



## Creations of a New Church Architect (see page 14)



new church

# Lifeline



## Behold, he is coming with the clouds ...



Revelation 1:7

Behold he is coming with the clouds of heaven, signifies that the Lord will reveal Himself in the literal sense of the Word, and will open its spiritual sense in the end of the church.      Apocalypse Revealed 24

### 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

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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.

# Our hopes, our problems and our policies

The following address was given by the late Rev Paul V Vickers, then President of Conference, during the course of the New Church World Assembly held in London from the 2nd to the 5th July 1970.

Although it is now 40 years since this address was given, and some of the language used may not be what we might choose today, the essential message remains as relevant today. As with much that took place that week 40 years ago I can still vividly remember Paul Vickers standing on the stage at the Victoria Halls, Bloomsbury giving this address - **Editor**.

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## Our hopes, our problems and our policies

I reminded the General Conference only this week of Goldsack's first law: "*No two New Church ministers ever agree about anything*". Although you have also to remember Goldsack's second law, I think, that all New Church ministers strive to think from divine revelation. I cannot speak in any way for the whole of the Conference, because all men receive light from the Lord into divine revelation in various ways. The Lord works through that variety. I am also sure that the Conference elected in me the wrong man for this, because I never bothered to learn the history of the Conference, and I shall not be able to remember a lot of its organization. Most of my work has lain in trying to analyse the problems that we face, when we try to use the revelation that the Lord has given to us. So I am

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asymmetry are expressive of his deeply held beliefs". One would be hard pressed to find any passages in Swedenborg's writings to confirm these suggestions, but Trobridge was probably inspired by a desire to express 'correspondences'. I may find an opportunity to document such an idea, but it would require space for many illustrations. Incidentally Brent are selling a well illustrated booklet: *Ernest George Trobridge 1884-1942 Architect Extraordinary* and giving away free maps locating his buildings in Kingsbury.

Although Trobridge seems to have had a sincere desire to create a Swedenborgian architecture it is sad that the New Church gave him little opportunity to do so. A satirical definition of an architect is: 'A man who draughts a plan of your house and then plans a draft of your money'. It so happens that after the 1914-18 war Trobridge launched an imaginative scheme to build cheap houses for ex-servicemen, to be built by ex-servicemen and using cheap 'green elm', as seasoned timber had been exhausted during the war. He persuaded several New-churchmen, including David Wynter, to invest in the scheme. In the exhibition I was amused to note that a drawing for one of these was labelled 'Mr Johnson's house', but was never built. My Father never had a good word to say about Trobridge, and had probably put an unredeemed deposit down. Sadly the scheme failed, though not entirely through the fault of Trobridge. Nevertheless he became bankrupt, had blotted his copybook and acquired a poor reputation as a businessman. The next few years saw the construction of the Kensington and Willesden New Churches, and the Swedenborg Hall adaption, for which Trobridge should have been the obvious choice of architect, but for better or worse, none of the commissions were given to him.

Although he never achieved fame in his lifetime, the London Borough of Brent - in which Kingbury lies – consider his individualistic architecture a welcome relief in the sea of Wembley and Willesden semi detached houses. They have sponsored this exhibition of his work, open till 24/9/10, in the Willesden Green Library Centre, 95, High Street, London NW10 2SF (tel.020 8937 3600). It is not far from the former Willesden Green New Church that some readers will remember.

### Patrick Johnson

Family note: Ernest married Jenny Pulsford, sister of Lawrence Pulsford. Ernest and Jenny's son Bryan was trained at the New Church College and served in the ministry in Yorkshire, but resigned after a few years and went into teaching. He died earlier this year.

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If you are able to attend, it would be helpful if you would contact:

### David Haseler

Secretary 0121 440 8070

[david.haseler@generalconference.org.uk](mailto:david.haseler@generalconference.org.uk)

## Ernest Trobridge Exhibition in Willesden

New Church people in North West London have recently had the unexpected experience of seeing large posters around the London Borough of Brent celebrating the work of a New-churchman.

Ernest was the son of George Trobridge the author of *Swedenborg's Life and Teaching*; over the years probably the best selling biography of Swedenborg. George was a painter and was head of the School of Design in Belfast. Ernest was equally creative, but his field was architecture. He designed a little Swedenborgian church in Claygate (Surrey) and was responsible for the rebuilding of the Camden Road Church Hall and Sunday School buildings. However, although these are illustrated in the exhibition, they are not the buildings that really interested the Brent Museum.



Claygate New Church (now demolished)

What he is best known for are his suburban houses in North West London, especially in Kingsbury (see my pictures on page 16). They are essays in the Arts and Crafts Style, somewhat in the character of Voysey or Baillie Scott, but making greater use of timber. When built, they may have been on the edge of the country, but they now look oddly rural in suburbia, with their half timbering and thatched roofs. Not that all still have thatched roofs, due to thatch's tendency to catch fire, but Trobridge believed in thatch for its insulation value as much as any aesthetic charm. He also felt it gave a more 'homely' feel, he particularly wanted his clients to feel 'at home' and he went to some trouble to make each house different, so that they could feel it belonged to them as individuals. He also built flats, where it was more difficult to get individuality, but he adopted another ploy. Many of his flat blocks have towers and battlements so that these Englishmen could indeed claim that their homes were their castles.

Trobridge was indeed an individualist and like many unusual or pioneer architects never attended a school of architecture, where he would have been knocked into a fashionable mould. What the exhibition's promoters also suspected to be the cause of his extraordinary approaches was that he claimed to be guided by Swedenborg's teachings. They noted that "certain recurring symbols, powerful hearths and chimneys, highly styled entrances, and an ever present love of

going to go in along that line, and then perhaps try to show the work the Conference does under that light.

Our hopes, our problems, our policy! Our hope is in the Lord; our problem is human nature; our policy is the Lord's way of working.

That's the summary. Let us think about it. Our hope is in the Lord. Now we hope for the Lord's New Church and we must be very careful not to identify the Church with the organization. The Writings teach us that the Lord's Church in the world is universal and specific. It means that every man, woman, and child in the world at this time is a member of the New Church - including any head-hunters left in Borneo - because there is only one dispensation of the Church at any one time. Now all of those people can be saved. The Lord accomplishes their salvation by the faith into which they were born. The first question I think we should ask is, "How?" If we have the duty to convey to them the revelation that has been entrusted to us in this age, we need to understand in what the Lord is saving them now. What is it that the Lord has left with every man and woman in every age? It is a confrontation with God. Not with the Lord Jesus Christ, for they may never have heard of Him; but, not knowing the Lord by His own name and His own nature, nevertheless He has left with them a confrontation with God. Sometimes out of the most distant ages, the worn and tattered remnants of past revelation have brought to them an idea of God. Their salvation lies in whether, faced with this concept, they will live for God and their fellows, so far as they understand it, or whether they choose in their freedom to live for themselves. Salvation is to be saved from one's selfishness by living for others in the knowledge of God. The Lord can save all those men and women in the faith in which they are.

What then is the purpose of the revelation given now to this age at the Second Coming in the Writings? It is, of course, to shed greater light upon this confrontation of man with his choice in life. We hope in the Lord. We hope in the Lord and trust in Him because we know that all men and women will be saved, and the multiplication of those who actually know of the Writings is not really involved at that point. It is essential that there should be a Church specific, or the universal Church cannot even have light from the spiritual world. We all know that. Yet the actual numbers in the Church specific at any time are no measure of the Lord's work in salvation.

There is another side to the way in which we hope in the Lord. This perhaps is most important at this time to all of us. The world is being vastated of so many ideas. So many things that the human race has assumed for so long are being questioned and destroyed. This destruction is coming because of the light of the Second Coming. Even where the Writings are not known, the Second Coming has brought change in the channels of influx from the spiritual world. The actual light coming into the mind of any human being by which he can think at all is now different. It has been changed and clarified, so that distorted purposes no longer

*(Continued on page 4)*

sustain the pattern of men's thinking. This does not bring the knowledge of new truth, but it brings a great power to destroy the old. And we sit in the midst of destruction and we lament. Now, why? Our hope is in the Lord. The destruction of those false ways of thinking, even down to earthly ideas on government, is desperately important because that work alone will open up the minds of men and women of later generations to see the truth that now is offered and which they need. Our hope in the Lord, then, is sure on these two grounds. First, the Lord's world is achieving its purpose and every man and woman can be saved from selfishness. Second, man's thought is detecting the fallacies and selfish assumptions of the past, even though no true new ways replace them.

Our problem, of course, is human nature. Now that is a double problem. It is a problem because of what men and women are like now; and it is a problem because they have been like that for too long. There is the problem of individuals now, who have got to choose between their selfishness and the Lord. And there is the problem streaming out of the past; the fact that men and women have been selfish, have chosen selfishness so often and so long, that they have perverted all ideas, all concepts of government, ways of life, even the way they react to one another in a 'bus queue! Everything is perverted and twisted. Now that, we all inherit. Even we who have the new revelation must have much of that in our minds, undetected, that goes on affecting our behaviour day by day. That is there and, while it is there, it prevents the light coming in. It needs a steady, long, life-long, lives-long, breaking down of those attitudes by a constant use of divine revelation, before slowly men and women can come to see more of the light and see more quickly this confrontation state in which they stand. Added to this general problem of human nature, is the specific problem of each individual who, in what he understands, must choose in life between selfishness and service in order to accept the truth and think from it.

Our task in face of this problem is to bring to others the light that has been given to us, or rather (to be quite correct theologically) to bring to others the forms in which the truth has been revealed to us by which the Lord can shed living light in human minds. We have to bring those things to other men and women in their varied states. The Lord will really shed the light; we can do nothing about that. But we can present to others those forms that He has given to us in the Word and the Writings, and then they can see the light that He will give them. This involves that, when those things are given to them, they must be in a form that these people can take, that they can use. They must be in terms and ideas which speak about life situations they really can understand. You know (I have said this in print but I must say it again) divine revelation is not like an abstract book of philosophy. It is rather like the instructions on a fire extinguisher. Everybody has got to be able to read them sufficiently. It is absolutely essential that they should be able to understand them. And every man and woman can understand divine revelation to the degree of their development. The task the Church has is to bring these forms of truth to other men, and to understand them ourselves, in face of the problem of human nature and its selfishness, inherited and chosen.

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## Letter

Dear Editor,

In the March edition of *Lifeline* there was a letter from George Young regarding reaching out. I agree with him wholeheartedly about the need not just to think in terms of numbers. (At the same time, I'm thoughtful about how much less easy it may be to put this into practice in church groups where we might be painfully aware of a current lack of numbers). I also welcome his encouragement for us to look out not just through presenting our teachings, but also through being of use in the local community.

For a number of years, part of SOLCe training has been to look at what helps us to reach out. For example, we have a module which considers how we can talk to people about our beliefs (Communicating Personal Conviction). We have also touched on various areas at SOLCe Summer and Winter Schools.

As George Young's letter suggests, it feels as if there is an important area for the church to think about. This year's Summer School at SOLCe is going to focus on various aspects of reaching out. We will also be looking at how we need to prepare for reaching out by looking at what any particular group has to offer in doing this. The title of Summer School is *Reaching In, Reaching Out*.

We are wanting to offer the opportunity to attend Summer School to anyone within the church who feels attracted by this subject. Summer School takes place from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> July at the New Church College. Further details are available by writing to:  
SOLCe/New Church College  
25 Radcliffe New Road  
Radcliffe, Manchester, M26 1LE  
or phone: 0161-766 2521  
or email: enquiries@solce.org.uk

**Rev David Lomax**

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## Annual Meeting of the New Church College

The Annual Meeting will be held at The College on Saturday, 10th July 2010 at 14.30. In addition to the business meeting, there will be a session on 'Moving from Vision to Action'. We shall be looking at how groups develop ways to reach out. When we think about church groups reaching out, we know that this is not always an easy process. One of the difficulties can be moving from Vision to Action. After a brief introduction, we will be considering in small groups some tools which can help with this.

The work of The College continues to develop in new and interesting ways, and we would warmly like to invite you, whether or not you are a Governor, to join us for the afternoon. Tea and cakes will be provided; a donation towards the cost will be welcomed.

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# Pictures from the Book of Revelation

In the last edition of *Lifeline*, you may have read about plans for an exhibition of Roland Smith's pictures from the Book of Revelation and associated events at New Church College. These are planned for the period from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

Three events have so far been put in place in this period. These are aimed at attracting an audience from outside the New Church. This is because the hope of the Apocalypse Study Group has always been to present something of a New Church view of the Book of Revelation to the world at large. The aim is not to exclude those from within our organisation, but rather to make the most of this opportunity to spread a message beyond our own community. Anyone attending this year's Annual Meeting of Conference will have the chance to see all the original pictures. Anyone within reach of the College will also have an opportunity to see them during the period mentioned above. (The exact timings for the exhibition are yet to be determined but will appear in *Lifeline* at a future date).

However, I'd also like some feedback from the church at large as to whether there is an interest in having an additional event of some description in October. Would people be interested in some sort of workshop day or talk about the pictures? So far we have events arranged for Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup>. It would be good to know if a midweek date (and, if so, evening or day-time) would work for people, if there is an interest, or if a weekend would be preferred. What sort of event would people like? Is there a preference for something interactive or a more traditional talk or lecture, which would make use of the pictures as well?

I'd very much appreciate people letting me know their thoughts. You can write to me at SOLCe/New Church College at 25, Radcliffe New Road, Radcliffe, Manchester, M26 1LE, phone me on 0161-766 2521 or e-mail me: david.lomax@solce.org.uk

## Rev David Lomax

Don't forget that contributions towards the costs of exhibiting the Apocalypse Pictures can be sent to Rev Bruce Jarvis (who is the co-ordinator for the Apocalypse Study Group) at: 6 Park Avenue, Seaburn, Sunderland SR6 9NJ  
Cheques payable to: The General Conference of the New Church  
If you are a tax payer your contribution can be treated as part of the Gift Aid scheme.

There are certain cardinal principles about policies and ways of working that we have been worrying about in Conference, I think, for some years now. I have only been in the ministry twenty-five years, and the whole thought and attitude and drive of the Conference has changed in that time. Indeed, Conference ten years ago bears no relationship to what it is now. And this has been because of our thought about those cardinal principles we seek in revelation to tell us how to approach men and women. The first one is very important: that we should never condemn. When they brought to the Lord a woman hot from a bed of adultery, He would not condemn her. So when we look upon the world; never should we condemn it for lack of understanding, for false choices, even for deliberate evils. Never! Because when you condemn a man, at once you cut him off from you. The hells seek to make us feel we are condemned. The heavens seek to excuse us - not to excuse our evils, but to excuse us with the sense that we can find our salvation. This, then, is the first principle: we should never appear, whether in our organizations or in this glorious claim to be New Church men and women, to cut ourselves off by appearing to condemn others. Next, we should never try to destroy the light which other men already have, because, as we have seen, the Lord is saving them in the faith into which they were born, unless He sees that it can be changed by something in their circumstances or by something in the way He can lead their affections. This second point should lead us to use the light men already have. Sometimes one feels inclined to call it darkness and not light, I know. But we must see that to them it is the light. It is a way in which they look at God. Into that has got to be drawn a fuller light. The day may come when they say that light was darkness; but they will only say that because by then the light has come by a living process into their minds. This means that real meaning must be brought into the way we can talk to others. We have got to sit and listen to them, to find out the way they think, and to detect how the new light of the new revelation can be brought to them. Let us be quite clear. Man of himself has no understanding of his position; only revelation can ever show man anything he needs. The function of the Church is to bring this into the life situation of the people and show it to them.

In the work of the Conference, the developments that have taken place have been in the effort to grapple with these ideas. Take ministry first. We have tried to train the ministry in ever greater depth of doctrine from the Writings and an ever fuller concept of the Word in the letter – for the literal sense of the Word sheds light when used with the light of its general doctrine. Then we have tried to take these things into the pastoral and life-situation in which people have to be taught and see how this can be conveyed there. Now that is not a field you can cover in a few years. Do let me make it clear, our ambition is not that men should enter into the mere activities or expertise of modern life and use that. That is useless, because it is man's. What is man's is useless by definition. We must try to take the light that is God's and bring it into the present situation of ideas, understanding and endeavour already known and see how it can be used. This means that much of our work now, we feel, will turn towards small groups worshipping in their homes

*(Continued on page 6)*

or family groups. Teaching will be both question and answer, so that genuine life understanding exists and not mere structures of terms. We move towards seminars in which the depth behind is to be discussed. The smallness of groups has worried us, because in Conference we were constructed on the large Church basis. But, thanks be to God, He is destroying all our large Churches - either He is taking the congregation away or He is giving the buildings dry rot! Somehow or other He has got to get us down to the life situation in which the truth and only the truth is important. But the truth must be used in the living way. We must not be frightened of the path He leads us down, but be content to work down it.

Our activities are very varied. Many of the Ministry and the laity question and strive to understand in our various schools and seminars, seeking to learn that they might talk to others. Most of the real power of this activity will probably only be felt when they can explain personally to someone, in terms that person can understand, something of the light of the Word and the Writings of the Second Coming. Other activities cover a wide range. I should not really talk of any of it, because how can I select? Perhaps I could just mention the United Search for a True Christian Religion, a brainchild of the Rev C V A Hasler. He set to work, he worked for five years and created havoc in his household and his domestic affairs to produce and get this out! Other men work on things like ways of teaching children in their homes. Often we confess ourselves utter failures, but still work at it. This is what the Church must do in the coming years. That we are in a time of flux we all recognize in the Conference. I don't think any one of us would wave before you the pattern of the next ten or fifteen years. Why should we try? For the future is of the Lord's Providence. The essence of the moment is that we should look at the truth He has given us, and only look from that at the problems of men. We can take many things from the modern world. Let us be quite clear, world-wide the Word of God is now being used by some men. And it is being used, not as a text book to argue from pro-positionally, but to see what light it may shed. Now we can fasten on those ideas. We can lead from the things that men like Karl Barth have said, from the revolution that Soren Kierkegaard began. We can lead out of these things. Indeed, sometimes I feel that there is a burden upon our shoulders that the revolution came from Kierkegaard not from us, that the break-back to the Word of God was pro-claimed world-wide by Barth and not by us. They, having the smaller measure of the gospel, could still see its essential purpose for men. Now that is what we can infill, gifting them with a light that we wish God had given to them, as He has to us in our unworthiness. But He has entrusted it to us. We in the General Conference are at one in striving to do the Lord's work on earth. We are trying to change our methods so that they use the Lord's own revelation to understand men and women, and so that they work in the Lord's own ways so that His providence can be in our efforts.

Whatever the ways we choose, we are in no doubt that our hope is in the Lord, our problem is human nature, and our policy is - and can only ever be - the Lord's way of working.

## Spiritual Growth online

'I Stand At The Door And Knock' is a new course available online from the Lifeline web site. Here are some extracts from the course description:

*This 6 session course has been specially designed to support people wishing to explore a personal application of the Book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse. It offers a new insight into John's complex visions recorded in Revelation, in a setting that provides for some personal examination for spiritual growth in a non-threatening way. Each of the sessions is based on a text from the Book, and offers a pictorial representation of the vision for initial reflection and comment. This is a novel way of approaching the theme, and is encouraging because it uses the sense of sight to stimulate individual responses. This course is not strictly a study course. The emphasis is not so much on extending knowledge as developing the capacity to apply the Word of God to one's inner life. The materials encourage looking for meaning and application, and seeing applications to personal/spiritual growth. Anyone leading the course is asked to act as a facilitator, drawing out others' reactions and ideas, whilst at the same time offering background material as the need arises. There is also time for*

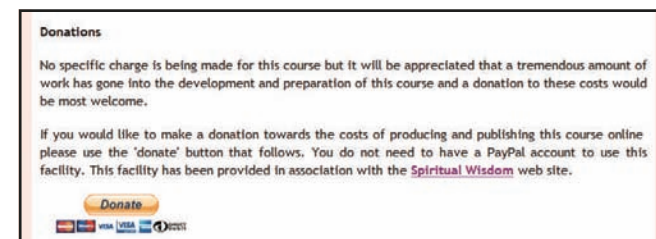


*Each of the sessions is based on a text from the Book, and offers a pictorial representation of the vision for initial reflection and comment. This is a novel way of approaching the theme, and is encouraging because it uses the sense of sight to stimulate individual responses.*

*There are two documents available for this course - a course handbook and a course leader's handbook. The course handbook is available as an A5 booklet of 28 A5 pages and the course leader's handbook is available as an A4 booklet of 43 pages.*

No specific charge is being made for this course but it will be appreciated that a tremendous amount of work has gone into the development and preparation of this course and a donation to these costs would be most welcome.

If you would like to make a donation towards the costs of producing and publishing this course online please use the 'donate' button that follows. You do not need to have a PayPal account to use this facility. This facility has been provided in association with the [Spiritual Wisdom](#) web site.



to help recover these costs a new 'donation' facility has been set up on the Lifeline web site.

To learn more about the course go to [www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk](http://www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk) and select 'Resources'. Then click on 'I stand at the door and knock' - a spiritual growth course. Don't forget! If you download these resources please make a donation towards their costs.

## Heart, Head and Hands



If you haven't yet bought a copy of this excellent book by Stephen Russell-Lacy why not buy it through the Spiritual Wisdom Bookshop and generate a small commission for Conference from Amazon Books.

Go to: [www.spiritualwisdom.org.uk](http://www.spiritualwisdom.org.uk) and click on 'shop' on the home page. Then click on 'Bookshop' and you will find this book the first one listed.

Here are two typical reviews.

"A long overdue and useful contribution. This book is well written and easy to read, not things that often are to be found in a work that deals with the work of the 18th century philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg. The author draws on his wide experience as a cognitive behavioural therapist and draws links between the ideas and modern thinking on these topics, but always in a clear and sensible way. Self help books and more so spiritual ones are ten a penny, this one is in it's own class and ought to be a model for it's clarity and down to earth helpfulness.

I am not a believer myself but found this book to be the most sane I have read in all my wide readings and studies of Theology and Therapy. I wish that I and many who suffered from imposed 'Religious Guilt' had the benefit of this small book when growing up."  
E.M.Preston, Radio Kinver, 4th July 2008

"A fine little work ... that will warm the hearts of the general public and all practicing Swedenborgians who are of a non-technical bent. ... We find ourselves understanding a text while feeling that, at the same time, we are liberated by just reading it. This happens in many places in the narrative. Traditionalists will love the book, as it preaches the straight and narrow with regard to doctrine, but in places it almost unconsciously breaks out into a kind of semi-restrained wildness that reminds us of Swedenborg's own mind – rational but also inward, intuitive, deep, creative, and as our British cousins are wont to say, spot on."  
Eugene Taylor, The Messenger, October 2008

### Change of Address

Becky Jarratt

50 Lycett Road  
York YO24 1NB  
01904 703 666

## Forgiveness in Matthew 6:14-15

*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14-15*

There are times when we read or hear the Word when we find it difficult to reconcile what is being said with our wider understanding of the nature of God. It seems to me that these two verses in Matthew, occurring just after the Lord's Prayer, present exactly that problem. Simply put, Matthew 6:14 says - If you forgive others God will forgive you - and then Matthew 6:15 says - If you don't forgive others God will not forgive you.

Now to me this sounds just like the sort of thing we might say to someone else - "I'll forgive you if you'll forgive me but if you don't forgive me I won't forgive you." Have you ever found yourself saying something like that, making what you will do for someone else conditional on what they will do for you? Is this how we would expect God to operate and if not why does Jesus use these words in talking to those around him?

Whenever we run into this sort of difficulty in making sense of a key passage we need to go back to basics and consider the most important teaching we have about the true nature of God - God is Love. But we need to go further than that and remind ourselves that God's love is unconditional. It is not the imperfect love which we express in our lives, that has limits and conditions, but an unconditional love that has no limits and no boundaries and is shared equally with all. And it is the nature of God's love that it is given with the freedom for us to accept it, reject it or misuse it - there are no conditions in which God's love is not given - it is unconditional.

We need to hold on to this concept of God at all times because it can transform the way we look at things. As it says in Divine Love and Wisdom 13

*... unless there is a true concept of God there can be no communication with heaven.*

Now what this says to me is that since God's love is unconditional his forgiveness must be unconditional as well because forgiveness is just part of how we love. This means that God forgives everyone! So why does Jesus say - *but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

*(Continued on page 8)*

Well a simple answer might be that he is appealing first to his audiences most basic and down to earth view of life. It is the same approach that gives rise to the idea of God being angry which occurs so much in the Old Testament.

When we start out in life we see things at a very natural level and even very simple expressions of truth can lead us to become obedient to God's will. Just think how often we might have heard these words spoken by a mother to her child – "*now eat up your dinner or mummy will be cross with you*". As children we get used to all sorts of these conditional requests which, however inappropriate they may really be, can nevertheless lead to the establishment of simple obedience in the child.

And the same is true of the development of our religious life because it has to start at the level of simple obedience to God's word. And so when it comes to forgiveness we need to learn to forgive others because otherwise God won't forgive us. This is not really the truth. Rather it is an apparent truth that is particularly useful in the first child like stage of spiritual growth. The real truth of the matter can only be realised by each one of us when we have fully taken on board the nature of God's unconditional love and its implications for our relationship with him. We can then begin to see and understand that God forgives everyone.

But there is another aspect of this concept I think we need to consider which arises from a further key teaching found in Arcana Caelestia 5828:

*It is a universal law that an inflow adjusts itself to the outflow, and if the outflow is blocked, so is the inflow. Through the internal person there is an inflow of good and truth from the Lord, and through the external there should be an outflow, an outflow into life, that is, in the exercise of charity. As long as that outflow is taking place the inflow from heaven, that is, from the Lord by way of heaven, is continuous. If however no outflow takes place but something stands in the way in the external or natural person, namely evil and falsity which tear the inflowing good to pieces and annihilate it, it follows from the universal law mentioned above that the inflow adjusts itself to the outflow.*

I think we can directly apply this to forgiveness and rephrase the quotation something like this –

*Through the internal person there is an inflow of forgiveness from the Lord and through the external person there should be an outflow of forgiveness in life. As long as a person practices forgiveness then forgiveness flows in from heaven and the Lord. But if something stands in the way of the person practicing forgiveness the inflow of forgiveness from the Lord reduces and becomes blocked.*

The key message here to me is that so long as we practice forgiveness we will feel forgiven by the Lord. But if we fail to practice forgiveness then, although the Lord will always forgive us, nevertheless we will block the experience of that forgiveness in our lives. In this situation it *appears* that the Lord is not forgiving us, which cannot be actually true, but nevertheless because we are the ones blocking the flow of forgiveness from the Lord it *appears* just like that.

Do you recall these words from verse 2 of Hymn 100 in Songs for Worship?

*How can your pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart that broods on wrongs and will not let old bitterness depart?*

It seems to me that Rosamond Eleanor Herklots, the writer of Hymn 100, has captured the true essence and meaning of Jesus' words as recorded in Matthew 6:14-15.

*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Here are two further quotations from the Writings related to this subject.

*I have been told from heaven that the Lord forgives everyone his sins, and never punishes him for them, or even imputes them to him, because He is love itself and good itself. Nevertheless the sins are not wiped away by this, for it is only by repentance that they can be wiped away. For if he told Peter to forgive up to seventy times seven times, is there anything that the Lord Himself would not do?* True Christian Religion 409

*No truth in its earliest stages is the actual truth but an appearance of truth. In the course of time however it sheds the cloak of appearance and puts on the real essence of truth. To make this intelligible it can be illustrated by examples, for the moment by this alone: It is a Divine truth that the Lord is never angry, never punishes anyone, let alone does evil to anyone, and that from the Lord nothing but good ever comes. Nevertheless in its earliest stages this truth declares that the Lord is angry when someone sins, and that the Lord therefore punishes; indeed with some people it declares that evil comes from the Lord. But as a person progresses from early childhood, grows up, and matures in judgement he casts away that which from the appearance seemed to him to be the truth and gradually takes up the truth itself, which is that the Lord is never angry and does not punish, let alone perform evil. Arcana Caelestia 3131*

**Alan Misson**