betrothal the minds of the two are prepared for conjugal love, though in different ways according to their affections.

CL 303 VII. THAT BY BETROTHAL THE MIND OF THE ONE IS CONJOINED TO THE MIND OF THE OTHER IN ORDER THAT A MARRIAGE OF THE SPIRIT MAY TAKE PLACE BEFORE THAT OF THE BODY. Since this is a conclusion from what has been said above (nos. 301, 302), it is passed by without bringing in further confirmations from reason.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of betrothal?
2. What does it mean for conjugal love to ascend before it descends?
3. Do you see a connection between the uses of betrothal and AC 9182.4 from the previous reading?
4. Are all weddings in heaven preceded by a betrothal?
5. How do you think other religions view the idea of betrothal? Is betrothal exclusive to the New Church?

3. Consent and Betrothal

And they called Rebekah, and said to her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.
(Genesis 24:58)

AC 3180 *And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.* That this signifies full consent, is evident from the sense resulting from the internal sense of these words; for when to the question she replied, "I will go," it denotes that she fully consented. The full consent of truth is given when truth perceives in itself an image of good, and in good the very effigy of itself, from which it is.

CL 21 (= TCR 748). With us [in heaven] a priest does minister at betrothals, and hears, receives, confirms, and consecrates the consent. Consent is the essential of marriage, all that follows being its formalities.

AC 3155 For with the initiation and conjunction of truth with good, the case is as when a virgin is betrothed and afterwards joined to a husband; that is to say, she ought to be instructed in all things before she gives consent. Although such things do not appear with a man when the truths in the natural are being initiated and conjoined, that is, when the man is being reformed, still they take place; that is, instruction precedes, of good concerning truth, and of truth concerning good; and afterwards there is consent on each side.

CL 300 IV. THAT AFTER THE DECLARATION OF CONSENT, PLEDGES ARE TO BE GIVEN. By pledges are meant gifts. After the consent, these are confirmations, testifications, first favors, and gratifications. That the gifts are confirmations is because they are the tokens of mutual consent. Therefore, when two people consent to anything, it is said, "Give me a token," and of two who are solemnly betrothed and have confirmed their betrothal by gifts, it is said that they are pledged and so confirmed.

[2] That they are testifications is because these pledges are like continual eye-witnesses of their mutual love and hence are also reminders of it, especially if they are rings, scent-bottles and pendants which are suspended in sight, there being in these an image representative of the minds of the bridegroom and bride.

That these pledges are first favors is because conjugal love promises itself everlasting favor, and of this, these gifts are the first fruits.

That they are the gratifications of love is known, for the mind is exhilarated at the sight of them; and because love is in them, these favors are dearer and more precious than all other gifts. It is as though their hearts were in them.

Moreover, because these pledges are stabilizers of conjugal love, the giving of gifts after consent was an established custom among the ancients, and after acceptance of them, the two were declared to be bridegroom and bride.

But it should be known that the giving of gifts, whether before the act of betrothal or after, is a matter of choice. They are confirmations and testifications of consent to the betrothal if given before it, and to the nuptials if given after it.

CL 301 V. THAT CONSENT IS TO BE STRENGTHENED AND CONFIRMED BY A SOLEMN BETROTHAL.

Questions

1. Can arranged marriages ever result in a truly conjugal union?
2. Rings, scent bottles and pendants are mentioned in the readings as tokens of betrothal (CL 300). What do you think is a good token of betrothal?
3. It is a tradition in the New Church to use the woman's engagement ring during the betrothal as a pledge. What do you think of this practice?
4. Is it lawful to break a betrothal?
5. What does it mean for a betrothal to be solemn? The Latin is *solemnis*, meaning "customary" or "usual," according to Chadwick's Lexicon.

4. Chastity and Betrothal

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field as it turned toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and saw Isaac, and she alighted from off the camel. And she said to the servant, Who is that man there walking in the field to meet us? And the servant said, He is my lord. And she took the veil and covered herself. (Genesis 24:63-65)

CL 304 VIII. THAT THIS IS THE CASE WITH THOSE WHO THINK OF MARRIAGES CHASTELY; NOT SO WITH THOSE WHO THINK OF THEM UNCHASTELY. With the chaste, being those who think about marriages from religion, the marriage of the spirit precedes, and that of the body follows. These are the ones spoken of above (no. 302), with whom the love ascends towards the soul and then descends from its height. Their souls separate themselves from the unlimited love of the sex and, attaching themselves to one, look to an everlasting and eternal union with that one, and to its increasing blessings as nourishers of the hope which continually recreates their minds.

[2] It is wholly different with the unchaste, being those who do not think of marriages and their holiness from religion. With them, there is a marriage of the body and none of the spirit. If anything of a marriage of the spirit appears during the state of betrothal, yet, if this ascends by an elevation of the thoughts respecting it, it nevertheless falls back to the concupiscences [or lusts] which are in the will from the flesh; and so, by reason of the unchaste things there, casts itself headlong into the body and pollutes the ultimates of its love with alluring ardor. The result is, that as in the beginning it burned, so, suddenly it burns out and passes off into the cold of winter whereby its disappearance is accelerated. With such men, the state of betrothal does hardly anything else than help to fill their concupiscences with lascivious things, and from these to contaminate the conjugal of love.

CL 305 IX. THAT DURING THE TIME OF BETROTHAL, IT IS NOT LAWFUL TO BE CONJOINED CORPOREALLY, for thus the order which is inscribed on conjugal love perishes. In human minds there are three regions, the highest of which is called celestial, the middle spiritual, and the lowest natural. It is into this lowest region that man is born. He ascends into his higher region, which is called spiritual, by a life according to the truths of religion; and into the highest, by the marriage of love and wisdom. In the lowest region, which is called natural, reside all the concupiscences of evil and lasciviousness, but in the higher region which is called spiritual, are no concupiscences of evil and lasciviousness, for man is led into this region by the Lord when he is born again; and in the highest region called celestial, is conjugal chastity residing in its own love. Man is elevated into this region by the love of uses, and since the most excellent uses are from marriages, by love truly conjugal.

[2] From this it can be seen in brief, that from the first periods of its heat, conjugal love, if it is to become chaste, must be elevated from the lowest region into the highest, that from what is chaste it may then be let down through the middle and lowest region into the body. When this is done, this lowest region is purified of its unchastities by the descent of what is chaste, and then the ultimate of that love also becomes chaste. If then the successive order of this love be precipitated by corporeal conjunctions before their due time, it follows that the man acts from the lowest region which is unchaste from birth. That from this region, cold in

respect to marriage and neglect of the married partner together with loathing, has its beginning and origin, is well known. Yet there are various differences in the results of premature conjunction, as also of an over-prolonging and likewise of an over-hastening of the time of betrothal; but on account of their number and varieties, these can hardly be adduced.

AC 9182:3 Unlawful conjunction is that which is not made from affection for marriage, but from some other affection, as the affection of beauty, the affection of gain, or the affection of personal rank; and also which is made from lasciviousness. In the beginning these conjunctions are unlawful, because that which conjoins is external, and not at the same time internal. Nevertheless, a lawful conjunction may afterward be effected from them as means, which takes place when the minds are conjoined.

Questions

1. What do these passages mean for a couple that does not get betrothed before they are married?
2. What do these passages mean for a couple that engages in pre-marital sex?
3. Should a priest offer a betrothal to a couple that is living together?
4. How does an unlawful conjunction as referred to in AC 9182:3 become a lawful conjunction?

5. The Correspondence of Betrothal

And I will betroth thee to Me for eternity; and I will betroth thee to Me in justice and in judgment, and in mercy and in compassions. (Hosea 2:19)

AR 688:2 Since the Lord is the Divine good and the Divine truth, and since by "judgment" is signified the Divine truth, and by "justice" the Divine good, therefore, in many passages where the Lord is spoken of, "justice and judgment" are mentioned.

AC 3132:2 The conjunction of Divine good and Divine truth in the Lord is the very Divine marriage from which is the heavenly marriage, which is likewise a marriage of good and truth; from this also comes conjugal love (see n. 2727-2759). Hence it is that where marriage is treated of in the Word, in the internal sense there is signified the heavenly marriage, which is that of good and truth; and in the supreme sense the Divine marriage, which is in the Lord. Therefore nothing else is here meant by the marriage between Isaac and Rebekah.

The conjunction of good and truth is the marriage itself, but the initiation is the betrothal, or the state preceding marriage. But the state that precedes betrothal is what is here described. As in this state it is within the power of the maiden to be betrothed, and afterwards as a wife to be conjoined with a husband, so it is within the power of the affection of truth to be initiated into Divine truth, and in this manner to be conjoined with Divine good. And further: in the first affection and afterwards in every affection of truth with the Lord, there was inmosty the Divine good itself and the Divine truth itself, because there was Jehovah Himself; from this came the power that is here treated of.

DLW 402 (4) *Love or the will prepares a house or bridal chamber for its future married partner, which is wisdom or the understanding.* In the created universe and in each of its particulars, there is a marriage of good and truth; and this is so because good is of love and truth is of wisdom, and these two are in the Lord, and out of Him all things are created. How this marriage comes into existence in man can be seen mirrored in the conjunction of the heart with the lungs, since the heart corresponds to love or good, and the lungs to wisdom or truth (see above, n. 378-381, 382-385). From that conjunction it can be seen how love or the will betroths to itself wisdom or the understanding, and afterwards weds it, that is, enters into a kind of marriage with it. Love betroths to itself wisdom by preparing for it a house or bridal chamber, and marries it by conjoining it to itself by affections, and afterwards lives wisely with it in that house.

How this is cannot be fully described except in spiritual language, because love and wisdom, consequently will and understanding, are spiritual; and spiritual things can, indeed, be expressed in natural language, but can be perceived only obscurely, from a lack of knowledge of what love is, what wisdom is, what affections for good are, and what affections for wisdom, that is, affections for truth, are. Yet the nature of the betrothal and of the marriage of love with wisdom, or of will with understanding, can be seen by the parallel that is furnished by their correspondence with the heart and lungs. What is true of these is true of love and wisdom, so entirely that there is no difference whatever except that one is natural and the other spiritual.

Thus, it is evident from the heart and lungs that the heart first forms the lungs, and afterwards joins itself to them. It forms the lungs in the fetus, and joins itself to them after birth. The heart does this in its abode, which is called the breast, where the two are encamped together, separated from the other parts of the body by a partition called the diaphragm and by a covering called the pleura. So it is with love and wisdom or with will and understanding.

Questions

1. As we have seen, the Isaac and Rebekah story in Genesis 24 contains within it teachings about betrothal as it applies between a man and a woman in the context of conjugal love, as it applies to the will and the understanding in the context of regeneration and as it applies to the Lord in the context of His glorification (see AC 3011-3212). Do these different focuses help or confuse your understanding of betrothal?
2. How does DLW 402 help us understand the different qualities that men and women bring to marriage?
3. How does DLW 402 fit together with CL 393? "The sphere of conjugal love is received by women, and through women is transferred to men, and this because women are born loves of the understanding of men and the understanding is a recipient."

6. Betrothals in Heaven and on Other Planets

CL 444.2. I asked the two angels from what society in heaven they were. They said: "We are from the heaven of innocence. We came into this heavenly world as infants and were brought up under the Lord's auspices; and when I became a young man and my wife who is here with me became a marriageable girl, we were betrothed and contracted and were joined in marriage.... We have not known of any other love than love truly nuptial and conjugal.

CL 316.3. The Lord's Divine Providence is most singular and at the same time most universal in regard to marriages in the heavens, and in the marriages themselves, because all the happiness of heaven springs from the delights of conjugal love, as sweet waters from the sweet vein of a fountain. Therefore it is provided by the Lord that conjugal pairs be born, and that, all unknown to the boy and girl, they be continually educated for marriage; that in due time, the girl, then a marriageable maiden, and the boy, then a young man fit for entrance into marriage, meet somewhere as if by chance and see each other; that, as if by instinct, they instantly know that they are mates, and, as though from a kind of inner dictate, think within themselves, the young man, "She is mine," and the maiden, "He is mine." And that after this thought has dwelt for some time in the minds of both, they deliberately address each other

and are betrothed. It is said, as if by fate and as if by instinct, but what is meant is by Divine Providence because, when not known, Divine Providence has this appearance.

SE/SD 6110.33. There is sometimes an investigation by angels, previous to a betrothing, as to whether there exists the reciprocal of love. If not, they recognize the fact of themselves; and this is from the Lord.

EU 178. As regards betrothals and marriages among the inhabitants on that earth¹, they related that a daughter of marriageable age is kept at home, and is not allowed to go out until the day when she is to be married; and that she is then conducted to a certain wedding house, to which a number of other young women who are marriageable have also been brought; and they are there placed behind a partition that is raised as high as the middle part of their bodies, so that they are seen undressed merely in respect to the breast and face; and then the young men come thither to choose one for a wife; and when a young man sees one who is like himself, and to whom his mind draws him, he takes her by the hand; and if she then follows he leads her into a house that has been made ready, and she becomes his wife. For in that earth people see from the faces of others whether they agree in their minds, because there the face of everyone is the index of the mind, being quite free from pretense and deception.

That all things may be done in a becoming manner, and without lasciviousness, an old man sits behind the virgin girls, and at their side an old woman, and they keep watch. There are a number of such places to which the young women are led, and there are also stated times when the young men may make their choice. For if they do not see a girl who suits them in one place, they go away to another; and if not at that time, they return at a subsequent time. They said further that a husband has only one wife, and never more, because this is contrary to Divine order.

Questions

1. After reading these passages what do you think about the courtship and betrothal process that seems to occur in heaven?
2. What can we learn from the heavenly courtship process?
3. What do you think about the betrothal and courtship process as described in EU 178?
4. Why is it difficult to relate to a betrothal and courtship process like the one described in EU 178?
5. What can we learn from the courtship process described in EU 178?

¹ This earth is referred to as the fifth earth in the starry heaven in *Earths in the Universe* (EU 168).

