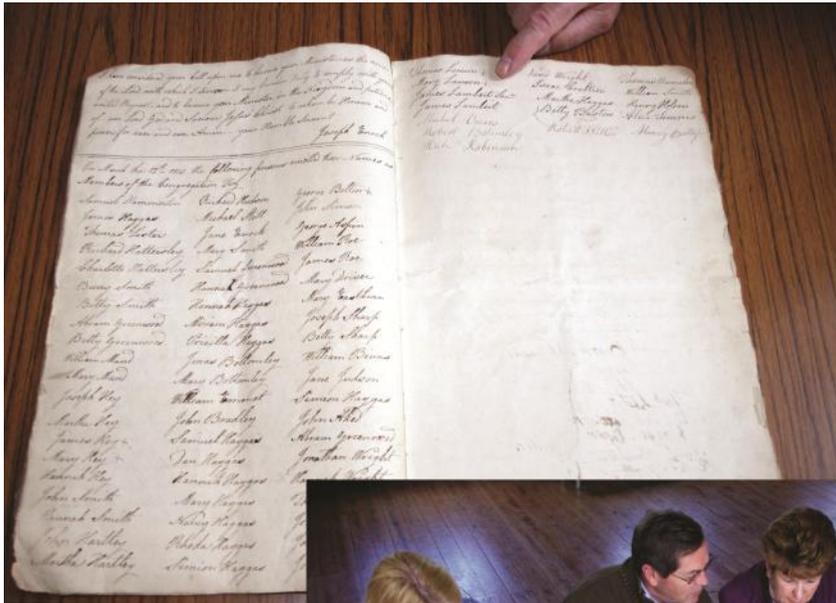
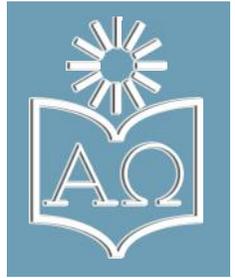


new church

# Lifeline



**‘Old friends’  
meet again  
after 198  
years!**

(see page 11)



In the inmost or third heaven especially, there are groves of trees, the fruits of which distil with oils; there are beds of flowers, from which fragrant odours are diffused around, and in the seeds of which there are delicious flavours arising from their fragrance, and the oil which they contain; grass-plots too which abound with similar perfumes. **Apocalypse Explained 1211:3**

## Lifeline

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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.**

# Conference 2013 - Reports

Conference 2013 has now been and gone, having taken place towards the end of one of the longest spells of hot weather for some time. Fortunately things had a cooled a little during conference week and the lengthy sessions in the meeting hall did not prove too uncomfortable.

As is clear from the cover of the programme, shown opposite, the subject for the week was 'Enlightenment' and this theme was reflected in a variety of ways through the sessions both in services of worship and presentations.

In this August issue of Lifeline you will find the Keynote Address delivered by Rev David Gaffney. It is a long address but very well worth reading so I have included it complete in this issue. If you would like a copy to print at home it can be downloaded from the Lifeline website. Go to [www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk](http://www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk) and you will find a link to it on the home page.

Detailed reports and pictures of the sessions of Conference will be printed in the September issue of Lifeline.

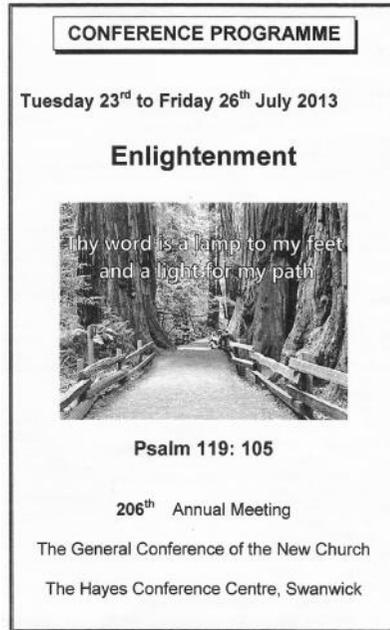
**Editor**

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*for in origin peace is something utterly heavenly. The angels inhabiting that inmost heaven are the wisest of all, and because of their innocence they are seen by others as young children. They themselves also love young children far more than even their forebears and mothers. They are present with infants in the womb, and through them the Lord takes care of the nourishment and proper development of infants in the womb. Thus angels from that heaven are placed in charge of those who are pregnant. [AC5052]*

This concept is one of the revelations of the New Church, and many similar passages appear in the Writings to teach us that the Lord is most intimately present by means of the highest angels with every foetus in an expectant mother. The teaching is quite simple: We, with our fallen heredity, are full of evil - both men and women: so for a time (and it could be for a year or longer) the parental heredity is as it were closed, so that evil spirits who are lurking around and trying to invade the new infant are isolated from the foetus and therefore can do no harm. But that is the time the angels have access to the infant in the womb and then to the child after birth. So it seems to me that these precious moments are stored up in the child and are the means whereby heaven can be close to the child. This is the heavenly heredity, not from our parents, but directly from the Lord through the angelic heaven.

As soon as the parental heredity begins to be opened, the evil spirits then have access to the mind and consciousness of the child and that is soon manifest in the child's behaviour and tantrums when, perhaps, he or she cannot get just what they want straight away.

So let us think of those first two years of our life when we are closer to heaven than we shall be for most of our earthly life. It seems such a wonderful mystery, and similarly when we can hold an infant at that age, are we not holding the sphere of heaven? Are we ever closer to our heavenly Father and Creator?

. . . or we say, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy."



**Rev Christopher V A Hasler**

cannot condemn us for making our choice where our love leads us. That is our human right and we are intelligent enough to realise what life would be like if we were full of lies and deceptions - such as are often used to avoid some awkward situation ! But if such experiences are sometimes painful, we know that we have only ourselves to blame. In a sense we bring upon ourselves our own punishment. What could be fairer than that? Nor is it an unknown situation if we are parents. Our children make mistakes and get into trouble - sometimes quite serious trouble. And we feel for them, would be willing to help them, but in the end it is up to them. But we still love them.

However, the Lord takes great care that He does not send us into the world unprepared and unprotected. This brings us to the doctrine of the 'Remnant' or simply 'Remains' which every child receives in infancy. It is interesting that we do not remember the first two years, even two-and-half years from our infancy. This is perhaps not so surprising because the mind of the baby at that early point is really quite empty: the baby knows nothing, except to cry when hungry, thirsty, cold or feeling some pain. Instinct makes the baby cry to draw attention. But there is no thinking involved.

It is therefore very interesting to read in New Church doctrines that the angels are very close to all babies. Consider this: we do not really inherit many good attributes of character from our parents, who are still usually young and have not developed the higher planes of their minds, which are close to heaven. Here are some quotes from Arcana Coelestia by Emanuel Swedenborg:

*At birth no one of himself possesses any good at all, but is wholly defiled with hereditary evil. Everything good flows in, such as his love for parents, nursemaids, and playmates, this influx being from innocence. These are the gifts which flow in from the Lord through the heaven of innocence and peace, and this is the manner in which they are imparted to him during early childhood. [AC1906:1]*

*Three kinds of goods meant my 'remnants' (or 'remains') – those instilled in earliest childhood, those instilled when want of knowledge is still present, and those instilled when intelligence is present. The goods of earliest childhood are those instilled into a person from birth up to the age when he starts to be taught and to know something. The goods received when want of knowledge is still present are instilled when he is taught and starts to know something. The goods that come with intelligence are instilled when he is able to reflect on what is good and what truth is. Good instilled in earliest childhood is received up to his tenth year. [AC2280:2-3]*

*The heaven through which the Lord imparts conjugal love is the inmost one, whose inhabitants enjoy greater peace than all others. Peace in the heavens may be compared to spring in the world which makes everything delightful;*

## Conference 2013 - Keynote Address

### Enlightenment

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light to my path. [Psalm 119:105]*

#### A spiritual journey

What wonderful words the good Lord speaks to us; words of comfort and reassurance. Imagine walking along on a dark night through unfamiliar terrain with a powerful lamp in your hand. What do you do with it? Perhaps you stand still for a moment and shine it into the distance all around to determine your general direction. Then you shine it at your feet to make sure that you are not immediately going to trip over a stone. Perhaps you step over a stone, then walk around another before continuing on your way - shining the lamp alternately ahead and downwards continually checking your direction and the potential obstacles before you. The lamp enables you to make your progress safely and in the right direction; a direction that will get you to your destination.

The journey is a journey of spiritual progress and the destination is moral wisdom which has heaven within it. [Conjugal Love 164 etc.] Moral wisdom is inextricably linked with procreating and nurturing the human race and thus the angelic heavens. This journey involves the engagement of all our faculties. The journey of life which the Lord wants us to make doesn't just involve walking the right walk; it also involves talking the right talk and praying the right thought. This walk of life inevitably involves interacting with other people and using the gifts we have and developing them. This is all done with the Lord's help, to enable us to assist our brothers and sisters to form harmonious communities. These are communities here on earth which are as much as possible reflections of heaven. "As in heaven, so upon the earth." Think for a moment about your own lives. How are you helping your brothers and sisters to form little heavenly communities? How am I? Have you any unhelpful loves which hold you back? Have I? Our journeys through the night will indeed involve frustration: difficult terrain, bad weather, robbers, wild animals and shortages from time to time of food and water. But as long as the Lamp keeps shining we can make it through the night.

#### Arise and trim your wicks - Enlightenment according to the New Church

Some of you may be familiar with the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew Chapter 25, This section has clear reference to enlightenment.

*... Then all those virgins rose up, and trimmed their lamps, ... [Matthew 25:7]*

The brightness of our inner lamp so to speak relates to our ability to perceive and see clearly what the Word means. To trim our lamps is to remove the debris of

misunderstandings which inevitably build up even in those people who are conscientious about following the Lord. This trimming of our lamps is done so that His truth can shine brightly for us and lead the way.

The Writings of our church say that: *... when a person reads the Word, and carefully compares one passage with another, he perceives then what is to be believed, and what is to be done; this does not take place except with such as are enlightened by the Lord.* [Arcana Caelestia 6222:3]

The Ten Virgins were awaiting the Bride Groom. In other words, they were awaiting conjunction, or a connected relationship with the good Lord. Five of them had let their lamps go out, but five of them had kept them filled with oil and trimmed their wicks so that their lights shone brighter than ever and they got maximum light from the oil they had; these were the wise virgins. They represent both men and women of the Church who from a position of humility before the Lord, had charity in their hearts and understanding from the Word in their heads. And from these, they produced good works in their lives.

The oil they had in their lamps would probably have been olive oil. Olive oil represents deeply seated goodness which we receive from the Lord. This in turn leads to the light given off from the burning wick, which represents a truer understanding of the Lord's Word so that we shall know how to act and what to do in life. We begin with a simple command of the Lord and try to obey it. As we are all different, the Lord brings different things before us with differing levels of difficulty for different people. But we need to be assured that He knows what He is doing.

To 'obey' the Lord is to do genuine good in life. Genuine good can only be done when our orientation to good work stems from Love towards the Lord and charity to the neighbour; and we are conscious to try to exclude aspects of self-aggrandizement. We need to genuinely give the Lord all the credit, even though we need to initiate the process and see the work through. This can be difficult; especially at first. The result is that the Lord can flow into us and implant a little of his deep goodness so that we then get a little bit of oil in our lamps so to speak. Just focus within yourselves for a minute! Can you feel the oil in your lamp? Can you feel a deep desire to do genuine good? Ask yourself: "Have I got a deep desire to do genuine good and to know how to do it?" If not, what is stopping you? The Lord will always tell us if we ask Him.

Edible oils and fats used to power lamps are also food for the body and represent spiritual food: the Lords deeply seated goodness known in the Writings as celestial good. This acquisition of deeply seated good from the Lord leads to a more inspired understanding of His Word, and this in turn to a better quality of applied goodness in our outward lives in the world. Thus a cyclic process is set up. The more genuine good we do, the more clearly we see and the more genuine good we do and so on. In our spiritual infancy, we need to act from obedience; later we begin to act from love. Having genuine and deep seated goodness in our hearts from the Lord allows us to be able to see the obstacles in our character traits which incline us to interpret the Word in a way which doesn't challenge us. When we can see these, we are then

spiritual world. Let us recall his teaching from the four Gospels:

Matthew 19:21: *"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me."* In Mark 12:27, the Lord rebukes the Sadducees, *"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* In Luke 16:19-31 the Lord uses parables to teach that our life continues after death, but adds a warning: *"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."* There are many references in John, but let me just use one, which is linked with the sacrament of the Holy Supper: *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* (Meaning, the last day of our life on earth!)

In the New Church we do approach the whole concept of God and of eternity from a new point of view, and though this a longish quote, it is fitting when we are considering the continuing of our life after death and so our relationship with the Lord. Swedenborg was meditating about the Trinity and the angels perceived this and started to question him:

*What are you thinking? Are you not thinking those things out of a natural light with which our spiritual light does not agree? And therefore unless you remove the ideas of that thought, we close heaven to you and go away.'* (Swedenborg replied, *'Please enter more deeply into my thought. And maybe you will see an agreement.'* And they did so, and saw that by the three Persons I understood three proceeding Divine Attributes, which are Creation, Salvation and Reformation, and that those are Attributes of the One God; and that by birth of the Son of God from eternity I understand His birth foreseen from eternity and provided in time. And then I told them that I had my natural thought concerning the Trinity and Unity of Persons, and concerning the birth of the Son of God from eternity, derived from the Church's doctrine of faith, which has its name from Athanasius; and that that doctrine is just and right, provided that instead of a Trinity of Persons there is understood the Trinity of Person that is given solely in the Lord Jesus Christ, and instead of the birth of the Son of God (from eternity) there is understood His birth foreseen from eternity and provided in time, because as to the Human in time He is openly called the 'Son of God'. The angels then said, *'It is well'*. [The Apocalypse Revealed 961:6]

Basically, life in this world is to give us the opportunity to learn something about ourselves and to live in such a way that we shall be worthy to enter heaven. And further to learn that when we are selfish and even evil, we shall not lose our life when we die, but go and live with like-minded people: people who simply do not fit into heaven and so could never feel 'at home' there.

Having been created to be free to follow our desires and choices, the Lord

## Earliest Memories

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What are our earliest memories?

It may come as a surprise that we do not remember anything before we were 2 years old, and often not till we were two and half. During that time we had constant attention from our mother, or nurse or older siblings. So why can't we remember some unusual event - whether pleasant or unpleasant?

In the widely accepted Christian doctrine about our resurrection it is believed that it will take place at the end of the world when we shall all rise from our graves when the last trumpet shall sound. Some artists have even painted this great event, but how many people can still believe this? Surely, it is impossible to take it seriously!

The New Church doctrines give us a very surprising answer, which is dealt with at some length in the works of Swedenborg. But before we go into any detail, let us remind ourselves about something which appears in the very early chapters of Genesis which describe the creation of the world and of mankind. But very soon we are into the story of the 'Fall of Man'. Let me however assure you that the early chapters of Genesis cannot be treated as genuine history. The world was not created in 6 days and it took millions of years before mankind made their appearance, but Genesis chapter one is really a parable of the creation of man - today, as much as in the past.

We understand that in the beginning mankind was gentle and loving and it took centuries or even millennia before selfishness became established as part of our normal character, and this led to deeper and deeper evil into which everyone is born today. In Genesis this is described in the story of Noah, who was instructed to build an ark and bring in his family and all the animals. But again, still it is a spiritual story which was taking place in the heart and mind of mankind, of which some could be saved. Why such care for mankind who had been going from bad to worse? Well, the answer is quite simple: We have a Creator who is our Father who cares for us and desires us to be happy in heaven, surrounded by like-minded people who are our brothers and sister.

There are many people today who do not believe that we have an immortal life before us. Somehow it can seem difficult to accept this. Life for ever and ever? And yet, when we have children, we are very much in the situation in which our Creator finds Himself, and we somehow cannot believe that our children will one day die and that will be the end of it.

The Lord certainly taught that when we die, our life continues immediately in the

in a better position to ask the Lord to help us move them out of the way so that we can see more clearly. This I believe is what is meant by trimming our wicks. Then the Lord's light within us shines brightly, illuminating our understanding of what needs to be done.

The Lord gave the written Word to Noah and later to Moses, the prophets and evangelists because since the fall of the Most Ancient Church, we cannot trust our feelings or emotions anymore. With the Lord's help we have to wrestle with ourselves, like Jacob did when he became Israel. The Word of God gives us conscience. Whether we like it or not, it is a fact of life that bad spirits try to flow into us with their desires and also with thoughts which corroborate them. So we need to form new wills by living from a new understanding from the Word.

This process is assisted by wide ranging knowledge of the Lord's Word and prayerfully seeking the Lord's guidance for understanding. We all have an inclination to interpret the Lord's Word from our own agenda and although it may not seem like it, this always serves the ego. We have a kind of spiritual inertia, which would prefer it if we interpreted the Lord's Word to suit ourselves, rather than change ourselves to suit the Word. This, I believe, is where the chief difficulty lies. We need to look inside, the Sufi mystic Rumi said:

*Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.*

Do you practise rising up and do you practise trimming your wicks? Do I? Do you diligently, honestly and with the Lord's leading, explore the Word? Is your love elevated above the love of material things of this life which decay? Do you go after eternal loves which do not decay? If you have good will in your heart, is your understanding lit up, does your understanding keep pace with it and confirm its choices? Can you distinguish between light and dark and how sure are you that you are right?

We are required to operate from genuine charity. Genuine charity means, living with a strong desire in the heart that our neighbour should go to heaven. This in turn leads us to ask ourselves, "How will my interactions with this person help them on their journey to heaven?" This in turn leads us to ask the questions: "How deep, broadly read and honest, is my knowledge and understanding of the Lord's Word? How deep and wide is my faith?" Our faith is the full complex of our knowledge and understanding of the Lord's nature, of heaven's nature, and what the Lord requires of us. Our faith is the key to our discernment and to how we relate and engage with people in many different situations.

Enlightenment is considered by many to be the fortune of a privileged few and special people, possibly imbued with a smidgeon of predestination. But the Writings of our church suggest that it is something which is available to the majority of us.

In all these things, don't treat yourself too harshly or you will find yourself on a treadmill or a 'work ethic' which in itself can contain aspects of self-aggrandizement

or asceticism or stress which can become self defeating. To quote the Desiderata by Max Ehrmann:

*... Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. ...*

Swedenborg tells us that it is not so difficult as one would imagine to live a life of heaven. This is what he says on the subject:

*It is not as difficult to live a heavenly life as you may think. If you have an inclination to do something which you know would be dishonest or unjust, think against it because it would be against God's Commandments. If you get accustomed to thinking like this and establish a habit, then you will gradually be joined to heaven. The more you are joined to heaven the more the higher regions of your mind are opened; and the more they are opened you more clearly you can see what is dishonest or unjust. The more you can see these evils, the more they can be dispersed because evils cannot be dispersed unless they are seen. The Lord has given us freedom to be able to work out what is good or bad, right and wrong. When we have made a start, the Lord brings to life all that is good in us, and causes us, not only to be able to see evils as evils, but to refrain from willing them, and finally to turn away from them. This is what is meant by the Lord's words:*

*My yoke is easy and My burden is light.* [Matthew 11:30]

*However, it is important to understand that the more we will and do evils, the more difficult it becomes to see them and resist them. Eventually we get to a point where we cannot see them anymore and we begin to love them and from the delight drawn from this love we excuse them and confirm them by all kinds of faulty reasoning, and tell others that they are actually allowable and good. This is the fate of those who in early youth plunge themselves into evils of various kinds without restraint and who also reject Divine things from the heart.* [Heaven and Hell 533 – paraphrased]

### **Ascetics, quietists and mystics**

To change the subject briefly and to try to throw some light on a broader concept of enlightenment, we can ask ourselves, what does the word enlightenment mean to the world at large compared to what it mean to the New Church?

The New Church interpretation of enlightenment as outlined so far, seems on the face of it to be different to how the world at large may see it but I think the essential elements of what Swedenborg describes in great detail in his Writings are also present in the lives of most of the well known mystics. I suspect many of them have followed a similar process in the development of their own spiritual stature.

According to the English mystic Evelyn Underhill, enlightenment is an English synonym for mysticism. Enlightenment of this kind is a term which spans many religions and ages and is associated with 'ascetics', 'quietists' and 'mystics.' The gloom, irrationality and ignorance of older orthodox expressions of world religions seem to have driven many gifted and conscientious people to 'break through' and

## **'Old friends' meet again after 198 years!**

A very unusual meeting took place in the Keighley Society in June. Robert Lawson, a descendant of a Keighley foundry man Thomas Lawson (who emigrated in 1815) met with Kathie Brooks, a descendant of Jonas Bottomley who was a fellow member of the New Church in 1815! Robert Lawson lives in the state of Maine and is also the President of the New Church Bath Society in Maine, USA. Robert is also a writer, professional fund raiser and amateur historian. He was visiting Ireland and England with his wife Shelia, partly to discover more about his ancestor and the environment he lived in. Robert's great, great, great grandfather Thomas Lawson joined a newly formed New Church in Cincinnati on his arrival in America 2 centuries ago, one year after the Treaty of Ghent, the peace treaty which ended the 2nd War of Independence. Thomas started the first iron foundry in America west of the former colonies.

The Keighley membership role, minutes and Sunday School records of the 19th Century are familiar to Kathryn Brooks, as she and her mother Marjorie have written history pamphlets about the church. Also, her family has been involved with the Church for 2 centuries and Kathie was also Secretary for 13 years, so Robert found her to be a great help. Robert also used the Keighley Reference library in order to locate the grave of Elizabeth, the mother of Thomas, which Robert found in St. Andrews (the Keighley Parish church) graveyard, complete with the 1851 headstone, which was paid for by her grandchildren in America.

His research of the minutes has now confirmed that the mysterious crosses, on the role by the names of key members of the 19th Century Society, indicate a group of locals who all decided to emigrate to North America at the same time. Their reasons for emigrating are not shown, but their desire to prioritise their own particular interpretation of the Bible and Swedenborg's writings may have been a significant factor. The importance of the records has shown that these books need to be preserved, as they are slowly decaying. There is now a need to start a scanning project, starting with a donation from Robert and Shelia to hire a suitable machine. They have vowed to return to Keighley next year to take part in the collating of the books and with the time consuming scanning of all the pages!

*One photo [see back page] shows Kathryn Brooks (on the right, pointing out the Lawson name to Robert in the 1800's Baptismal Register, with Shelia Lawson on the left. The other photo shows the 18-19th Century Keighley Membership Role, with Robert pointing out the names of his ancestors, which have a small pencilled cross after the name. Robert has helped us to realise that this cross identifies all those New Church folk who emigrated to the USA.*

**Phillip Brooks**

the ancient people of the Earth in their Golden and Silver Ages. Until we rediscover this lost spiritual science or science of correspondences, then the natural science we use can only really have a natural advantage to us.

The Lord Himself dwells within an internal part of us called the internal life and we have no sense perception (perception through the five senses) of this whatsoever. However, the Lord can flow down through our conscious natural or external life and access what is His in our memory. Bringing it to life and showing us by spiritual perception - His still small voice - the things he wants us to heed and live. And that which belongs to Him in our memory is anything which is from His Word.

So what is the future for a people who are distracted by the magic of science in a world that has largely sidelined religion? Well, all is not lost. Walt Whitman the American Poet said: "Swedenborg will make the deepest and broadest mark upon the religions of future ages of any man that has ever walked the earth" I assume he wasn't considering the Lord Himself.

Swedenborg was adamant when he said in all humility that the Lord had given him the teachings of the New Jerusalem; the perfect and holy city which is prophesied in the Apocalypse of John to descend from heaven. So we can rest assured that although things may seem a little gloomy at times that the Lord has a plan. He is working to establish a new church which will eventually be established in all its wonderful variety but with a common heart of love to the Lord and charity to the neighbour; based upon essential elements of His Word. The Lord is the redeemer of all mankind irrespective of religion. The beautiful perfume of His goodness and truth is wafting over the whole earth and His 'principles' are being imperceptibly imbibed by all and sundry. I believe that the Writings of Swedenborg are a necessary literary accompaniment to this process and artists and poets have already done a sterling job of spreading this knowledge. We in our church can only play our own tiny part in our time, but this tiny part is infinitely important to the Lord's work and adds to all the other tiny parts from around the world to produce the heavens in all their wonderful and interesting variety.

True enlightenment can only be achieved by holding in our hearts and minds a sense of the absolute Holiness of the Lord's Word, praying to the Lord for a true understanding of it and living a life in the world in accordance with this to the best of our gifts and capabilities. In doing these things, we will need to overcome egocentric obstacles which can be difficult, sometimes very difficult, as I'm sure many of you will recognise. And although it seems as though it is we that overcome them, we ought to believe that it is really the Lord working in us and through us.

**Rev David Gaffney**  
Spiritual Leader

find out for themselves. A situation perhaps summed up by Teresa of Avila with her comment:

*I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.*

This probably refers to such as the Inquisition and the like or their bosses who, perhaps in their zeal to protect those under their care, carried out deeds far worse.

It is said that there are many paths leading to the same place, like the many paths up a mountain. Many of the enlightened mystics seemed to have managed to coexist alongside the stifling regimes of their eras and make statements which would seem very much akin to New Church ideas. Evelyn Underhill tells us that: "Every minute you are thinking of evil, you might have been thinking of good instead. Refuse to pander to a morbid interest in your own misdeeds. Pick yourself up, be sorry, shake yourself, and go on again." This progressive and positive attitude seems very Swedenborgian; it includes a challenge to be cheerful come what may, review ourselves, genuinely regret if we have let down the Lord and the neighbour, determine to revise our actions in future, and then go on. Rumi as far back as the twelfth century, seems to instruct us to take heed of the meaning in scripture, and do good works:

*Why should I stay at the bottom of a well, when a strong rope is in my hand?*

And that enlightenment and faith increases as we step out and live the good life:

*As you start to walk out on the way, the way appears.*

The three mystics mentioned above, are all what might be termed 'people of the book', Christian or Islamic; people of the Occident, the West and whose belief systems have a commonality in that they can be traced back to Abraham. I once had an acquaintance who was a Japanese Zen Buddhist - an Oriental - who said he was once a monk in a temple in Japan being supervised by a Zen Master. During a gruelling week long meditation he had a mountain top experience where he says he saw the universe all at once and knew all things. He said that as a result of this he was enlightened, that he now had the Buddha mind. He had never been the same since. But he never came out with any profound statements such as those I have already mentioned above from the three western mystics (he may have done had I known him longer.) Nevertheless his life was a life of work and his output was his beautiful two acre garden which he cultivated himself and which was actually as close a picture of heaven as you could possibly imagine.

I wonder if people sometimes believe that mystics generally spend their lives in pious prayer, or meditation, or physically uncomfortable situations? But I would imagine that most well known mystics would have led active lives in the world alongside their prayerful lives. Swedenborg is clear that true enlightenment can only come from a healthy balance between reading scripture, a good and active life in the world and prayer. This is what he says on the subject.

*There are some who believe that to live the life that leads to heaven, which is called the spiritual life, is difficult, because they have been told that a person must renounce the world, must divest himself of the lusts called the lusts of the body and the flesh, and must live spiritually; and they understand this to mean that they must discard worldly things, which consist chiefly in riches and honors; that they must walk continually in pious meditation on God, salvation, and eternal life; and must spend their life in prayers and in reading the Word and pious books. Such is their idea of renouncing the world, and living in the spirit and not in the flesh. But that this is not at all true it has been made known to me by much experience and from conversation with the angels. I have learned, in fact, that those who renounce the world and live in the spirit in this manner acquire a sorrowful life that is not receptive of heavenly joy, since everyone's life continues the same after death. On the contrary, to receive the life of heaven a person must live in the world and engage in its business and employments, and by means of a moral and civil life there receive the spiritual life. In no other way can the spiritual life be formed in a person, or his spirit prepared for heaven; for to live an internal life and not at the same time an external life is like dwelling in a house that has no foundation, that gradually sinks or becomes cracked and rent asunder, or totters till it falls. [Heaven and Hell 528]*

I note also, that Carl Jung discussed the differences between Eastern and Western mystical practices and in doing so warns us in the West to be careful of some intense Eastern meditative practices. Some of these practices he says, are not conducive to the Western mindset.

### **The Age of Enlightenment**

On another tack, the Age of Enlightenment arrived around the eighteenth century. This is around the time when Swedenborg tells us that the Last Judgement occurred in the spiritual worlds. After this cataclysmic event, the quality of goodness and truth which flowed from the Lord through the heavens to mankind on earth, increased dramatically. Scientific discoveries began to accelerate and along with these, many of the old and irrational concepts of the Christian Churches began to be challenged. In fact, I believe all religions have been challenged and continue to be challenged.

This was probably a good thing except that the expansion of the natural sciences inevitably brought about an expansion of technology far in excess of the wisdom of mankind to use it. Weaponry and war experienced a quantum leap into a completely different league, and this along with our collective lack of wisdom had an inevitable effect. The old religions were thrown aside more than ever; perhaps by those who were embittered in the aftermath of war. What seems to have happened is that the decline of orthodox religions has left a kind of moral vacuum, as much of the control and responsibility possessed by religion, government and education transferred to other groups and the people themselves, allowing an erosion of some of the unhelpful dogma which existed within these old structures. At the same time, the lid seems to have been removed from 'Pandora's Box'. But it is hoped that out of this malaise of our current love affair with the materialistic side of life, a new consensus may arise from the people themselves about what religion should be like.

So the age of enlightenment has thrown many of the irrational aspects of orthodox religions into disrepute and at the same time opened up the horizons of scientific knowledge. However, our infatuation with the natural sciences (simply called 'science' in common parlance) has very little if any potential to develop us spiritually just at a time when we need wisdom more than ever. Mankind in general has entered into a love affair with science to the exclusion of the very thing which is capable of providing us the wisdom we need: good and true religions which make sense, give meaning to life and leave us in freedom.

### **The limitations of Natural Science**

Swedenborg said that the natural sciences cannot prove the existence of God or the spiritual realities of the afterlife. Hence the Lord removed the Israelites from Egypt, where Egypt represents the dream that natural science can provide salvation. All they can really do is lead to a more comfortable material existence whilst we are on the earth, but they have little power to help us develop spiritual stature, as the power to do this is from the Lord alone and terminates entirely in the domain of human interactions and relationships. In fact, the short term materialistic hedonism encouraged by technology erodes our spiritual stature if anything and puts pressure on our natural resources. Another problem with researching the natural sciences is that where it has been disconnected from religion, scientific researchers tend to attribute success to themselves as opposed to the Higher Mind and thus can have a tendency to become egocentric; which is spiritually dangerous. Having said all that, there can be many advantages of technology which can assist our spiritual progress but only to my mind, when they are shackled to wisdom. The communication power of the internet and green energy come immediately to mind. And the word wisdom, in its true sense, always implies/includes a sense of the Divine.

Swedenborg tells us that it is only spiritual science which can really help us spiritually.

*Thought from the eye closes the understanding, but thought from the understanding opens the eye. [Divine Love and Wisdom 46]*

In other words, to try to prove spiritual things from observations of material things per se is useless, the spiritual world is a discrete degree removed from the material world and so there is no continuous relationship with it - only correspondence. Faith can only be derived by gaining an understanding of the Word and confirming our thoughts by correspondence with the processes of natural or material sciences.

For instance, we can study a particular type of tree with the methods of natural science, and may by doing so, develop a variety which produces better fruit to eat and timber to build our houses with. But we need to understand that spiritually, a tree represents a person, the fruit, goodness in a person and timber, wisdom leading to spiritual stature. Also that each of the steps of the fairly complicated scientific process we used to develop the new species represents the steps of a series of spiritual processes we need to impose upon ourselves in order for us to develop goodness, and wisdom. This, according to Swedenborg, was the chief education of