



The Greatest Lesson of All

The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.
Mark15:38

This is one of the mysterious events recorded in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion. The curtain of the temple screened off the holy of holies. No-one was allowed to penetrate beyond that point, except once a year when the High Priest entered the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. The holy of holies was supposed to contain the Ark of the Covenant, which housed the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. It was also supposed that the Spirit of God dwelt behind that veil. Ironically, when some years later the temple was destroyed by the Romans, the holy of holies was discovered to be empty!

The purpose of Jesus' coming on earth was to reveal the true nature of God to the people of the Church. A true understanding of the Lord had been almost completely lost, and it was vital that men and women should be able to know Him as He really is - a loving and wise Father who provides for all our needs. Jesus spent His whole life opposing and subduing the powers of hell, resisting at every point their attempts to attack Him through the human tendencies towards evil which, like ourselves, were a part of His inheritance. This whole process came to a head at the crucifixion when the ultimate challenge was made. Would He remain faithful to the Father, or would He fall at the last hurdle and choose to save His skin?

Make no mistake about it, this was a crucial moment for the human race. With the benefit of hindsight, we can understand that good would triumph over evil. But for Jesus Christ, this final phase of His earthly life provided the supreme test. He knew He had some special power that He could choose to use for His own apparent comfort and safety. The temptation was to choose that way out, to give in to the attraction of an earthly kingdom and the adulation of the people. What torment He endured in resisting all of that is difficult for us to understand, except that

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**An article
on
Edward
VII ?**

**Well not
really.**

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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)

we do have experiences in which we are torn between satisfying our natural appetites and desires, and choosing another way which involves the values of heaven. Very often we agonise and wrestle with dark powers that are so persuasive, and sometimes we yield. But when we have resisted and the battle has been won, hindsight knows that it was the Lord fighting on our behalf, giving us the strength to overcome.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two at that very moment as an expression of the stupendous event that had taken place. At that point everything came together. The process of glorifying Jesus' human nature, in which everything that was susceptible to evil lusts and false ideas was emptied out, was now complete. His Human was now Divine. He and the Father were one. The promise made that God Himself would come and dwell among us had been kept. From now on men and women would have access, if they wanted, to the Divine by means of His Human. Because He had entered into our natural sphere of life, and experienced life as we live it, there could be a reciprocal relationship between humankind and their Maker which had not been possible before. Previously there had been an inadequate understanding of God and so an immature relationship with Him. Now He would be easily available to anyone who desired to know Him and receive His love and wisdom. Previously there had been an emptiness, as behind the curtain. Now His people could receive spiritual life in all its abundance.

Jesus' rebirth as the risen Lord God Jesus Christ is an occasion for great joy and celebration. His crucifixion reminds us of the reality that, like Him, we must experience trial and tribulation. Our faith and sincerity must be tested so that we have the responsible sense of choosing the path of faithfulness and heavenly life. It's worth experiencing the agonising so that our earth-bound inclinations can gradually be replaced by spiritual qualities. Remember, death always leads to new life.

Rev Bruce Jarvis

Medicine for the soul

I can remember when you only went to the doctor if you felt ill. You didn't make an appointment: you simply went along and sat or stood in a rather desolate waiting room with a lot of other ill people. Nobody spoke: there was nothing to look at, except a table with an ash-tray and a scattering of dog-eared women's weeklies. When it was your turn - it was difficult to remember in which order people had arrived - the doctor would try to find out what was wrong with you, and then prescribe a remedy which you came back to collect later.

It's all different now, of course. You make an appointment and sit in a bright comfortable waiting room - nobody actually seems unwell, and there is plenty to look at. There are stacks of leaflets about the hazards of this life, and the walls are covered with cheery colourful posters advertising all the various diseases on offer. You still have to wait a long time, but the doctor will probably look up from her computer for a moment to greet you. (She has been trying to catch up on your notes.) Even if there is absolutely nothing apparently the matter with you, she has a whole battery of tests to which you can be exposed: the doctor will do everything in her power to find something amiss if she possibly can. Whoever you are, you must be suffering from something.

I think this also tells us something about the state of the church (not the 'New Church' I hasten to add) because there are clear parallels. In the past, if you had done

something particularly reprehensible you might go along to your priest to confess that specific matter - and he would prescribe an appropriate penance. If you were really anxious about your spiritual prospects, you might even endow a chantry chapel so that the priests should continually utter prayers for your soul. Before Luther pulled the plug on indulgencies, you could purchase spiritual insurance with hard cash. Sins could be itemised and priced accordingly. Dealing in hell-fire punishments was a racket.

Not so today: though we may not know it, we are all culpable. The church therefore tells us all to mend our ways, it tests the unseen depths of our souls, it outlines the spiritual options, and advises us to adopt a healthy spiritual life-style.

G. Roland Smith

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them,
*"Those who are well have no need of a physician,
but those who are sick. I came not to call the
righteous, but sinners."* Mark 2:17

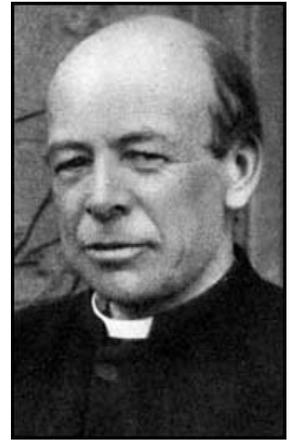
'Death is nothing at all'

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. John 14: 1-2.

These wonderful words of comfort, spoken by Jesus to the disciples on the evening of the Last Supper, are so familiar to us that we may sometimes gloss over them. If we ask ourselves what is 'different' about the New Church, we might come up with a number of answers, but perhaps the thing that is most striking about New Church teaching, that is the teaching given to Emanuel Swedenborg and set forth in the books we commonly call 'the Writings' (with a capital 'W'), is the explanation of the content and nature of the life beyond this one. It is still, sadly, true to say that Swedenborg has not been taken seriously by the main Christian churches and has often been regarded (quite wrongly) as a 'spiritualist' or 'spiritist', that is of being someone who tried by his own power to penetrate the secrets behind the curtain, and that is one of the reasons, I suppose, why we are still not accepted as a member of Churches Together in many places. We know that this is not correct. We know that Swedenborg believed that his psychic powers, if you like to call them that, were a gift from God and were not to be abused. But Swedenborg wrote long and learned books and he is not always easy to understand and I think that we can see that not everyone will want to study him. Perhaps we do unconsciously separate ourselves from others by using his name too often.

So let us leave Emanuel Swedenborg for the moment and turn to Canon Henry Scott Holland, a Canon of St Paul's Cathedral and Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, a pillar of the Church of England in the late Victorian and Edwardian age and, as a leader of the Christian Social Union, a man of practical Christianity much concerned with social reform and the alleviation of poverty. But Henry Scott Holland is remembered today for his meditation on death and the future life, '*Death is nothing at all*'. The popularity of these few lines is astonishing. It is the most visited page on the website www.poeticexpressions.co.uk and you can buy this little prose poem in hardback form at Waterstones and other good bookshops. It is often read at funerals and I am sure that it is found on many bedside tables. '*Death is nothing at all*' comes from a sermon on death, entitled 'The King of Terrors', delivered in St Paul's Cathedral on Whitsunday 1910, while the body of King Edward VII was lying in state at Westminster. Now Edward VII had lived what I think one would call a very full life and he died when he was nearly 70, not particularly old by today's standards, but still a reasonable age for those days. But the death of a monarch or other major member of the Royal Family is always an important national event and, like all deaths, is an event that reminds each one of us of our own mortality. Just

remember the national expression of mourning that occurred when the Queen Mother died in 2002 at the ripe old age of 101. Canon Scott Holland must have felt that a meditation on the meaning of physical death was what his congregation at St Paul's Cathedral needed on the occasion of the monarch's death.



Henry Scott Holland

Now what is quite remarkable about '*Death is nothing at all*' is its assumption, so delicately and beautifully expressed, that conscious life continues without interruption after physical death. There is no traditional sleeping in the grave before being raised up at the Last Day. Henry Scott Holland was a child of his own times (he was born in 1847 and died in 1918) and he was steeped in Victorian poetry and other literature. He would have been familiar with Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, that great Victorian poem about death and the future life. He was deeply read in Browning and delivered learned papers to the Browning Society. Both these poets had read Swedenborg and some of Tennyson's siblings were actually members of the New Church. Had Scott Holland also read Swedenborg, you may ask? I have no information that he did, although Swedenborg was quite widely read in his day, often without explicit acknowledgement. A congregation in St Paul's cathedral in 1910 would undoubtedly have had some familiarity with the poetry of Tennyson and Browning (although perhaps not with Swedenborg's writings) and the Canon's poetically-expressed ideas, which were certainly not orthodox Anglicanism, would probably have fallen on ears well-attuned to hear them.

Now fast forward to the parish church of St Peter at Burnham in Buckinghamshire (where I was a Sunday School pupil and then teacher and where I was confirmed in about 1957) in January 2006. The reading of '*Death is nothing at all*' immediately following the reading of verses 1 to 6 of chapter 14 of John's Gospel at a service of thanksgiving for the life of a school contemporary of mine was entirely proper and natural. The vicar who conducted the service beautifully did not comment on Henry Scott Holland's words, but she proceeded on the assumption that conscious life continues after physical death. The service, which also included the singing of 'Jerusalem', was one at which I felt entirely comfortable. It was a sad occasion, but one filled too with joy, with thanksgiving for the life of a man who had brought happiness to others, and with hope. The large church was quite full. I do not, of course, know about the religious beliefs (or lack of them) of those present, but I hope that the words spoken and the music played will have brought comfort and hope. I expect that several there were familiar with Scott

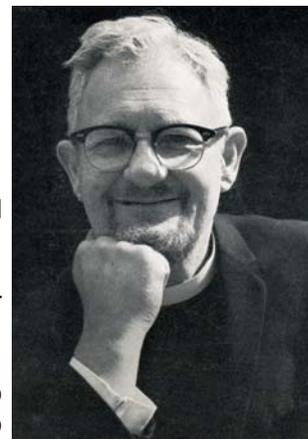
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The Upper Room

From 11th May 1974 to 1st February 1975 the Herald, the forerunner of Lifeline, published a series of fifteen Meditations by Rev Brian Kingslake using the title - The Upper Room.

His meditations and the accompanying prayers seem as relevant today as they did over thirty years ago and are now re-published in Lifeline in the same series.

The term 'Upper Room' can be seen as representing the higher levels of our minds into which enlightenment from the Lord can flow when we seek to know the truth and wish to apply it in a life of usefulness to others. Such enlightenment involves our coming closer to the Lord just as the disciples came close to Him at the Last Supper.



Rev Brian Kingslake
1907 - 1995

4. "Antidote to Pride"

READ Luke 9:46-56

How can one deal with Pride? What is the antidote? Humility? Not necessarily! One can be very proud of one's humility! ("I am the worst of all sinners, corrupt from head to foot, utterly unworthy . . ." That makes me feel pretty important!) The only effective antidote to Pride is - an honest acknowledgment that all my achievements, my gifts, my powers, my life itself, come from the Lord. If someone praises me, I can accept the praise with a modest "Thank you!" handing it over immediately to the Lord, without permitting any of it to touch my ego. I can have self-respect without pride, honouring myself as a child of God. I can be immensely proud of the Kingdom of God without being particularly conscious of what I may have contributed to it, which is probably very little!

PRAYER.

Dear Master, my Divine Creator and the Source of all goodness and truth, I want to be just an ordinary member of Your wonderful KINGDOM. Fill me with Your life, so that I can work with You and for You, attributing to You all glory, thanksgiving and praise.

(Continued from page 3)

Holland's words. I doubt if many there would have been familiar with the poetry of Tennyson and Browning and I am pretty sure that I was the only one there with any acquaintance with the contents of Swedenborg's writings. But none of this matters. I do not know if Henry Scott Holland would have predicted the immortality of his words when he preached his sermon in St Paul's Cathedral nearly a hundred years ago. I doubt it. Yet they have survived and their popularity, I am sure, extends well beyond Anglicans or committed Christians of any denomination. It is heartening to see New Church truths, if I can be presumptuous enough to say that, being eagerly sought on the most visited page of a poetry website.

'When will the New Jerusalem come?' is the rhetorical question asked by Lars Bergquist at the very end of his magnificent biography Swedenborg's Secret. While we talk of a 'New Church' (with capital letters) and while churches with that name (like our own) have played and still play a great role in assisting its evolution, that 'church' is not confined to one denomination or, indeed,

religion. It exists in the hearts and minds of regenerating men and women everywhere.

But, the cynic will say, what is the use of poetry, mere words without 'proof'? Science alone tells us what is 'real' and gives us no grounds for believing that there is anything beyond the here and now. Leaving aside scientific investigation of such phenomena as 'near death' experiences, I think we have to assert that science is not the only valid kind of knowledge. Poetry can express for us our very deepest longings. We would not respond positively to Henry Scott Holland's words, or, indeed, to Swedenborg's teachings about the next life in Heaven and Hell and other works if there were not 'something' in us that makes us respond in a positive way. That 'something' is, I believe, love, the divine essence and source of everything, but expressed within us as affection.

'Affection is what gives life -...It is from affection that anyone thinks, and nobody thinks without it'
Arcana Caelestia 2480.

Richard Lines

Atonement - 2

At the Ministers' Seminar in Autumn 2007 Rev Christopher Hasler gave three lectures on the Atonement, a theological concept that is of central importance to some Christians but which is at total variance with New Church Teaching. The lectures have now been edited and abridged for publication in Lifeline with the help of Rev Bruce Jarvis. Below you will find the second lecture.

Problem with the sense of the letter of the Word.

We are looking for a clearer understanding of the doctrine of Atonement, and as I pointed out in my first article, as a New Church, we do not start from the usual theological assumptions and that is where we usually meet with some difficulties.

Our doctrines teach the following:

The sense of the letter of the Word is the basis, the containant and support of the spiritual and celestial senses.

Divine Truth, in the in the sense of the letter of the Word, is in its fullness, its sanctity, and its power.

The doctrine of the church must be taken from the letter of the Word, and be confirmed by it.

We are aware of this teaching, but it also creates some problems for us when we engage in a discussion concerning some of the key doctrines of the Christian Church, particularly our view of the Atonement. When the Trinity is discussed, people quote those clear declarations of there being three persons in Godhead (or certainly two), or where the Son prays to the Father, or appears to be offering himself as the sacrificial Lamb. What are we to answer?

It seems a weak argument for us to say, "Well, it does not really mean that!" But we can also remind people that "*The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*" (2 Corinthians 3.6) Where then do we start on our journey bearing in mind the old farmer's dictum: "*I wouldn't start from here.*"

To begin with, we do not accept the idea that there are two or more persons in the Godhead. It would certainly help if the word Jehovah (or Yaweh) in the Old Testament were not be translated as 'LORD' into the English language, but kept strictly in the original form. Then all the prophecies of the Incarnation would be more clearly focussed on Jehovah and his promises. There is hardly any suggestion in the OT that there is a Divine Son, so that theologians are really straining a gnat when they point to the two texts from which this might be surmised:

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'" Genesis 1.26

The argument goes on like this: "What do the plural 'us' and 'our' mean? There was nothing created at that time, not even angels, so God must have been talking to his Son." We answer, the Creation story is not simply a story of creation at the beginning of time, but a continuing story applicable to every new creation or birth, including yours and mine. The creation in six days shows the development of every person's mind and character. The original text cannot be true literally, historically and scientifically speaking, since the sun is not created until the fourth day after the vegetable kingdom has appeared!

And when God speaks of 'us', what does that mean? This actually relates to the angelic influence in human life, especially in infancy and childhood when they surround us with the sphere of love and innocence, and so preserve something of heaven within each one of us. They are active in our spiritual development and without their involvement; we would never reach true humanity. So it is wonderful to realise that the story has a direct implication in our present life. To argue that the world was created in six day some 6 or 7000 years ago is completely pointless and wasteful.

The second verse in the OT which can be claimed as appearing to show that there is a second person in the Godhead is in the second Psalm which is full of tumult and wars against the Lord, and the Lord is preparing for battle in order to burst the bonds and cords of the enemy:

"I will tell of the decree, Jehovah said to me, 'You are my Son; this day I have begotten you.'" Psalm 2.7

This is usually quoted as the proof that there was a second Divine Person because the Creeds of the Church have always claimed that the Son was begotten 'before the world was'. But any new creation implies a sequence of time, so the text must apply to the birth in time, in Bethlehem, and clearly is a prophecy of the Lord's birth. In Apocalypse Revealed 4 the following statement is made on this verse:

'This day' is the presence of the Lord's coming. It is in consequence of this also that an entire period is termed 'a day', its first state being a day break and morning, and its last an evening and night.'

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So here we have two rather arcane biblical quotes against literally hundreds of references to the coming of Jehovah God, who is the Redeemer, Saviour and who himself will surely come.

That is the starting point for our journey. It really is worth picking up *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord and the Sacred Scriptures*. In these short books you will see hundreds of prophecies announcing the coming of Jehovah Himself. This is overwhelming evidence which reassures you that we are on very solid ground. Whatever might be the theology in other Churches, this evidence is indisputable and very comforting when we are feeling lonely and ignored by the world! But this is where we start from. . . .

Invisible and Visible God

All religions, if pressed, - Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and others -will admit that God is unknowable: Infinite and beyond human comprehension. Even those who make images claim they only show some aspects of the Divine character, and never claim that this is what God 'looks' like. And where Jehovah is concerned this is equally our position, but we also believe that out of necessity the Infinite God 'finited' Himself and became incarnate in the human form.

"No one has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." John 1.18

So Christians after one or two hundred years, started to make images or pictures of Jesus, but that is not how he is known to us. It is through his actions, words and attitudes to people: women, children, the poor, the sick - as well as the rich and learned - that we know and understand something about him. We may not claim that we understand his divinity, but we know plenty about the human face of our God whom we worship.

What a tragedy it is, that for the first time in human history when we can know and visualise the personality of our God, the Church managed to divide him into two, even three!

Of course, to accept that God could become incarnate is a deep mystery. We may understand the reasons for it, but how it all happened, that is the great wonder. However let us remind ourselves about our own birth. We know a lot these days about our reproduction and birth, but I heard recently that scientists were asked what it was that science has discovered in the last 100 years, and which still baffles them. The surprising answer was: *human reproduction*. It was explained, "We have learnt so much about chromosomes and genetic codes, but we still can't comprehend how all this information of building a body in the womb from a single cell, coming to birth and growing up can be stored in the male sperm." And when you consider it, it is amazing and miraculous. All our genes, character, ability to cope with diseases, intelligence - well an endless list of

potentialities - are all contained in that single microscopic seed.

Perhaps when we humbly remember the incarnate One, then it is no longer quite so strange, especially when we realise that the whole of creation is 'the Fullness of God'. This is where we, in the New Church, differ from others. We teach that God emitted substances from himself, and is inherently present within every atom in the created universe. We simply cannot exist without the constant presence of God. So the Incarnation itself was not really such a strange event.

There are those who object to our doctrine which teaches that it was the One God himself who became incarnate, "So who was looking after the universe and creation if God had become incarnate?" they ask. This is really such a crude and material form of thinking, that it shows complete lack of comprehension of Infinity. "Everything is the fullness of God." our teachings declare. The Divine did not absent himself from creation because he was present within the person of Jesus Christ in a unique way.

But still, Jesus was born as one of us: a human being and a helpless baby born into the darkness of ignorance. Above all, his birth was not due to some 'immaculate conception', meaning that he was born without being tainted by original sin. Indeed, the very reason for his birth was to assume our 'fallen nature'! He needed to be born into the human condition, to experience it, know it and face it in a series of many temptations.

As a biography, the Gospels are very inadequate. What exactly do they tell us about the life of Jesus? A short glimpse of his childhood and one incident when he visited the Temple in Jerusalem when he was 12, and then silence until he was 30! We do know quite a lot about the last 3 years of his life.

Many authors invented stories to fill this gap. For example they tell us that he went to Tibet to study mysticism.

While we do not know exactly what he did in his daily life, it seems pretty clear that he worked as a carpenter. But there is a lot more we can learn about someone if we can look into his mind, read his thoughts and intentions. This is where the New Church cherishes this new knowledge, never before revealed. The answer to these fascinating questions lies right in the Old Testament whose history and prophecies were the blueprint of what the Lord came to accomplish. The battles, the enslavement, the march to freedom and towards the Holy Land and its Temple are not only a part of the Jewish history, but the inner meaning is all about the inner life of the Lord

Jesus, first of all had to come to the realisation as to who he was and what he had to do. So we are given that brief glimpse at the age of 12 when he clearly understood that he "must be about his Father's business" (Luke 2.49) And it is clear, he did not mean Joseph's workshop. It was a rather harsh, apparently

ungrateful answer, yet it was the truth about his mission - the mission to restore human nature from its fallen state to its former glory.

Can we wonder then that he loved the Word which was his guide and inner light? Who else on earth could have taught him? Who else could possibly understand him and not think him either extremely arrogant, or completely insane? He was alone, except for those inner promptings, which he at first did not fully understand but came to recognise as the Divine voice within him.

*Oh, how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
You, through your commandments make me
wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers.
I understand more than the ancients.*

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my
path.
I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep your
righteous judgements.
Psalm 119. 97-100 and 105-106*

From anyone but the mouth of Jesus, such words would be boastful and exaggerated, yet he stood alone and no one could understand: the Word alone was his lamp and guide. He was guided and strengthened by it for otherwise he was utterly alone. And the temptations came thick and fast throughout his life. The three temptations in the wilderness in the Synoptic Gospels reveal simply the main pattern of his continuing battles against the hells. The prize of victory was humanity itself which had sunk so low, and was in danger of being swallowed up by the power of hell, which they were no longer able to resist, according to the ancient and beautiful prophecy:

*Arise, shine, for your light has come!!
And the glory of Jehovah is risen upon you.*

*For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
and deep darkness the people; but Jehovah will
arise over you,
and His glory will be seen upon you.
Isaiah 60.1-2*

What glory is contained in those words! What must they have meant to the young Jesus who quite early recognised that awesome mission which the Divine Love was yearning to accomplish in him and through him.

The marked difference in our point of view

It is worth considering the contrast between the traditional concept of the work of redemption / atonement / penal substitution, and what the New Church teaches about it. In the former teachings, Jesus came as substitution for mankind who had been judged and condemned as sinners fully deserving damnation. It is even worse than it appears since all people were born

with damnation pronounced over them. Hence the rush to get children baptised and the tragedy if infants died before being baptised. Then they could not be even buried in 'consecrated grounds' in the church graveyard, but outside in 'unconsecrated' ground. That's where the idea of the 'limbo' came from: such souls had to abide to 'in limbo' to eternity. Fortunately, that idea has recently been quietly dropped without much fuss.

But in that traditional view Jesus was not really involved in the process of leading mankind towards salvation except by his teaching and good example. He was simply the sacrifice to be offered as a worthy substitute for our inherited sinfulness. The whole transaction was an arrangement between Father and Son and perhaps the devil? We were as it were bystanders, but we could raise our hand and say, "Yes, I want to be saved!" In some way it was no better than if a slave owner should agree to sell his slaves to another master, who would take them over. From the Father to the Son, Alleluia!

In our concept, the Lord God Jehovah himself became incarnate because, of course, he was never angry with us, never stopped loving us, neither was he ever unwilling to forgive us. It was not he who threw a spanner into the works. We did that to such an extent that we were no longer able to resist evil, partly because we were too weak, and partly because we did not really want to. Evil, that is, selfishness, can be very comforting and enjoyable (as long as we can get away with it).

But the important thing is that the Lord did not hate those in hell either. He did not come to punish or annihilate them, simply to stand between them and us, and restrain them from dominating our life to the extent that we would not have the choice between good and evil.

So we have this remarkable, very unorthodox, teaching, that by his incarnation, the Lord, not only saved mankind, and the angels of heaven who were also affected by the growing dominance of hell, but he also came to rescue the hells themselves from running towards self-destruction! How is that for a new angle on the incarnation? But when you read some of the prophecies of Isaiah, the creeping darkness, the flood returning to swamp mankind, you begin to see that these are not just due to poetic licence, but are a true picture of the state of mankind prior to the Incarnation.

Another thing, the world today seems not look much better than it did in the time of Jesus, so that it is easy to turn round and say, "He was a failure because evil is still just as strong and pervasive as it ever was". And what about this phrase, 'the harrowing of hell', which Jesus is supposed to have done? They seem to be back and powerful as ever, so what difference did he really make?"

This, I feel is a valid question: was 'Christ triumphant'?

Yes and No. No, in the sense in which we understand triumph, meaning vanquishing the enemy completely. Rather like our bombardment of German cities, which

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was subsequently seen as a dubious victory. No, the Lord did not come to do away with hell.

Looking at it from the Divine point of view, he created us to be free and to make our own choice as to the life we wish to lead. It would be a terrible denial of that freedom if he were to hate us or punish us for exercising it! The Lord's love for us is unchangeable. If we make the wrong and selfish choice, we end up living in misery. But the Lord does not have to add to that misery since we are already self-punishing ourselves by choosing to live in a society of selfish, greedy and usually cruel people.

Yet the Lord does restrain us if our craving for enjoyment begins to cause pain to others. In the spiritual world at least, he sets barriers and if we can keep within those recognised rules, then all is well. There is never any retrospective punishment, a litany of old scores and sins committed. You are judged on what state you are in the present, not the past. So the hells appear to go on as ever before – up to a point, and of course, they feel more free if they attach themselves to us since we often have less restraints put on us by our society than is the case in the spiritual world. See this teaching against the awful trafficking in children and the abuse they suffer in this world. That simply does not happen in the spiritual world, for all children are immediately gathered under the protection and care of the highest angels. I once heard a most terrible definition of hell: "You never see there the smile on the face of a child." Think of that!

This reordering of the spiritual world is also a very important part of the Lord's (Jehovah's) work of redemption. Only in this world there is still a 'free-for-all' environment and the last century and the beginning of this one have perhaps seen the greatest atrocities in history. The words in Revelation 12 come to mind:

And the war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

However you read or interpret this, it is a very serious scenario which surely is reflected in the conditions in many parts of the world. There is a battle going on for human souls and their God-given birthright - their freedom. Many types of slavery are descending on mankind. Often it takes the form of religious oppression so that people's obedience to their leaders makes them commit the most appalling evils. No one is really safe from oppression or exploitation because hell feels truly free in our company. They can manipulate us through our own desires and greed.

This may sound as if the Lord's work of redemption was a complete failure, as if his victory has turned to dust. Surely this is what the hells would love us to believe, and lead us to 'enjoy ourselves' without restraint, without any barriers.

But the victory that the Lord bought so dearly is the freedom of true maturity. He has made us more, not less, responsible for our lives. We have true choice and will receive his support provided we follow his rules, and not make our own. We have to understand how his kingdom, in the form of the Grand Man operates. Each individual joyfully and happily works for the happiness of others. And unselfishness actually increases happiness and joy in everyone and so creates wonderful sense of peace and perfect safety.

We have truly reached the age of true human maturity, thanks to the Lord's intervention in the hells' machinations in human hearts and minds.

Now, we have true choice and true freedom. Let us appreciate it and accept it in humility, thankfulness and with love.

To be continued



It is with great sadness that we record the passing into the spiritual world of Rev Alan Hardy on Saturday 2nd February after a lengthy and courageous battle with cancer.

We offer our prayers and sympathy to his wife Gwen and their family.

A full memorial notice will be printed in due course.

The picture on the left, taken at the Conference in July 2000, shows (from left to right) Rev Alan Hardy, Rev Ian Russell, Rev Gillian Gordon

News from the Churches ...

Christmas Praise and Worship

It was a joy to see our church full to the doors at Christmas, and shining with silver, greenery, flowers, holly berries, and candles.

On the Sunday morning before Christmas Day we came for the Family Sing-Along, when the excited band of children, helped by the Seekers leaders, presented us with a Nativity puppet show. The children had made their puppets in the previous weeks, and used them to illustrate the Christmas story, interwoven with carols by them and us - how their singing has improved! It was great to see grandmas, aunts and uncles, and mums and dads, who are not always able to attend.

And that evening many of them were here again, plus Guides and Brownies, Women's League, and friends. All of us had come to enjoy that most wonderful Service of Lessons and Carols. Norman led our worship, assisted by readers from groups who use our premises round the year as well as church members, and our singing nearly raised the roof.

A highlight was the Singing for Pleasure group's English premiere of the carol composed by Becky Jarratt. Sadly family commitments meant that she and Chris could not be with us, but we have told her how the group sang their socks off - and when they finished there was a most amazingly reverent hush in church - followed by a round of applause. After the Service the majority of us lingered on for some time, enjoying the atmosphere.

On Christmas Day itself we took part in a shorter, quieter Service with fewer carols, which sent us away in the right spirit to enjoy the rest of the day.

We thank everyone who contributed to the success of our Christmas period, especially those who worked behind the scenes. Once again we thank Ann and Roy Thomason for providing the Christmas tree and decorating it and the church for us, Dot Best for the flower arrangements, and the Seekers leaders who provided tea and mince pies after the Sing-Along.

From the Chester Newsletter

The oldest angel in the Nativity

There was a new player in this year's Nativity re-enactment at the Keighley New Church, Braithwaite village. One of the angels was played by an octogenarian! Rhoda Longbottom is a lifelong supporter of the church, taking part in a diverse range of activities over the years from youth club member to Church treasurer. However, she had never been given the opportunity to take part in a Nativity play. So when she heard there was a shortage of angels, she volunteered for the role, much to the surprise and delight of the Sunday School who produced the Nativity scenes.

The photo shows her with fellow angel Millie.

From the Keighley Newsletter



(Continued on page 10)

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Centenary

Heaven consists of countless communities. They all vary, and yet all are one, for all are led as one by the Lord.
Arcana Caelestia 1285:2

Ordinand Christine Bank, Kensington Church Warden Howard Turner and Minister for London, Gillian Gordon enjoyed a varied, musical and well-attended service at Westminster Abbey on 18th January. They were in good company, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of Westminster and the Salvation Army Commissioner taking part in the celebration of the centenary of The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, on the theme "*Pray Without Ceasing*" (Thessalonians 5, 17).

The friendship of two church leaders led to the first observance from 18th to 25th January 1908 at the Friary of the Society of the Atonement in New York State and simultaneously at St. David's Church, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire in the hope of an Anglican and Catholic reunion. Nowadays, Churches Together in England comprises 29 Member Churches or Associations of Churches, so ecumenism has come a long way, not just in numbers, but in an increasing appreciation of each others contribution to Christian life rather than a striving for uniformity.

The next evening a more intimate service took place at St. Johns Parish Church, Notting Hill under the auspices of the local Churches Together. This was attended by a congregation of over 100 people from the churches in the area including 5 New Church members. Christine Bank read a prayer alongside seven other Church Representatives from the area. The Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor preached a sermon on prayer and church unity. In his address the Cardinal initially contrasted times past with the present day attitudes to differences in understanding between groups of Christians. He quoted the inscription associated with the tombs of Elizabeth 1 and Mary, both of which lie in Westminster Abbey, which reads, "Sisters in hope of the resurrection", reflecting the need, recognised even then, of the need for unity among Christians.

We were all invited to pray for unity among Christians and for peace within ourselves. Archbishop O'Connor commented that conversion of the individual heart was the basis of ecumenism and that we should all try to see and recognise what is positive in each church and each person, so that the gifts of each could be shared.

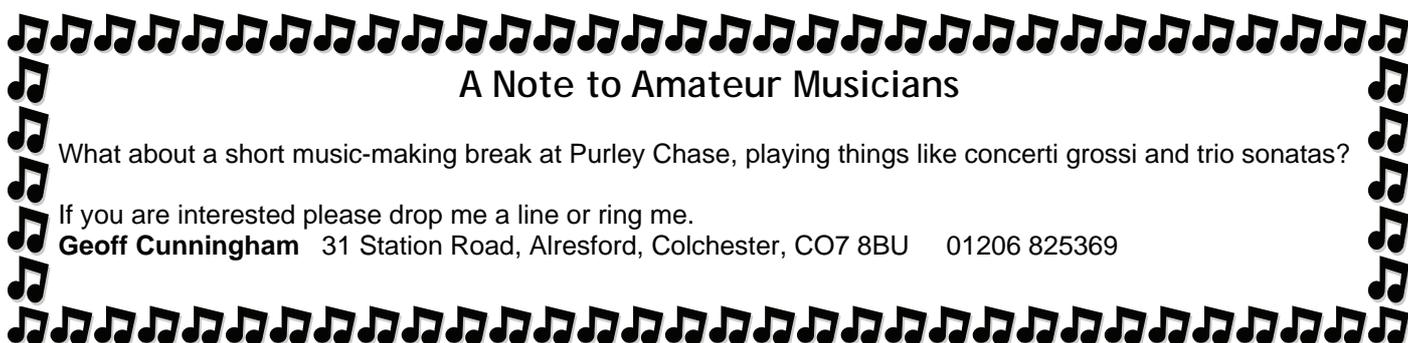
Moving on, the Cardinal reflected that Churches Together as an organisation had come on a long way since its foundation 100 years ago. He observed that whatever happens at national level is a reflection of what happens at local level. The Lord said, "Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them." In this increasingly secular world Christians need to be braver and more united. There are spiritually minded people out there looking for the hope which Christianity can bring. Our constant prayer must be, "That they may all be one ..."

The Blessing and Sending Out was given collectively by The Cardinal and The Bishop of Kensington with Bishops from the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches. A touching moment was when we were invited to say The Lord's Prayer in our native tongues. It felt right that The New Church was part of both the preparations and the proceedings in the light of our unique teachings about the perfection of heaven coming from variety.

The variety of the worship of the Lord, from the variety of good in one or other of the Societies, does no harm, but is an advantage: for the perfection of Heaven is from it. Heaven and Hell 56

At a short reception after the service refreshments were served and conversation was noisy and continuous. Cardinal O'Connor, a tall and imposing, almost regal, figure, was among those of the clergy circulating and greeting worshippers during this informal gathering. A splendid occasion much appreciated by those attending.

From the Kensington Newsletter



A Note to Amateur Musicians

What about a short music-making break at Purley Chase, playing things like concerti grossi and trio sonatas?

If you are interested please drop me a line or ring me.
Geoff Cunningham 31 Station Road, Alresford, Colchester, CO7 8BU 01206 825369

God is Love

“God is Love” is a common religious expression but in what way can we really say that - “God **IS** Love”?

One thing that people from all sorts of religious traditions would say is that God loves us. Different traditions might have different ways of describing God or the Divine but the message that God loves us is common to all. We might then go on and describe God’s love as an unconditional love that has no limits and no boundaries and is shared equally with all. Such thinking brings us to see that God is a ‘loving’ God but is this the same as saying that “God is Love”? Well in a way the simple answer is yes, but we need to explore why this is so.

Think for a moment about an everyday situation which illustrates this problem. We know that we can get money from the bank because money is stored there. We might even say that “the bank is made of money”, but we know full well that the bank isn’t money. Now we could easily view God just like that. We know we can get love from God, indeed we might even say that “God is made of love” but we stop short of believing that God is love because it doesn’t seem to make any real sense to us.

One way to try and move forward and make sense of this is to look at ourselves. If we are made in the image and likeness of God then it should be possible to see within ourselves something of the nature of God although what we see will be a very dim and limited reflection of the infinite Divine nature.

We love all sorts of things - partners, family, friends, hobbies, possessions and much more. But what tends to happen is that what we love the most becomes most important in our life to the point where our lives revolve about what we love most. Suppose we love the pursuit of wealth and its resulting possessions to the exclusion of all else. Gradually our whole life becomes totally absorbed by a focus on how to make money and yet more money. Money has become our whole purpose in living - it has become our life. By contrast we may make our family the focus of our love. Supporting and caring for our family then becomes the whole purpose in living - it has become our life.

We can see from these two examples that our love tends to show itself in the way we live, so much so, that we can describe our life in terms of what we love, indeed our life becomes our love and our love is our life. In our deepest and inmost being life and love are one and the same thing.

If it can be said of our human nature that love is our life then this ‘likeness’ of God in us must first exist fully and perfectly in the Divine Itself. Thus we can begin to see that the Life that is God is Love. Now although it appears otherwise, we really have no life or love in



ourselves. What we call our life and our love really come from God because God alone is the source of all life and all love. In God, Life Itself and Love Itself are one and the same thing.

God is Love because God is Life.

Some Quotations

This is all that I've known for certain, that God is love. Even if I have been mistaken on this or that point: God is nevertheless love.
Soren Kierkegaard

God is love, and the ability to love is inborn in every living creature, most especially in human beings. Sadhu Sundar Singh

In loving and serving, we prove that we have been created in the likeness of God, for God is love and when we love we are like God.
Mother Teresa

God alone is love itself, because he is life itself. Both we on earth and angels are life-receivers. Emanuel Swedenborg

From the Spiritual Wisdom web site

On Friday 9th November 2007 our minister Rev Clifford Curry led a service at Bournemouth New Church celebrating the life of Mrs Elizabeth Stevenson known affectionately to us all as 'Bessie'. Here follows a transcript of part of his address from that service.

It is not just to say our farewells to Bessie but also to give thanks for her life and to remember the ways in which her special qualities enriched our experience of life with her warmth and generosity of spirit. We inevitably feel sadness that she has parted from us in this life, but let us all remember those who have gone before her who surely will rejoice to welcome her into the greater life of the spiritual world.

After she moved to Weymouth Dorset in 1969 she travelled over here to worship and was a committed choir member always ready to give of her time to support the church. She loved this church and the people in it. I should especially like to pay tribute to the hours of work that went into her handicrafts stall for the mini-market. Woe betide the organiser who did not allocate the right table space! Twelve months of dedicated work with her needle and thread meant there was always a stall full of neat and colourful goods to appeal to both young and old. Yet more of her work was given as gifts and cards to people she knew. Many of us

own an example of her skill. She was for over twenty five years with the Weymouth Embroiderers group, and over thirty five years with the local woman's institute. Bessie's lifelong Christian faith was woven into the life she lived and the attitudes she showed towards others, she was the one who made a point of talking to newcomers at church and making them welcome. We never had to guess how she was feeling, it was always obvious! A genuinely unselfish person who gave generously and willingly of her time and energies, her life has touched so many both old and young. Swedenborg describes heaven as a kingdom of uses and heavenly joy in terms of "*desiring from the heart the good of others more than one's own, and in serving others with a view to their happiness, not with recompense as an end, but from love.*"

Bessie put so much of her energies into supporting and encouraging others and was generous with her time and talents. She always looked for something useful to be doing and has been described to me as "the most unselfish person I have ever known." Scouting's motto is "Be Prepared" and I believe the life she has lived has indeed prepared her for the new life she is entering today; She **gave her best** and I believe that as we think of her entering into the greater life of the spiritual world; that **the best is yet to be.**

Committee for Auxiliary Ministry

Sermons 10-19 by Rev Geoffrey Clarkson

CAM is pleased to announce that a new collection of Sermons is now available. This is a set of ten sermons produced by Rev Geoffrey Clarkson. Worship leaders are free to adapt them to suit their own particular speaking style. Each set costs £5.00 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 CDs are also available at £2.00 per set.

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Lifeline Contributions should be sent to the Editor, Alan C Misson
27 Woodland Way, Shirley, Croydon, CR0 7UB Tel: 020 8777 5098 Email: alanmisson@btinternet.com

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