

To the Members of the Lord's New Church which is Nova  
Hierosolyma.

June 14, 1968

Dear Friends:

The International Council of Priests in its recent meetings made additions to the "Resolutions concerning the Government of the Church" and made changes in certain of the Resolutions. All these additions and changes were made by unanimous agreement of the members of that Council, and were confirmed by unanimous agreement of the International Interior Council.

The Secretary of the International Council of Priests now sends to you a copy of all the additions and changes, carefully noted, together with a copy of the Resolutions as they stand in their new form. It was the desire of the Councils that this letter should accompany the copies of the additions and changes. Because of illness I have been unable to write it before now, although the Secretary has had everything ready on his part for over a week. I wish to express my regret over this delay.

The additions and changes in the Resolutions do not involve any change in the ultimate form of the government of the Church. They are not amendments to the order of the Church, but express living essentials which must be within that order, and, in some cases, clarify that order. For this reason we do not ask that they be accepted and confirmed by any formal actions of the Societies of the Church, but that you, if you so desire, make known your thoughts and feelings about them to your Pastors.

The Secretary sends you also a copy of "The Essentials of the Church," and of "The Principles of Doctrine," which are referred to in the additions and changes to the Resolutions. "The Essentials of the Church" were formulated by the Councils and sent to members of the Church in 1956. "The Principles of Doctrine" is a statement of the principles which have been taught in the Church from its beginning. In their present form they were drawn up by the International Interior Council for the amendments to the Articles of Incorporation of the Church in America. They are sent to you now in order that you may know exactly what is meant by the references to them in the additions and changes to the Resolutions.

The Resolution "Freedom in the Church", has been added in response to a feeling of need that a definition of that freedom should be included in any outline of the order of the government of the Church. The Resolution on Freedom begins with

the mention of human freedom. Human freedom is the freedom desired by every man to live his own life in the enjoyment of his own loves and in the pursuit of his own happiness. In the world this freedom is regarded as an end in itself. In the Church it is seen that this freedom has its highest use in serving as a basis and plane in which the Lord can lead man in that freedom which is according to reason. In this second freedom alone can man be reformed and regenerated, and by means of this be introduced into freedom itself and into rationality itself, which is in the life in the Lord.

The border that is placed on freedom in the Church is the border of the Church itself, namely, the Essentials of the Church and the Principles of Doctrine. That which is in opposition to these is in opposition to the Church itself, and places itself outside of the Church. This should be self-evident to all.

The Resolution on Freedom in the Church then states, "Within this freedom there must be a unanimity of acknowledgment of the presence of an internal sense in the literal sense of the Third Testament, and a striving for a further opening of it and for unity in its Spirit and Life." If the unanimity here expressed is not present in the freedom in the Church, the agreement as to the Essentials and the Principles of Doctrine becomes more and more external, and at last becomes a point of departure from which we go more and more apart. If that unanimity is present, then there can be an ever more interior unity of the Church in the Lord. If that unanimity of acknowledgment is not present, the Church will fall into diversities; if it is present, there can develop genuine varieties in unity, such as exist in heaven.

The Resolution on "Overseeing" has been reworded so as to express more clearly the positive side of the work of the Bishop in relation to the priests of the Church.

Additions and changes have been made to the Resolution on the "Maintenance of Order." These have been made in order to remove misunderstandings of the things there said, and again, to bring out the positive aspects of the work of the Bishop in this relation.

A whole new paragraph has been added to this resolution because we found that we had provided for the possibility of the removal of a Bishop but nothing had been said about the possibility of the removal of a priest. The absence of any definition of order with regard to the possibility of the removal of a priest might give the impression that this was left to the sole decision of the Bishop. The new paragraph shows the order that must be followed in the unhappy necessity

for any such thing should ever arise in the Church.

With regard to the Resolution on the Maintenance of Order I wish to express the relation it has to the preservation of the freedom of the Church, and the spirit in which the government of the Church regards the administration of this Resolution.

The maintenance of order in the Church has for its end the guarding of the purity and integrity of the Doctrine of the Church, and thus also the freedom of all in the Church in their approach to the Lord in the Word. Where the doctrine of the Church is falsified, there the Word is closed to men. This is evident from the history of the former Christian Church in which the Word was closed to the Church through the falsification of the doctrine. Even after the Word was restored to the people in the Reformation, the Word was not opened to the Church because the falsities of doctrine were retained. In such a state there is no spiritual freedom. All in the Church must have at heart the integrity and purity of the Doctrine, which instaurates the Church and in which spiritual freedom is preserved. At the same time the Church must with equal zeal encourage and foster in each individual his approach to the Lord in the Word, and never inhibit it. Without this the Doctrine cannot be internally received, nor can it be developed in the Church.

The Resolution on Freedom in the Church, and the addition to the Resolution on Maintenance of Order, have been drawn up in accord with the spirit of the teaching in the Arcana Coelestia Number 1834, namely, that the doctrinal opinion of each one is to be left to his own conscience, provided it is not against Divine Order, that is, against the Precepts of the Decalogue. These Principles as they now are seen in the Church are expressed in "The Essentials of the Church" and in the "Principles of Doctrine."

It is expected that the consideration by the Interior Council of those doctrinal opinions about which there is doubt as to their agreement with the Essentials of the Church and the Principles of Doctrine will lead to the clarification of the subject for all, and to the removal of any element of denial of the Essentials and Principles of Doctrine, if that is in fact involved. Only in cases of the most flagrant and self-evident denial of these truths should the government of the Church consider the silencing of a priest.

The government of the Church in the conduct of its overseeing and in the administration of the order of the Church recognizes the following truths: that it is better that the Church should in patience trust to the eventual reception of

the genuine true than that by impatient action it should impair the sphere of a free approach to the Lord in the Word; that it is better to look to the eventual harmony of the opinion with the genuine true than by any arbitrary or ill-considered action to reject an opinion which might by orderly development contribute to the genuine understanding of the Word in the Church; and that it is better that the true and good should be so clearly manifested in the Church that the evil and false will separate themselves therefrom, rather than that the Church by external means should have to separate from itself those who would introduce what is evil and false. These truths express the spirit in which we administer the order of the Church.

It is hoped that all in the Church will see that the life of the Church depends on the purity and integrity of its Doctrine and that they will therefore welcome and from the heart cooperate with the order provided in the Church for their safe-keeping and safe development. And it is hoped that all in the Church will avail themselves of the freedom of approach to the Word, and of the freedom of the orderly expression and communication of their thoughts and feelings that is recognized in the Church.

It had been intended in this letter to consider certain things said in the Principles and Plan of Order about the future form of the episcopal office in the Church, and the relation thereto of the present form of that office instituted in the "Resolutions on the Government of the Church." Due to the delays caused by my illness and the pressure of other work that part of my letter is not yet finished. As it is desirable that the additions and changes in the Resolutions should be sent to you as soon as possible without further delay, the consideration of the above-mentioned things will be sent to you shortly in a separate letter.

Rt. Rev. Philip N. Odhner.