

REFLECTIONS ON BISHOP GEORGE deCHARM'S
ADDRESS ON RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

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reformer, and statements of his views appear to be a radiance of a deeper
at least not clear.

In Bishop de Charm's address published in *The New Church Life*,
December 1955, he says in part:

"How does this apply to the New Church? It means that we must
seek to bring into harmonious relationship and concord all throughout the
world who join in the acknowledgment and worship of the Lord in His Second
Coming, all who look to the Heavenly Doctrine as the supreme law of their
life, allowing for unlimited freedom of interpretation and application, for
the full development of various uses, for differences of organization in
adaption to those uses. It means that, we... will say in our hearts that
every one is a New Church man who lives according to these teachings as his
conscience may direct....

"This kind of toleration can be achieved only so far as the
proprium is overcome. It is the product of regeneration, which is, of course,
the life long struggle of each one with his own inherited nature... It is
the only kind that will defend the truth of Revelation... yet with an unceas-
ing endeavor to lead all men everywhere to look to the Lord and to His Word
as the only source of that spiritual truth, which is relevant, nay indispensable
to the right solution that confronts human society. This kind of toleration
will embrace innumerable bodies of the New Church into one concordant spiri-
tual brotherhood united by mutual love and the charity that springs from a
common love to the Lord. So far as this may become a reality, the Lord Himself
will govern. He will bring all things into the kind of harmony that exists in
heaven, so that 'from all differing churches there will be made one church;
and all the dissensions that come forth from doctrine alone will vanish; yea,
all hatreds of one against another will be dissipated in a moment, and the
Lord's Kingdom will come upon the earth.' A.C. 1799. For then, in the sight
of the Lord, there will be one fold and one shepherd."

With the above we are in full agreement and desire that it may be fulfilled. But interspersed between the above statements of Bishop deCharms, are statements which appear to be contradictory or ambiguous or at least not clear. Among these we read:

"It means that we shall ascribe Divine authority to no human interpretation of doctrine or of application, but solely to the direct teaching of the Lord." Every one would agree that "we shall ascribe Divine authority to no human interpretation of doctrine," for this is a contradiction in terms. The question is, Is a truth that is given to the Church from the Lord by His Holy Spirit in the Church, or what is the same, is a truth that is seen by the Church in the light of heaven a "human interpretation?" This involves a subject about which there is much teaching given in the Writings; which teaching, is differently understood and differently interpreted by different bodies and different men. Bishop deCharms says: "All who join in the acknowledgment and worship of the Lord in His Second Coming, all who look to the Heavenly Doctrine as the supreme law of their life, allowing for unlimited freedom in interpretation." Does this "unlimited freedom of interpretation", we ask him, include the passages on the Holy Spirit, and enlightenment? If one interprets these passages to mean that those things which are of the Holy Spirit or are seen in the light of heaven, are not "human interpretations" but are from the Lord; We ask Bishop deCharms does he include this possibility in his "unlimited freedom of interpretation."

Bishop deCharms would undoubtedly say that his address is a human interpretation. If he should say that it is not permissible to interpret what is said in the Writings concerning the Holy Spirit and enlightenment to mean that those things which are of the Holy Spirit and spiritual enlightenment, are not "human interpretations," then he is making his own human interpretation, the supreme authority and not the Writings, which is just the thing that he is contending against.

It may be observed that Bishop deCharms does not show that his doctrine of "human interpretations" is drawn from the Writings, nor does he confirm it by any quotations from the Writings, in a word he gives it solely on his own authority.

Bishop deCharms states: "We shall ascribe Divine authority solely to the direct teaching of the Lord." If by this he means that the Writings are the only source of Divine Truth in the Church we would agree. But the Writings not understood can have no actual authority in the Church, while the Writings misunderstood have a false authority. It is only the Writings genuinely understood that have a genuine authority in the Church, and such a genuine understanding is solely from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Is it not solely the Writings seen in the light of heaven that are "the Direct teaching of the Lord in the Church." While the Writings contain all truth, and have all authority in themselves, the truth of the Writings has no actual authority unless it is in the Church and is seen.

Bishop deCharms does not make clear what he means by direct teaching of the Lord. Does he mean the most obvious meaning which comes to man directly from a given statement in the Writings apart from meditation. Such an idea, appears to me is not in agreement with the number which reads: "Those are said to see the back parts of Jehovah and not His face, who believe and adore the Word, but only its external which is the sense of the letter, and do not penetrate more interiorly, as do those who have been enlightened, and who make for themselves doctrine out of the Word, by which they see its genuine sense, thus its interior sense." A.C. 10586. There are many similar passages which teach that man does not see interior truths merely by direct reading of the Word.

Bishop deCharms continues: "But it means also that we will protect the church against every influence, either from within or from without, that is contrary to the plain teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine..." What appears the plain teaching of the Writings to one man is often the opposite to what appears the plain teaching to another. What appears like the plain teaching to Convention, is often the opposite of what appears to be the plain teaching to those in the General Church; as to what appears to be the plain teaching entirely depends on what light the Church or the man of the Church is in.

The apparently plain teaching of one number of the Writings is often apparently contradictory to the apparently plain teaching of another number. Wherefore if there is not genuine light and genuine doctrine no one can know what the plain teaching is. For example, in relation to a most important doctrine of theology we find the two following statements:

"The soul which is from the father, continually wills to make the external, which is from the mother a likeness and image of itself. This being the case with man, it can be seen that it was especially so with the Lord... His inmost was the Divine Itself... was not this, more than in any man, able to make the external, which is from the mother, an image of itself? thus making the Human, which was external and from the mother Divine, and this by His own power." A.C. 6716.

"But with the Lord, the prior forms which were from the maternal, were completely blotted out and exterped; and the Divine ones were received in their place... Hence, when the Lord was glorified, he was no longer the son of Mary." A.C. 6872.

The plain teaching of these two passages appears entirely contradictory; Wherefore until the Lord gives to the Church a doctrine which reconciles these two passages it cannot be said, what the plain teaching on the subject of the glorification of the Lord is; and the same thing applies to many things in the Writings.

We would ask, when Bishop deCharms says: "We will protect the church against every influence from within or without that is contrary to the plain teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine." "It is the only kind that while openly combatting falsity and evil, will do so without rancor." Does he mean that the church must be protected from, and combat waged against those who do not look to the Writings as the Lord in His Second Coming and the only source of truth. Or, does he mean that such combat must be waged against those who do not accept his idea of "human interpretations of doctrine," his idea of "the direct teachings of the Lord," and his idea of "the plain teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine." Is it only those who accept his interpretations in regard to these subjects, to whom he says: "This kind of toleration will embrace innumerable bodies of the New Church into one concordant spiritual brotherhood united by mutual love and charity that springs from a common love to the Lord," or does he extend this kind of toleration to all who look to the Lord in His Second Coming in the Writings of Swedenborg as the only source of good and truth in the Church?