



Autumn Studies

A young-at-heart group of ten senior citizens (see picture above) joined Rev Christine Bank at Purley Chase for the Autumn Studies week in September. With ages varying from 'in my forties' to a couple of nonagenarians, the group could have been expected to take things easy over the five day period; but this was not to be. Two study periods in the mornings preceded 'free time' afternoons and 'sharing time' evenings - all interspersed by meals and coffee/tea breaks to keep any possible flagging spirits going.

(Continued on page 15)

Lifeline

Lifeline is published in the first week of the month by the General Conference of the New Church. Articles and notices should reach the editor by the end of the second week of the month prior to publication.

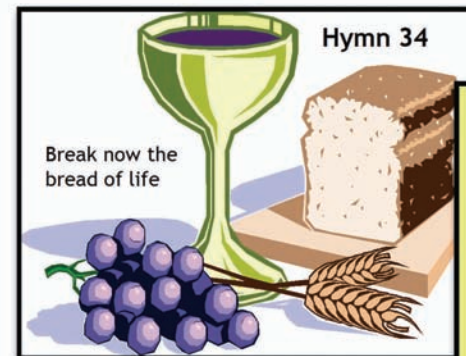
Editor: Alan Misson, 27 Woodland Way, Shirley, Croydon, CR0 7UB
Tel: 020 8777 5098 Email: alanmisson@btinternet.com

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

ISSN 0308-3624

new church

Lifeline



Hymn 34

Break now the
bread of life

Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!
fruit and crops are gathered in
safe before the storms begin:

A new commandment
I give unto you,
that you love one another
as I have loved you,
that you love one another
as I have loved you.



Hymn 271

Make me a channel of your peace

Hymns for PowerPoint

(see page 3)

November 2009

Number 379

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

“His mercies never come to an end”

Living, as we do, in a sad and troubled world, many people find it difficult to believe in a God of mercy. How can we square the existence of such a God with the hunger that so many millions suffer, with the terrible diseases that still ravage the human race, or with the ruthless violence and death inflicted on the innocent by terrorists and warmongers? How can a merciful God stand by and do nothing whilst such abominable evils afflict His people?

I have to agree that a cold-hearted God who stood aloof from His people's sufferings would be a very difficult God to love, respect and believe in. I do question, however, whether this common perception of God bears any resemblance to the reality of what our God is actually like. Perhaps we should remind ourselves of some lovely words that shine out from one of the saddest books of the Bible.

The book of Lamentations is full of heart-breaking poems recalling the cruel destruction of Jerusalem and its people by the Babylonians. Yet it is in the middle of this reflection on human trauma and suffering that suddenly we are reminded that: -

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness."
Lamentations 3:22

(Continued on page 3)

Contents

"His mercies never come to an end"	2	Committee for Auxiliary Ministry	12
Hymns for PowerPoint	4	In Memory - Lady Yvette Walter	13
United Search for Divine Providence - 13	5	From the Writings ...	15
The shrinking church	8	Autumn Studies	16

For the current issue of Lifeline, back issues and other resources visit:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

From the Writings ...

The angelic spirit came in with me. I mentioned what I had heard from the two angels about love and wisdom, and goodwill and faith. The angelic spirit said, "Did they not also mention a third element?" "What third element?" I asked. The angelic spirit answered, "Good, useful action. Love and wisdom without good, useful action are nothing. They are only conceptual entities. They do not become real until they exist in usefulness. Love, wisdom, and usefulness are three things that cannot be separated. If they are separated, none of them is anything. Love is nothing without wisdom, but in wisdom it is formed for something; the something that love is formed for is usefulness. Therefore when love exists in usefulness through the help of wisdom, it really exists, because it becomes actual."

From a memorable occurrence related in **True Christian Religion 387:3**

(Continued from page 16)

Matins and vespers, led by members of the group, as well as the leader, had a varied content including some spoken as well as sung hymns. The focus of the study time was 'Prayer and Praise' and everyone was able to contribute to the lively and informative discussion on the various aspects of the subjects presented by Christine, even if a couple of the participants tended to hog the majority of the debate.

The free afternoons provided an opportunity for two car-loads to visit Coventry, with the majority spending time in appreciation of the cathedral and its ruined predecessor. Differences of opinion about routes led to some anxious moments, but all returned safely to Purley, even if a late meal was called for in some cases! Other afternoons were spent walking in the local environs and absorbing the wonders of the local Garden Centre - a place where plants and gardening accoutrements seemed to be almost an afterthought in the layout of the site. Pleasant evenings were spent visiting the Antarctic, wondering about the place names in group members' addresses, and reminiscing about 'church buildings we have visited'; all before retiring to the lounge for a night-cap.

Autumn Studies for 2010 has already been fixed - 4th to 8th October - with all current members agreeing to participate if possible. If there are any others who fancy a relaxing, friendly, talkative few days with like-minded folk from around the church, this is the place to be. We look forward to seeing you there next year.

David Friend

(Continued from page 13)

talents in the stained-glass windows above the altar in the sanctuary, for it was Lady Yvette, as she was known to members of the congregation, who designed the portrayal of The Tree of Life in the round, central window. She it was also who for more than half a century produced the beautiful arrangements of flowers that caught worshippers' eyes as they entered the church on Sunday mornings, the flowers coming from her own attractive garden. And with her sweet singing voice she helped us all 'to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'.

Members of the New Church in Mauritius will remember Lady Yvette however not only for her artistic talents but also for her sound knowledge of the church's teachings and for her endeavours to make these known to others. The implantation of that knowledge began when she was young, that is, when members of the Toolsey family joined the New Church, or rather La Nouvelle Eglise, in Mauritius. She learned much as a young person from the pastor Maurice de Chazal, and from studying for the Swedenborg Society's examinations in doctrine, which I believe she passed with distinction. In later years she was a regular attender at doctrinal classes, and when there was no minister in Mauritius to lead them she helped to maintain regular meetings at which folk read together one of the books from which the church draws its teachings. And she was not afraid to impart what she knew to others, even to clerics of other denominations!

Yvette Toolsey was the oldest of five children, three of whom - two sisters and an only brother - passed on before her into the spiritual world. When in London she usually worshipped with the congregation meeting for thirty odd years at North Finchley and after that at Greenhill, where her third sister and her brother-in-law, Arlette and Norman Pettersen, are regular attenders. It was appropriate therefore that on 20 September members at Greenhill, along with a few other folk having Mauritian connections, commemorated the life and work of Lady Walter.

Her funeral service held in the Curepipe church in Mauritius, which was led by the recognised lay-preacher Clifford Phanjoo, was attended by people with whom she had been variously linked during her long life. The present Prime Minister, Mr Navin Ramgoolam, was among those who came to pay their respects. After the service Yvette's body was laid to rest in Reduit, alongside that of Sir Harold, whose father had in the past been the Rector of the Anglican church there.

Yvette's earthly life of service – in national and local government, in education, and in church affairs – sprang from her understanding of the religious teachings she had come to know and love more and more. According to those very teachings she will have now been reunited with family and friends who entered the spiritual world ahead of her. Recently, when she became frail and was unable to get out and about, she wanted so much to be with her beloved Harold. Let us rejoice that they are reunited in another dimension of life, where new fields of service to their God and King await them.

Rev John Elliott

Even in the midst of human suffering God's mercy is at work. We see it in the simple things that we usually take for granted. The sun still rises and the birds sing; the stars still shine in the night sky and the flowers blossom; the four seasons continue to come round in their sequence and there is enough food grown on earth to feed everyone if we only had the will to distribute it fairly. Can we not see God's mercy at work in His preservation of creation despite the way in which we often abuse and deface it? He could so easily turn His back on us and snuff out our lives, but He continues to sustain us as human beings.

His mercies also continue through people. For every bad person in the world there are many good ones. Their loving kindness goes large unreported and yet their care for others, especially their care for the suffering folk around them, is a tangible expression of the mercy of God. If it were not for God at work in their lives they would have neither the resources nor the will to help those-in need. Such human kindness in the face of terrible evils is of God's mercy.

That mercy is also to be seen in God's care for our spiritual life through even the darkest days. No matter what evils happen to us externally they cannot destroy us spiritually. In His mercy God preserves our spiritual faculties of freedom and reason within, enabling us to reject the temptation to repay evil with evil and to choose instead thoughts, words and deeds that accord with the Gospel. But it is because God must also preserve the spiritual faculties of all other people that, from their choices, evils can arise in our world for a time, often inflicting cruelty and suffering on the innocent.

However, God in His mercy uses those suffering experiences to strengthen what is heavenly within us: -

"Those who have become alienated from truth and good, as the spirits who bring about temptations have, intend nothing but evil. But the Divine turns that evil into good, in accord with order existing from eternity; and life is thereby imparted to those governed by the truths of good"
Arcana Caelestia 6574:3

Hence God mercifully provides that every experience we live through, no matter how bad, can be turned to the benefit of our spiritual life. This mercy is largely hidden and often forgotten but it is real and of great significance. Without it our life would be nothing but bleak darkness from now until to eternity.

God's mercy never ceases. Despite our waywardness He bestows a thousand acts of mercy, both natural and spiritual, upon us each day. If we were to stop and count them we would be astonished at how blessed we actually are and how totally horrible and unbearable our world and life would be without Him.

Rev Robert Gill

Hymns for PowerPoint

With an increasing number of churches using digital projection facilities for worship and other events there is a growing demand for resources to support this use of technology.

One of the most popular uses is the projection of hymns during a service.

It is a common experience that when hymns are projected singers look up rather than down into their hymn books and the singing is much improved. But it also frees up the body to move with the hymn singing perhaps with the raising of hands and other arm movements. This can be particularly useful with the 'activity' songs used with younger children.

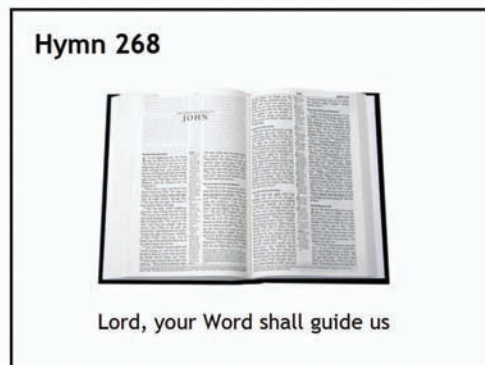
The problem is that anyone who wants to use hymns in this way has to copy the words from the hymn book into PowerPoint or StarOffice Impress or whatever other software is being used. To help get round this problem a new resource is now available on the Lifeline web site which provides for easy downloading of hymns to your computer. Once downloaded the material can be altered in any way you wish to suit your style. So far just 42 of the 461 hymns in Songs for Worship have been put on the web site. Some of the hymns are words only, some have pictures on the first slide and some have pictures as backgrounds. The hymns added so far have been prepared by Rev Rita Russell and myself but I would be delighted to receive hymns from anyone who has prepared them for digital projection in any format so that they can be added to the site and thus build up a useful digital library for worship leaders to dip into.

To find this new resource go to: www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Then click on the Resources button and on that page click on PowerPoint Hymns. Then just click on the hymn of your choice to download it to your computer. All the hymns are stored in Microsoft PowerPoint 2003 format but if you are using StarOffice Impress on your computer the files should still download correctly.

Please make use of this resource and please let me have your hymns to add to the library. Other popular hymns, not in Songs for Worship, will also be added in due course.

Alan Misson



In Memory

Lady Yvette Walter

Lady Walter passed into the spiritual world on 7 September, in her ninety-third year. Many of the million or more people living in Mauritius, and perhaps even more Mauritians scattered around the world, will remember her as the wife of the lawyer and politician Sir Harold Walter. Quite a number will also have known her as a school-teacher, and some as an active member of the New Church in that small country in the Indian Ocean.

After being elected to the Mauritian parliament, Sir Harold served in the government of the country soon after it gained independence in 1968; and it was for his service to his country, which was now a member of the British Commonwealth, that he was knighted by the Queen. He was to become deputy Prime Minister, though I think he is remembered more by Mauritians as the government minister responsible for the construction of the motorway that runs from the airport in a more or less south-to-north direction through most of the island. In all his political activities in and outside of parliament and government he was lovingly supported by his wife, for whom he acquired the car number-plate Y1.



Lady Yvette Walter
Picture copyright Judy Elliott

Indeed it was political activities that first brought them together. How fitting therefore that, according to a report I've heard, a public hospital is to be named after them both. After his party was voted out of office and he lost his seat in the Mauritian parliament Sir Harold returned to the work of a lawyer, and while in Mauritius my wife and I have met individuals – notably taxi-drivers, it seems to us - who testified to the kind ways in which he'd helped them.

Lady Walter also made her own contribution to the government and welfare of the people of Mauritius, for she served for many years on what we in UK would refer to as the town- or borough-council of Curepipe. Furthermore she was its chairman for some of that time. Yet it was in her work as a teacher at St Andrews, the Anglican day-school in Rose Hill, that she was to have an influence on so many lives, on staff as well as pupils. They will remember her as a lovely lady who possessed artistic talents and encouraged others to develop theirs.

People who visit the New-Church place of worship in Curepipe can see evidence of those

(Continued on page 14)

the old church. There are many Swedenborgian principles such as life after death, angels and conjugal love that are attractive to people who are seeking spirituality but who eschew Sunday worship. Perhaps we should be making principles like these more widely known rather than trying to put people in pews on Sunday mornings.

In other words, in the 222 years since the first Conference and 252 years since the Last Judgment of 1757, have we got it wrong? Did Michael Stanley have a point?

Think about it.

Alan Bowie

Committee for Auxiliary Ministry Service Plans by Rev Christine Bank

CAM is very pleased to publish the first collection of eight service plans produced by Rev Christine Bank. They include introductions, children's presentations, talks, prayers and suggestions for hymns. Worship Leaders may feel free to adapt them to incorporate their own ideas and style.

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

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

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

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

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you;
moon and stars pour their beaming light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, the light of the world, to you.

United Search for Divine Providence



Session 13

The Divine Providence is equally with the evil and with the good.

The Divine Providence is at work in the smallest details everywhere, not only with the good but also the evil: but it is not in their evils! (DP 285-307)

This Session is very challenging, but if you persevere it will enable you to know what exactly "makes you tick". No school of psychology or psychiatry has such deep insights unless it knows something of how the Lord interacts with and sustains our mind. You will be amazed how constant His presence is in your whole being.

Section 1 (287-294) Please begin by reading the whole chapter of Genesis 3 – the story of the Fall. How easy it is to dismiss this story with a quip or some cynicism and move to another subject! After all, there are plenty of things to talk about: Rising prices, sporting results, goings on in Parliament. But this session, more than any other, helps us to step back from our normal, daily sensations and to see what is really going on within us: "I smell a rose and I am delighted with it! This is my sensation and it is real to me; I can analyse it, describe it." And yet, the odour is not our property. It flows in from outside, as does every other sensation, whether of light, music or taste. All of these are the property of things outside of us. Even thoughts, which we believe are entirely our own, flow in from the spiritual world and stimulate our mind. Genesis 3 shows that we are constantly receiving sensations from outside and mostly, they are trying to take control of our life if we give in to them thoughtlessly. We need to understand this and to be on our guard. Even our inner world is not our own and we have to learn to recognise the serpent's voice with its alluring promises. And no, it is no good hiding behind a tree, hoping that God will not see us or forget about us!

This is the difficult lesson we need to learn: the Lord is universally present in everything of our mind. Without His constant presence we simply would not be.

Angels freely acknowledge this and rejoice in this certainty. Evil spirits deny it completely and believe that their life and thoughts are completely their own. But in a way, that is how the Lord wants us to feel: Free in our body, free in all our sensations and thoughts, because if we realised and felt how completely we depend on the Lord, we would feel enslaved and life would have no real joy in it. Yes, it is something of a contradiction, but try to recognise how quickly our sensations and thoughts can change. As if we moved from one room into another where completely different music is being played. All the time we are at the receiving end of influences from the spiritual world, but we have to choose which to accept or reject.

Section 2 (295-296) A short, but important section on how the hells continually try to control us, mainly by letting us feel that their influences are delightful. Think of pornography – what a hold it can have over some people because it all seems a bit of harmless fun. But if we are addicted to some of these things, and enter the spiritual world, the silken cords of interest become heavy chains which drag us lower and lower. This Session teaches us to recognise the danger and asks us to distance ourselves from such sweet titillations while it is still possible. In fact, we are told that the Lord permits us to be aware of such things, so that we shall reject them before we get addicted!

Section 3 (297-298) This is an important section on **atheism** – very much in evidence in our society, so it is well to study these two numbers carefully to see where the attraction lies. One is to argue that intelligent people can think for themselves, and do not need to listen to silly old stories about fumbling God – whom no one has seen! But we are warned that a person is such as he/she is interiorly. And as we saw, the hells are doing their utmost to involve us in worldly ideas and values. The Lord and the angels influence us towards loving our neighbour and developing spiritual values. This battle will not go away! Hells will always try to lead us towards materialism and selfish and sensuous pleasures.

Section 4 (299-307) Read 299 with care, because this is about your mind and the implications are simply vast! In this Section, I invite you to do some reading in the Word (you may need to take several days over it). If your experience is the same as mine, you may come to the conclusion that although the work we are studying (DP) has some amazingly new insights into the way the Lord's Providence reaches towards us, yet when you turn to the Word itself you may equally explain, "But it is all so clearly described in the Prophets and Psalms!" And somehow, when we understand it, we realise that the Lord's words have their own power, but the Writings help us to understand its personal implications more deeply. So, as an experiment, read Isaiah 55 and note how closely it resembles 299. The Lord has not changed His longing to lead us to heaven in the least. The same desire comes through. A similarly lovely passage is in Jeremiah 29:8-14 in which the false prophets are the atheists of our day.

If this is the case, maybe the Clowesian model is more appropriate. What have we to thank Clowes for?

- *The Establishment and the Individual* - Clowes correctly recognised that the spread of the Swedenborgian ideas has to take place not via the existing establishment but through individuals. They are the new wineskins into which new wine is poured.
- *The New Church around Manchester* - He was not to know it at the time - indeed, he would have implacably opposed it - but many of the groups formed by Clowes in his travels amongst the towns and villages around Manchester would progress to setting up their own churches and church buildings, some of which are still in existence today.
- *Bringing Swedenborgianism to a wider audience* - He realised that Swedenborg's books would have greater impact in English, and started enthusiastically translating them from the Latin. Swedenborg's ideas on social justice were very popular in the Lancashire mills.

However, the big disadvantage of Clowes' approach is that, although you can interest people in Swedenborgian ideas, you cannot necessarily convert them, or bring them in to Sunday worship. But is this what Swedenborg intended?

By the worship of God people at the present day mean primarily oral worship in church, on Sundays. However, worship of God does not consist essentially in that, but in a life of performing useful services; this worship is in keeping with the order of heaven. Arcana Caelestia 7884

Whole life worship, not just worship on Sunday mornings, is what Swedenborg meant when he wrote this. The Church is not the building that is used for a few hours per week, the millstone that is steadily becoming an expensive liability for each society. Swedenborg tells us that the Church is not the building or the central organisation but the people:

The church comes from the Lord and it exists in people who go to Him and live according to His commandments ... because they alone have conjunction with Him. Conjugial Love 129

Perhaps, then, Clowes' groups that met for talk and discussion is what Swedenborg intended. We cannot know what the future will bring. Perhaps it lies in small groups meeting in hired rooms or in people's houses, led primarily by lay pastors and coordinated by ordained ministers. These groups could be backed up by central facilities based in locations like Purley Chase, the College in Manchester or Swedenborg House in London.

Or perhaps it will be something completely different.

We do know however that the Lord's Divine Providence will ensure that there will always be a New Church. It may be very different from what we know and love. New adherents may come from outside the religious community rather than from

But who was right? We are deeply indebted to both men for their significant but very different contributions to our church. Perhaps neither was wrong; both had advantages and disadvantages in their approach. Two hundred years on, we still feel the benefits, but we are a Hindmarshian organisation as opposed to a Clowesian. But what does it mean to be “Hindmarshian”?

Many early New Church people were converts from what might be called Orthodox Christianity or the “old church” - from the Church of England, from Methodism and the Baptists, Presbyterians, Unitarians, and even from the Roman Catholics. They were steeped in tradition. They inherited much that was lovely and significant in their Church practices and worship; and when they came into the New Church they wanted to preserve certain features of their religious practices. These included:

- A church building in which to worship. A chapel was found, late in 1787, to be ready for use on Sunday 27th January 1788 - taken on a tenancy lease by Robert Hindmarsh and his friends. It was a large square building, able to hold about seven hundred worshippers.
- A liturgy to guide worship. The liturgy of 1787 produced by Robert Hindmarsh, which ran into five editions and was the first ever to be composed for the New Church, was an attempt to preserve what is sound and true in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, but excluding sentiments not in keeping with Swedenborgian teaching. Hindmarsh followed the general outline and structure of the Prayer Book, but was strict in his editing. Since his time fifteen or so New Church liturgies have been produced.
- A hymnbook that changed unsuitable lines in existing hymns, and included new hymns expressing Swedenborgian doctrine. One early New Church minister, Joseph Proud, wrote over 300 new hymns, some of which are still used today (see *Songs for Worship* numbers 196, 273, 307, 415 and 430).
- A central organisation supporting Societies - The first Conference took place in 1789, under the instigation and guidance of Robert Hindmarsh. This produced a remarkable summary of doctrine, with complete unanimity.

Were they right to cling on to these? Swedenborg writes in Brief Exposition 103:

Those who have confirmed themselves in the faith of the old Church cannot embrace the faith of the New Church without danger to their spiritual life, unless they have first rejected and thus rooted out one by one all the points of their former faith, that is, its dogmas.

This seems to suggest that the early New Church worshippers might have been mistaken in their approach. But the New Church would be very different today if Conference did not exist, if we did not have our church buildings or our modern hymnbook or liturgy. Perhaps the establishment we call “The New Church” is not the *nova ecclesia* that Swedenborg envisaged.

Read also and meditate on Psalm 139 and Isaiah 40 – you can do this over a period of several days. If you meet in a group, it will be interesting to share your own perceptions of these teachings. The Lord has always spoken to mankind trying to wean them from selfishness (by means of which hell controls us) and lead us towards real freedom.

What comes over very powerfully is this: the Lord “governs” every person in the fullest possible way, whether that person is in heaven or in hell. The Lord never, never gives up on us – read 307. We remain His children, ever residing in His love. But more than anything Session 13, shows us that we should be far more aware of the opportunities the Lord gives us to turn away from evil which holds us in its grip. Even such trivial things as mean or critical attitude towards others play their part on our weakness in turning away from opportunities to do something immoral or dishonest. For young people especially it is hard to go against the stream of present day behaviour and the abuse of drugs and sex. How hard it is at times simply to say, “No thanks!” This Session really probes the heart, and with the voice of the Lord speaking through the Prophets and the Psalmists we should be in no doubt that the Lord lovingly expects a positive response from us – for the sake of our own happiness.

Prayers without words and Meditation

The reason I have suggested using ‘thought prayers’, rather than ‘word prayers’ goes back many years. I was leading a small group in prayer. People had their eyes closed and I glanced over my book at a man passed middle age, and a great stalwart and worker in the Church. I was shocked to see his face with eyes closed but screwed up in a high degree of intensity. My heart went out to him and I wanted to say, “Prayer should not be so painfully tense! Relax; put yourself into your Father’s hands. Let’s offer to the Lord our love and ask Him to lead us, and promise Him, we shall follow Him gladly.

Christopher Hasler

This session 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.

The shrinking church

In common with most Christian denominations, our church is shrinking in many ways – fewer societies with less members, smaller congregations, not as many ordained “traditional” ministers, reduced investments. What has gone wrong? Is there simply a general malaise in the world which is becoming self-centred and materialistic? Or is the growing interest in spirituality an indication that the “old church” is finally being rejected by the populace? And where do we fit in? Is our wonderful Swedenborgian church tarred with the same brush as this failing behemoth? Let’s explore.

What did Swedenborg actually mean when he wrote about *nova ecclesia*?

Nova ecclesia translates from the Latin as “new church”, or “new assembly”, since *ecclesia* is a term derived from the Greek root *ekklesia* [ἐκκλησία], which literally means a “gathering” of citizens in an ancient Greek city-state, or a “called out assembly”. Further, Latin has no definite article or indefinite article, so “the” and “a” do not exist, and it is up to the translator which one is used. Because of this, *nova ecclesia* could be translated as “**a** new assembly” or “**the** new assembly”. Are you intrigued? More familiarly, it could also be translated as “**a** new church” or “**the** new church” or even “**the New Church**”, thus claiming by capitalisation to be the church whose doctrines were described by Swedenborg. But are we?

At Conference this year there was a lively but inconclusive discussion on Strategic Planning, during which Michael Stanley shocked some delegates by suggesting that we knock down all existing church buildings and start afresh. To understand what Michael was getting at, we will look back to the early days of Swedenborgianism and investigate the meeting of two New Church luminaries, John Clowes and Robert Hindmarsh.

In mid 1787, just fifteen years after the death of Emanuel Swedenborg, John Clowes, pronounced Clooz, the Rector of St John's Church in Deansgate, Manchester, travelled to London to try to dissuade a group of people called the Theosophical Society from forming a breakaway Swedenborgian Church. Clowes had good reason for his stance, and powerful arguments in opposition to separatism. He himself had discovered Swedenborg's writings when he was just thirty, and had started to preach Swedenborgian ideas from his Anglican pulpit. The Theosophical Society had been founded four years previously, and one of its principals was Robert Hindmarsh, a well-respected printer and publisher who was based in London but educated at Kingswood Methodist School for Boys near the City of Bath. The society's purpose was to meet and discuss Swedenborg's theological writings, but as their interest grew, and a deeper understanding began to bond them together, some of them began to feel the need for more, for worshipping together, for becoming a Church, rather than just

a group with a common interest.

Can you imagine the discussion that ebbed and flowed? Clowes could point to his receptive Anglican congregation, presumably of some considerable size, while Hindmarsh had only his small group with aspirations on renting a church building in the heart of the City of London. Clowes could claim that he had started translating *Arcana Caelestia* into English, and had attracted funding from a group of gentlemen in Manchester for the formation of a “Society for printing, publishing and circulating the writings of the Hon Emanuel Swedenborg”. Hindmarsh and his associates still read the Writings in Latin. Clowes could argue that his work at translating the Writings into English would open Swedenborg to a potentially much wider audience than was possible by distributing Latin books. Clowes could show that his travels around Manchester had established little assemblies (*ecclesia*) of Swedenborgian interest in villages like Ringley Fold, Rhodes, Radcliffe, Heywood and Farnworth, and towns like Bolton, Bury, Ramsbottom and Stockport. At the time of the meeting, Clowes could claim that his chosen path had made Swedenborgian ideas available to a much larger, much wider audience than had Hindmarsh.

But Hindmarsh still felt that a separate Church organisation was required. It could therefore be said that Hindmarsh might have translated *nova ecclesia* as “new church” while Clowes might have translated it as “new assembly”. Who was right?

Hindmarsh's arguments must have been along the following lines:

- how could Clowes guarantee continuity of preaching Swedenborgian ideas? Would the Rector following him at St John's also be Swedenborgian, or would these ideas fade away when he left? Did his congregation actually realise that the ideas were Swedenborgian?
- there needed to be an organisation to which people could turn when they had discovered Swedenborg's books, and realised they wanted more contact with others.
- there are fundamental incompatibilities between the basic doctrines of the old church and the New Church that made combining services from both sides unacceptable.
- the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper were of such significance and so different from the “old church”, there had to be the opportunity to celebrate them following New Church ideals.

The two men went their separate ways. Clowes was instrumental in the spread of the New Church in the Manchester/South Lancashire area, where it is still strong today. Hindmarsh and his group founded the first New Church and the first Conference, and we have to thank his drive and determination for the organisation of which we are all members.