



Why the Lord was born as a man

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” John 1:14

All residents of this planet we call “earth” share a common element of our heritage, one that is unique among all of the planets, galaxies, and universes. Something happened on this orb 2,000 years ago that has never happened anywhere before or since: the Maker and Creator Himself, the infinite God, came to earth and was born as a human being. He walked among His people, taught them, loved them, and so saved an entire race from total destruction.

What had made this incredible mission necessary? Nothing short of infinite Divine Love burning with a desire to save human beings from a hidden but impending doom. Through generations of choosing to serve their selfish and worldly loves, people had separated themselves from God. They had chosen to forget God and how He meant that people should live. The Lord could not be present in people’s lives because they had chosen to exclude Him. Mutual love among people was extinguished, and evil was breaking out everywhere, in both the natural and spiritual worlds, destroying all ability to see or choose anything true or good - dragging people further into hell. Complete planetary destruction and annihilation were imminent.

And so the Lord assumed a human body so that He could be attacked by the hells, defeat them, and break the grip of every evil and falsity that held the human race in bondage. And He came to teach people how they could again live and be conjoined with Him.

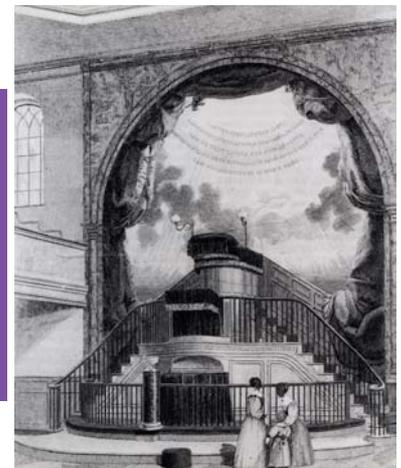
Even though the Lord has provided us with the four Gospels and many volumes of the Writings for the New Church that explain His mission, it can still be difficult for us to understand how this process could have worked. Two questions especially stand out.

(Continued on page 2)

Why the Lord was born a man	1
From the Writings ...	3
Spiritual Wisdom - the first 18 months	4
New Church Revolution and Evolution - 5	6
Notice	8
Lifeline Online	9
Coming Home	10
Purley traditions forever !	11
Notices	11
December 25 th	12

The picture on the right shows the ornate interior of the New Jerusalem Temple, Cross Street, Hatton Garden, London.

Find out more about the history of the New Church in London on page 6.



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Our mission is to express, share and experience with others in life an inclusive, non-judgmental vision of God’s kingdom

(Continued from page 1)

1) How could the Creator, the Source of all goodness and truth ever be attacked by evil? After all, the Lord is Life Itself, Love Itself, Power Itself - how could anything or any one He created pose any threat to Him?

2) Why did the Lord have to be born on earth as a human being? Since He is so powerful, couldn't He have simply done this job from heaven, using angels and miracles to defeat evil and save the human race?

In answer to these questions, first we are taught that the Lord had to come to earth because He had exhausted every other method of helping people. For hundreds of years the Lord had appeared to people in the guise of angels, who spoke in His name and acted as willing instruments of His love and guidance. He had empowered dozens of prophets to speak in His Name, warning the human race of its spiritual folly in turning away from their Creator. But in time, the spiritual condition of the human race degenerated so much that this indirect communication was no longer sufficient or powerful enough. The Lord Himself would have to come and set things right.

Secondly, the Lord would never have used His great power to force His will on anyone. It would have been contrary to His nature for the Lord to compel people to obey Him through fear and awe. He wants us to be free to choose in spiritual things above everything else; in fact, He guards this freedom so closely that we are allowed to use that very freedom to reject Him and choose hell. People can become spiritual only by choosing to leave behind their selfish loves, and asking the Lord to grant them heavenly loves. In order to do this, we have to be able to understand what the Lord wants, and then compel ourselves to accept it. This freedom to understand and choose heaven was what was missing from people's lives before the Lord was born on earth. And it is this freedom that the Lord came to restore.

And so the Lord had to devise a way to carry out His mission of redemption while preserving our precious freedom, one that would enable Him to permanently restore conditions in the natural and spiritual worlds so that spiritual freedom would never again be threatened. But how did this work? The Lord is so powerful that no evil love or false thought could ever come close to Him. In order for the hells to attack Him, the Lord needed to find a way to share in the human proclivity for evil and falsity. He had to become, as it were, like one of us, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy 700 years earlier:

"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" Isaiah 53:4-5.

The method He chose to meet all these requirements was birth in a physical human form. The Lord's physical body was born from a woman named Mary, but was conceived by the Lord Himself. From the beginning, therefore, the Lord had two natures, one derived from the Lord Himself, which was like His "soul" (which He referred to as "the Father") and the other derived from Mary, which was His physical body (which He referred to as "the Son"). As to His Father, the hells could not even approach - much less tempt the Lord. It was from His human mother that the Lord received the hereditary tendencies associated with His physical body - His external man - the Son - that would enable the hells to attack Him.

The Lord could never have been tempted to do evil by the hells as to His Good or Love. But because He was born into a physical human body, the Lord had a natural part to His mind like everyone else. He had to grow and learn like anyone else. And in that process of viewing the world, through that impure mind and learning about the world around Him, He could be assailed by the illusions and falsities that had overwhelmed every other person. The Lord could be tempted to think, consider and accept false assumptions and illusions based on His senses - and from this false thinking He could be drawn to commit evil. In this way all the hells broke upon the Lord and tormented Him throughout His entire earthly life.

We read about the Lord's temptations in this powerful passage from the Arcana Caelestia 1690.

... the whole of the Lord's life in the world from earliest childhood consisted in constant temptation and constant victory. The last was when on the Cross He prayed for His enemies, and so for all people in the whole world... [and] that out of His love towards the whole human race. He fought against self-love and love of the world, with which the hells were filled completely.... The love that was the Lord's very life is meant by His being hungry and by the devil's saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread" and Jesus answered, "It is written that man will not live by bread alone but by every word of God" Luke 4:2-4; Matt. 4:2-4.

The Lord's combats against the love of the world are described in the Gospels as the devil taking Him on to a high mountain and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and saying,

"To you I will give all this power and their glory, for it has been given to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship before me, it will all be yours". But answering him Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve'" Luke 4:5-8; Matt. 4:8-10.

The Lord's combats against self-love are described in the Gospels as the devil taking Him into the holy city, setting Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saying to Him,

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will give His angels charge regarding you, and on their hands they will bear you, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ Jesus said to him, again it is written. ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’”

Matt. 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12.

Based on these teachings, can we surmise what kinds of illusions and falsities tormented the Lord? Because He fought against all the loves of self and the world from a love for saving the entire human race, He was tempted to doubt that His mission would succeed, about His ability to save people, and their willingness to be saved. He was assailed with doubts and fears because He had a frail human part that is just like ours. He knew He must die and He feared His mission might fail. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and sweated blood. He may have been tempted to take short cuts - to force people to accept Him - to exercise the great power that was within Him, rather than allow people to mistreat and reject Him. These temptations, and more, battered the Lord throughout His entire earthly life.

We also know that the Lord’s temptations were *“so serious that no other could ever endure one ten thousandth part of them”* (AC 1573:4). This was because *“the intensity of the love determines that of the temptation”* (AC 1690:6). Since the love that was tempted in the Lord was His infinite, burning, compassionate love for the entire human race, His temptations were of a similarly grievous nature.

Yet miraculously, the Lord never failed in any temptation. Every time He was tempted, the Lord was victorious. Every day of His life the Lord fought the hells from the Divine Truth of the Word. And every day He was victorious. *“The hells were constantly overpowered, subdued, and vanquished by Him; and this He did solely out of love towards the whole human race”* (AC 1690:6).

Through this process the Lord gradually glorified His human. He put off every hereditary tendency for what was false and evil, and put on what was from the Father. By the time His earthly life ended, the Lord’s material body was completely dissipated, and there was nothing left in the tomb. Instead, the Lord had a Divine Human - He was God even down to and including the natural level.

As we celebrate this Advent season, let each of us spend time reflecting on the reason why the Lord had to be born on our earth as a man. By becoming flesh and living among us, the Lord broke hell’s evil stranglehold over human hearts and minds; and this restored our ability to receive, understand and accept the truth, and so be saved from hell - if we choose to do so. This is the Lord’s hidden gift to us.

But He has also given us another gift of immeasurable worth - and it is one that we can see. Because He was born as a man, we know that the Lord is Human, - that He became the embodiment of all that is truly human. Through His presence on earth, the example He set by His life, and the clear teachings He gave in the Sacred Scriptures and the Writings for the New Church we can see Him for what He is: our infinite, loving, merciful Heavenly Father, Who was and is willing to do anything and everything to give us every opportunity for eternal happiness - the joy and peace of heaven that we will each receive when we allow Him to make His Advent into our lives.

Rev David W Ayers

From the Writings ...



Since the Lord as the sun is always in the east, early people for whom all the elements of worship were symbolic of spiritual realities faced the east when they worshiped. Further, to be sure that they did this in all their rituals, they faced their temples in the same direction. This is the reason churches are built in the same way at present.

Divine Love and Wisdom 123

Spiritual Wisdom - the first 18 months

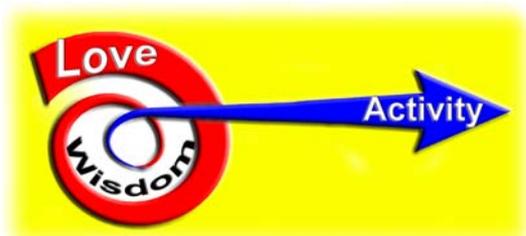
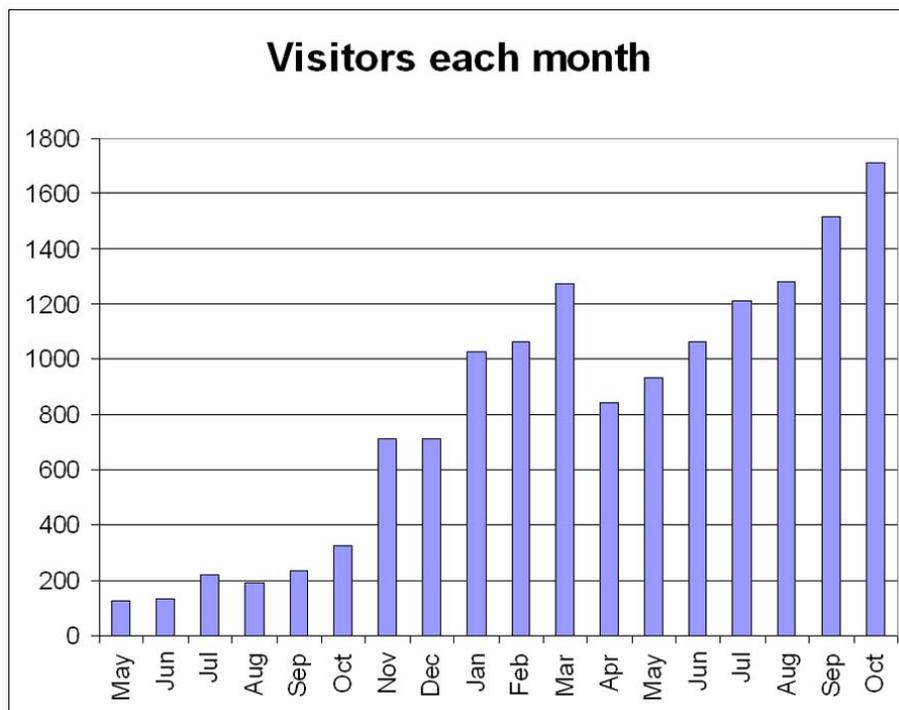
Visitor Numbers

The Spiritual Wisdom web site clocked up 18 months of being accessible to the public at the end of October 2006. As can be seen from the chart on the right there has been an increase in visitors nearly every month since launch.

In May 2005 just 125 visitors arrived at the Spiritual Wisdom web site but in October 2006 the number had reached 1710 making a total of 14578 visitors over the 18 month period.

But it hasn't all gone smoothly. In April 2006 there was a significant fall back in visitor numbers which was only recovered by August 2006. This fall back was caused by a very marked reduction in the number of pages on the site ranked by the Google search engine. This was due to an error on my part in the way I had been updating and modifying existing pages and it all goes to show how easy it is to make simple mistakes which dramatically affect a site's popularity.

Visitors download pages to a varying degree - some will look at just one page and go, others will look at dozens - but over the whole 18 month period a total of 55255 pages have been downloaded.



This picture, used in a topic on 'The Oneness of God', pictures the threefold nature of God as Love, Wisdom and emanating Activity.



This picture, used in a topic on 'Eternal Life' seeks to picture eternal life as a spiral progression made up of the colours of the rainbow leading to a distant brilliant white light.

Content

Over the past 18 months the content of Spiritual Wisdom has grown and evolved within the overall scheme established at the beginning of 7 main sections linked to the colours of the rainbow.

As at the end of October 2006 the web site was made up of the following:

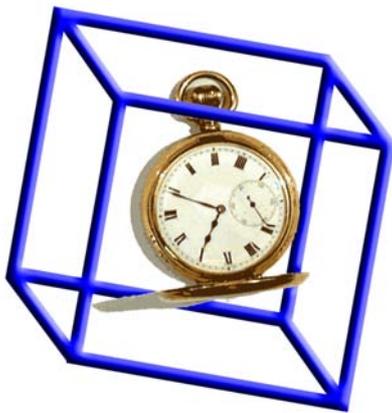
Home Page	1
Main Section pages	7
Topic pages	62
Support pages	5
Swedenborg pages	4
Theological Works pages	12
Hopeful Year pages	55
Pictures/Illustrations	90

Pictures form a key part of the site. Sometimes these pictures directly illustrate the topic being discussed, on other occasions they have a more symbolic design. Three examples of this approach are shown; two on the left and one on the opposite page. (These look very much better in colour! - see page 9 to learn how you will be able to view Lifeline Online in colour).

Finding Spiritual Wisdom

Visitors arrive at the Spiritual wisdom web site either because they know the site address or because they have done a search using Google, Yahoo, MSN or some other search engine. But the keywords people use can vary enormously and yet they can still land on a page of the web site. Here are some examples of keywords together with their 'landing' page (the page the visitor arrives at as a result of their search).

Keywords	Landing Page
after life	Life after Death
angelic symbols	Angels
symbols of wisdom	Symbols
wisdom	Home Page
battles in the old testament	The Bible
god loves everyone	God loves you
noah's rainbow	Colours of the rainbow
bible dream symbols	Symbols in dreams
life trapped frustrated	Amazing life



This picture is used in a topic on 'Time and Space'

Moving Forward – the next 18 months

The success of the Spiritual Wisdom web site has demonstrated that there is a demand 'out there' for spiritual teachings presented in an easy to read style and illustrated by appropriate graphics. The strategy for moving forward must be to further develop the scope, scale and nature of the content being offered and to promote visitor interaction.

New pages will continue to be planned taking into account what people are searching for within the appropriate subject area and then potential authors will be identified to prepare the desired material. But re-using existing material also has great benefits. There is a wealth of existing material in leaflets, booklets and magazines that needs to be identified and assessed for possible inclusion in the Spiritual Wisdom web site.

Repeated attempts have been made to get visitors to interact. Initially there was just a simple 'Contact' page but this resulted in just a few people feeling able to make contact this way. Subsequently a 'Visitor's Book' was prepared and advertised on every page of the site but again only a few felt they could send an email to

Over the past year or so there has been an enormous increase in the use of 'image' searching on the internet to find pictures of interest. Images are found by searching with keywords and then both the image and the page where it is used are made available to the searcher. A very popular image search at the moment is for 'forgiveness' which leads to a picture of a welcoming hand in the topic on the subject of forgiveness.

As a result of how searching and keywords work some landing pages or 'entry pages' appear far more often in visitor's logs than others.

Entry Page	Percentage of visitors arriving on this 'entry page'
Home Page	17.4%
Symbols	14.2%
Symbols in sacred scriptures	6.9%
Symbols in nature	5.1%
Love	3.9%
Number symbols	3.1%
Life after death	2.9%
Colours of the rainbow	2.6%
Angels	2.4%
Forgiveness	2.3%

Once visitors have found the Spiritual Wisdom web site they move around as their interest takes them. This inevitably means that some pages turn out to be more popular than others. Here are the top 10 in their order of popularity.

Home Page, Symbols, Life after Death, Meaning of Life, Spiritual Living, Angels, Symbols in Nature, Symbols in Sacred Scripture, Love, Emanuel Swedenborg.

leave an entry in the book. So the net result has been that very few people have made any sort of contact despite the numbers of visitors and the volume of pages downloaded.

Following an assessment of how interaction is achieved on web sites it has become clear that simple 'contact' arrangements and 'visitor's books' are a thing of the past. What is really needed is a 'blog'. A 'blog' or 'weblog' is a form of web site like a diary which is designed to enable publishing of material on a very regular basis and provide the opportunity for visitors to leave comments and establish dialogues. In a way it is like writing a letter to a newspaper or writing an editorial for a magazine and then having re-actions to your letter or editorial printed alongside.

The last 18 months has opened a new and exciting world where thousands of 'seekers' are eager to explore the teachings we are so fortunate to be able to offer. I am sure the next 18 months will prove even more exciting.

Alan Misson

New Church Revolution and Evolution 1789 - 2007



The Annual Meeting of the General Conference of the New Church in 2007 will be its 200th Meeting. For this very important occasion a series of articles will be appearing in Lifeline from August 2006 to June 2007.

The article below, written by Patrick Johnson, is the fifth in the series.

The New Church in London

The New Church began in London. Swedenborg almost lived there; publishing his books there. Many of his earliest readers lived there and published English translations. The first services of worship and conferences were held at Great East Cheap chapel. This has been detailed in earlier articles, so I will start about 1820, after the Napoleonic Wars, when there were three London churches with approximately 200 members.

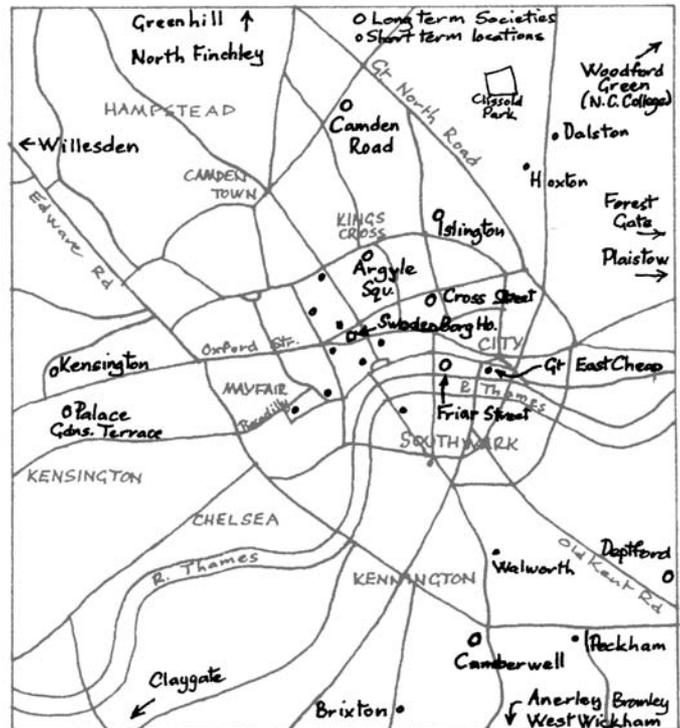
The history of the London New Church was one of continuous diffusion as the city expanded. Londoners rarely put down roots, constantly moving outwards. The first Society moved from the City, to the West End, Holborn, Holloway, North Finchley and finally Greenhill (Barnet). In only five generations, my family experienced four relocations.

Nevertheless you could summarise our history in three stages, the pedestrians, the tram riders and the railway commuters. Those who attended the early churches at Cross Street, Friar Street, Dudley Court and Waterloo Rd walked to work – and church. In the later 19th century the trams facilitated the development of the inner suburbs and impressive Victorian churches were built at Argyle Square, Camden Road, Camberwell, Anerley and Kensington (though Kensingtonians used carriages). By the twentieth century, however, trains were servicing outer suburbs, new generations built churches in Willesden, Plaistow and Claygate. Others reluctantly sold their fine Victorian churches and moved to Finchley and West Wickham.

In *A Branching Tree* Dennis Duckworth lists over thirty London locations where New Church worship was held, and by 1900 twelve societies were reporting to Conference. The main development from our City origins can be seen in two groups moving northwards and southwards; there being only one or two established groups in the west and east.

The north was home to the earliest and originally most influential group. In the early 19th century several congregations were moving here and there between rented chapels. There were money problems, lease problems, personal and theological arguments, but by the 1840s they had settled down in two chapels; at Cross Street in Holborn; and Friar Street near St Paul's.

It is a moot point which congregation was oldest. Through its association with the 'Hindmarsh group'



Cross Street claims to be the successor of Great East Cheap, but its early history is one of stops and starts. Friar Street had seceded from that group, but from then on, had a stable history during Manoah Sibley's long pastorate. In the 'tram' period, Friar Street moved cautiously out to Argyle Square, while Cross Street zoomed out to Holloway. The two groups were complementary; Friar Street/Argyle Square having 'city gentlemen' playing safe with Sibley, Jonathan Bayley and John Presland; while Cross Street/Camden Road catered for West End entrepreneurs and artists, listening to the more radical teaching of Samuel Noble, William Bruce and Rudolf Tafel. Alongside these strong societies smaller groups were formed in Islington, Hoxton, Dalston and Willesden.

Great things were achieved by these societies, in the late 19th century they were supporting small groups all over South East England, but after the 1939-45 war their members had moved into leafier suburbs and congregations were shrinking. So the two societies took the pragmatic decision to relocate at North Finchley into a large house, but later grasping the opportunity to purchase the modern Christian Scientist church (designed by Frederick Gibberd – architect of Liverpool R.C. Cathedral) at Greenhill, in Barnet.

The church started later in the south, because with only

one bridge few people lived south of the Thames. In our 'pedestrian' period, Thomas Goyder started a society at St Georges Fields which soon built a substantial church and school on Waterloo Road. With more bridges and public transport, churches were launched in the eighteen-sixties at Deptford, Peckham and Camberwell, and in the eighties at Bromley and Anerley (where they built the first ever concrete church). Of these only Camberwell and Anerley survived the 39-45 war and later, they joined forces at West Wickham.

Development did not take place in the west until Victorian times, with a small group at Hammersmith. It was eclipsed, however, when in the 1880s the wealthy Scot, John Finnie, financed the purchase of a large chapel in the fashionable Palace Gardens Terrace (near Kensington Palace). The popular preacher Dr Jonathan Bayley managed to fill the church, but the Christian revival had reached its peak and the less charismatic Thomas Child (who tried preaching socialism; in Kensington!!) saw the congregation shrink and shrink (even though they had the world's first amateur Gilbert and Sullivan society). So in 1925 they moved to moderate sized premises in less fashionable Westbourne Grove, which serve us well today.

The New Church in the East has acquired little fame. The Forest Gate society, launched in 1888 only lasted for sixteen years, although Plaistow (1898) prospered until 1945. Some of their members probably moved yet further east to join the young society at Southend. But the east did have educational significance in Woodford, where a boarding school was launched and later the New Church College found a home.

But the story of the Church in London is not only one of church activity. The worshipping members may have dispersed to all the points of the compass, but they remained centrally united in other interests such as publishing, missionary work, Sunday Schools and other activities.

London can claim to have been the main centre for publishing Swedenborg's writings and New Church collateral works. The Swedenborg Society was launched in 1810, but its predecessors go back to 1783, just before the foundation of the Church in 1787. In its early days it worked by sponsorship of agents, rather than direct publishing. Books were 'made' and sold in family 'printer/publisher shops' and so early 19th cent. editions of the Writings bare the imprint of James Hodson or James Speirs. Those names occur most frequently on title pages, but there were several individual publishers, such as Robert Hindmarsh, Sibley, Thos. Goyder, William Newberry, Elihu Rich,

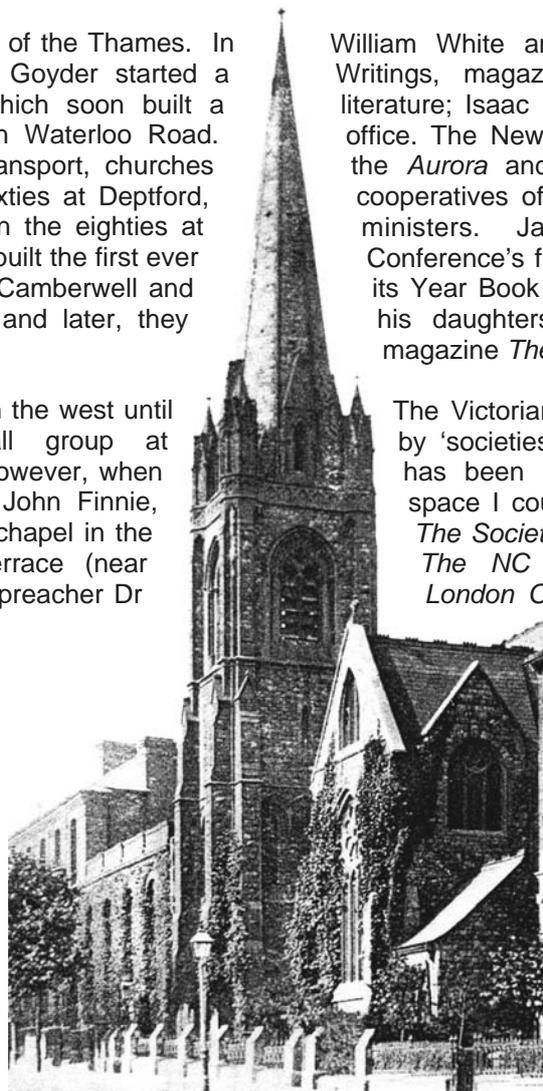
William White and James Trimen, publishing the Writings, magazines, tracts and other collateral literature; Isaac Pitman of Bath also had a London office. The New Church's first magazines such as the *Aurora* and the *Intellectual Repository* were cooperatives of such businesses with the London ministers. James Hodson was also the Conference's first long term Secretary and printed its Year Book annually. For several years one of his daughters, Sophia, produced a children's magazine *The Friend of Youth*.

The Victorians soon replaced 'individual' efforts by 'societies and committees' and the Church has been particularly keen on them. Had I space I could entertain you with the sagas of *The Society for the Diffusion of NC Literature*, *The NC Mutual Instruction Society*, *The London Coffee Meeting*, *The NC Analogical Society*, *The Philosophical and Theological Society*, *The London NC Reading Meeting*, *NC Evidence Society*, *Young Men's Weekly Meeting*; I could name several others. The London New Church scene was a hive of activity. At first such meetings gathered in inns or coffee houses. Later they met at No 1 Bloomsbury Street, the lease of which had been given to the Church by the Rev Augustus Clissold. Surprisingly he was not a New Church minister, but a rather 'Jane Austen' character, Curate of St Martins in the Fields, and living in a mansion in Clissold

Park in Highbury, now a public park. But eventually the lease ran out and great efforts had to be made to create a new home at Swedenborg House (21/22 Bloomsbury Way), which houses a shop, hall for a hundred, committee rooms, libraries etc. Half the money came from David Wynter and George Marchant (a former Lancastrian and an emigrant to Australia it has to be admitted) but the organisation was mostly done by Frederick Gardiner, a true cockney. The main rooms of the building are named after them. Although intended for the use of the New Church in general, the building was invested in the name of the Swedenborg Society. When you entered the shop in the thirties you were offered hymn books and Sunday School expression work; and meetings in the Hall were for College lectures, the London SSU or Young Peoples' Council, the Swedenborg Society only using the premises for administration and AGMs. Gradually, however, church activity has shrunk and the Swedenborg Society has taken over space-wise and time-wise; probably a good thing in a less and less 'church minded' age.

The infant school pioneers James Buchanan and Samuel Wilderspin were Swedenborgians and established London schools, but neither had a formal link to a New Church. There was the short-lived boarding school at Woodford, and schools were

(Continued on page 8)



Camden Road New Jerusalem Church

(Continued from page 7)

attached to the Waterloo Road and Argyle Square churches, but education was well provided for in London and our schools were never as significant as in the North.

It was in London, however, that the need for ministerial education was first addressed. As was customary at the time, the *New Church College* was launched as a boy's school as well as a theological establishment. A well appointed college was built in Islington, dominated by a splendid chapel; also used by the Islington Church. One or two ministers were trained, but it soon became apparent that most of the effort and resources were going into the 'school'. When Rudolf Tafel, coming from German and American traditions, took up the Camden Road pastorate and joined the staff, he strongly criticised the set up. Eventually he launched a rival *New Church Educational Institute* at Camden Road, just

teaching Theology, which attracted all the best ministerial candidates. It ran for several years until the Conference persuaded the College to drop the school, when the College was able to take up the role it played throughout the 20th century. Later the Islington premises were considered too institutional and the College moved out to verdant Woodford Green where it also served the London Church well for young people's weekends and garden parties.

In the latter half of the century the College migrated away from London to the North, followed by the Orphanage and the Women's League. London can no longer claim to be the heart of the Church as it once did. Two hours of travel congestion separates London churches impeding cooperation. Nevertheless, the spirit of Newchurchmanship in the London societies mirrors the enthusiasm of the early founders of the Church as well, if not better, than anywhere.

Committee for Auxiliary Ministry

Services for Special Occasions (2)

CAM is pleased to announce that a new collection of Services for Special Occasions is now available. This is a set of eight services from different sources consisting of two New Year services, a Mothering Sunday service, a Gift Day service, an Act of Worship for Whitsunday, two Harvest Festivals and a Remembrance Sunday service.

Worship leaders are free to adapt them to suit their own particular speaking style.

Each set costs £4.00 if you require printed copies. If you prefer to receive copies by email these are available at a cost of £1.00 per set and floppy disks are also available at £2.00 per set.

If you would like to receive this new collection please send your order to:

Mrs Jan Millar Flat 6, Springfield House, Park Road, Bingley, BD16 4LR Tel: 01274 511653
Email: jan.millar@generalconference.org.uk

Cheques should be made payable to The General Conference of the New Church.

Errata

In the November issue of Lifeline I printed a picture of a person I thought was James Buchanan in the article by Richard Lines on Education and the New Church. Richard had supplied me with a picture but I searched the internet for another one and came up with the one I printed. I felt sure that it was correct since the dates given were 1785-1857 and Richard had quoted 1784-1858. Since both the birth and death dates were within one year I assumed that it was the right person. But I was wrong. I apologise for misleading the readership of Lifeline.

Editor

Lifeline Online

A major change is about to take place with Lifeline over the next few months.

The current format of Lifeline was launched in February 2000 making full use of computer based publishing. This has enabled far more efficient production but now the next step is being taken with Lifeline going online!

The screen shot on the right shows the home page of Lifeline online which can be found at:



www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

The change is taking place in two key steps.

First Step - From December 2006

The first step in providing access to Lifeline online starts in December 2006 with the following facilities available on the Lifeline web site:

Archive

The archive provides free access to past issues of Lifeline from February 2000 onwards. All back issues can be downloaded and locally printed if required. The archive uses the Adobe PDF format and you will need Adobe Reader on your computer to use this facility. This is commonly available when you purchase a computer but if you don't have it there are instructions on the Lifeline site to show how to install it.

From 2000 - 2005 all pictures are in black and white but from 2006 onwards full colour is used where available.

Image Library

The image library provides access, not only to pictures used in Lifeline issues, but also to a wider range of images such as the Apocalypse paintings by Roland Smith. The library is divided into a number of sections, which will be added to from time to time, and every picture can be viewed and downloaded for local use.

Resources

The resources section of the site provides access to Adobe Reader and a selection of Outreach Leaflets. Other resources will be added as the site develops.

Contact

A simple link provides direct email access to the Editor.

Second Step - From April 2007

This second step is very significant.

Current Issue

From April 2007 the current issue of Lifeline will be available for free download in the same month as the printed version is published.

It is very important to note that Lifeline will continue to be published in paper form - it is just being made available additionally and freely online.

As with all documents on the site the current issue will be in Adobe PDF format. This means that if you download the magazine you can locally print it in full colour on 12 pages of A4 paper or if you prefer on 6 pages of double-sided A4 paper - the choice will be yours.



So don't forget !

Visit

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

**and find out what is available
in December 2006
and April 2007**

Coming Home

I was born and brought up in a New Church family. In fact, my father was a New Church Minister, and so my early years were dominated by church activities. The strange thing was, though, that I never really felt that I belonged. Church life never seemed to have any relevance to what I regarded as my 'real' life - that of a musician - out in the big, wide world.

When I was eighteen I started my first job in a professional orchestra, and never looked back. As the years went by I became ever more detached from things religious and spiritual. My occasional efforts to reconnect always left me feeling that religious people were just deluding themselves - there was really nothing out there, and we were on our own. I felt this most strongly when my sister's friends were praying for her when she was dying of cancer when she was only fifty-seven. Could her chances of survival possibly depend upon how many people were praying for her? When the tsunami disaster happened that seemed to be the final proof. How could a loving God create a world that could turn bandit? Where was the freedom to choose in that?

This summer I had reached a point where I was even worrying about what I was to do when Christmas arrived. At each previous Christmas I had allowed myself the luxury of hoping there really was something in it.

Then, out of the blue, my cousin Judith Wilson asked me if I would like to go with her to a New Church 'Spiritual Growth Workshop'. I felt I had nothing to lose, and agreed to go, although I could not see how I would fit in. I went with an open mind.

In due course we went, in August, staying with about twenty other people - not all New Church folk by any means - at a 'retreat' in a beautiful part of Derbyshire. I was immediately struck by how friendly everyone was. I immediately felt welcome. The 'weekend' was run by Rita Russell and the leader was Michael Stanley.



Michael proved to be one of the most astonishing speakers I have ever heard - he spoke with such love and conviction, and I found myself totally convinced by what he was telling us. I discovered that we are 'surrounded by and bedded in love from our Creator', and that each of us is a part of the Whole. We are given an ego to give us the opportunity to have the illusion that what we achieve comes from ourselves. Michael amused us by pointing out that we can actually observe our own ego preening itself, but we should never forget that we can actually achieve nothing at all by ourselves.

Everything Michael said during that weekend made such wonderful sense, and he even helped me to make sense of the tsunami tragedy, by explaining that we cannot be protected from pain and it is how we respond to the things which happen to us which is important.

Everyone there seemed to be tremendously affected by the whole weekend - the shared meals, the beauty of our surroundings, the 'Circle-Dancing', the meditations and the whole atmosphere of warmth and inclusiveness which was created by our two leaders.

I went home on a high, thinking that I had at last found the answer. Of course I had, but staying in that wonderful frame of mind proved to be very difficult out in the real world. I discovered that staying open to Divine help needs to be worked at all the time. Just as I was beginning to feel rather isolated, and needing some more human help, I received a little note from Hilda Johnson, asking if I would like to come on another Workshop - called Pathways to Wholeness and Healing. I jumped at it. This time it was held in a convent in Kent, with Rita Russell organising again and Helen Brown leading. She gently led us into a realisation that we are all connected to each other, and encouraged us all to share our feelings on a variety of Pathways. We enjoyed many shared activities, which included responding to various items of beauty which Helen and Rita had brought for us, 'Walking the Labyrinth' and guided meditations. Yet again this was an uplifting and heart warming experience.

I am trying hard to carry into my life what I have learned, and people keep telling me how well and happy I look. I am! I feel that I have at last come home.

Pru Cooper-Mitchell



Part of the labyrinth for 'Pathways to Wholeness'

Purley traditions forever!

Well who'd have thought that I could casually flick through a copy of Lifeline and have my gaze so instantly arrested by the word "whack-a-box"! Unlikely to be connected with some church worthy's erudite theological musings this could only possibly be the whack-a-box of the mid-nineties Purley Chase Children's Schools' bonfire and barbecue. Deserving I'm sure a capital 'W' what on earth is Whack-a-box? I hear you ask. So, lest any erroneous myths should be spawned and spread, I hope here to be allowed to dispel any such tales with the truth.

For several years I helped at Children's School (latterly Summer Camp). Being a non-swimmer I sometimes managed to escape the afternoon trip to Atherstone baths. Instead I'd opt to enjoy the resultant peaceful Purley parkland indulging in a bit of solitary and far less harrowing bonfire-building. Sometimes one or maybe two children would ask to forgo swimming and stay too, to help me. Children though, I'm sure you'll agree just can't be trusted with such a demanding and responsible job. Their lot, prior to traipsing down the long drive for a fun-filled afternoon in Atherstone, was to perform the slightly less exciting task of collecting from far and wide fallen dead wood with which to build the bonfire.

I could never quite understand why my idea of far and wide should seem by the children to be so unreasonably extreme? Nevertheless, the afternoon for me and my more-willing helpers would stretch out before us into a wearying routine of hunting, gathering and carting wood. Wilfred and Irene had saved catering packaging as kindling for us and eventually we would set-to and build the fire. I say 'we' but let me just remind you, bonfire-building is a serious matter and certainly not to be left in the hands of mere unskilled minors.

So how could I occupy my young helpers whose enthusiasm for their relentless slave-like labour was understandably beginning to wane. Well, one year I suggested to my lad that it would be a great help if he were to tear into thin strips all the big pile of packaging so that I (of course!) could then deftly stuff them into the base of the fire. Easy enough with limp cereal packets but some of those outer cartons I admit were a bit on the large side and far too thick for a child with bare hands to tear. So what better method could my charge devise to reduce corrugated cardboard to shreds? Thrash it with a piece of dead tree was the obvious answer!

When the swimmers trickled back on the scene further weapons were eagerly wrenched from my fast diminishing stock of firewood. It seemed everybody wanted to have a go. Some of the older girls; and of course boring adults too, looked-on baffled seeking some explanation for this bizarre seemingly pointless exercise? But even as they spoke, their questions floated away unanswered as the manic activity of the box-basher boys became more and more competitive and thus their concentration so intense that distraction by such trifling enquiry was futile. And so the strange ritual of Whack-a-box was born and destined thereby to pass so soon into myth and legend.

Just imagine how tickled I subsequently was with one episode of TV's "The Simpsons" when the theme was "Snake-whacking Day". I did wonder perhaps whether the scriptwriter had any connections with Purley Chase?

Howard Turner

Training & Development Officer

The Council has appointed Mrs Helen Newton to this new post. She will work closely with the Purley Programme Director, the Principal of the New Church College, the CAM Coordinator and others, to develop models of training, and the creating and marketing of new learning resources and workshop development.

Michael Hindley Chief Executive

Annual Meeting of the Missionary Society

Friday 16th March 2007 at 7pm at the Kensington New Church

This is a very important meeting as the future of the Society is to be decided. In accordance with a resolution at the 2006 Annual Meeting, the Committee has approached the Swedenborg Society and the General Conference of the New Church about alternatives to a possible link-up with the Swedenborg Association of Australia. Proposals will be submitted to the Annual Meeting. As many members as possible are urged to attend this vital occasion for the future of the Society.

December 25th

There is no historical evidence whatever to show on what day of the year Jesus was born. We simply do not know whether the Nativity occurred during spring, summer, autumn or winter. In fact it was not until 336 AD that the first celebration of December 25th as the Feast of the Nativity was held, and not until the sixth century AD that it was widely observed throughout the Western Church. Indeed, even to this day many Eastern Christians continue to hold their celebration of Christmas on January 6th.

Why was December 25th eventually chosen by Western Christians to be the Feast of the Nativity? The date was a significant one in pagan circles, celebrated by them as the birthday of the unconquered sun, which by that time was beginning to rise in the sky again after the winter solstice. Because the Church had been unable to stamp out this pagan festival it resolved to "Christianise" it by making it the date for celebrating the Nativity. It was on this very flimsy and questionable basis that December 25th became the date of our Christmas.

Because of its pagan associations the Puritans suppressed the celebration of Christmas and read the Nativity stories at other seasons of the year. However, by the nineteenth century the popularity of Christmas was growing and its universal celebration in the West became unstoppable. Our modern Christmas is thus a mix of the pagan and the Christian, although in all honesty I have to say that it appears to me that for many British people today the pagan influence does appear to be dominant.

Where does this leave Christians? I have no desire to be a killjoy and I recognise that the pagan elements of Christmas do bring much pleasure to many people, although when taken to excess I think they can make the festival into something grotesque. Furthermore, I certainly do wish to have a special day that marks the Lord's Nativity. His coming among us in human flesh is such an important event for our own spiritual lives that it needs to be remembered, studied and celebrated.

Whilst one radical step might be to remove our celebration of the Lord's Nativity to another date, such as January 6th, I think in all honesty that this is not a realistic option. We are just too wedded to December 25th. However there is a need for us to use this day in ways that are appropriate for us as Christians. It does no harm for us to look again at how we as individuals celebrate Christmas and to strip away that which in any way detracts from the celebration of our Lord's birth in very humble circumstances.

Christmas celebrations that tend to make us more hedonistic, materialistic, or self-centred are clearly inappropriate for Christians and need to be shunned. However, celebrations that centre on the Lord or emphasise mutual love for others are entirely fitting and useful. It might perhaps be helpful to recall what we are taught about the uses of the Sabbath Day, for Christmas Day falls into a similar category. Concerning the Sabbath, we read that it is -

A day for instruction in Divine matters, and also a day of rest from work, for meditation about matters conducive to salvation, and a day for love towards the neighbour
True Christian Religion 301.

None of this should make Christmas Day a dull one. Time with the Lord can be joyful and love for others can include much laughter and happiness. A Christmas Day centred on the Lord and others will be a day of peace and refreshment. No matter what the wider world makes of December 25th, we can ensure that in our homes and lives it is a true celebration of the Nativity. All else is secondary and might usefully be reduced or discarded.

May December 25th be a truly Happy Christmas for you all.

Rev Robert Gill

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Lifeline

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