



Induction of Stephen Thomas as Lay Pastor

Rev Gillian Gordon, Stephen Thomas, Rev Mary Duckworth, Rev Clifford Curry
(See page 15)

Lifeline

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Lifeline



Young Family and Adults Weekend

The Young Family & Adults Weekend held in the ever lovely Purley Chase Centre over the May Day Bank holiday 22nd - 25th May was quite possibly the most well attended school in its history. The Weekend was hosted by Jenny and Stephen Jones and lead by Rev David Lomax. 23 children ranging from 10 months to 16 years were accompanied by about 18 adults and supported gratefully by a team of 7 helpers whose excellent care enabled a good attendance to David's sessions on the theme of **Spiritual Paths**. Arrival on Friday afternoon/evening was a long drawn out affair. As people's journeys from as far as Scotland & Dorset came to a close they were met with a superb buffet

(Continued on page 2)

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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.

laid on by Ann Gaffney and her staff. As we all gathered together (filling the Olive room) I took a look around expecting there to be no need for introductions. I was delighted to see that there were people who I didn't know well and others who had never been to Purley before. So the introductions took place after all!

Rising early on a glorious Saturday morning and after a hearty breakfast and Matins it was straight into the first of 6 excellent and thought provoking sessions. During these we explored what a Spiritual Path is, what influences we have over it or whether it is all planned out for us. Some Challenging ideas and quotations were discussed in small groups and further into the weekend on Monday we looked into Spiritual Parenting: What is a Spiritual Parent? Do we consider ourselves to be one? And how we could include a spiritual element into our children's upbringing? That afternoon we all headed for Rosliston Forestry Park. There was anxiety in the air for us as hosts as we had never been there before... Having eaten our picnic in the sun shine we then had our own private Falconry display. All who wished to could hold, 'call in' and in some cases 'cast away' fascinating and elegant Birds of Prey. This topped off with a walk around the Park, another great meal back at Purley and an evening filled with fun and games for old and young made for a brilliant and much enjoyed day.

Sunday again (thanks to Connie) started very early for me, but was made worthwhile by seeing the grounds of Purley peacefully alive in the morning sunshine. After sessions and lunch it was time for me to organise the orienteering course I had been working on for the last 2 weeks! The big question was Will it work? Totally unplanned, this activity fitted rather nicely into David's chosen theme for the weekend. Providence? Similar Spiritual pathways? All very interesting! The course worked very well so if anyone fancies a spot of orienteering around Purley anytime I'll be happy to send it!! Once the younger children had retired (or been retired!) to their beds the rest of us joined together for an evening session, again lead by David Lomax but taking a very different role! "Tonight Michael, I'm going to be Chris Tarrant" Yes, we had our very own version of 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' the prize at the end was of course? Yep, you guessed it Spiritual enlightenment!

With our weekend racing by Monday came and the final session, after which we
(Continued on page 9)

Contents

Young Families and Adults Weekend	1	Conference Service - Address on 'Dust'	10
United Search for Divine Providence - 10	3	A Truly Spiritual Experience	15
Some Reflections on Swine Flu - part 2	6		

A Truly Spiritual Experience

It was a lovely sunny Sunday morning on June 14th as God's radiance streamed into our Church at Bournemouth.

Rev Mary Duckworth came to lead the service assisted by Rev Clifford Curry and Rev Gillian Gordon. We were please to welcome Mary for she had come to induct Stephen Thomas as Lay Pastor for the Eastbourne Group. It was also a pleasure to welcome Gillian after her recent illness.

During the very moving service we celebrated the Sacrament of the Lord's Holy Supper and this seemed so appropriate for such an important occasion.

Stephen read from John Chapter 15 concerning the vine and the branches. Mary elaborated on this, pointing out that if we seek the Lord we shall not want for any good thing. She also emphasised that God is love and so encouraged us to love one another.

Good wishes go to Stephen as he embarks on his new role in the New Church. Clifford paid tribute to his faithfulness.

Thank you to Mary, Clifford and Gillian for enriching my communion with God on such a wonderful morning. I felt the peace of our Lord within me during the service, a feeling which remained during the rest of the day.

After the service we gathered in the lounge for coffee; Mary enjoyed renewing acquaintances with old friends and meeting new ones.

Patsy Booth

Secretary Bournemouth Church

The session on Divine Providence on page 3 is part of a complete course being published in Lifeline for use by individuals and groups. It is also available online as a leaflet which can be downloaded and easily printed.

To find out more go to: www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Click on Resources and then United Search for Divine Providence. You will find an Introduction and Invitation to the course and the Session notes as they become available.

go so far as to say that it comes with the territory and is part of God's plan. This time last year I was reading several books relating to people re-evaluating church, what it is for and what it sets out to do and how. Much of this writing has arisen out of an awareness of the challenge to how church has been in the past posed by many changes in society. One of these books had a chapter entitled "Dirt". In it, the author made the point that when we define what is dirty, we may want to avoid contact with it, in order to maintain our own cleanliness. I find it significant that the disciples aren't told to avoid going into places where they aren't received. Similarly, Jesus over and over again interacts in the Gospel stories with people who are not "clean". If a church is going to be engaged with society at large, it will get "dirty" at some level. What is important is the way that we then also engage in the sort of looking at ourselves which means that the dirt doesn't clog up the way we need to work. What may be even more important is that the church will find hope in being open to having people come into it who we may find challenge us in one way or another. Another way of looking at this may be the idea of being "in the world, but not of the world."

From being involved in their training, I have had a chance to see Jack and Helen's determination to be engaged with the world at large in their ministry and I'd like to address a few words directly to them. I have witnessed your vision, your passion and your commitment. The day of your ordination is in some ways about outer forms, new forms of dress and a ritual. In some sense it is also about "being sent out into the world". There is an awful lot that has led up to this day that you also carry with you as this happens, much of which those who are here today may not see. On one level, ministry is about lofty aspirations and spiritual ideals; but it is not about "castles in the air". I know that you already have strong ideas on how you will "ground" your ministry and that you have been working on these before your ordination to translate them into reality. I have no doubt that in continuing this process you will find yourselves with "dusty feet" in some way. I can't predict any more than you can how that will manifest itself. It may be that part of this will be the desire you have to teach and to heal taking different forms from the ones that you have before you now. It may equally be that you need to stay true to those forms even when they don't initially have the results you'd hope for. There will also be other ways in which the dust comes to you, but I pray that you'll have the focus, the strength, the clarity and the love to shake it off. Most of all, I pray that you have a sense of the Lord's presence with you to be with you as you journey, teaching and healing, and that you will be aware of all the resources that come from Him to accompany you.

Rev David Lomax

United Search for Divine Providence

Session 10



We are admitted into interior things only if we can be kept in them to the end of our life in the world.

Although the Lord wills the salvation of all, yet our choice and cooperation are essential. (DP 221-233)

This Session is easy enough to understand, but its implications in our lives are very profound. Yet they explain much which often puzzles and worries us – e.g. we often bemoan the fact that the New Church does not seem to grow; in some places it is even shrinking! This section gets to the very roots of such questions and is very helpful in showing us how deeply the Lord is concerned and involved in our eternal welfare and freedom. In short, we learn that many people cannot respond to the doctrines of the New Age – this could actually cause harm to them! A doctor may advise us against taking certain medicines because of their side-effects on us. Equally the Lord withholds some people from "entering with understanding into the mysteries of faith" (True Christian Religion 508). It is easy to assume that salvation can be attained by some easy formula, like a direct act of Divine mercy, or some specific ritual. The Lord is merciful and desires our complete happiness – but at the same time He cannot ignore our free will. At that point we would cease to be human.

Section 1 (222-225) We may be attracted by spiritual teachings or mysteries purely as an intellectual delight, without in the least changing our way of life. In this case our knowledge remains purely intellectual, and in no way is it any indication that we are 'spiritual'! As usual, the Lord explained this very simply in Matthew 7:24-27. Please read it and consider the deceptive simplicity of this parable and its profound implications in our lives. However we need to start somewhere : we can't wait until we become 'spiritually minded'.

Section 2 (226-228) This is about a very serious subject: **profanation** – from which the Lord does His best to protect us. The reason for this is that if we

experience a sense of holiness and purity, and then turn against it, we destroy within us that sacredness and are in a worse condition than if we had never known of it.

Here is an example in our contemporary society. At one time virginity was regarded as a badge of chastity (Conjugal Love 503). Today, few think in that way because promiscuity is regarded as acceptable. Therefore such behaviour no longer creates a great sense of guilt. This is a concession to modern ways which seems unfortunate, yet it lifts a deep burden of guilt and unworthiness which might last our whole life on earth. The Lord knows that we cannot serve two masters. Please read Matthew 6:24-34. The reality of acceptable behaviour in today's society makes grim reading: yet the Lord is involved in not increasing our deepest anxieties and sense of guilt. We are not really responsible for the world into which we were born. Also, He knows our 'Book of Life' – even before we begin to compose it - and He disposes that good and evil may be kept separate in our lives as far as possible. He often withholds us from seeing the truth too early in life: if He didn't, our humanity might be irretrievably destroyed.

In 228:2 there is an important statement. The truths of religion which are taught in childhood are not really received personally until we can acknowledge them rationally and accept them in freedom. Therefore no child can be held responsible for what he has been taught in childhood. No person can profane anything holy unless he knows and acknowledges it as such. Millions today seem to be in that position. Very little is regarded as 'holy'. This, surely, explains why the New Church doctrines remain among the few. (You may look up Apocalypse Revealed 547, 561)

Section 3 (229-231) We are still with profanation, but more fully defined. Those who are atheists cannot profane anything Divine, because there is nothing holy in them. They may offend religious people; but we are dealing with the personal effects of profanation, not the social ones. However, those who acknowledge God, and act and speak in a pious manner, yet in their heart deny God and His Word, do a great deal of harm to themselves and are real profaners since they are leading a double life. Many examples of such a life have been coming into the news, revealing that thousands of children had been abused in religious institutions which brought scandal on the Church and religion in general. But in the work we are studying, we see that the Lord is equally concerned with the harm such people do to themselves, not just to their victims.

In studying DP, we are not sitting in judgement on others, but are invited to look at ourselves. Are we not all sometimes very close to undermining the holy values in our life, speech, entertainment or business? The dangers are clearly pointed out in 231 and many examples are given in a very practical way. Read the 7 examples carefully; it is so easy to say, "Well, that's not me!" Yet the Lord, when in the human tainted by a long history of evils, was never sure of His invincibility.

more about this. Many of the ideas that I'm presenting have been in my mind for many months, but I came across an article a few weeks ago which appeared in New Church Life, which is the magazine for one of our sister churches, the General Church and which is published in the United States, which has also helped me to develop them. The writer of this article was addressing the subject of conflict in the church, although she didn't introduce it as bluntly as that by any means. Most specifically, she was looking at how people seem to want to organise and prioritise the church in very different ways. Perhaps it's most important to say before going any further that she entitled her article "Hope".

I have often wondered over the past few years to what extent the fact that we within Conference are an organisation in physical decline affects how we do business with each other. I don't just mean the business of the Annual Meeting, although that may be part of it, but just how we are with one another. If we feel in any sense that we are "failing", how could that not be a form of dust on our feet? Whether we really are failing is another matter, but I want to look at how any sense of failure would affect us. I'm not saying either that we should react by focusing exclusively on what could be branded a success or to deny the struggles of decline. Perhaps we need to treat success and failure as imposters, much as Rudyard Kipling's poem, "If", made the same point about triumph and disaster.

What I wonder is how we can be honest with each other, in a spirit of "mutual respect", as the author of this article put it, even when we see things differently, in our attempt to gain clarity about what is happening within our organisation. Can we be honest about our difficulty finding a united vision for the church? Perhaps we need to do this, with all the pain that this involves, in order to have any sort of vision, which is surely essential for us to have hope. Another part of this article which has made me think very hard is the idea of the need for local churches to acknowledge their own individual situations and goals, as well as their strengths (and I don't feel it's necessarily negative to say weaknesses as well). Perhaps what needs to unite us is a sense of supporting and even cherishing each other in multiple visions and not a sense of a single vision after all.

It's perhaps worth reminding ourselves at this point that the disciples had a dual focus in their mission – healing and preaching. These seem to relate to me to the idea of the balance between love and wisdom. Surely this is one of the areas where we tend as individuals, and therefore potentially as groups within the church, to focus on one rather than the other.

To go back to our theme, we have a saying about "getting our hands dirty" when we are talking about getting down to work. If I replace hands with feet, I think it's worth saying that getting our feet dirty, even as a church, is inevitable. I'd even

(Continued on page 14)

whom we seem to be “out of synch”. There is nothing wrong with wanting to get on with people, but Jesus seems to present a very practical, almost matter-of-fact solution if that doesn’t happen – if you don’t get on with them, don’t dwell on it, move on... On a very everyday, human level that seems like very good advice, because we won’t always agree. But it’s not always easy to operate in that way, and perhaps we need to look at a slightly deeper level in order to be aware of why this is.

That level brings us to our sense of our self, or our “proprium” as we usually call it from our reading of Swedenborg. Imagine if I am talking to someone about something that is really important to me, let’s say, for the sake of argument, something to do with the life of the church. Perhaps the first thing to note in this situation is that I might have a true sense of the Lord in what I’m saying or I might not. Let’s assume that this is something that I’ve reflected on in a mature way and weighed it carefully. (I’m not necessarily just talking about matters of doctrine – we might equally include other aspects of church life, which still need to be evaluated in terms of how we bring in the Lord within them. We could easily relate “dust” to the idea of the “nitty-gritty”, the practical or “nuts and bolts” side of things). However, I can never be absolutely sure that I’ve got something right or that I’m presenting the full picture. I am liable to skew things because I have my own priorities or even prejudices. Perhaps the point isn’t even whether I am wrong or I am right. If the other person doesn’t agree with me, how do I respond then? I might retreat, not wanting to risk a confrontation or because I don’t feel confident enough to “argue my corner”; or I might be the one to go “on the attack”, determined that I need to say more in order to help (make?) the other person “understand” or even agree with me. If retreating or moving forward in this way aren’t the solution, what is? The alternative would seem to be to “stay still”. That doesn’t mean that we give up thinking or feeling what we do about whatever it is that is so important to us. To put it another way, we maintain our position, but without feeling that we have to “stick to our guns”, as a military metaphor puts it. Doing this is a way of making sure that the dust doesn’t stick to our feet, the dust that comes from the part of us that may feel a need to be right or a need to avoid conflict with others, that has to get our own way or even just finds it difficult to cope with uncertainty or there being different views. All of these are only examples of subtle ways that our proprium can drag us down but there are many more – dust is lots of tiny particles, but when there are enough of these ways that our thinking is “off-beam” they can certainly affect us. Perhaps you can think of how you react, the thoughts that go through your mind or the feelings that affect you, when you come across a situation when you’re not in agreement with someone. How do you feel that this part of you comes into play and what would help you to make a connection with the Lord so that you can “shake off the dust”?

We have perhaps already moved from looking at ourselves purely as individuals to thinking of ourselves in the context of the church, but I’d like to say a little

Read Psalm 30 which in the inner sense describes “The glorification of the Human of the Lord after He has suffered temptations, even the last of them which was that on the cross.” Today and every day we are in such a situation and must never be complacent. Meditate for a few moments about the Lord’s constant, yet non-intrusive presence which upholds us.

Section 4 (232-233) Another very important teaching about the subtle way the Lord gradually changes our selfish nature, which is not done miraculously in an instant (which would destroy our personality), but so gently that we do not even notice it. He does it via our love of self, which is our fundamental love and is essential to our survival. But the Lord can gradually introduce into it the love of use! A selfish teacher, doctor, politician may begin to enjoy his/her ability to be useful to pupils, patients or the country. His delight to be helpful to others, and in seeing them develop or get better, becomes the principal reward and joy. It is no longer anything that could be seen in terms of how much cash it brings.

This really is a very joyful teaching and very important in our money-centred world. Spend a few moments contemplating some happy and fulfilling moments in your life. This is no secret! They were those when you were actually useful (perhaps essential) to someone who needed you! I sometimes feel we could rename the book we are studying and call it, Handbook to Happiness! Read Matthew 20:20-28, it is clear that such questions occupied the disciples minds as well. Are we being instructed that we can serve others as the Lord does – ever with their happiness in view?

Yet this is not such an easy section to study - partly, because we are nearly always in a hurry to fulfil our present ambitions, forgetting that eternity is simply being able to savour the present without worrying about the past or being scared about the future. If we cannot live fully in the present we are missing the only opportunity we have. That in itself is a form of profanity. But this Session really faces us with the truth that the Lord is present and concerned for our eternal life and happiness. He does accept our choices, and if they are unwise and selfish He will always minimise the damage we may do to ourselves and others. But if they are the right choices, heaven welcomes us with open arms.

Prayers and Meditation

We have made use of several opportunities for meditation during this session, but you may like to use them again a few times in the coming weeks. The story of Jonah may be a useful one to read. He could not run away from his duty and was even angry that the Lord did not destroy the people of Niniveh. How little he understood the Lord’s universal love! Let us make sure that in this divided world we do not see only our side as being right!

Christopher Hasler

Some Reflections on Swine Flu

This is the second part of a two part article by Alan Bowie in which he reflects on the nature and source of disease.



Illness as spiritual defect

Alternatively, we could take the view that illness and disease are present in the natural world as the result of spiritual defects, not necessarily on the part of the actual sufferers, but in the world in general. Swedenborg wrote:

The reason sicknesses have a correspondence with those in hell is that sicknesses correspond to the evil desires and cravings of the lower mind, and these desires and cravings are the origins of those sicknesses, the origins of sicknesses in general being various kinds of intemperance and self-gratification, wholly physical pleasures, as well as feelings of envy, hatred, revenge, lust, and the like, which destroy a person's interiors. Once these are destroyed his exteriors suffer and subject him to sickness and so to death. **Arcana Caelestia 5712**

Some people might call this punishment for our sins, but this is not the case. The Lord Jesus Christ is a loving God, and it is inconceivable that He would punish even the most evil of us in this way. But how does this account for sickness in animals? We can hardly attribute spiritual defects to the animals that have caught swine flu.

In Swedenborg's time, bacteria and viruses were unknown. Illnesses were observed as effects rather than causes, and it was then quite logical for Swedenborg to attribute the causes to corresponding spiritual illnesses. It is certainly true that many can still be linked to spiritual defects, especially illnesses that are self-inflicted. Some writers also link viruses and bacteria with the spiritual world. In his book "Swedenborg Explores the Spiritual Dimension", Brian Kingslake writes:

Even physical sickness is the result of the misuse of freedom by somebody somewhere - though not necessarily by the person who is sick. If there had been no sin in the world, there would be no sickness Influences from hell are pouring into this world in the form of germs and bacteria, and into our physical bodies as cancerous growths and other morbid conditions. (page 102)

It is therefore conceivable that illnesses which originate in animals can be

We often think of our communal worship as being a form of "coming to the Lord". Does that mean that we "leave the Lord behind" at other times? The answer may well be "yes and no". Like the disciples we are asked to "go out into the world" and know that we are doing the Lord's will even though there is a sense that we have moved away from him in some way. And yet, he is still with us – how else could Jesus instruct the disciples to "take nothing for the journey" unless they were confident of God providing for them?

I want to begin now to look at some of the detailed imagery in this passage. The key image for me that I want us to focus on is the image of "shaking off the dust". I'm writing this in late June, so I can't claim that we can easily identify with the dusty byways of Palestine, as the long, hot summer that we have been promised this year has not yet materialised and the last few summers in this country haven't tended to follow that pattern either. Perhaps the closest I can come to thinking about this in my recent experience is remembering seaside holidays with the proverbial "sand between my toes".

Jesus is talking about our feet. (I didn't choose this theme because feet were going to be the theme for our Annual Meeting, but hope that what I have to say may complement what else we have focused on regarding feet this week). I want to share a little of what Swedenborg says about how we can understand feet when they are referred to in the Word. What he says varies slightly from passage to passage, but he basically concentrates on the fact that our feet are the part of us which is normally in contact with the ground. They are a relatively "earthly" part of us, but they enable us to move around and give us stability and balance. They represent the natural part of us, the way that the world tends to look without having a higher perspective. From this we can perhaps start to get an idea of why they might get "dusty". If we are in tune with the Lord, the lower parts of us are still in the flow of what comes from Him, they are "the basis on which things prior and higher rest", as Swedenborg puts it. However, we can easily lose that focus.

In this Bible passage, this happens when we are not welcomed by people (some translations have "received"). Even on the literal level, this may give us some clues about a deeper meaning, because we know what happens when we don't feel welcome. We may begin to feel unsure about ourselves, uncertain of what to say or the contribution we can make to a situation, especially if we feel it's our ideas which are not welcome. On the other hand, we may feel we need to overcome the lack of welcome in some way, by trying to win over another person in some fashion or convince them that what we have to say is right. The danger is, whether we go down the road of feeling that we must be wrong or that we are definitely right (and that therefore the other person must be wrong!) our feet are getting clogged up with dust because we're reacting to another person, with

(Continued on page 12)

Conference Service - Address on 'Dust'

Readings: Isaiah 52:1-10 Luke 9:1-6

"If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." Luke 9:5

I want to begin by explaining that what you read in what follows will not be exactly what was said at the Conference Service during the Annual Meeting. My pattern is to use notes rather than speaking from a full script and I intend to do this in July rather than just reading out loud what you have here. I hope this may also allow me when the day comes to adapt what I say according to the proceedings of the Meeting up to that point (and I also hope it may allow the Lord to give me new insights even as I'm talking). That brings me to one of the three levels that I hope to address in what I'm going to say. It seems to me that the Conference address is an opportunity to think about our life together as a church organisation and I want to share some thoughts about this. However, in order to work together we need also to be aware of ourselves as individuals and see how we fit into the group in that context, so I shall address this level first. Finally, some of what I have to say touches particularly on ministry, which I hope may be of value to Helen Brown and Jack Dunion on the day of ordination and beyond.

The reading that I have chosen from Luke is one that is often read in the context of ordination, as Jesus gives instructions to the twelve disciples, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't have relevance to each one of us. That's partly because we can say that each one of us is involved in some sort of ministry and discipleship. In that sense, we each have a role in "taking out" the things of the Lord to the world. That's part of the reason that I've chosen this passage, because of the way as a church we strive to do this and I'll come back to this more later.

However, the passage isn't necessarily just referring to how we spread the church's teachings, however important that may be. It's at least as much about how we embody the Lord in our daily lives, our actions and our words, how we behave and how we relate to and treat other people.

That comes over perhaps in the way that the disciples seem to leave Jesus behind. This is one of those many passages in the Gospels when I would love to have more details about what happened next. Verse 6 tells us only "So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere." A few verses further on in Luke than the reading we have "When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done" (v. 10) but that is all we get.

connected with *mankind's* spiritual illnesses. When animals are under stress to produce more milk, or to fatten up more quickly, they can be more prone to illness, just as we are when we are under stress. The initial outbreak of swine flu in pigs may therefore have had its origins in, for example, mankind's greed for more profit at whatever cost to the community.

Illness as part of creation

There is a third argument that links the existence of viruses and bacteria with the Lord's creation.

Everything that exists has evolved from what the Lord initially created. This includes mankind, the plant kingdom and the physical world about us. The Lord created everything to evolve because He knew that it was only by evolution that humans could appear, and it is only by evolution that we can exist in freedom in the natural world. The purpose of creation is to populate heaven with angels who had started life as human beings (e.g. **Divine Providence 323**). Everything that exists was provided by the Lord for this purpose, including all the things that are good for mankind, and all the things that are harmful for mankind. The reason for this is that mankind needs to remain in complete freedom to choose as the governing aspects of their lives either good and truth, or evil and falsity. If this freedom does not exist, any choices that are made would not be owned by mankind, but forced upon them. In the natural world, as well as humans and animals and plants and minerals, there are millions of different bacteria, most of them beneficial or without effect, but there are some that are harmful. The E Coli 157 bacterium exists in the gut of cattle and does them no harm, but is often fatal to humans. Other variants of the same bacterium are present naturally in human gut. The swine flu virus is virulent amongst pigs but until recently had not transferred to humans. If the bacteria and viruses had not been allowed by the Lord to evolve this way, the Lord would have broken His own laws of Divine Order.

Our physical bodies are not designed to last forever. In fact, recent research (quoted in the BBC's Reith lectures in 2001) suggests that our genes are programmed for reproduction and not longevity. This is perfectly feasible. As long as the human race survives - to continue to provide a supply of angels for heaven - the survival of individuals is much less significant. The Lord and His Divine Providence always act for the longer term and the greater good rather than the shorter term and to the benefit of specific individuals. We should not expect to live for ever. The Lord created the *spiritual* world, not the natural world, as the place where there is everlasting life, and where there is an ideal environment for angels in heaven, and for evil spirits in hell. We must expect our physical bodies to die at some stage. This may be sooner rather than later, as there are many reasons why our bodies die. Some of them involve bacteria or viruses which have evolved just as we have evolved as part of the Lord's

creation. Some involve our misuse of our own bodies, either through overindulgence in things that may taste good but are ultimately harmful to us, substance abuse, or by getting ourselves into situations of stress, anger or jealous resentment. Some simply involve our body parts wearing out with age and use.

Swedenborg tells us that we will all die eventually, even although we have led a faultless life:

If it were the case that the person was leading a good life his interiors would lie open into heaven, and through heaven towards the Lord. If this were so man would not know any sickness and would grow weak only as he approached extreme old age, until he became a young child again, but now a young child with wisdom. And when his body was no longer able to serve his internal man, which is his spirit, he would pass, without knowing any sickness, from his earthly body into a body such as angels possess, and so would pass from the world directly into heaven. **AC 5726**

It could not be otherwise, or nobody's physical bodies would die and nobody would reach heaven! Is anybody this good? Even Swedenborg suffered a stroke towards the end of his life; strokes are often put down nowadays to high blood pressure or stress, and he certainly had a stressful existence, travelling Europe in his seventies and eighties to publish his final theological works. Animals, too, are programmed for reproduction rather than longevity, and are susceptible to viral and bacterial attacks just like humans. Indeed, most animals have significantly shorter, more violent lives than we do, where survival of the species is the principal factor. Viruses and bacteria, too, have to evolve to survive. So the arrival of a new strain of the swine flu virus may simply be another step in the ladder of evolution, part of the natural progression established by the Lord at creation. Is this evolution at work?

Conclusions

We now have three scenarios for the incidence of swine flu which can be deduced from Swedenborg's writings. The first suggests that the hells are physically present in the natural world, and take great delight in causing illness and disease whenever they can break through, as they are constantly trying to do. But can we accept that the Lord will permit the hells to directly intervene in the natural world, especially as His laws of Divine Providence say that He Himself will not? Swedenborg writes - "The Lord reduced to order everything in both heaven and hell" **True Christian Religion 123:2** - suggesting that the hells cannot physically be present. If He did allow intervention in such a minor way as to allow a virus to take hold, where would it all end?

The second suggests that sickness and disease in the natural world all

correspond to mankind's spiritual sicknesses, and are all caused by these spiritual defects. This was Swedenborg's own interpretation, viewing the illnesses from effect rather than cause, as he had no means of knowing about bacteria and viruses. But now that we do know about them, is this an acceptably realistic view? Undoubtedly we do cause some of our own diseases by the choice of our lifestyle, but how can we cause diseases that are triggered by an external agent such as a virus?

The third suggests that agents like viruses and bacteria are part of the Lord's creation, and they have all evolved in the same way as mankind has evolved. Those that are now harmful to some groups of animals or humans have got there simply by evolving to survive and develop - in exactly the way that the Lord intended for all His creation, mankind included. But can we accept that the Lord would allow such harmful things to evolve? Or is this another case of Him not interfering with the natural world, which He established to form the seminary for heaven?

So who can we blame? We cannot blame God, as He is omnipotent, and loving. We could blame the hells, if we accept that they are physically present in the natural world. We could blame ourselves and the way we self-centredly manipulate everything for our own advantage. Alternatively, we could accept that it is not possible to attribute blame, but to appreciate that the world we live in is constantly changing, as part of the Lord's overall plan for creation. Whichever scenario is most comfortable for us, we can be sure that the Lord and His Divine Providence are present. While we all feel enormous sympathy for the families who have lost loved ones to the virus, we have to accept that such outbreaks are inevitable, as we live in an imperfect world that is continually changing. However, we can take comfort from the fact that the Lord is always available to us, helping us to cope with the world as we currently find it, helping us to improve ourselves and our environment, helping us to get to heaven.

Alan Bowie

(Continued from page 2)

held a service in the Chapel led by the 10 to 16 year olds, which was re-enacting the story of David and Goliath. This I must add was highly entertaining, excellently put together and enjoyed by all who watched. Well done to you all. The other groups then showed all the activities which they had been doing over the weekend, ranging from a fantastic map portraying the journey of the Israelites to the promised land to biscuit making and shrinking magnets baked in the ovens of Purley Chase. Then finally, a 'Witchabella', loads of goodbyes and it's all over - until November ... "Hooray!"

Stephen Jones