



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society April 2021

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Space, Science, and the Death of Imagination

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

You likely heard that just over a month ago the folks over at NASA landed their Perseverance rover on the surface of Mars. To no one's surprise they have found no little green men walking around in snazzy, shiny suits with ray guns hanging off their hips. We used to have such a great imagination for what lies in outer space! I wish there was some disappointment around NASA's failure to find anything but red rocks, but instead there seems to be a collective shrug.

It wasn't always this way. Back when I was a kid... and you know every good tale starts off this way... I think there was still hope that there were people, preferably, but not necessarily green, living on Mars. There were plenty of science fiction books and movies still in popular culture in the 70's that depicted such a reality (anybody remember the TV show "My Favourite Martian?!), even if that hope was squashed like one of Gallagher's watermelons ever since the Apollo missions were unable to find people on the Moon.

Of course this created a problem for those of us who regard the Writings as an absolute authority on any topic contained therein. I'd say that these days there is not a more vexing book than *Earths in the Universe*, because nothing else is the Writings is so provably wrong. This wasn't a problem over 100 years ago when the General Church deemed the revelation from God, not Swedenborg, but it is now. Science and religion are in direct conflict!

It seemed that for a while the solution was to declare that the life described by Swedenborg was life that *used* to exist there, even if it isn't there now. That position made it socially acceptable for Bryn Athyn Elementary School to have an assignment where we drew pictures of the people on the various planets in our solar system based on Swedenborg's descriptions. I doubt they do that these days because modern science is quite clear: not only are there not people on the moon, Mars, or any other planet in our solar system, but there's no evidence they have *ever* been there! At best we can hope for is traces of some past microbial life.

Yet I just don't buy it. I don't think science and religion are in conflict here. I just think we need a bit more humility, and a lot more imagination. Some people might call my solution "weird," and I'm sure others will suggest that when the men from the mental health institution come that I should go quietly. Maybe so, but hear me out because believe it or not, Swedenborg isn't the only one claiming life on other planets.

Way back in 1971 a man named Robert Monroe wrote a book titled, *Journeys Out of the Body*. It's a classic if you are into psychic world kind of stuff. In it he tells his own personal tale of a man with an ability that he did not ask for. He worked in the radio business, and was experimenting with, "data learning during sleep" and using himself as the number one test subject. Shortly after this he started noticing that his body would start vibrating. This started happening to him at random times, and one night he lay in bed as

the vibrations began. This time he noticed that during these vibrations he could put his hand through the floor of his bedroom.

From there he learned how to leave his physical body behind, and explore the world in a whole new way. He learned quickly that thought brings presence. If he was thinking about a person, he would immediately be there. Now when he visited people alive in this world, they could not see him. Eventually though he found that there were people who could see him. Some of them had already passed on from a life on Earth. Others were intelligent species from – you guessed it – other worlds.

In fairness, Monroe does not say “I met people from Jupiter” or name any other planet in the solar system. But he does say he’s travelled the galaxy and beyond, and has talked at great length with many beings that he labels as “intelligent species.” He comes to the conclusion that there are “billions” of different species throughout the universe. That’s right: billions. They just live on a higher frequency than we do. Just because we can’t see them doesn’t mean they’re not there.

Most people give you the “you must be crazy” look if you mention other beings that we can’t see. But really, why not? After all, we have associate spirits with us all the time that cannot see us “because nothing that is in our solar world falls into their sight”. (HH 292) Why not beings that we can’t see? Is our imagination so limited that we can only conceive of what we see? Isn’t that the sin of Adam and Eve? They trusted their senses over what God Himself told them. I also tend to think that the Lord, the creator of the entire universe, probably has the imagination and creative juices enough to figure out how to make humans in more than just one way. If love and wisdom are the only true substances, why must we confine our thoughts of beings to those that are carbon based? Surely love and wisdom can terminate in some other, finer substance, to create life as well.

Seeing the universe this way reconciles some of the other problems created by *Earths in the Universe* as well, such as how could we have had beings on a gaseous planet like Jupiter and no water for the must-be-thirsty people of Mercury. We can release ourselves from the faulty idea that just because life works a certain way here that it must also work that way elsewhere too.

That said, I won’t be upset if the whole “there used to be life there” solution works for Mars. There’s still a part of me that really is hoping that Perseverance will find some sort of fossilized humanoid alien skeleton with an oversized skull and antennae on its head. Maybe even the remains of a flying saucer or two. Is that really too much to ask? Perhaps I’ve let my imagination run a little too wild, but that’s because I believe with an infinite and loving God in charge that the possibilities truly are endless.

Where Two Or Three Are Gathered Together

by Jenn Beiswenger

The middle weekend of March saw a number of Australian New Church-minded women gather together – a few in the flesh, others via Zoom – for our fourth semi-annual women's weekend. There wasn't any heavy doctrine this time, but over the course of the three days we got to know each other through introductory ice breakers, learned about 'Stephen Ministry' and practised listening skills with guest speaker Nina Cooper Dewees, did some 'care cooking' to give to someone in need, received insights into mindfulness and did a guided meditation, and enjoyed a mindful doodling tutorial.

We had a good mix of ladies from Sydney, up the coast, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra (and our guest speaker from east-coast America!). Each session was lead by a different woman, and each session had its unique take-aways. Feedback indicates that participants found the weekend to be very enjoyable, and we look forward to doing it again sometime! - Please let Jenn know if you'd like to be on the mailing list (jenn@beiswenger.net). More than two or three were gathered together, this weekend, and the Lord was surely in that place.

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Living Courageously Recap

In the years that I've been here, we've run a spiritual growth program starting in February and run it up to Palm Sunday. So once again we've done that, using a program that was originally produced by the General Church in 2009. This past Monday was the final night in our discussion group, and I thought I'd take a moment here to put forward some of the things that people took away from the program. I hope you'll see that these programs really are worthwhile, and that maybe next time we run one that you'll really consider joining in. Here are a few comments:

- What I've taken away is to filter my complaining and actually appreciate what I have of Our Lord's Divine Providence.
- I need to make a better effort to actually live by my values, and to put those values into action. I can get caught up into my thoughts and intentions, and I feel they're good, but I need to really put those good thoughts into action.
- The application of the four stages of competence really struck me, and this program has given me the confidence to work harder on moving to the next stage.
- I enjoyed seeing the progression in these stories, and could certainly see how these stories applied to my life experience.
- Perseverance: no matter how hard things seem to be, listen for that still small voice.
- The idea that God cares more about process than outcome was really challenging for me, and something that I know I need to carry forward.
- Listen to the Lord!

- With God, all things are possible.

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Upcoming Classes

We just completed our 7-week spiritual growth program, “Living Courageously,” and so we’ll now go back to our normal twice-a-month class schedule. What I’m thinking at this time is that we’ll restart classes on Monday, April 26th. That will allow me time after Easter to put it all together, plus there are five Mondays in May, so it works out well to start later in April anyway. The plan is to get back to the series we started last year on the Ancient Church in other cultures. While we spent a lot of time on that series, we never really looked at the three A’s: Africa, Americas and Australia. We can spend one class on each of these and finish this series in May, having classes May 10 and 24. This also sets up well for two classes in June on some as yet determined topic (aliens?!) before we head off to camp in July.

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New Windows

Later this year we will celebrate and acknowledge in some form the fact that the church building was built 100 years ago. I don’t know for sure, but I wonder if the original windows have been there this whole time. Now the process of replacing them has begun. There are a few reasons why: first, one of the windows had a few large cracks in it. But the bigger reason is that the old windows were just very draughty in the winter, and also didn’t let a lot of light into the church. Next time you come by, be sure to check them out.

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Good Friday, Easter and Easter Egg Hunt

As usual we will be having a service on **Good Friday** at **7pm**. Normally I just read from the Gospels and play some music, but I’m thinking I’m going to add perhaps a mini-sermon to it as well. Change things up a bit. Plus we really haven’t explored the deeper meaning of these stories at other times, so I think that needs to be done.

On **Easter Sunday** we will be having our usual family style service in celebration of the Lord’s resurrection. After the service we will also be offering an **Easter egg hunt** for any children in attendance. Every year it seems that there’s one or two eggs that are hidden that are not found, so let’s see if we can actually find them all this year! It’ll be a good time for the kids, and it’s good fun to hang out with everybody while it is happening.

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Working Bee

By now you know the drill. The first Sunday back after school holidays we have a working bee where we tackle property maintenance. You can have your choice of tasks... there's always weeding to be done, as well as trimming and pruning, deep cleaning of Baringa or even just taking some time to go through the building doing some decluttering. Whatever it is you're willing to do, we're willing to let you do it!

As always, we offer a pizza lunch as compensation and gratitude for your labours! Thanks!

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Beiswenger Holiday

Like everybody else we had to put travel plans on hold last year. Originally Zach and I were going to fly to the Gold Coast, take three days to hit three theme parks, and fly back. However, none of the three of us have left the State in quite a while now, so we've decided to make a full holiday out of it this time. The plan is to leave on the 9th April, take a couple days to drive up, and return on the 17th. We'll have to work out what to do for church on the 11th, but likely a lay led service. Stay tuned.

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Resurrection Fears

A man and his ever-nagging wife went on vacation in Jerusalem. The woman kept complaining about every little detail and making the trip unbearable. But a few days before their vacation ended, a tragic accident ended the woman's life. The undertaker told the husband, "You can have her buried here in the Holy Land for \$150 or we can have her shipped back home for \$5,000."

The husband thought about it for a few seconds, then told the undertaker he would have her shipped back home. "Why would you spend \$5,000 to have her shipped home when you could have a beautiful burial here in Jerusalem, and it would only cost \$150?!" the undertaker asked, taken aback. The husband replied, "Long ago, a man died here, was buried here, and three days later, rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance!"

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Todd Beiswenger** (3rd), **Donna Heldon** (5th) **Dylan Johnson** (7th), **Riley Evans** (11th), **Aneira Robson** (14th) **Huiling Sun** (20th), **Kerry Horner** (22nd), **David Horner** (25th), **Lucy Evans** (27th), **April Hams** (28th)

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