



All the world's a stage

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Lifeline

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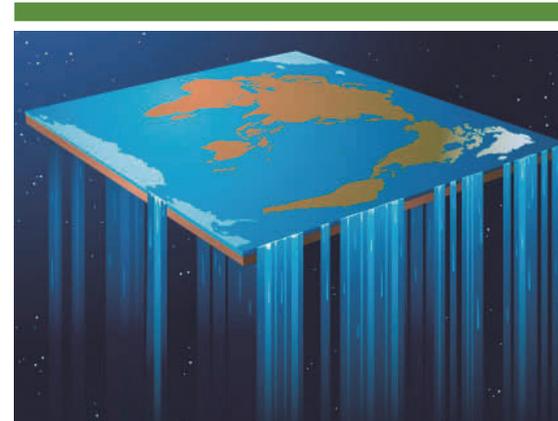
Editor: Alan Misson, 27 Woodland Way, Shirley, Croydon, CR0 7UB
Tel: 020 8777 5098 Email: alanmisson@btinternet.com

Distributor: Howard Turner, Kensington New Church, 5 Pembridge Villas, Kensington, London, W11 3EN Tel: 020 7229 9340
Email: howard.turner@generalconference.org.uk

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Lifeline



Flat Earth

or

Spherical Earth?

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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.

One Truth - Many Appearances

For many centuries man assumed that the earth was flat and never moved; it was also universally accepted that the sun followed an orbit around the earth. This was how things appeared to be and nobody questioned them. Man based his life on these assumptions and things worked out well for him. The buildings he put up stood firm, the crops he grew provided food, and the ships he built took him to foreign lands. The flat earth view worked well and great civilisations flourished on its assumptions.

Yet today we know that the flat earth view is not the whole truth but only an appearance. We have learned that the earth is a sphere spinning around on its axis and orbiting the stationary sun. These discoveries have not only brought man closer to the truth of how our universe works, but have also enabled him to make further progress in many areas of life. Yet can anyone doubt that there are yet further discoveries to be made? Perhaps many of our present working assumptions will eventually be turned upside down as we get even closer to the absolute truths on which our world is founded.

Yet, no matter how far man's knowledge may advance, I doubt whether we shall ever be able to arrive at the pure and infinite truth behind creation. No human mind is able to approach a full knowledge and understanding of such creative truth without being destroyed by its sheer intensity. God tells us that, "*No man may see me and live*" [Exodus 33:20], and the psalmist writes of infinite divine

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Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15

And although it doesn't seem quite as bad we can get things the other way round as well. We may be quiet, thoughtful and caring people deep inside, but feel that sometimes in life we have to put on a face that appears strong, ambitious and self-focussed. And the end result is that we fail to be true to ourselves. Do we know what our true character really is? Do we let our inner spiritual being shine through on the stage of daily life? Or is the character that other people know just a mask – a life unreal, a scene badly written, in which we must play?

Life is not just a dress rehearsal for the real thing – it is the real thing! It is the one opportunity we have to build an inner spiritual character that is focussed more on the needs of others than ourselves - to develop a real humanity involving care, kindness, compassion, mercy, love, wisdom, understanding, tolerance – and much more.

But what about the stage of life when we face the final curtain? Will it be as Shakespeare suggests?

*Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,*

New Church Teaching is absolutely clear – there is no oblivion!

*One life continues into the other, and death is merely a transition.
Heaven and Hell 493*

*Let anyone who wishes to be happy for evermore know and believe
that he is going to be alive after death; let him think about it and
remember it, for it is the truth. Arcana Caelestia 8939*

Whilst we are in this world our inner and outer characters can be different – if we have allowed them to be like that. But when the physical falls away at death our true inner spiritual character emerges transparent for all to see, without any mask or pretence, and we find our spiritual home. Our spiritual character is essentially built around what we love, because what we love is always at the centre of our being and life. And this is true whether our love is focussed more on the needs of others or more on ourselves.

Our spiritual home is truly where the heart is and because we are all unique individuals there is a special place for each of us determined by the content of our character and its love.

All the world's a stage

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,*

Shakespeare got it about right when he described us as having many roles in life - from being cared for as an infant right through to the last stage of life when we are often cared for once again. And in between there are the many stages of growth and development as child becomes adult and adult life unfolds. And the parts we play are very diverse. The obedient child leads onto the rebellious teenage years. The excitement and ambition of youth and the opportunities it brings leads on to the possibility of partnerships, families and responsibilities, with all their ups and downs, joys and heartaches. We become child, parent, brother, sister, husband, wife, partner, cousin, aunt, uncle, grandparent. Yes we certainly have many parts to play on the stage of life.

But what of our inner character?

Throughout the ages wise people have realised that we live in two worlds at the same time, a physical outer world and a deeper inner spiritual world. The problem is that we get so absorbed by the opportunities and problems of our outer physical world that we don't spend enough time on the spiritual world within us and sometimes we are barely aware that it exists at all. And yet the real 'us' is the character within – the part of us that is spiritual and created for eternal life. Whereas our outer physical life is just something we put on, like a coat, as we go through the stages of our life in this world.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the visionary Jesuit priest, wrote in the 20th century:

*"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience;
we are spiritual beings having a human experience"*

But the problem we have to face up to is that it is quite possible for us to present one character to those around us whilst our real spiritual character within is quite different. We can appear charming and considerate to people we meet whilst really inside we are deceitful and determined to get our own way by pretending we are something we are not. Jesus commented about this type of hypocrisy when he said:

truths, *"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it"* [Psalm 139:61. For the most part we must live our lives on the basis of how things appear to be and the working assumptions that we have drawn from such appearances. So we continue to look to the east for the rising sun, even though we now know that the sun doesn't actually rise or go down.

Despite God's revelation that the fullness of His truth is beyond our sight, many who hold religious views assume that the teachings of their particular faith are absolute truths from God. Indeed some people are so dogmatic that they brand all who disagree with their beliefs as heretics. As a result we have a world full of many different religious groups, each claiming to possess the real truth and judging all other views as false. The fact, however, is that all religions can only work on appearances of truth, for it is by them alone that something of infinite or absolute truth can be safely accommodated to the finite human mind. Hence we read that, *"There are no pure truths with a man, and not even with an angel, but only with the Lord. Truths with man are appearances of truth"* [Heavenly Doctrine 27]. The Scriptures of all religions are full of such appearances of truth.

These appearances of truth are really truths as we see them at the time and as we apply them to the particular state which we are in. They will work for us in that state by helping us to put off our evils and embrace a good life. People can make real spiritual progress working on such appearances of truth as, for example: *God gets angry with sinners; the poor are favoured over the wealthy; heaven is a reward earned by those who live a good life.* These and many other such appearances of truth can get a person started on the spiritual life. They work to a degree and by doing so move us on to the next stage of spiritual enlightenment and life. When this happens a greater light of truth shines through and we begin to see truth more clearly thus coming a little closer to the Lord and heaven.

It is because all religions have to work by appearances of truth that there is such a variety of belief in the world. Apparent disagreement, far from being a sign of the confusion of all religion, is a sign that God's truth appears in many forms according to the needs of different people. Behind all these many appearances, however, lies the absolute truth; this is in much the same way as the bright sun lies behind the many shades of cloud in the sky. It would be foolish then for any of us to decry the sincerely held beliefs of others, for such beliefs, though only appearances, might be working well for them. In fact the inner core within many different religious views is largely the same Divine truth. There may be many paths but there is only one final destination.

Rev Robert Gill

From the Paisley Newsletter

'God is Love' - a new website

Introduction

For the past 8 years or so I have been involved in the development of the Spiritual Wisdom web site. Spiritual Wisdom was conceived as a web site offering Swedenborgian concepts to those seeking spiritual ideas. One of the key guiding principles involved was the need to avoid 'church' and theological language so that the ideas being presented were easily accessible. The site has proved moderately successful with over 150,000 visitors from its launch in May 2005 to May 2010.

However over these past few years I became increasingly aware of the need to produce a second parallel web site aimed principally at those for whom 'church' and theological language are not barriers to taking on board new ideas. Such a site could present New Church Teaching in a more traditional Christ and Bible focussed setting.

I felt this was sufficiently important that about three years ago I reserved the domain name www.god-is-love.org.uk for this purpose with the intention of then proceeding to define what needed to be built. However it then proved much harder to start the process of producing a specification, so that the development could proceed, than I had imagined.

What was missing was an overall scheme for the site. In the beginning I had thought of presenting New Church Teaching in a structure like a book starting with God is Love and then proceeding in an orderly fashion through the teachings. Such an approach can be found in many places including True Christian Religion, The Structure of New Church Teaching by Alan Grange and Swedenborg Explores the Spiritual Dimension by Brian Kingslake. But I still did not feel it was quite right – the approach seemed far too dry and even scholarly! – not what I had in mind at all.

But after some time I received some enlightenment on the subject and a way forward emerged around the number twelve and the fact that there are twelve gates into the Holy City New Jerusalem. This led me on to think about what we might consider as the Twelve Key New Church Teachings.

Often when we are thinking about some problem in life and how to position it in relation to our understanding of God we are forced to go back to basic principles and see how these apply. So, for example, if we want to comment about natural disasters we may pull together ideas on the unconditional nature of God's love, on providence, on free-will etc and putting these ideas together we begin to see

Notices

Transition

On 21st May, 2010, Margaret Presland, aged 97, passed peacefully into the spiritual world. She loved, and was well loved by, her 3 children, her 8 grandchildren and her many great grandchildren. As her late husband Claud said: "*Never mourn for the guests of God. Be glad for us and be happy.*"

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Changes of Address Details

Madeleine Taylor 143B Long Ridge Lane
Upper Poppleton
York
YO26 6HA
Tel: 01904 270 347

Ruth & Steven Ogden 11A Craig Walk
Windermere
Cumbria
LA23 2ES
Tel: 015394 45828

Lara Nicholls Tel: 020 3441 8773
Email: laranicholls@talktalk.net

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NewSearch 4

NewSearch 4 was advertised in the April 2010 issue of Lifeline with an expected price of £20 from the New Church College. Copies have now been received from the New Church Bookstore in Bryn Athyn and the cost including packaging and postage has come out at £17.50. If you would like to order a copy of this very valuable software please send your cheques, payable to The New Church College, to:

Melanie Bennett
Administrator
New Church College
25 Radcliffe New Road
Radcliffe, Manchester
M26 1LE

think and act in certain ways to fulfil our professions, in order to earn money which buys all of our possessions, comes from the Lord God alone.

So God lets us use His stuff. We drive His cars and use His money to feed our families and live in His houses. And good or bad stewardship is a function of how we use and care for all the things God lets us use. How do we use our cars and houses and money and time? If we use it in ways which honour God - meaning if we support God's work and do God's will, then we are Good Stewards. This is where tithing comes in. Good stewardship comes first and then tithing is an outgrowth of it. If we truly believe that all we have is God's to begin with and that we are simply caretakers, then giving a little back is no problem. And we are able to give with a happy heart, joyful that we have been blessed with so much from the Lord and able to give back within our means. And when we give with joyful hearts (whether it is money, time, compassion, encouragement, love...) we will receive back tenfold what we have given out.

It is the promise that is stated in Matthew 25:29:

"For everyone who has will be given more, and they will have an abundance."

I would like to leave you with a short children's song which relates to this concept, and ask you to think about where you are able to recognise this principle in your own life. If you do see it manifest in your world, take a moment to stop and thank the Lord for all the blessings He has given you.

Rev Catherine Lauber

From the Derby Newsletter

Love is Something if You Give it Away

Love is something if you give it away
You've got to give it away
Give it away
Love is something if you give it away
You'll end up having more

Love is like a lucky penny
Hold it tight and you won't have any
But, give it away
And you'll have plenty
You'll end up having more

how God works in disasters. So I began to see the Twelve Key Teachings as those which really would come to the fore in helping shed light on life and which would also act as an introduction into deeper teachings.

I did not feel able to work on this proposal alone so I consulted with the ministry and a small core group volunteered to work with me on identifying the Twelve Key Teachings. Work got underway in May 2009 and slowly we began the first task together of drawing up a list of what might be key teachings and also how these key teachings might be further sub-divided.

All the work was conducted by email with some special web pages on the Lifeline web site being used to archive the work being done. By the end of September three rounds of activity had been concluded and there was reasonable consensus on 10 of the teachings and various options for the remaining 2. The second task, to identify three to five important elements or essentials within each key teaching, then commenced. This second phase continued through to April 2010 when a sufficient consensus had been reached on the Twelve Key Teachings and the most relevant Elements and Essentials to each teaching. At this point the core group agreed that it was time to move onto producing the actual content of the web site within the agreed framework.

Site Structure

The structure of the site is built around the idea of presenting 12 Key New Church Teachings to make, as it were, the twelve gates into the Holy City New Jerusalem.

The Key Teachings are:

1. Divine Being - How and Who God is
2. Divine Manifesting - How God is made known to us
3. Divine Revealing - What God reveals to us
4. Divine Governing - How God provides for our eternal welfare
5. Divine Trinity
6. Parallel worlds – links between spiritual & natural worlds
7. Human being – a person's nature and an image and likeness of God
8. Human journeying – a person's journey towards becoming human
9. Union
10. Life continuing
11. The Kingdom of God
12. Having a true concept of God

These are working titles only and may well change as the development progresses and the content is written.

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Appeal for Authors

My purpose in writing this article at this stage is to make an appeal for writers to come forward who would like to take part in producing content for the 'God is Love' web site. This method was adopted for the Spiritual Wisdom web site and it proved to be a very effective way of proceeding, resulting in a very broad range of styles and approaches to the subjects involved.

To support authors in this task a number of special web pages have been produced starting from a 'Support Home' page which can be found at:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk/godislove/support-home.htm

From this page you can look at the *Overall Structure of 'God is Love', Guidance notes for Authors, a List of Articles and Allocated Authors and Examples of Content.*

If you feel you would like to contribute as an author please consult these pages and then contact me on my usual email address (see back page of Lifeline). You may feel that there is sufficient information on these pages to enable you to choose one or more articles you would like to write but you may also feel that you need more information before committing. In either case please contact me about your interest.

I am very aware that coming into this project at this stage, without having experienced the lengthy debates of the past year, will be quite difficult. But please do not let this put you off thinking about writing for the 'God is Love' web site. After all, the more people that are involved the quicker progress will be and the earlier the site can go 'live'.

Alan Misson

July 2010

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

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

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 7,8

back in Nazareth. There is much in the narrative to interest the reader, with accounts of Jewish family life and the synagogues. For most of us who are not experts in this field, Anne Rice provides a rich tapestry of insights into the sort of life Jesus would have led, all the time with increasing intimations of his inner nature. She suggests a complex inter-relationship across the network of Jewish families that will provide Jesus with many natural contacts and links. His cousin John's background, too, is included.

For me, the author has written a superb account, wonderfully complementary to the knowledge we have of Jesus' inner growth. Inevitably there is speculation and invention, but all very reasonable and in tune with what lies behind the novel. There is a dynamism that harmonises so well with the inner reality.

Reluctantly, I came to the end, wishing the story could go on into his more mature years, which is probably where a good writer should leave you – wanting more! Inevitably, as I read I had been asking many questions, wanting to know something more about the author and how she had come to write this book. If you buy or borrow 'Christ the Lord' you, too, will have a pleasant surprise.

Rev Bruce Jarvis

Stewardship

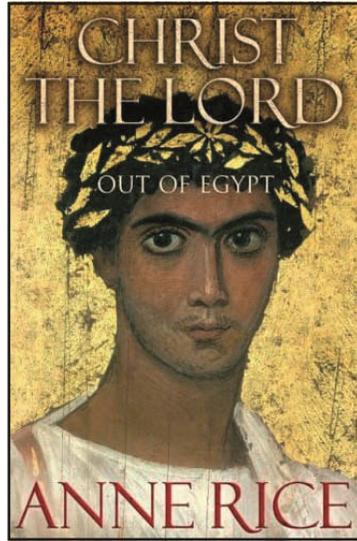
Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, Or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Isaiah 40:12

When people hear the word "Stewardship" they think about giving money or more specifically, they think about tithing. And tithing is part of stewardship, but stewardship is much more. In a sense tithing is a symptom of good stewardship, not stewardship itself.

Put simply - stewardship is the belief that all we have belongs to God and we are merely caretakers or stewards of things. The concept that all things come from God is a basic tenant of Swedenborgian doctrine. And the concept that the Lord is the giver of all life, and all truth and goodness, fits well with our understanding of the 'As If' principle (namely, we are to act 'as if' we are acting on our own, but with the understanding that all power to do good and discern truth comes from the Lord). Now, take that principle and apply it to material things as well. Think about your car, house, computer or television set. We don't really own those things either. If we extend the concept that all life comes from the Lord, and that we can do nothing at all without the influx from the Lord, then even our ability to choose what size television set we would like comes from the Lord. Our ability to

Book Review

CHRIST THE LORD
 Out of Egypt
 A Novel by Anne Rice
 Chatto & Windus 2005
 ISBN 0 7011 73564



A few days before last Christmas I popped into my local library to take out several books for the holiday period. Needless to say, very little reading was done but one has to live with one's hopes. Gradually, with oft-repeated renewals, I worked through the pile. Christ the Lord was the last, for no particular reason; it just happened to be at the bottom.

Memory becomes somewhat hazy, but I think I must have picked up this book from a display, glanced through the dustjacket, and thought, "Oh, that looks interesting." What an understatement. It has had me gripped and enthralled and intrigued. Although described as a novel, it is more a biography of the early years of Jesus' life, admittedly and necessarily speculative but still compelling.

As we often remark, the Gospels tell us very little about Jesus' childhood. That doesn't bother us too much, for we have the blessing of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem to help us. The volumes of Arcana Coelestia give us much unique and Divinely revealed knowledge about the inner development of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Doctrines are a sheer treasure house into which we do well to dip to develop our understanding of the Lord's road to glorification and our own path of regeneration.

The novel opens in sophisticated Alexandria, where Jesus and his extended family are living in exile, having escaped from Herod the Great's slaughter in Bethlehem. The Greek speaking Jewish community provides for Jesus' early education, and the male family members are recognised for their practical skills. News comes of Herod's death, opening the possibility of a return to Jerusalem in time for the Passover Festival. Already Jesus is discovering that he has powers not given to his contemporaries. It's all very puzzling. There is talk among his parents and relatives, and hints of something unusual about this boy, but it is kept from him.

The story progresses through a number of incidents in Jerusalem and Jericho, reflecting the greatly troubled and extremely violent times, until the family arrives

Past Present and Future

Until fairly recently an interest in history has tended to be regarded as a rather dry and academic pursuit that had no relevance to everyday life and such things as a history degree were considered to be useless. In perhaps the last decade this perception of history has changed radically; family history magazines have mushroomed and family history research societies have become very popular. Programmes on TV too have encouraged people once more to take an interest in the past. With the increasing prevalence of small nuclear families and present migratory trends, people have in many cases lost contact with members of their extended families and have very little knowledge of their roots. Tracing a family tree and reading around the history of places and times can help to build a sense of self identity and a sense of empathy with and understanding of the people and the backgrounds that give us present day identity. Our present lies in and is moulded by our past.

Different people with many varying motives drop into our places of worship from time to time. These days most of our churches are modern, cheerful and welcoming. Most of us try to do our best to be friendly and helpful to all strangers who come into our buildings; we try to answer questions about our church, explain the service, invite them to have tea or coffee afterwards, send them on their way well provided with leaflets or booklets and keep our finger crossed that they will return again.

Yet increasingly people come to our churches, knock on our doors or write to us or email us, not primarily for religious purposes, but for research purposes when trying to discover their family history. Quite often this request will inconvenience us and it is sometimes an effort to ferret through dusty registers in a building not on our doorstep. The temptation sometimes is to put off doing anything about the request and hope it will go away or at the very least to agree with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. I feel like that myself sometimes and I only have to go across the road to access the dusty registers!

John Presland	Head	Mar	31	Swedenborgian Minister	Widow: Clitherwell
Martha J. de	Wife	do	29		do
Jessie Pulsford	do	do	20		do
Total of Males and Females..			10	14	

Extract from 1871 Census in Derby showing John Presland as a Swedenborgian Minister with his wife Martha and her sister Jessie Pulsford.

However for many of these enquirers it is their first point of contact with our organisation and it is important that we do try to present an interested, positive

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and helpful image for we are judged by the people who come into contact with us in this way. Some of these enquirers really are very interested in finding out why their ancestors were attracted to what might seem a small and obscure organisation. Explaining which of our teachings might have been attractive to them and why, is a very positive and practical form of outreach. It is probably a form of outreach that will not bear immediate fruit but hopefully it might encourage people to go away and read about the ideas and beliefs that made their ancestors what they were and of course made them what they are.

One of the difficulties of helping people with this kind of research is that few people know very much about the beginnings of their own church society possibly way back in the nineteenth or even the eighteenth century. In the past the minister of a society would know about registers and records and where they could be found. Now many people are not aware of what records are to be found even within their own church. Only a few months ago I had to look for records and registers and no-one in that society knew where they were or indeed what they actually were. It would be helpful perhaps to spend time going through registers and records and listing them and then passing on the list to a member of the Library and Archives Committee or the New Church Historical Society.

The work of these bodies is of upmost value in preserving the fascinating and copious documentation of our past. To read about our past can and indeed should inspire and enthuse us also as we read about the tremendous work and effort that went into the early years of our church organisation. Many revivals and regenerations of religious organisations have occurred when people have gone back to rediscover the beliefs that made them what they were.

Past, present and future together make us what we are and what we will be. In 2010 perhaps we can rediscover the past, learn from it and value it in our present and discern and use its lessons to build on for our future.

During the Annual General Meeting of Conference at Swanwick Maeve Hawkins, the Assistant Convenor of the Historical Society will present a fascinating well-researched 'PowerPoint' talk entitled '*Purley Chase and its Owners.*' Hopefully the Purley Chase topic will interest people and perhaps stimulate people to visit and maybe change your future. Will you feel a slight frisson of fear or a tingle down your spine as you hear of the ghost!?

Pauline Grimshaw

From the Governing Council

May was an extraordinary month, not least because the Governing Council met twice. On the second occasion, in mid May, Purley Chase's wonderful azaleas were in full bloom and in all their glorious colours.

The earlier meeting was specifically to consider 2011 and life after our CEO's, Michael Hindley, retirement. Additionally our Chairman, David Sharrock will end his term of office, two Trustees will retire (an annual event) with the Treasurer, Nigel Sutton, also retiring in the autumn of that year. A 'wind of change' is blowing through the organisation!

Rev Christine Bank was welcomed to the second meeting in place of the Senior Minister who was not able to attend. Rev Christine Lauber was also in attendance. The agenda of about two dozen items represented many aspects of our organisation and the wide variety of work in which the Council and officers are involved. It was approached with anticipation and optimism following the earlier quite exciting meeting (- well, how exciting can the Governing Council be?)

Various areas of our church are now looking positively at the way ahead, a theme that Christine picked up in her opening words about the hand-over from Moses to Joshua. Kathy continued the next day with a reading from paragraph 37 of *Arcana Caelestia*.

Two really pressing areas became the focus for the meeting - the forthcoming Conference and the future mentioned above. On the first afternoon of Conference, those present will hear of initial ideas to enable our organisation to continue - in different ways and on a voluntary basis. There will then be time for thought and discussion throughout the four day event. In its efforts to balance finances within a very few years the Council's decision is that employees cannot be replaced. The essential work of the CEO will be divided up and volunteers are being sought over the next months. With many openings for offers of help delegates will be asked to widen the search.

One way and another there will be lots to talk about at this year's AGM and very interesting reports to think about afterwards for those not attending – watch this space! Let us all be open to change and ready to offer ourselves if we can. The Lord works through us in unexpected ways if we are open to him. Let us go with Joshua towards the 'promised land'.

Judith Wilson