

Lesson 6: THE GENERAL GOOD

Doctrine of Charity, chapter 6

Introductory Ideas for the Sixth Lesson

This lovely chapter gets at the essence of what life is about, and what is unique about the New Church perspective on life. The terms "charity" and "use" are used in the New Church in a specific way – their dictionary definitions and generally accepted usage being quite different. In this chapter, use is defined as "goods which are of love to the neighbor" (C 127). And the point is made that motivations are important in determining true usefulness. An act done from a selfish motivation only serves the self, and is not truly useful. We are in charity when we are "...in a use, or a good of use..." (C 150). Here are a couple of opening questions:

1. What is the Grand Man? (This idea is covered in the chapter.)
2. Are people in hell in the Grand Man?

Some Key Points in Chapter 6:

The chapter heading says it all in a nutshell: Man is born that he may become charity; and this he cannot become unless he perpetually does the good of use to the neighbor, *from affection and delight*. (Emphasis added.)

Charity 127 discusses the concept of the general good of society. This might be a good point to ponder. As individuals we see our choices being insignificant in the landscape of society as a whole. But our choices are significant. Try to draw examples from the students in which a single act or choice made a difference to many. (How do wars start? How would the world be different if Swedenborg had not heeded the Lord's call?)

Charity 129 states the well-known passage about materials being gathered to build a house. The genuine good of a house is the not the building, but the dwelling in it.

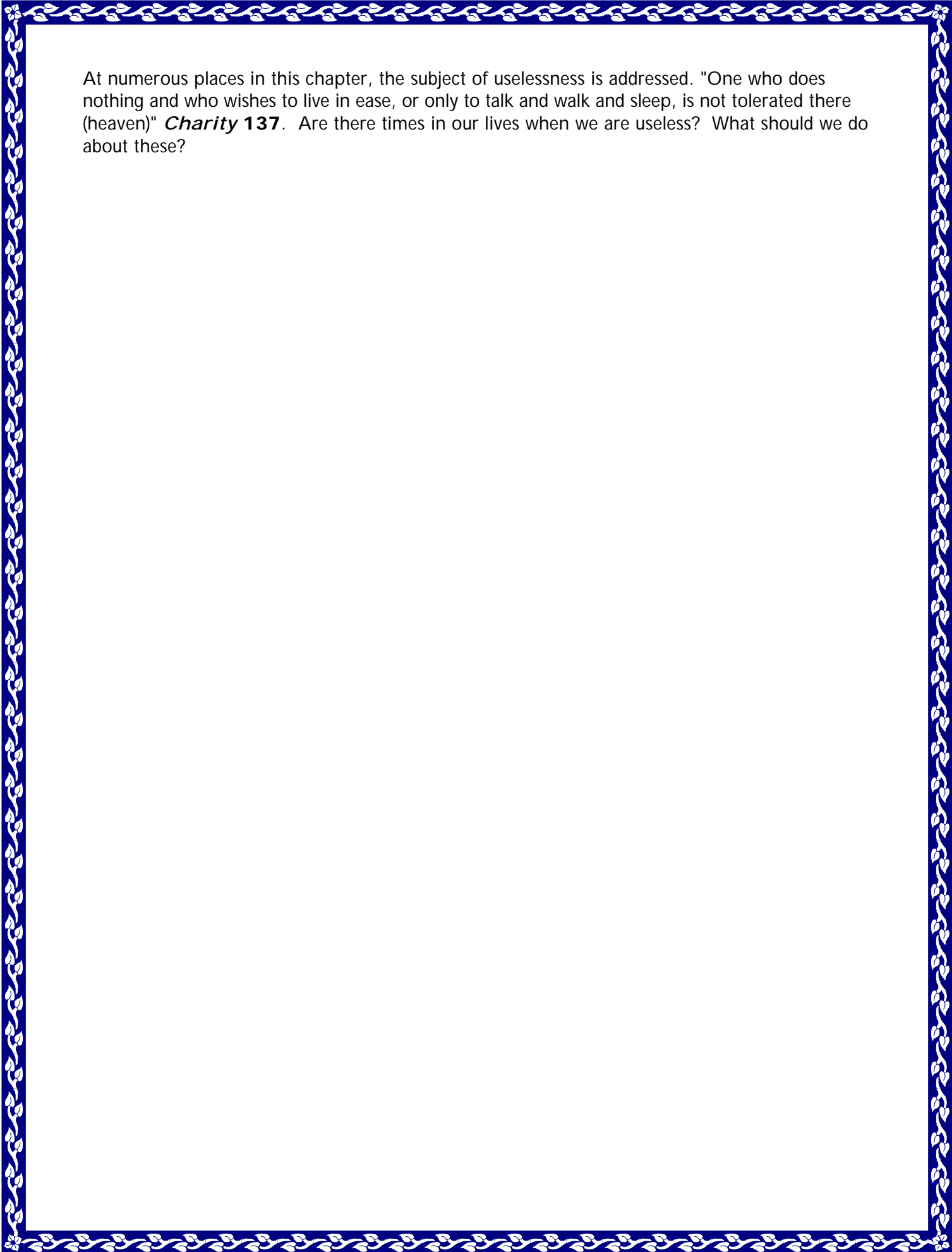
Charity 130 lists the things that are important in society.

Charity 131 the quality of a society comes from the individuals in it. (As an illustration, think of a television or computer screen. The image on the screen depends on the quality and quantity of the "dots" there. If some are missing, damaged *etc.*, it impacts the whole picture.)

Viewed from a spiritual perspective, human society appears as a man. The form and appearance of the man depend on the kind of life in the society. (Hell is in the form of a Grand Monster – a hellish distortion of the Grand Man.) Each person in society contributes in one way or another to this picture. Just as the bodily organs can get sick, so can aspects of human communities (see section 4). The beauty and wonder of how organisms work through the functioning of all systems together lends itself to illustrations from books on the human body.

Charity 149 makes an interesting point: unless an affection of truth from good becomes an act, it perishes. (Good intentions pave the way to hell, as the saying goes!)

Charity 150 and **157** point to our motivation as being primary in our efforts to do genuine good.



At numerous places in this chapter, the subject of uselessness is addressed. "One who does nothing and who wishes to live in ease, or only to talk and walk and sleep, is not tolerated there (heaven)" *Charity 137*. Are there times in our lives when we are useless? What should we do about these?