

General Doctrinal Class.

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INVOCATION: O Lord, open our eyes to understand the Teachings  
of Thy Word on human suffering.

The Place of Misfortunes, Diseases, and Other Natural Sufferings  
in the Spiritual Life of Man.

This class on misfortunes, diseases, and other natural sufferings is a preliminary investigation of the teachings of the Word on this subject. Many things are said in the Third Testament about it. Due to disorders in our understanding and in our loves, some of these teachings appear not to agree with each other. Some of the teachings have been misunderstood in the New Church in such a way as to produce the most absurd conclusions, which if taken seriously, would be insults against the Lord's Love and Wisdom. And some are such that we can see that we cannot understand them now, and must wait for further light to be given in the development of the Church. Yet this is a subject that is of immediate concern to all. There is no one who does not suffer much in this world, and face the question as to why this should be so with regard to himself. While acknowledging the severe limitations of our understanding at this day, it is nevertheless of use to enter as far as possible into the teachings given to us, seeking further light, learning to be more careful in the reading of them, comparing the passages that treat of the subject, seeking to see the plane on which they apply, avoiding superficial conclusions, striving to view them from the sphere of the Divine Ends and Uses of the Lord, and not from our own or proprial ends.

The first teachings on this subject are given in the early chapters of the Arcana Coelestia. In Arcana Coelestia 8, it is said in relation to the second state of regeneration that a distinction is made in that state between the things which are of the Lord and those which are properly of man, or the proprial things of man. The things which are of the Lord are called Remains, and are here especially the Cognitions of faith, which he has learned from infancy, and which are stored up and do not open before he comes into this state, "Which state rarely exists at this day without temptation, misfortune, sad things, which make that those things which are of the body and of the world, thus which are proprial, quiesce and as if die. Thus the things which are of the external man are separated from those which are of the internal. In the internal are the remains which are stored up by the Lord for this time and for this use."

A similar idea about the use to which misfortunes, sickness, disease, and other sad things can be brought is set forth in several other numbers in the Arcana Coelestia. (Cp. 268,762,847,857.) In general the idea is that the love of self and the world and their delights and pleasures rule in man's external mind, making it impossible for him to feel and be affected by the good and true things of the internal man which can come into the external through the remains. When the pleasures of these loves are taken away, and the loves themselves made quiet through misfortunes and disease, then the things inflowing from the internal can affect man, and he begins to think holily and piously about God, Heaven, and the spiritual life. It is not said that this is the inevitable result of sufferings, but it is said that it can be the result both with the well disposed and even with the evil. From this arises the saying in the world, "The devil sick, the devil a saint

will be." Everyone can recognize the truth of this teaching of the Word from common experience in themselves, as for example, when someone we love dies, the thought is forcibly drawn to holy and pious things. It is also evident from the opposite, namely, that when we are caught up in worldly affairs and our worldly ends are being pleased with success over a long period, the thought about the Lord and Heaven and the spiritual life usually is absent.

It is also usually taught in relation to this subject that, when the misfortunes or diseases go away, man returns to his former state of life and may forget all about the holy and pious things by which he was affected during his sufferings. But while this may be the case with a man, yet it is said that the first states of regeneration rarely take place with a man without such misfortunes, and anxieties, in general, by natural temptations. Apparently then with some they can be bent to this use, and with others they cannot be so bent. In Arcana Coelestia 8981:3, it is said that through these natural sufferings an affection of doing well, thus of a certain charity, can inflow and infill the understanding, and can serve for confirming and more deeply inrooting the trues of doctrine, although such suffering does not change the will of man. Thus it is as if a certain beginning can be made out of which a man is free to change and advance. It is a means of bringing the man into an equilibrium in which he is able to reflect and see within himself a life that is opposed to his merely natural life. And in general in our lives we can see that misfortunes and sufferings are often the means of bringing to our consciousness and thus into our lives good and true things which never would have been possible for us without them. In the facing of them we are led to deeper trues and deeper feelings.

In apparent contrast to these teachings is the well known teaching given in the Divine Providence, namely, that no one is reformed in a state of misfortune (140) nor in a state of bodily disease (142). From this teaching men often get the impression that the Lord cannot do anything for the spiritual life of man in such states, and that they are of no use at all, as far as the spiritual life is concerned. But this is a misunderstanding of that teaching. What is actually said there is that reformation cannot be initiated in such states. In such states a man cannot feel the delights of the love of self and of the world and is not free to face them. He cannot shun an evil when he is in no position to be in the delights of that evil. If man could be reformed and changed fundamentally as to his will through natural sufferings, the Lord could and would save all men, no matter how evil they might be in their lives.

But it is said in those numbers of the Divine Providence that if reformation has begun with a man before he comes into those states, then those states of suffering can confirm and deepen his acknowledgment and love of the true and good. Thus with regard to the state of misfortune it is said that no one is reformed in that state, "if then only he thinks about God, and implores His aid," and that "It is otherwise with those who have before in a free state feared God," that is, who have out of love feared to sin against Him. (140.) And of the state of disease it is said that if a man has been reformed before he fell into the disease, he can be confirmed in his reformation through his suffering. (142.) Moreover with regard to all these states of suffering it must be remembered that reformation does not take place or is impossible, only in the degree that the mind is compelled by the state so that he is not in the equilibrium between the world and Heaven, and therefore is not free to act out of what is of Heaven with him against what is merely of the world.

In this connection we must also reflect that the Lord does infinite things to the spirit of man during his whole life here which are necessary even if further reformation is not possible, as in the case of the old who live on for years when all apparent use of rationality and liberty are withdrawn. Active reformation is not the only Divine operation in the spiritual life of man. Many other things must take place with the spirit of man, as is evident from the fact that most must spend many years in the World of Spirits before entering Heaven or hell, when yet after death there is no further reformation possible of the kind that is meant in these numbers of the Divine Providence.

The teaching in these numbers of the Divine Providence that man is not reformed in states of misfortune and disease appear to be opposed to those teachings which state that rarely at this day is anyone brought to the first states of regeneration without such sufferings. As I see it, the use of natural sufferings in helping to bring men to those first states of regeneration does not involve reformation but rather the things which make reformation possible for man. And it can be seen that there is an application of this principle not just to those very first things of the order of regeneration, but to all new states. For in every new state, there has to be a further quieting of the things of the love of self and of the world on more interior planes, in relation to their attachment to the true in the mind, in which they perform a certain use to the man. And if this were not so, we would have to conclude that a man who is being regenerated, and who has come to any internal state of life would automatically be spared all natural suffering, and if this were to be known to man, all regeneration would be impossible, as men would then cease to do evil and do well only for the end that all might be well with them naturally, and moreover would attribute their good health, and prosperity and external happiness to themselves and their own goodness.

Another principle which must be understood with regard to the teachings about natural sufferings is this: that the things said about them apply in one way to those who can be regenerated, and in another way to those who as yet cannot be regenerated, and in another to those who reject all things of spiritual life.

It is taught that there is a great difference between celestial temptations, spiritual temptations, and natural temptations. Celestial temptations are inmost, and are attacks against the love into the Lord with those who have come into that love. Spiritual temptations are attacks against the love of the neighbor, the love of the true and the life according to it. These temptations are sufferings of celestial and spiritual loves with men. Natural temptations are sufferings of the natural loves. In some places it is said that natural temptations effect nothing with regard to man's spiritual life. And this obviously is the case with those sufferings of men in which nothing of the spiritual life is involved. Thus, with a merely natural man, natural temptations would effect nothing for him spiritually, if he were such that he could not be brought to some humiliation of the spirit through them, or if he were such that the holy and pious thoughts that he might come to in them could not remain with him at all when the suffering is over. But it is also taught that natural temptations can bring man into spiritual temptations, if there is in his spirit some love of the good and true. This is clear from the doubts into which some are brought through suffering, doubts about

the Divine Providence of the Lord, doubts about His Mercy and Love. And it is also taught in the Arcana Coelestia 8392 as follows: "Repentance which is done in a free state avails, but that which is done in a compelled state does not avail. A state of compulsion is a state of disease, a state of dejected mind from misfortune, a state of threatened death, in a word, every state of fear which takes away the use of sound reason. He who is evil and in a compelled state promises repentance and also does good, he, when he comes into a free state returns into the former life of evil. It is otherwise with the good man. Those states are to him states of temptation, in which he conquers." From this it is evident that with the evil such sufferings are one thing, and with the good they are quite different in use and nature.

It is also taught that spiritual temptations when accompanied by bodily sufferings are more grievous. (Arcana Coelestia 8161:2; Nova Hierosolyma and Her Celestial Doctrine 196.) And in this relation the Word speaks of the Lord's temptation on the cross, which was most atrocious. From these things we can see that great care must be taken in understanding the teachings of the Word about natural sufferings. In every case they must be regarded in relation to the things of the spirit of man that are involved in them, and not apart from that relation. They are different with the one and the other.

Now I would speak about the things which, to my mind, can not be understood so well at this day. These are the things said about the correspondence of disease, and about misfortunes, in many places in the Arcana Coelestia, and in the Spiritual Diary particularly. It is taught that all disease is out of evil, and that if there were no evil there would not be any disease. It is also taught that misfortunes are produced through evil spirits with men. From these teachings, men have, in the Church, come into very grotesque ideas and very ugly ones. You can imagine: Someone gets sick and we start to think, "Oh, he is in such and such an evil," which is ridiculous. For example, if you talk about a little baby and the little baby has some horrible disease, then are you going to think of that baby as being in some horrible evil? It doesn't follow at all. There is something entirely wrong. As I see it, this whole trouble of our understanding of what is said about the correspondences of diseases, and also about the sources of misfortunes, comes from our lack of understanding about what a real correspondence is. We have been teaching much about this in our doctrinal classes; that until men are in some kind of correspondence, they do not and will not understand what correspondence really is. They will not understand it until they are brought into that state in which their rational and their natural man can be brought into conjunction, because there is where the real correspondence comes. If you start talking about the correspondences of diseases and how they all come out of evil, you can't deny what is said there. It is right, but as to how we understand that, that is another thing entirely.

I have heard it said in the past in the Church, though not in recent years, "There is a man in such and such a disease, so that means he is in such and such an evil," as though they could figure out by some kind of alphabet of correspondence what kind of evil a man is in from the kind of disease he has. And yet it is obvious to everybody that there are perfectly healthy devils walking around all over the world, who do not have any disease at all, and yet they do all kinds of the most horrible things you could imagine both to their friends and to their enemies. That to my mind is one of those things which are not to be taken in that grotesque manner. You have to come to a much greater understanding of what is meant by correspondence before you can see what is meant by this teaching.



Perhaps what is said about misfortunes and how they are produced by spirits can illustrate further what we mean here about the correspondences of diseases. It is said that spirits produce a certain sphere in which all kinds of terrible misfortunes take place. When people read that, they think that if they are going along alright, doing what they should do, no misfortune will befall them, and that they will be exempt from them. As we have demonstrated before, it is entirely contrary to the Divine Order that a man should be so exempt. But they get that idea, and that is wrong. We can see this from what is said in the Spiritual Diary, 4562. That number is teaching how every least thing of life is out of an internal cause, every least nod is out of an internal cause with men. Then it speaks about misfortunes and how they are produced by evil spirits; but it says then that the misfortunes spoken of concern the eternal blessedness and happiness of man, and not such things as are in the world, for these appear to man as happy when yet they may be most hurtful. From this you can see that that entirely wipes away all this false supposition that if you are on the right line, everything is going to go well for you and you don't have to worry about a thing. That is not true in regard to your natural life and it never will be. The misfortunes that are spoken of are those that are in the spirit of man and they are only there because your mind is such as to be able to attract these evil spirits to you. Otherwise you would have the picture of a perfectly fine man suddenly being infested by the sphere of evil spirits and all kinds of terrible things going wrong. That is not true. If you can see that, you can also see that, with regard to the correspondences of diseases, that there is something else there. Certainly there are diseases that come out of man's evil. That is obvious to anyone. If a man drinks too much, or indulges in all kinds of pleasures and luxuries, he is very liable to come into some kind of bodily disorder. That kind of evil opens up, indeed, to influxes which produce disease in his body. There are diseases which come from an internal cause; that is true; but you have to think of what is meant by that. The Word also teaches that diseases have natural causes, and that the one flows into the other, so to speak, where man is such that that kind of influx or correspondence between the natural disease and the spiritual disease take place.

Now, these are not things we should grasp at and rush off to apply to our life or anybody else's life because you can see that there are things hidden in it that we don't understand, because we don't know enough about correspondence. We are not in the science of correspondences, and we will not be until there comes into actuality that relationship between a regenerated rational mind and a natural mind that is being regenerated to correspond with it. Then a man is in correspondence, and then he will be in the science of it. To apply those things apart from any living reality of that correspondence is going to lead us into things that are of no profit whatsoever, either for our body or for our spirits; and they could lead us, as I've said, into all kinds of ideas that are totally contrary to the love and mercy of the Lord.

Now, as I have said, this is only a preliminary investigation into this subject. There is very much more to be said about it, but still, from the things said, I hope that we can be guarded against rash and foolish conclusions about the things said in the Word on this subject.

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