

TALKING TO TEENAGERS ABOUT WORSHIP

Adapted from a chapel talk by Rev. Ormond Odhner

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church teaches that every person who looks at the universe and beholds the order in it is moved to acknowledge a Supreme Being and seeks to worship him. Yet at times the duty of worship seems irksome. This can be especially true for older children and teenagers who are compelled to attend worship services. They may argue that forced worship is not real worship at all, for there is no freedom and thus no life in it. And it is correct that true worship, internal worship, essentially consists in a daily life of charity and also that the Heavenly Doctrine never makes external worship essential to salvation.

But teenagers are not and cannot yet be in real freedom. And, until they are adult enough to be able to compel themselves to orderly ways of life, it is the duty of their parents and guardians to compel them. And though it is true that compelled worship is not genuine worship, nevertheless, worship from self-compulsion *is* genuine and is free. A teenager's emerging rationality can begin to understand the Divinely-given reasons why he should compel himself to remember the Sabbath day. You might read and discuss *Arcana Coelestia* 1618 with your child. It says that

A person, while in the world, ought not to be otherwise than in external worship...for by external worship internal things are excited, and by means of external worship external things are kept in holiness, so that internal things can flow in. And besides, a person is thus imbued with knowledges...and is also gifted with states of holiness, although he is unaware of this; which states of holiness are preserved in him by the Lord for the use of eternal life.

“By external worship internal things are excited.” When a young person is finally, individually moved to make the Lord his or her God, the chances are very great that it will be at some service of worship. You might tell your teenager about a worship service when your heart suddenly grasped the true beauty of the Lord. Has your child ever had a similar experience?

“By means of external worship external things are kept in holiness.” Above everything else in life, external worship helps to keep the externals of life in order—external actions and external thoughts and desires. We all need external reminders to keep our lives in order.

“Besides, a person is thus imbued with knowledges...and is also gifted with states of holiness.” Try asking your child if she doesn't learn something about Divine and heavenly things, whenever she makes herself pay attention at worship? Remind her that every time she compels herself to worship, she is being given states of holiness from the Lord which will remain within her to serve her in her work of regeneration in adulthood.

But still our children may ask, “Why do we have to have worship so often—every Sunday and then school chapel, grace at meals, family worship?” It is true that in heaven there is no fixed Sabbath; the Sabbath occurs only when the governor of a society proclaims one. On one of the earths in the universe there is a Sabbath only every thirty days. But the Lord must have had good reason to institute the Sabbath every seven days on this earth. He must have known that we need

it that often. You might ask your teen to add up exactly how many minutes he spends in worship each week. Then ask whether that time really is too much to devote to the Lord.

In the New Church the Sabbath is to be a day of instruction in Divine things and of meditation upon them. Neither work nor play should keep us from worship. So for our children's sake we must make every effort to keep the church safe from the erosion of materialism and selfishness. We must strive to plant an affection for the church in our children, so that they may become part of the Lord's kingdom. Encourage your teenager not just to attend worship services, but to pay attention and meditate upon the life instructions he hears. Family discussions after a worship service can facilitate this.

And in the New Church the Sabbath is also to be a day of charity—external charity. So encourage your teenager to go out of her way to be nice on Sunday. You might explain to her that although she cannot “be nice” to the Lord directly, she can be kind and loving to those around her. And as the Lord Himself said, “By this sign shall men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”