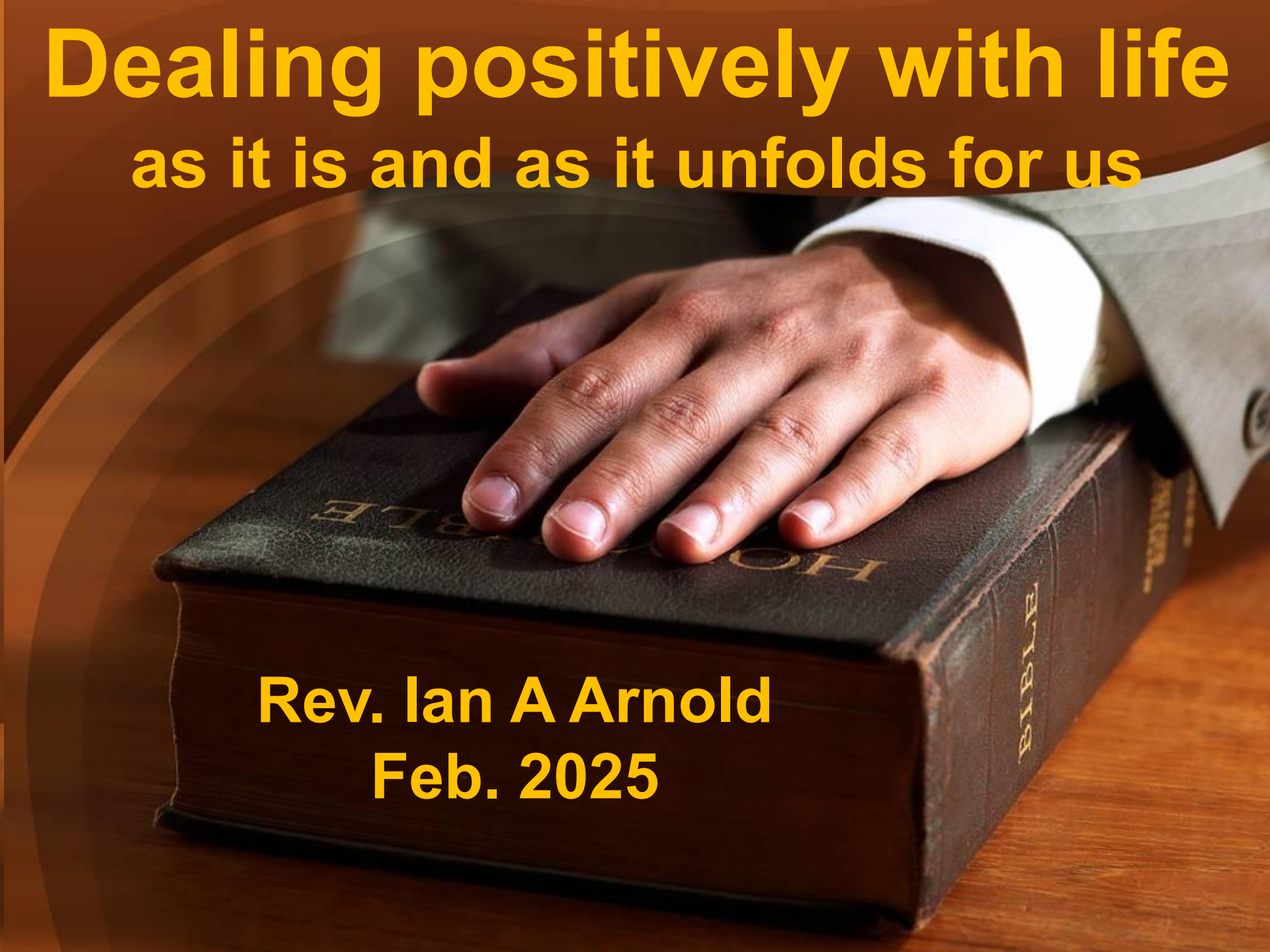
Dealing positively with life

as it is and as it unfolds for us



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Please read Jeremiah 29:4-7 and 11:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have cause to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husband, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and

Quite recently I was talking with a man who, with retirement now on his horizon, he reflected on the different twists and turns his life had taken over the years, and how his life had unfolded quite a lot differently from what he had anticipated when he was a much younger man.

To be sure this doesn't apply to everyone. There are, indeed, people who at a young age set their heart on becoming a doctor or an engineer or an architect or a park ranger, or on being a carpenter or an electrician, and they achieve that goal and everything works out for them. I have heard people talk about having a "dream job". Life has worked out for them exactly as they anticipated.

But this is not every one. I know people who have wanted to study medicine but, failing to qualify, they became paramedics or radiologists. I bring to mind people who have been made redundant and so had to choose – and train for – another career.

One lady I have talked with, now nearing retirement herself, told me that as a young woman she had wanted to

And then there are “chance” encounters with people whose comments or suggestions have led to people making choices that have set the course of their lives in a totally different direction. Unexpectedly, and for the sake of work, people often discover they have to move and live in a faraway town or city, something they never anticipated.

And then there are illnesses or accidents, totally unforeseen, and which – unexpectedly - turn people’s lives upside down. And so they find themselves in situations and facing challenges they never imagined they would have to deal with.

In the year 597 B.C., and in the Holy Land, the unimaginable happened. The little Jewish kingdom of Judah, the capital city of which was Jerusalem, was over-run by the then greatest and most brutal empire of that time, Babylon. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the Temple ransacked and destroyed, its treasures looted, and many of its citizens were captured and taken away into Babylon and into exile there.

It was a situation no one ever imagined would happen. The people of Judah had thought they would always have God's protection, notwithstanding how badly and sinfully they behaved. But they were mistaken. They had been warned, but they took no notice. Or, if they appeared to listen, changes they made were only on the surface. (See 2 Kings 24).

It is not difficult to imagine the heartache of those Jews who were now captives in Babylon. Psalm 137 was written by one such exile. The first six verses of this sad lament read,

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion (Jerusalem).

We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it,

For there those who carried us away captive required of us a song,

And those who plundered us required of us mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion'.

How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget her skill!"

If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth.

Running through the whole of this Psalm is self-pity. And we can understand that. These were people feeling very sorry for themselves. They were foreigners in a strange lad. They felt they didn't fit in. This wasn't as they had expected. It was a development they had never anticipated would ever happen. But it had! They were depressed and they were longing for life as they had once known it back in Jerusalem and before the Babylonians had taken over.

Clearly, word had got back to the prophet Jeremiah, who had been left in Jerusalem with a remnant of the people – mainly poor people – that such a self-pitying mind-set had taken hold of the people in exile in Babylon. And so the Lord, through him (through Jeremiah) sent a message to these captives. They were not to sit around feeling sorry for

The letter which Jeremiah was commanded to write read, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your daughters and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished.”

“That you may be increased there, and not diminished.”

Do you see the message here?

The message was to turn what seemed like a negative into a positive!

Remember: life for these people had taken a most unexpected turn. And here was the Lord telling them to make good things happen; to turn it around, so that many positives could come of it. Better this than sitting around, wallowing in self-pity, lost in a darkness of self-pity, burdened down by depression and a longing for the past.

As we saw earlier, (and I hope you agree), for most people, if not all of us, life has its unexpected twists and turns. We find ourselves in situations, and faced with challenges we never imagined possible. It might be the result of a loss of a job, loss of good

The question now is, “What does the Lord want us to do in such situations?”

Please be sure that it is NOT being suggested that there is no place for grief, or sadness, or the need for a time to adjust. But one of the messages here is that the Lord urges us to **move beyond the darkness and sense of burden** that life’s unexpected twists and turns can cause to come over us.

Years ago an old friend said to me that **“It is not what happens in life that matters: rather, what matters is how you respond to what happens.”** And I have never forgotten this.

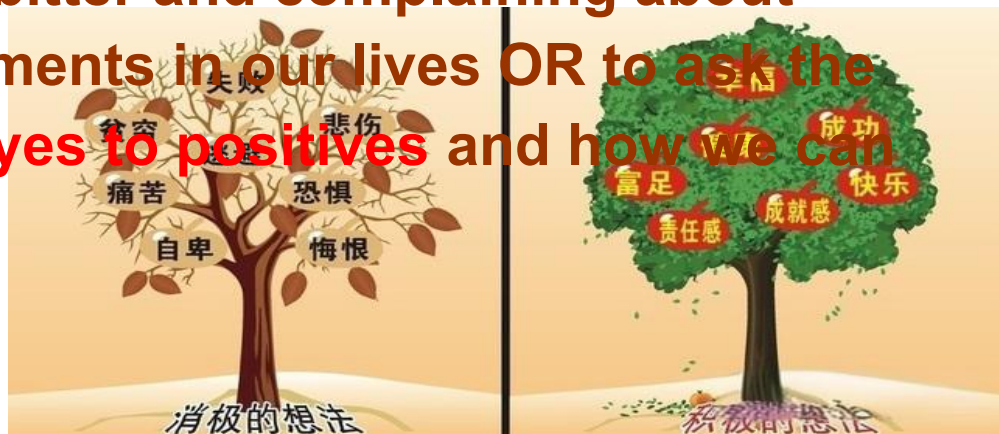
It is the Lord's gift to us that we have the capacity to choose,

* whether to succumb to darkness OR to break free from darkness;

*whether to succumb to self-pity OR to turn around an unwanted situation that has arisen and ask the Lord to show us positives that we can move forward with and build on;

*whether to live longing for the past, always looking backwards, OR to turn forward and embrace what the future holds

*whether to be bitter and complaining about unwanted developments in our lives OR to ask the Lord to open our eyes to positives and how we can become a better person as the result of what has



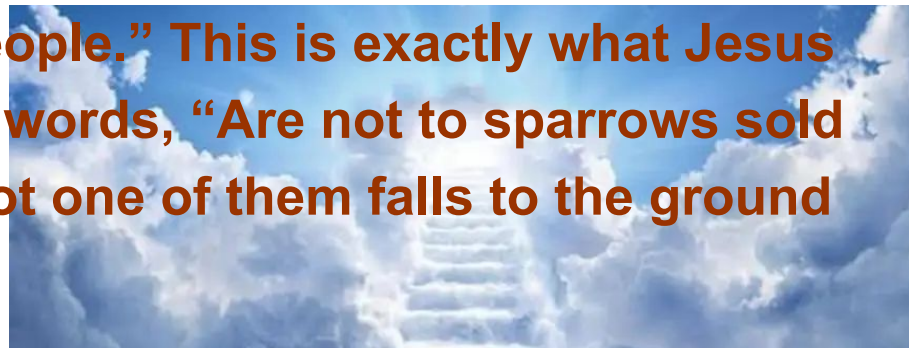
It may be that we need a friend to remind us that we have such ability. In the grip of grief or darkness it can be very difficult to see, or believe, that this is so. Needing to process the loss of a job we have loved it can seem that we will never find another job so fulfilling or satisfying. Now confined to a wheel chair as the result of an accident I have heard such people wonder if, from now on, life held any meaning or purpose for them. And this is when insightful encouragement by a friend or family member can awaken hope and a sense of future for them.

In all likelihood you remember what the apostle Paul wrote, that "All things work together for good to those who love God, and to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28).

All things work together for good, if we choose for them to do so. It doesn't just happen.

It is important for us to remember, also, that God is a God of new beginnings. God meets us where we are, and it is in the midst of where we are that there can always be a new beginning. We read from the Teachings for The New Church, that "The Lord's foresight and providence are present within the tiniest details of all the smallest individual things with people, and in details so tiny that it is impossible to comprehend in any manner of thought one in many millions of them. 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." (Arcana Caelestia 3854:2).

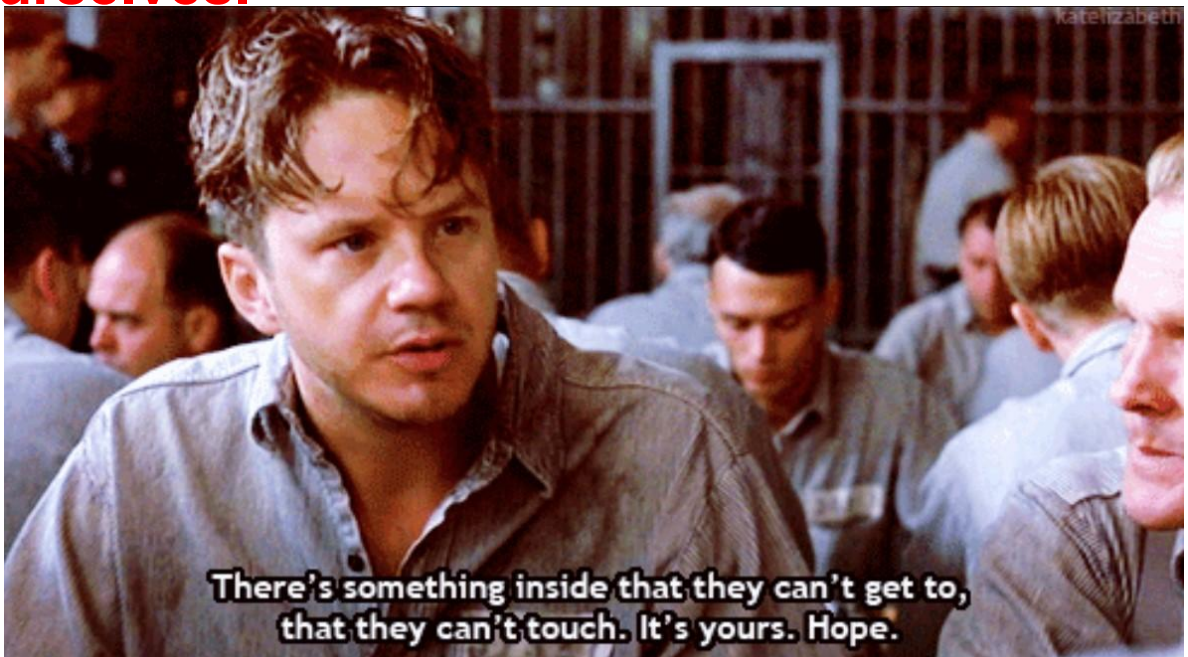
Did you get that? "The Lord's foresight and providence are present within the tiniest details of all the smallest individual things with people." This is exactly what Jesus said, though in different words, "Are not to sparrows sold for a copper coin, and not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's



will. But the very hairs

Some months ago I was in a bookshop and I picked up a book written by a man who had been imprisoned for six years. He wrote about these six years in prison as being the best six years of his life! Why? Because he had learned so many valuable lessons about life and about himself and had, he believed, become a much better person.

It is one of the most effective strategies of evil spirits ("the devil") to try to cause us to despair about life, about the unexpected that has happened, and about ourselves.



Another quotation from the Teachings of The New Church which I find very helpful, and hope you do, is,"Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord that He governs everything and provides all things, and that He is leading to a good outcome. When people believe these things about Him they are at peace, and so fear nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs them."(Arcana Caelestia 8455).

So, too, another quotation, about people who have such trust in God, "Though concerned about the tomorrow, yet they are unconcerned, in that they are not anxious, let along worried, when they give thought to the tomorrow. They remain even-tempered whether or not they obtain their desires, and they do not grieve over loss; they are content with their lot. If they become wealthy they do not become infatuated with wealth; if they are promoted to important positions they do not consider themselves worthier than others. If they become poor they are not made miserable either; if lowly in status they do not feel downcast. They

It needs to be noted that this is not about meekly accepting what happens to us in life. None of us looks for what is unexpected and unwanted in life! And it is right that we strive to break free of the hold that such unexpected and unwanted experiences have over us.

But there comes a point when we need to accept, to be content, and to work with the Lord, identifying positives that can arise from new, unwanted and unexpected developments in our lives.

One of our problems is that we incline to measure things in worldly and material terms. It is, after all, relatively easy to measure losses in the way they impact on us with regard to our health or our wealth. It is considerably more difficult to measure losses, or benefits, in the way these impact on us within, and as to our spirit.

No doubt feeling he was not receiving his fair share from his parents' estate, a man came to Jesus "and said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But Jesus said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?' And Jesus said to them, 'Take heed

The apostle Paul wrote beautifully, “As God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, let him walk.”(1 Corinthians 7:17) And, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4: 11-13)

In and through all of life’s different, changing, sometimes unwanted, often challenging, circumstances, the Lord is working out His purposes for us. This was part of the message He sent to the exiled Jews, in Babylon, through the prophet Jeremiah, “For I know the thoughts I have towards you,” He said, “ thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”(Chapter 29:11)

It is the all-important, central purpose, of the Lord creating each of us is that we will find a home in heaven, and be among the angels there, after we die. And He never abandons that promise or purpose for us.

This is amongst the most familiar and best-loved Teachings of the New Church, that "Everyone is created to live forever in a blessed state. This means that everyone is created to go to heaven. Divine love cannot do otherwise than intend this and divine wisdom cannot do otherwise than provide for this. This shows us that divine providence is a predestination only to heaven and it cannot be changed into anything else." ("Divine Providence " 323 & 324).

Whatever happens to us in life; whatever twists and turns there are; however much – looking back over our lives – we see our life has differed from what years ago we anticipated; the Lord has been with us, every step and every second of every day. It is and has been His goal,

This is His promise; this is His plan for us.

“The LORD GOD is a sun and shield;
The LORD will give grace and glory’
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly.”
(Psalm 84:11)

“Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
And attend to the voice of my supplications.
In the day of trouble I will call upon You,
For You will answer me.”
(Psalm 86:6, 7)

AMEN

Readings:

Jeremiah 29: 1-14

Psalm 37: 1-11

And, From the Teachings for The New Church:

(These are two passages which highlight how unwanted times of misfortune are used by the Lord to break down resistance to higher, divine life of love and wisdom, flowing into us).

Arcana Caelestia 8560

"God's Providence is different from any other kind if leading or guidance in that it constantly has in view what is eternal and is constantly leading to salvation. It does so through various states, sometimes joyful and at other times miserable; and though these are beyond the person's comprehension they all nevertheless make a contribution towards his life into eternity"

Arcana Caelestia 857

"A further purpose of temptation is that **the external side of a person may be subdued and so made subservient to the internal.** This may become clear to anyone from the fact that as soon as a person's loves are assaulted and crushed, as they are in times of misfortune, sickness, and mental illness, his evil desires start to subside. And as they begin to subside he begins to talk more of devout things….The external "man" (or external side of our nature) is made subservient solely to ensure that affections for good and truth are not hindered, halted or stifled by evil desires and by falsities deriving from them."

THE END