

E-READ

The General Conference of the New Church **Articles and Letters**

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Providence at Work

by *David Friend*

“Who, in the 1990’s, would have thought this would be the situation today? The Lord obviously did! The book of Exodus tells us what will happen.”

²¹ Then the Lord said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform”
William Cowper 1731-1800

The ways of working of the Lord’s Divine Providence are well illustrated from this account in the book of Exodus chapter 33, quoted above, and are acknowledged in the opening lines of William Cowper’s hymn - number 121 in our church Book of Worship.

During the 1980’s, I think, a national survey of Christian church denominations in this country declared that, without substantial change, the General Conference would die out early in the 21st century. Twenty years into the new century we note that that forecast hasn’t come true yet. Looking back from today, I detect some subtle but important changes which would have been difficult to forecast 30 years ago, but which encourage more positive thoughts of the on-going future of our organisation.

If we look at the list of ordained ministers as recorded in the Conference Year Book - page 65 of the current edition - the names of 23 ministers are listed, headed by 3 ordaining ministers. Six of these ministers are children of earlier New Church clergymen and, within the past few years, at least two other ministers, children of earlier New Church ministers, have passed on. Many of the other people on the list were brought up by members of the New Church, and had been steeped in Swedenborgian teachings from Sunday School onwards.

Recently, however, several of those who have been ordained have not had a New Church background, but have found the teachings of Swedenborg by other means - Purley Chase and Mind Body Spirit festivals spring to mind - and have declared their intent to become New Church ministers to help them more readily to pass on the good news to others. The General Conference is shortly to ordain another student into ministerial service in the church, and there is at least one other candidate in training as well. The balance between those whose background has been in the church for a long time compared with those new to the teachings is changing.

Who, in the 1990's, would have thought this would be the situation today? The Lord obviously did! The book of Exodus tells us what will happen. We shall stand where the Lord puts us, and then we shall be able to see his providential hand at work - but only after it has all happened. We give thanks for His providential care and look forward to further evidence of the growing belief among mankind at large in the truths revealed by the Lord through Swedenborg's writings.