

General Doctrinal Class.

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October 20, 1983
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Self - Exploration.

Invocation: O Lord, cast Thy Light upon our lives that we may
see what we are and what we have to do.

The Third Testament places great importance on self-exploration. It is taught that a man must repent of his evils, in order that the Lord may save him. And it is taught that actual repentance is to explore one self, to see one's own evils, to acknowledge them, confess them, and to desist from them. This is called the Christian Religion itself in the Divine Providence 278. As stated in the True Christian Religion 528, "Actual Repentance is to explore self, to cognize and acknowledge one's sins, to make supplication to the Lord, and to begin a new life." Self-exploration is the beginning of repentance. From the Word, and from the Doctrine of the Church out of the Word, man knows what evils are, and that they are sins against the Lord, preventing the reception of the Lord's life, the life of Heaven, with man. The whole purpose of man's knowing and understanding these things is that he might see them in himself and shun them as sins against the Lord. In this class we will treat of the teachings of the Word and of the Doctrine of the Church about the seeing of evils in oneself which is by self exploration.

At the outset we would lay stress on the truth that the purpose of the exploration is to see one's evils. It is not to see whether there are goods or evils in one's life, but to see the evils there. Some have supposed that the exploration is to see whether they have acted out of good, or whether out of evil. In relation to repentance the Word says nothing at all about finding whether one has acted out of good; the whole purpose is to see the evils in oneself and repent of them.

In general, the instruction given in the Word about self-exploration is as follows;

1. That man should explore the acts of his life. (True Christian Religion 525.) This is the most external exploration. One may wonder why this exploration is necessary, since everyone knows what one has done. But one might very well have said or done something which is contrary to the broader natural meaning of the Commandments which he would not notice in himself except by reflection. You might say or do something against another without realizing that it is wrong, or even under the supposition at the time that it was good to say or do it. For example, one may defame another, destroying his good name, a thing which is forbidden under the Commandment not to kill, and also under not to bear false witness. (True Christian Religion 309, 321.) Reflection on one's deeds and words is therefore necessary, and should not be neglected. But it is also taught that exploration of the deeds and speech is not sufficient. This is because from the love of one's own honor, reputation and gain, one may clean up the external life which appears before others. One may put away all external evils of the body, not because they are sins against God, but because they are hurtful to one's own selfish purposes in life. This teaching, however, must not be used as an excuse for not exploring our deeds and speech. It is

possible and necessary for a man to see and shun such external evils as sins against the Lord. And this is the beginning of repentance. As said in the footnote to the Doctrine of Charity, number 5, if the exploration is only as to acts, it does not find much, and this is not sufficient.

2. Exploration must therefore be made on the thoughts and intentions. It is obvious to everyone that if one entertains thoughts of evils with delight, or if one intends them, and only refrains from them because of fears of worldly punishment, one has not repented of the evil, and it is still in the heart and spirit of man. No one is held responsible by the Lord for what enters into his thought, but he is held responsible for entertaining it with delight, for then it begins to draw from his will. Intentions are the thoughts of the will, and man is responsible before the Lord for the intentions of evil.

Many in the New Church speak of exploring themselves to see what their motives are, and the general conclusion is that a man cannot tell out of what motive he is acting. The Third Testament does not speak of motives. It does speak of intentions and ends. The ends are in the intentions. And the Third Testament says in many places that the intentions must be explored to see what is evil there so that man may repent of it. One may suppose that one's intentions are good. Indeed they might be good. But the influence of the hells operating through the unregenerated things of man can bend and turn the affections of the good and true into affections of the evil and false. (Arcana Coelestia 751.) As is said in the prayer we use in our worship, "that the devil may not seduce us and put evils into our hearts, knowing that while we are not led by Thee, O Lord, he leads and breathes in evils of every kind." (Apocalypse Explained 1148.) And we cannot be led by the Lord unless in some degree we use the trues of His Word to explore our lives and see the intrusions of the devil there, and repent. And you can see that the presence of the Lord, and the whole operation of His Love and Mercy, of His Wisdom, comes down into the act of repentance with man, the beginning of which is in the exploration of self. Any good motive, any good intention or end, with us comes down into the love to be regenerated by the Lord. Out of this love a man will explore himself to see his evils.

3. The man must explore himself as to what he thinks is allowable in the eyes of the Lord, as to what he thinks is a sin or not a sin. To see this he must reflect on what he would will, think and do if there were no external fears of the loss of reputation, honor and gain restraining him. Whatever a man makes allowable in his own mind, this he does in his spirit. He makes it of his will.

4. The love of dominating over all, and the love of possessing the goods of all have been inrooted in the human race for a long time. Out of the love of dominating over all, a man wills to be the god of Heaven and out of the love of possessing the goods of all, a man wills to be the god of earth. To explore these two loves is difficult, for they reside inmosty and hide themselves. (True Christian Religion 533.)

It is taught that self exploration begins repentance, actual repentance. It is also taught that actual repentance is very difficult for those in the Christian Reformed World. (Apocalypse Revealed 531:7, True Christian Religion 535.) They cannot drive themselves to do it. It is as if a horror invaded them when they intend to do it. "Therefore an easier form of repentance is adduced, which is that when they are turning over evil in the lower mind and

"intending it, they say to themselves, I am thinking this, and I am intending it, but because it is a sin, I will not do it." (True Christian Religion 535.) Clearly this easier form of repentance involves the seeing of evil in themselves. They see what they are thinking and intending, and shun it. Yet it is not so much reflection as a kind of catching themselves in the act of thinking and intending while the process is going on in them. It misses much, and does not go so deeply. And yet it is taught that by this kind of repentance the temptation injected from hell is broken and its further entrance inhibited.

The Third Testament teaches that actual repentance, including self-exploration is hard for those who have never done it, but that it becomes easier for those who have done it. The instruction is given that a man should do it once or twice a year, or as often as he prepares himself to partake of the Holy Supper. Not that a man should stop there, but that this is sufficient to introduce him into the practice of it. (True Christian Religion 530, Apocalypse Revealed 531:7.) In the Arcana Coelestia 8391, it is said that he who leads the life of faith does this actual repentance daily, reflecting on the evils with himself, acknowledging them, warning himself away from them, making supplication to the Lord for help. From this we can see that the ability to explore one's self not only becomes easier from the doing of it, but that it is intended that it should become a daily exercise of the mind as the man is more interiorly regenerated.

The association of the beginnings of self-exploration with the Holy Supper is important. In worship the ends of the love into the Lord and love toward the neighbor are able to be felt, and in that sphere the ends of the love of self and the world can be seen as things opposed to them. In a state of worship the love to be regenerated is felt, and the will to be cleansed from evils. From these things a man overcomes the inertia arising from his repugnance to look into himself, into his own mind, to see what is really taking place there. In more interior states of regeneration, the states of worship are of internal origin, not dependent on external worship, and from the things active in those states of internal worship, a man can see the things of the ends which disagree with the Lord's ends with him.

A man is able to explore himself and see and acknowledge his evils, because the Lord has given men both an interior and an exterior thought. "Out of the higher or interior thought he sees what the will acts in the lower or exterior thought; this he sees as a man sees his face in a mirror." (Divine Providence 278a.) This ability to reflect on one's self is a truly human faculty, which animals do not have. In the beginning, this internal with man is from the Lord with him through remains and instruction. Later, when the rational is conceived and born in man out of the new internal from the Lord, this ability to see what is taking place in the mind is tremendously increased. Thus we read: "For the rational is the medium uniting the internal man with the external, and thus from the Lord apprehending what is going on in the external, and reducing the external to obedience, yea, elevating it from the bodily and earthly things in which it immerses itself, and effecting that man be a man, that he look to Heaven, of which he is indigenous, not as brute animals only to the earth in which he only sojourns, still less to hell. These are the offices of the rational. Wherefore unless a man is such that he can think this, it cannot be said that he has the rational." (Arcana Coelestia 1944.) From this we can see how the whole operation of repentance, including self-exploration, becomes more constant and more penetrating as man enters into the interior states of regeneration.

In general, it can be seen that in the external states of the formation of the Church with men, man faces external evils, and the thoughts and intentions of them. In those states of the Church represented by the Adamic or Most Ancient Church, the Noachic or Ancient Church, and by the Hebrew Church, man sees in himself more and more interiorly the external evils of life and turns away from them. But his reasons for doing this change. More and more he comes to see that if he is to be saved by the Lord, there must be formed and opened in him a new internal from the Lord. This is what is represented by the prophecies of the Coming of the Lord in the Churches before the Advent of the Lord into the world. So he comes more and more to see and shun evils, not for the sake of having a clean external, but for the sake of what the Lord can then do in forming his internal, thus for the sake of the future coming of the Lord to him. By this he is protected and delivered from the supposition that he is regenerate just because of the cleaning up of his external man.

When a new internal has been formed and opened in man, in those states of the formation of the Church which correspond to the Lord's life on earth, to the states of His glorification, he comes to see his hereditary evils in the internal forms in which they operate in the states of regeneration. These evils all have to do with the influences of the hereditary will of man upon the goods and trues for the external man, thus for one's self. All the internal sense of the Commandments, and of evils mentioned elsewhere in the Word have to do with these internal evils, these internal forms of evil in man.

The exploration of these evils is complicated by the fact that the Lord first not only tolerates them with man but makes use of them in introducing what is good and true to man. And yet if man is to be regenerated, they must be seen and shunned. The seeing and shunning of them takes place in states of internal worship, in which the things which are from the Lord in the ends and intentions of man can be distinguished from the things which are from the love of self and the world in his ends and intentions. Thus a separation can take place. But the most complete seeing of these evils takes place in temptations which take place when man has been prepared to enter into a more interior state of regeneration. The evils then rise in rebellion against any more interior good and true, and can be seen in their true colors. Such explorations take place when the state is brought to judgment. As I see it, it is in such explorations that a man can begin to see the inmost of the evils with himself, the love of dominating over all, even over the Lord in his own life, and the love of possessing the goods of all.

The Church must know and understand more and more about repentance, about self-exploration, and strive to enter into the practice of this precious faculty given by the Lord.
