

Guest Editorial

THE SELF-EVIDENCING REASON OF LOVE WILL REESTABLISH THE CHURCH BY THE REV. GEOFFREY HOWARD

There is an interesting statement found in the Prologue to the unpublished work entitled *The Canons of the New Church*. It reads as follows: “At this day nothing else than the self-evidencing reason of love will reestablish the church.” What is meant by “the self-evidencing reason of love”? What does this teaching imply?

That simple statement embodies a profound doctrine. In essence it speaks of the mode whereby we can recognize truth, and distinguish it from falsity. It speaks to such questions as to how we know whether our beliefs are true. For example, how do we know that God really exists? How do we know with relative certainty that there really is a continuation of life beyond the grave?

It is important not to view beliefs in God and in His truth from the limitations imposed by sectarianism. Sectarian doctrines impose parameters. They limit the beliefs of their followers to statements formulated into their creeds. Creeds are of human origin. Church leaders adopted them in the effort to suppress heresies. Their intent also was to impose a uniform system of belief upon the church. Creeds however, if not in agreement with the doctrine of the Word, lead people into fallacious beliefs.

By contrast, the Writings draw their doctrine directly from the inspired Word of the Old and New Testaments. They bypass all traditional creeds and establish every doctrine firmly upon open teachings found in the letter of the Word. They also confirm their stated doctrinal tenets with numerous supportive passages drawn from sources throughout those former Testaments. What effect do these doctrines have upon people who read or hear them?

To those whose religious outlook has been colored by traditional interpretations, some parts of the Writings may well sound fanciful and transcendent. The vivid descriptions of the spiritual world, the seemingly strange communications of Swedenborg with spirits and angels, may well seem like figments of the imagination.

On the other hand, to those whose minds are not inexorably committed to scientific or religious dogma, the propositions of the Writings ring true and stand forth with resounding clarity. Every doctrine found in the Writings of the New Church, if viewed in its proper context, appeals to our innate sense of logic. Logic, however, operates on two different levels: that of the intellect as well as of the will. While many can intellectually see the logic of a true statement, only those who live by the truth can come to perceive its verity. Such people see and also perceive spiritual truths as self evident, as “common sense.” When both the intellect and the will are affected and moved by the power of truth from within, then the whole mind rings with a sense of affirmation. That is the principle referred to above, “the self-evidencing reason of love, [which] will reestablish the church.” When the doctrines of the New Church are truly lived, the Lord gives us “an internal acknowledgement of truth” which is a living faith. (*Doctrine of Faith* 1)

WHO CAN SEE TRUTH?

The person who receives enlightenment is one who refrains from evils because they are sins, and because they are against the Lord and are endeavors opposed to His Divine laws. In such a one and in no other the spiritual mind opens, and in the measure that it opens, in the same measure the light of heaven enters.

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