

The Promotion of Uses

by the Rev. David R. Simons

The Heavenly Doctrines teach that every individual man and woman is created for the sake of use. “A person is born [they say] not for the sake of himself, but for the sake of others” (*True Christian Religion* 406). “A Person is born for no other end than that he may perform uses to the society in which he is and to the neighbor” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1103). That we may live a life of use and in this way become a form of use to all eternity in heaven is the very purpose why each one of us was created. And to this end we have been endowed by the Lord with special talents, special gifts which enable us to serve others. Every individual possesses potential qualities which he is privileged to share with his neighbors. Each one of us has been formed with unique abilities which, if developed and entered into, provide us with opportunities to be truly human. For to be human, understood spiritually, means to perform uses (*Divine Love* xiii).

Matched with what the Heavenly Doctrines tell us we have the experience of daily life, where hard necessity has a way of bending ideals. We have to go to school; we have to make a living; we have problems to solve; people and things demand our attention and consume our energy; daily routines clutter up our lives, sap our ambition, and erode our spontaneity. Frustration is the devil’s own way of catching at our heels to trip us into the mire of despair. Reluctantly, in spite of personal preference and desire, we are forced to meet the necessities of life through hard work.

The ideals of doctrine and the necessities of daily living seem worlds apart. They seem unrelated and at times they even seem divisive. Ideals tend to make us think too much. We think we might be contented and satisfied with things as they are, if only we did not know so much! We long for the carefree states of primitive ignorance. We think our minds could be absorbed and satisfied by the necessities and pleasures of natural life if we were free from conscience. If we could only choose our own work in life; if only we could select what talents we think we need; if we could but control the circumstances of our lives; then, we suppose, we might more readily accept the ideals of doctrine. How can we apply the doctrine of use to our own lives when we are not sure what our use is? We often sincerely doubt that the work we have to do has any relation whatever to our eternal use in heaven.

Fortunately, the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines are not as far away from such thinking as might be supposed. The Lord rules the world of hard necessity as well as the world of ideals, and He rules them for our eternal good. The Lord comes to us in His Word and offers us help—direct and immediate help in facing the problems of daily life. He provides us with a sense of values which frees us from needless worry and doubt. He opens our eyes to what is eternally true so the frustrations of the moment can be seen as trivial and inconsequential. He warms our hearts in the midst of seeming adversity. He gives us the power and strength to go on when our difficulties seem insurmountable. But He can only provide this help if we learn to see things in His light, in the perspective of eternity. And He can only make this help felt insofar as we are willing to acquire those spiritual qualities of character which can grow when we make the effort to apply the ideals of religion to life.

In the New Church we sometimes get the impression that our natural occupations—being a housewife, a businessman, or a mechanic—are not our use. Our uses, we feel, are remote and perhaps unrelated to our everyday activities. We may even entertain the idea that our natural occupations are only incidental to the performance of uses. But is this what the Heavenly Doctrines teach? Do the Heavenly Doctrines speak of use as something apart from occupation? How closely are these two things—daily work and use—related?

The overwhelming evidence of the Heavenly Doctrines, as we read them, teaches that occupation and use are inseparably linked together. Our natural occupations are an essential means whereby we become forms of use. Doing work honestly, justly, and faithfully, day by day, is the ordained way in which our minds are reformed and regenerated and thus opened to receive use from the Lord. In our daily occupations we are protected from wandering lusts which infest the idle. And in our daily work we can perform those essential acts of charity toward the neighbor which are the ultimates and essence of heaven.

That use is directly related to occupation, to the very offices and employments of life, is clear from the following teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines: “Use is to discharge one’s office rightly, faithfully, sincerely, and justly” (*Divine Love* xi). “Uses are everyone’s, performing offices prudently according to the quality of each person” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7038). “When a person sincerely, justly, and faithfully does the work that belongs to his office or employment, from affection and its delight, he is continually in the good of use” (*Charity* 158). And further from the same number:

Every person who looks to the Lord and shuns evils as sins, if he sincerely, justly, and faithfully does the work of his office and employment, becomes a form of charity. And the goods that he does are the goods of use which he does every day, and which when he is not doing, he thinks of doing. There is an interior affection which inwardly remains and desires it.... Otherwise he cannot become a form, that is, a receptacle of charity.

Loving the Lord and loving the neighbor means nothing more than being willing to perform uses for them, and neither of these can be loved except by the uses that belong to one’s office or job. As we read:

A priest...loves the neighbor if he teaches and leads his hearers from a zeal for their salvation. Magistrates and officers love...the neighbor if they discharge their respective functions from a zeal for the common good; judges, if from zeal for justice; merchants from a zeal for sincerity; workmen, if from uprightness; servants, if from faithfulness, and so forth. When with all these there is faithfulness, uprightness, sincerity, justice, and zeal, there is the love of use from the Lord” (*Divine Love* xiii).

The Heavenly Doctrines, in so many words and repeatedly, teach that a person’s occupation is intimately bound up with his use. However, although occupation and use are closely related, they are not identical. In every definition of use given above, it is not the *occupation* involved which

makes it a use, but the *way* in which it is done. It is the right performance, the sincere performance, the faithful performance, the just performance and the zealous performance of our work which make it truly a use. This distinction is an important one to recognize, for occupations are only genuine uses in so far as they embody love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. The idea of use, like the idea of a person, must have both a soul and a body. The spirit of sincerity, justice, faithfulness, and zeal is the soul; offices and employments, the work people do, this is the body. As we read, “Use is...like a soul, because its form is like a body” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 310).

The truth that it is not merely the occupation but the spirit in which something is done which makes it a genuine use has tremendous and far-reaching implications. This truth tells us that no matter what our occupation may be—provided, of course, that it serves the neighbor for good—no matter how menial or how exalted it may be in the eyes of the world, the person who looks to the Lord, shuns evils as sins, and does his work sincerely, justly, faithfully and with ambition, performs the highest uses of all. Here is an ideal which is eminently practical. Here is a teaching which touches life. For who cannot look to the Lord? Who cannot shun evils as sins? Who cannot strive to be sincere and ambitious in his work? Hard necessity may require a person to enter some particular occupation, it is true, yet it can never dictate how that work is going to be performed. Practical conditions in life may force us into work for which we have no innate love, but they can never take away our freedom to carry on this work to the best of our ability for the sake of our neighbor and the Lord. For it is the spirit of the use which counts spiritually. In respect to the spirit, we are perfectly free. Our freedom and our responsibility is to place use above self and thus to promote uses by doing them to the best of our ability from religious principles, that is, from the Lord.

The Heavenly Doctrines hold out a special promise and a special hope for those who choose to perform uses for the sake of use. They teach that for all who do their work for the sake of the neighbor, for all who learn to live not for themselves alone but for others, the very work which may have been distasteful to them at first will become progressively more delightful. For the person who performs uses from the soul of use will be given an affection for the use he performs—an affection which will cause him, even when not engaged in work, to think about it with delight. “Hence it is [the teaching concludes] that [such a person] is perpetually in the good of use, from morning to evening, from year to year, from his earliest age to the end of his life” (*Charity* 158).

Amen.