

A SERMON ON ARCANA COELESTIA, 2327  
 Lessons: Isaiah 14:4-16;  
 Luke/8:9-28; D.P. 231: 4+5

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 Bryn Athyn, Pa.

"That the state of humiliation is the essential state of worship itself, comes from the fact that so far as the heart is humbled, so far the love of self and all the evil therefrom ceases; and so far as this ceases, so far the good and the true, that is, charity and faith, flow in from the Lord; for that which stands in the way of the reception of these is principally the love of self, in which there is contempt for others in comparison with oneself; hatred and revenge if self is not treated with honor; and also unmercifulness and cruelty; thus the worst evils of all, and unto these goods and trues cannot be introduced, for they are opposites." (Arcana Coelestia, 2327.)

In our last sermon we treated of the worst evils which are hatred, and revenge, cunning and deceit, which include unmercifulness and cruelty. But in the present sermon we will especially treat of the fifth interior evil that is often included in such a series as in our text, namely, "despising others in comparison with oneself."

We are told that the higher angels regard themselves as least worthy of all and are therefore the farthest removed from despising others in comparison with themselves.

One of the most common and worst forms of despising others in comparison with oneself is on the basis of religion. There is the story of the Sunday school teacher who told the children the story of the Pharisee, "who stood and prayed within himself, God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. While the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The Sunday school teacher after speaking about this parable closed her class with the words, "Let us thank the Lord that we are not like the Pharisee."

The Jews in their despisal thanked God that they were not like other peoples, and the Christians in their despisal of the Jews and Gentiles, thanked God as in the above story, that they were not like the Jewish Pharisee. Not that they necessarily do this openly but, as is said of the Pharisee, in prayer with himself.

In the New Church generally many tend to despise those in the Christian Church. In the Academy from its beginning there were those who despised those in Convention, and some in the Lord's New Church, who despise especially those in the General Church, and there are those in the General Church who despise those in the Lord's New Church. It may be noted that the despisal is most strongly directed against those who are most closely spiritually related.

In this question of despal there lies concealed a paradox, for in the Word and in the Genuine Doctrine of the Church from the Word there is given a judgment on the churches that have existed; and some out of a spirit of what they imagine to be charity, and which is called charity in the world, deny the judgment on the churches in the external and internal of the Word. Such a denial is a worse despal than the despal of other churches for it involves a despal of the Word and Genuine Doctrine. The man of the Church is therefore placed between two opposite dangers, which appear like a paradox, and the resolving of this matter is not primarily a matter of doctrine but of life. It is only by a man's coming into a genuine humility before the Lord, by his becoming again a little child that he can be freed on the one hand from despising others, and on the other from despising the judgments of the Word of the Lord. While this question is primarily a question of life; it is still useful to consider the matter.

There is also this apparent paradox that the higher the angels are the less they despise others in comparison with themselves, and in fact we are told the more they consider themselves unworthy in comparison with others. Yet the celestial angels certainly know that they are in the celestial heaven. We are indeed told that the celestial angels pray for mercy while the spiritual angels, except when in grievous temptations, only pray for grace. The reason for this is that the celestial angels, see clearly the diabolic nature of their proprium, and the mercy of the Lord in withholding them from it by a mighty force, and they clearly perceive that it is not due to any merit of their own that they are saved, and that of themselves they would sink to the lowest hell; while the spiritual are not entirely free of a feeling of merit, nor do they clearly see the native quality of their proprium, and therefore do not in the same way perceive the mercy of the Lord in withholding them from the hell of their proprium.

It is a false idea that the Gentile, the Jew, the Christian, or the different bodies in the New Church can be in the same good. A Gentile may be in things which would be serious evils for a Christian, yet which are excusable in a Gentile, and the same applies to the man in the New Church in relation to the old church, and this also applies to the New Church, as interior degrees of the true of the Word are opened in the Church, in relation to those with whom these degrees of the true have not been opened.

The Lord's words: "For I say unto you, that except your justice shall exceed (that) of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt.5:20.) applies to every degree in relation to a lower degree. If the justice of the man or woman of the Lord's New Church does not exceed the justice of other churches he is guilty beyond any one else, according to the words of the Lord: "And that servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will shall be beaten with many stripes, ... For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required." (Luke 12:47, 48.)

If we really realize what is involved in these words we will be brought into a holy fear, and into a state of great humility, in which we will be far from despising others in comparison with ourselves, for, having been given so much, we have made so little of this of our life.

We read: "As to Christians and Gentiles in the other life, the case is this: Christians who have acknowledged the trues of faith, and at the same time have lived a good life, are received in preference to Gentiles; but at this day such are few. Whereas Gentiles who have lived in obedience and mutual charity are received in preference to Christians who have not lived so good a life." (A.C. 2590.)

The more internal and genuine the trues of the Church are the more spiritual or celestial the life can be. But the sad thing is that often those who know more internal trues do not live according to them. If we view the history of the New Church as a whole, or if we view the history of the Lord's New Church, there is much to make one sad.

We read: "The truly spiritual or internal are to be found only within the Church." (A.C. 5081.) That is within the genuine Church. This does not mean that those who are not of the genuine Church on earth, when instructed and regenerated in the other life, on the basis of their faithfulness to their religion while on earth may not become internal in the other world. The saddest fact is that so few of those in a church which as to Doctrine is an internal Church become, internal men and women of the Church.

If we would have some idea of our state, this may be had by reflecting on our reaction, when we read in the Word, about the Gentiles, the Jews, the Catholics or the Protestants, or especially in the Doctrine of the Church about the states in the New Church, with the fallings away. Do we like the Pharisee thank God that we are not like others, or do we see all these hereditary evils in ourselves, and do we perceive the great danger that those evils may become actual and carry us to hell. Do we feel the dependence on the mercy of the Lord for our salvation; and do we perceive the Lord's mercy to all in the human race, and that if we are not in this, the Lord's mercy we may be condemned more than others.

May the words of our text sink into our hearts; namely: "That the state of humiliation is the essential state of worship itself comes from the fact that so far as the heart is humbled, so far the love of self and all evil therefrom ceases, and so far as this ceases, so far the good and true, that is charity and faith flow in from the Lord, for that which stands in the way of reception of these is principally the love of self, in which there is contempt for others in comparison with oneself; hatred and revenge if self is not treated with honor; and also unmercifulness and cruelty, thus the worst evils of all, and into these goods and trues cannot be introduced for they are opposites!" (A. C. 2327.)

AMEN