

Yet this is not such an easy section to study - partly, because we are nearly always in a hurry to fulfil our present ambitions, forgetting that eternity is simply being able to savour the present without worrying about the past or being scared about the future. If we cannot live fully in the present we are missing the only opportunity we have. That in itself is a form of profanity. But this Session really faces us with the truth that the Lord is present and concerned for our eternal life and happiness. He does accept our choices, and if they are unwise and selfish He will always minimise the damage we may do to ourselves and others. But if they are the right choices, heaven welcomes us with open arms.

Prayers and Meditation.

We have made use of several opportunities for meditation during this session, but you may like to use them again a few times in the coming weeks. The story of Jonah may be a useful one to read. He could not run away from his duty and was even angry that the Lord did not destroy the people of Niniveh. How little he understood the Lord's universal love! Let us make sure that in this divided world we do not see only our side as being right!

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Session 10

We are admitted into interior things only if we can be kept in them to the end of our life in the world.

Although the Lord wills the salvation of all, yet our choice and cooperation are essential. (DP 221-233)

This Session is easy enough to understand, but its implications in our lives are very profound. Yet they explain much which often puzzles and worries us – e.g. we often bemoan the fact that the New Church does not seem to grow; in some places it is even shrinking! This section gets to the very roots of such questions and is very helpful in showing us how deeply the Lord is concerned and involved in our eternal welfare and freedom. In short, we learn that many people cannot respond to the doctrines of the New Age – this could actually cause harm to them!

A doctor may advise us against taking certain medicines because of their side-effects on us. Equally the Lord withholds some people from “entering with understanding into the mysteries of faith” (True Christian Religion 508). It is easy to assume that salvation can be attained by some easy formula, like a direct act of Divine mercy, or some specific ritual. The Lord is merciful and desires our complete happiness – but at the same time He cannot ignore our free will. At that point we would cease to be human.

Section 1 (222-225) We may be attracted by spiritual teachings or mysteries purely as an intellectual delight, without in the least changing our way of life. In this case our knowledge remains purely intellectual, and in no way is it any indication that we are ‘spiritual’! As usual, the Lord explained this very simply in Matthew 7:24-27. Please read it and

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consider the deceptive simplicity of this parable and its profound implications in our lives. However we need to start somewhere : we can't wait until we become 'spiritually minded'.

Section 2 (226-228) This is about a very serious subject: **profanation** – from which the Lord does His best to protect us. The reason for this is that if we experience a sense of holiness and purity, and then turn against it, we destroy within us that sacredness and are in a worse condition than if we had never known of it.

Here is an example in our contemporary society. At one time virginity was regarded as a badge of chastity (Conjugal Love 503). Today, few think in that way because promiscuity is regarded as acceptable. Therefore such behaviour no longer creates a great sense of guilt. This is a concession to modern ways which seems unfortunate, yet it lifts a deep burden of guilt and unworthiness which might last our whole life on earth. The Lord knows that we cannot serve two masters. Please read Matthew 6:24-34. The reality of acceptable behaviour in today's society makes grim reading : yet the Lord is involved in not increasing our deepest anxieties and sense of guilt. We are not really responsible for the world into which we were born. Also, He knows our 'Book of Life' – even before we begin to compose it - and He disposes that good and evil may be kept separate in our lives as far as possible. He often withholds us from seeing the truth too early in life : if He didn't, our humanity might be irretrievably destroyed.

In 228:2 there is an important statement. The truths of religion which are taught in childhood are not really received personally until we can acknowledge them rationally and accept them in freedom. Therefore no child can be held responsible for what he has been taught in childhood. No person can profane anything holy unless he knows and acknowledges it as such. Millions today seem to be in that position. Very little is regarded as 'holy'. This, surely, explains why the New Church doctrines remain among the few. (You may look up Apocalypse Revealed 547, 561)

Section 3 (229-231) We are still with profanation, but more fully defined. Those who are atheists cannot profane anything Divine, because there is nothing holy in them. They may offend religious people; but we are dealing with the personal effects of profanation, not the social ones. However, those who acknowledge God, and act and speak in a pious manner, yet in their heart deny God and His Word, do a great deal of

harm to themselves and are real profaners since they are leading a double life. Many examples of such a life have been coming into the news, revealing that thousands of children had been abused in religious institutions which brought scandal on the Church and religion in general. But in the work we are studying, we see that the Lord is equally concerned with the harm such people do to themselves, not just to their victims.

In studying DP, we are not sitting in judgement on others, but are invited to look at ourselves. Are we not all sometimes very close to undermining the holy values in our life, speech, entertainment or business? The dangers are clearly pointed out in 231 and many examples are given in a very practical way. Read the 7 examples carefully; it is so easy to say, "Well, that's not me!" Yet the Lord, when in the human tainted by a long history of evils, was never sure of His invincibility. Read Psalm 30 which in the inner sense describes "The glorification of the Human of the Lord after He has suffered temptations, even the last of them which was that on the cross." Today and every day we are in such a situation and must never be complacent. Meditate for a few moments about the Lord's constant, yet non-intrusive presence which upholds us.

Section 4 (232-233) Another very important teaching about the subtle way the Lord gradually changes our selfish nature, which is not done miraculously in an instant (which would destroy our personality), but so gently that we do not even notice it. He does it via our love of self, which is our fundamental love and is essential to our survival. But the Lord can gradually introduce into it the love of use! A selfish teacher, doctor, politician may begin to enjoy his/her ability to be useful to pupils, patients or the country. His delight to be helpful to others, and in seeing them develop or get better, becomes the principal reward and joy. It is no longer anything that could be seen in terms of how much cash it brings.

This really is a very joyful teaching and very important in our money-centred world. Spend a few moments contemplating some happy and fulfilling moments in your life. This is no secret! They were those when you were actually useful (perhaps essential) to someone who needed you! I sometimes feel we could rename the book we are studying and call it, Handbook to Happiness! Read Matthew 20:20-28, it is clear that such questions occupied the disciples minds as well. Are we being instructed that we can serve others as the Lord does – ever with their happiness in view?