

Quotes from the Word: Divine Providence and Evil

OLD TESTAMENT

The Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh but he disobeyed and went to Joppa and got on a ship going to Tarshish.

But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

They questioned Jonah. So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

The men tried everything they could think of, but the sea grew more tempestuous. So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

(Jonah 1:4-5, 7, 9-12, 15-17; 2:1,10)

O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.

If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there;
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me....

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

(Psalm 139:1-3, 8-10, 23-24)

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NEW TESTAMENT

Every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:44-45).

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:12-14).

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? (Matthew 9:4).

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

HEAVENLY DOCTRINE

OVERVIEW OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The operation of the Divine providence to save a person begins at the person’s birth and continues to the end of his life, and afterward to eternity (*Divine Providence* 332).

The Lord’s providence has in view what is eternal (*Arcana Coelestia* 7007:4).

Everything done by the Lord constitutes His Providence (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5264:2).

A person is led by the Lord, and he takes no step into which and from which the Lord does not lead. The Lord leads him as if by the hand, permitting and withholding as far as a person is willing to follow in freedom (see *Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2).

When the Lord is with someone, He leads him and makes provision so that all that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring him what is good. This is Divine Providence (*Arcana Coelestia* 6303).

Providence is the government of the Lord in the heavens and on the earth (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 276).

Unless the Lord’s Providence were present in the most specific details, a person could not possibly be saved or even have life, since life comes from the Lord and every moment of life holds a chain of consequences stretching into eternity (*Arcana Coelestia* 6490).

Quotes from the Word: Divine Providence and Evil

FREEDOM

A person is continually led by the Lord in freedom (*Divine Providence* 43).

Providence acts invisibly, in order that a person may not be compelled to believe from visible things, and thus that his free-will may not be injured (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 276).

To be led by good is freedom, while to be led by evil is enslavement; for to be led by good is to be led by the Lord, whereas to be led by evil is to be led by the devil (*Divine Providence* 43).

All freedom belongs to love; for what a person loves he does freely (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 141).

Whatever does not enter a person in freedom, does not remain, because it is not of his love or will (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 149).

To be moved to act by a delight of one's love is to act in freedom, since delight draws a person as river does an object which is borne along of itself in the direction of its current (*Divine Providence* 73:2).

A human being has reason and freedom, or rationality and liberty, and these two faculties are present in a person from the Lord (*Divine Providence* 73).

Who cannot employ his faculty called rationality to understand that this or that good is useful to society, and that this or that evil is harmful to society? That, for example, justice, honesty, and chastity in marriage are useful to society, and that injustice, dishonesty, and adulterous relations with the wives of others are harmful to society (*Divine Providence* 77).

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Spiritual freedom is from the love of eternal life. Into this love and its delight no one comes but the person who thinks that evils are sins, and consequently does not will them, and at the same time looks to the Lord. At first this freedom does not appear to be freedom, and yet it is. Later it does so appear, when the person acts from freedom itself according to reason itself, in thinking, willing, speaking and doing what is good and true (see *Divine Providence* 73:6).

Everyone may come into this [spiritual] freedom provided he is willing to think that there is an eternal life, and that the temporary delight and bliss of a life in time are but as a fleeting shadow compared with the never-ending delight and bliss of a life in eternity (*Divine Providence* 73:7).

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EQUILIBRIUM

Freedom originates from the equilibrium between heaven and hell (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 149).

The equilibrium between heaven and hell is a spiritual equilibrium, that is, an equilibrium of falsity against truth and of evil against good. It is this spiritual equilibrium that causes a person to think and will in freedom. When he is in that equilibrium he is in freedom either to admit or receive evil and its falsity from hell or to admit or receive good and its truth from heaven. Every person is held in this equilibrium as a result of the Lord's ruling both heaven and hell (see *Heaven and Hell* 537:1-3).

With the good, spiritual equilibrium or freedom is between good acting and evil reacting; but with the evil, the equilibrium is between evil acting and good reacting (see *Heaven and Hell* 589:2-3).

Goodness cannot be forced on anyone, because nothing remains fixed if it has been forced on a person; it is not his. The only things that become a person's own are those done in freedom; for things done in freedom are those that spring from the will, and the will is the person's true self. Therefore unless a person is kept in freedom to do even what is bad he cannot be provided with good from the Lord (*Arcana Coelestia* 10777).

HEAVENLY VERSUS HELLISH FREEDOM

It is an exercise of heavenly freedom to think and to will good, and so far as opportunity is given, to speak and do it (*Divine Providence* 43).

To do evil from freedom, appears as freedom, but it is slavery, because that freedom is from the love of self and from the love of the world, and these loves are from hell.... But to do good from freedom is freedom itself, because it is from love to the Lord and from love towards the neighbor, and these loves are from heaven (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 142).

Hellish freedom consists in being led by the loves of self and of the world (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 148).

It is an exercise of hellish freedom to think and to will evil, and so far as civil and moral laws do not hinder, to speak and do it (*Divine Providence* 43).

A wicked person from himself continually leads himself more and more deeply into his evils... (*Divine Providence* 296:3).

Through the exercise of his freedom, the Lord continually leads a person away from evils, and to the extent that the person can through the exercise of his freedom be led away, to the same extent the Lord uses the exercise of his freedom to implant goods. Thus He gradually replaces infernal freedom with heavenly freedom (*Divine Providence* 97).

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FROM PERMISSION

The Lord foresees and sees all things and every individual thing though some things arise from His permission, some from His concession, some from His consent, some from His good pleasure, and some from His will (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1755).

Leaving a person in freedom to even do what is bad, is permission (*Arcana Coelestia* 10778).

Whatever happens for the sake of salvation as the goal, happens in accordance with the laws of Divine providence. For Divine providence continually operates counter to and in conflict with a person's will, continually intent on the goal. Consequently at every moment of its operation, or at every step of its progress, when it sees a person stray from the goal, it guides, bends, and directs the person in accordance with its laws, withdrawing him from evil, leading him to good. This cannot be done without the permitting of evil (*Divine Providence* 234).

The permission of evil by the Lord is not that of one who wills, but of one who does not will, but who cannot bring aid on account of the urgency of the end, which is salvation (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 276).

Without permissions, a person cannot be led away from evil and so be reformed and saved. For if evils were not permitted to break out, a person would not see them and therefore would not acknowledge them, and so could not be brought to resist them (see *Divine Providence* 251).

Evils cannot be removed unless they appear. We do not mean that a person has to commit evils in order for them to appear, but that he must examine himself, not only his deeds, but also his thoughts, and what he would do if he did not fear the laws and disgrace—especially what evils he makes in his spirit allowable and does not regard as sins, for these he continues to do (*Divine Providence* 278).

The reason why the designs of bad people meet with success is that proper order requires all people to use their reason when they do what they do, and also to act in freedom. Therefore unless a person were left to act in accord with his reason and in freedom, and so unless the designs carried out with the aid of reason and in freedom met with success, no one would ever be in a proper state of mind to receive eternal life. For this life is instilled when people are in freedom and their reason is enlightened (*Arcana Coelestia* 10777).

The Divine Providence with the wicked is a continual permission of evil, to the end that there may be a continual withdrawal from it. The withdrawal from evil is effected by the Lord in a thousand ways that are most secret (*Divine Providence* 295:3,4).

He who has advanced more interiorly and deeply into infernal societies becomes as if he were bound with chains. So long as he lives in the world, however, he does not feel his chains, for they are as if made from soft wool or from fine threads of silk. But after death, instead of being soft they become hard, and instead of being pleasant they become galling (see *Divine Providence* 296:3).

Quotes from the Word: Divine Providence and Evil

CONSEQUENCES

It is a law of Divine order that good holds within itself its own reward, which is heaven. So too evil holds within itself its own punishment, which is hell (*Arcana Coelestia* 9033:2).

Those who trust in the Lord are constantly receiving good from Him. For whatever happens to them, whether it seems to be advantageous or not advantageous, is nevertheless good, for it serves as a means contributing to their eternal happiness. But those who trust in themselves are constantly bringing evil on themselves, for whatever happens to them, even if it seems to be advantageous and fortunate, is nevertheless bad, and consequently acts as a means contributing to their eternal unhappiness (*Arcana Coelestia* 8480:1,3).

The Lord never curses anyone, is never angry with anyone, never leads anyone into temptation, and never punishes. Such things cannot possibly come from the fountain of mercy, peace, and goodness (see *Arcana Coelestia* 245).

Every evil has its limits to which it is allowed to extend. When it is carried beyond those limits it incurs the punishment of evil (*Arcana Coelestia* 1311:2).

WHEN THE LORD FORESEES EVIL

The nature of the Lord's providence is such that it is linked together with foresight. The one does not exist without the other. For evil things are foreseen, but good ones are provided (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489).

Providence consists in making provision for something and looking towards it, thus in leading towards good, and in protecting from evil—for the Lord provides what is good but foresees what is evil (*Arcana Coelestia* 9304).

In its dealings with evil, providence is nothing else than the directing and steering of evil towards a milder evil, and so far as possible towards good (*Arcana Coelestia* 5155).

The Lord does not take away evil but withholds a person from it and maintains him in good (*Arcana Coelestia* 8364).

The evils things that are foreseen are constantly being turned towards what is good by means of the Lord's provident arrangement, since the Divine end, which has good in view, governs everything (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489).

Nothing is therefore allowed to happen except to the end that something good may come out of it (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489).

The Lord's foresight and providence are present within the tiniest details of all the smallest individual things with a person. For every smallest fraction of a moment of a person's life entails a chain of consequences extending into eternity. Indeed everyone is like a new beginning to those that follow, and so every single moment of the life both of his understanding and of his will is a new beginning (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3854:3).