

Translator's Corner

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Amor conjugialis

1. Some evidence.

Some years ago, Durban Odhner expressed the thought that there was a difference in meaning between *conjugialis* (“conjugal”) and *conjugalis* (“conjugal”). He stated with some assurance that *conjugialis* was to *conjugium*, “marriage,” as *conjugalis* is to *conjunx*, “spouse” with the consequence that the *conjugialis* meant “having to do with marriage” rather than “having to do with one’s spouse.” I recall thinking at the time that the distinction was rather precious, and at this later date would not rest much weight on it unless parallel instances could be cited. However, I have recently arrived at the same conclusion by a different route and am inclined to suspect that Durban got it right.

After experimenting with “the love of marriage” as a translation of *amor conjugialis* for a while and having found no clear contraindications, I decided to do a little research.

The parallels *amor polygamicus* and *amor monogamicus* (ML 295) surely refer to love of polygamy and love of monogamy rather than to love of a polygamist and love of a monogamist—that is, to a state rather than to a person. Much the same can be said of the more familiar *amor scortatorius*. It surely refers to a love of promiscuity rather than to a love of someone who is promiscuous.

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Perhaps more telling is the virtual definition in *Married Love* 38:

Dicitur Amor sexus et Amor conjugialis, quia Amor sexus est aliud quam Amor conjugialis; . . . homo spiritualis amat et desiderat conjunctionem internam, et ex illa spiritus faustitates, et has percipit dari cum una Uxore. . . .

I refer to love of the [opposite] sex and *amor conjugialis* because love of the [opposite] sex is not the same thing as *amore conjugialis*. A spiritual person loves and longs for an inner union and for the delights of the spirit that attend it, and perceives that these occur only with one wife.

Here a distinction is made between the love and desire for inner union and the restriction to one wife, the former being realized only with the latter.

The most striking material, though, turned up in *Spiritual Experiences*. Section 3975 is headed, *de conjugii amore*, “about the love of marriage,” and says, *percepi . . . quod gaudia et felicitates ex amore conjugiali in altera vita sint . . . indefinita*, “I perceived . . . that the joys and happiness from *amore conjugialis* (“conjugal love”) in the other life are . . . unlimited.” This strongly suggests that “love of marriage” and *amore conjugialis* are synonymous.

Section 4076 includes the following.

Perceptum, quod qui non vivit in amore fidei, quod non possit vivere in amore conjugii, et tametsi in conjugii amore videtur sibi vivere, usque non est nisi genus quoddam adulteria aut lascivia, amat conjugem solum ob cohabitationem . . . nam coelestia influere debent in amorem conjugialem.

I perceived that anyone who does not live in the love of faith cannot live in the love of marriage, and even though such individuals may seem to themselves to be living in the love of marriage, it is nothing but a particular kind of adultery or wantonness. They love their spouses only for the sake of cohabitation . . . for heavenly things must flow into *amorem conjugialem* (“conjugal love”).

Section 4192 includes the following.

Conjugium est talis amor ut unus alterum, et vicissim ita ament, ut unum esse velint . . . ex mutuo hoc . . . existit amor conjugii. . . . Inde constat quod amor conjugialis sit fundamentalis et ipsum coelum.

Marriage is the kind of love in which two people love each other so much that they want to be one . . . From this mutual attitude a love of marriage arises. . . . This shows that *amore conjugialis* ("conjugal love") is basic and is heaven itself.

And lastly but not leastly, §6055, headed *Continuatio de amore conjugiali* (more on "conjugal love"), ends with the epigram, *Amor conjugii aperit coelum, amor adulterii claudit coelum*: "A love of marriage opens heaven; a love of adultery closes heaven."

Twice in *Marriage Love* itself (§§460.4 and 475.3), *amor conjugii* is used as synonymous with *amor conjugialis*. In both of these passages, it is contrasted with "the love of keeping a mistress" (*amor pellicatus/concubinatus*); and four times (§§54, 434, 478.3, and 497.4), it is contrasted with *amor adulterii*, "love of adultery." It should be noted, however, that adjectives related to *adulterium*, *concubinatus*, and *pellicatus* (as *conjugialis* is related to *conjugium*) are not readily available. Even so, the genitive phrases strongly suggest that the love is for the kind of relationship rather than for the partner; since there would be no difficulty in saying *amor adulteri*, "love for an adulterer," or *amor concubinae/pellicis*, "love for a mistress."

2. Some implications.

For me, this gives particular cogency to the statement that "the source of the love of marriage is the marriage of the good and the true" (*ML* 83). One central point made in support of this proposition is that "Nothing good can occur in isolation, and neither can anything true. They are united everywhere" (*ibid*). I am not the first to have noted that while it says in §12 of *New Jerusalem* that nothing is more important than to know what "good" and truth" are and how they relate to each other, no definition of either word is offered in the subsequent discussion. The focus is solely on their inseparability.

It has finally occurred to me that this might be telling us that the two words actually define each other to the extent that they cannot be defined separately. That is, “the truth” is what shows us what is good, and “the good” is what inclines us to see and accept the truth. Perhaps the most vivid examples come from our relationships with each other, where it is inescapably obvious that only genuine caring awakens the desire to understand truly, and that only true understanding awakens genuine caring. This is why “the same facts are false for evil people, because they are applied to evil ends, that are true for good people because they are applied to good ends” (*Heaven and Hell* 356.13, with reference to *Secrets of Heaven* 6917).

This takes on immense importance in that most intense, intimate, and prolonged of human relationships, marriage. It may be factually true that my wife left the car headlights on and ran the battery dead, but that accurate information becomes false if I fill it with feelings of resentment because I am reading into it something about her motives or attitudes or character that is not true. The only foundation of a good marriage is the union of mutual genuine affection and genuine understanding. Without the affection, the understanding is simply impossible. Without the understanding, the affection is not an affection for the person who is actually there.

Lastly, the marriage of the good and the true stems from the marriage of love and wisdom in the Lord. If there is one statement in the theological works that invites misinterpretation, it is the statement that “divine truth condemns everyone to hell, so unless the Lord’s mercy (which comes from what is good) was eternal, absolutely everyone would be damned” (*Secrets of Heaven* 2258, see also §§2447.2 and 2769). Taken with strict literalism, this pictures the Lord’s love and wisdom as at war with each other, and in a disconcerting way mirrors the picture of the wrathful Father and the mediating Son that is elsewhere regarded as anathema (see, for example, *Faith* 44).

The persistent theme of our theology is that there is no such thing as divine truth separated from divine good. There is no actual distinction between divine justice and divine mercy. The perfectly just act is perfectly merciful, and the perfectly merciful act is perfectly just. This, I would

suggest, is the obvious and compelling meaning of the command not to stray to the right or to the left (Deuteronomy 5:32). It has nothing whatever to do with intolerance or inflexibility, and everything to do with finding the perfect balance, the narrow path that leads to life (Matthew 7:14). □

