

battle between the two. It is normal to get used to the fact that the outer desires rule – unless they might bring us into trouble! But avoiding getting caught is no temptation, just a protection of the outward self. It is when the inner voice of truth points out that “This is wrong and against the 10 commandments!” that the real battles begin! The good angels against evil spirits engage in a confrontation and these are real temptations!

Prayer and Reflections

Consider in quietness how often you experience real temptations in which the Lord’s Word reminds you of certain spiritual responsibilities which your outer self is trying to avoid. But how the difficulty and fear can suddenly change and you are filled with love and in the end the thing you feared, or felt you could never do, is done and you feel (literally) a new person who is full of joy. Now read two or three sections from Psalm 119:17-24, 25-32, 33-39 or any other section you chose. This Psalm in the spiritual sense describes how:

The Lord fulfilled the law, or the Word, from its firsts to its lasts, and therefore He was hated, and suffered temptations, and thus made the Human one with the Divine.

Now read Luke 4:1-15. These verses describe the 3 temptations in the wilderness. Link them with the fourth section (138-144) and consider how the Lord, in His weak human, also experienced states of fear, misfortune, bodily disease and injury, possibly also of ignorance when He was not sure in His weak human if He would overcome the hells. The Psalms often speak of great darkness in which we are blind and unsure.

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United Search for Divine Providence



Session 6

Every person must be free to choose, to believe and to do what his heart desires and his understanding sees.

**The 3rd Law of Divine Providence -
No one should be compelled by force to think, to will or believe and do the things of religion, but should persuade himself to do them and to love them. (DP 129-153)**

Let us begin this Session by reading Luke 4:16-22. Sit in silence for a few minutes and think about those ‘gracious words’: *To heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives.* These words sum up the whole purpose of the Lord’s Providence, because we are often broken-hearted and captive in many ways when we are deprived of true freedom. We need to look to the Lord who truly is our Redeemer, yet in a strangely unobtrusive way.

Many religions feel the need to compel their followers to ritual actions, endless repetitions, and to uniformity. This gives the movement apparent strength - but is it the strength of free people? The Lord’s relationship with each one of us is very different, and He increases our freedom of thought, love and action. The Lord never seeks to be our Dictator; on the contrary, from our childhood He has filled our minds with many dreams of hidden potentials which our heart longs to realise. Some of these (though we are unaware of it) are the dreams of heaven! But there is no uniformity in them - we all wish to develop our own inner self. In six subheadings we are warned against the practices we should recognize and avoid at all costs!

1 We are not reformed by miracles and signs, because they compel! (DP 130-133)

Can you just hear a howl of protest from those who see miracles as signs of God's favour? But the fact remains that miracles compel us to believe without understanding. They cause confusion and even fear, since we do not know what might happen next! So it is an imposition on our mind and remains on the surface and eventually loses its hold on us. Do not place your faith in them! Indeed, the Jewish people who saw so many miracles never remained faithful to them for very long.

2 We are not reformed by visions or by talking to the departed! (134-135)

But why not? What could be more reassuring? The problem is that we do not know what spirits are in contact with us. They could be evil spirits, who may be able to tune into our memory and reassure us that they are relatives or friends and so begin to invade our mind and control it. In fact, their contact is not so different from miracles. Read carefully the story in Luke 16:19-31 in which parable the Lord very clearly states that even if spirits of our own kindred were to appear to us it would not really convince us: frighten us for a while, perhaps, but not deep down. The truth must come from the mouth of the Lord in His Word. And He never rushes us. He made us to be free!

3 We are never reformed by threats and punishments: they compel! (136-137)

Don't we know it! We resent doing anything under compulsion, and even if we convince ourselves that this is the 'right' thing to do, because the 'Church' says so, such behaviour or ritual remains on the surface and when the pressure is lifted, it is discarded. The world is full of examples of such imposed behaviour and I am sure you can think of many; but let us look at ourselves. There may be many things in our lives which are rituals or customs which we do because that is what is expected, not because they come from the heart. Let us not become slaves to such demands which can become meaningless and repetitive if our heart is not in them. But read Mark 7:1-8 or up to verse 23.

The danger of having traditions imposed on us, and then becoming a slave to them, is an ever-present threat. All great leaders seek to

regiment their people and make them blindly obedient to their rule. 137 warns us about worship which can also be forced and so become gloomy and lifeless. But genuine worship comes from the heart and is felt as delightful. This is a challenge for all of us - whatever form our worship may take!

We may also add to the list the hell-fire preaching which has been very effective in the past, and still is now. If it leads to 'conversion', it is not a true conversion of the inner self, but just a person frightened for his immortal soul. One day that person will learn that this is not what God does to us!

4 We cannot be reformed unless we are rational and are at liberty. (138-144)

This is a very merciful and lovingly human section. In our life we pass through difficult periods which are outlined in this section: states of fear or misfortune, mental disorder, bodily disease, ignorance and blindness of understanding (which can be blindness through false religious teaching). How just and merciful the Lord is in treating us with such kindness or love! Far from trying to pin some terrible sin on us, He takes in every extenuating circumstance to excuse our behaviour. A very different view of God from the one which is generally held!

5 It is not contrary to rationality and liberty to compel oneself. (145-149)

This in fact is the supreme mark of our humanity. We can compel ourselves to do what is right and good, in which case it is genuine goodness because it comes from the heart and our spirit. It is the divine invitation to each one of us to be like our Creator and to do everything from love and to reach out to all. The change in us may be quite gradual as the inner self is trying to control the outer self. In all temptations this is the real battle going on.

6 The external person must be reformed by the inner, and not the reverse. (150-153)

This may take a little while to take in. We are not used to identifying the inner and the outer self: we just feel we are the same person throughout; but the reality is very different, and since childhood we have often had a