



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society September 2022

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Is Creation Without God a Fool's Errand?

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

Did you hear the news? New images from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) have come back and critics of the Big Bang Theory are celebrating. Why? Because they now have more evidence to back their claims of being right! I'm not much of a cosmologist, but I do understand the ego-inflating joy of being right, and nothing makes us feel more right than having some empirical data to back up our theories. In this case they found that distant galaxies are not the size, shape or proximity from each other that should be the case if we actually had a big bang. This of course means that they seem to be right about their claim that the universe was not created by a "big bang."

This news got me to research more about the Big Bang theory, and as it turns out critics of the theory have been jumping up and down for years saying that it isn't correct, which was news to me as I thought the scientific community was pretty settled on it being more than just a theory. Apparently not. From what I've gathered the Big Bang theory does solve three issues: the expansion of the universe, the Cosmic Microwave Background, and the Big Bang Nucleosynthesis.

However there are problems with the Big Bang theory that have actually been known for years. I won't break your brain - or mine - by getting into explanations of the "initial density perturbation," "flatness problem," "horizon problem," or "monopole problem," but suffice it to say there are things that have been observed and/or predicted in the cosmos that run contrary to the way things should be if in fact the Big Bang theory is true. That these problems have been known for quite some time is rather vexing to the scientists who see the Big Bang theory continually promoted as a viable theory much the way Swedenborgians recoil at the theory that faith alone can bring about salvation.

Due to technological limitations, the church has had a hard time getting photographs from the afterlife that show there are people in hell who nonetheless believed that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, but thanks to the JWST, cosmologists don't have such constraints to prove their point these days. While I'm always glad to see science improve itself by moving past and discarding old theories that prove to be untrue, I'm still waiting for the day when it isn't just one materialistic theory being replaced for another. Realizing a theory is wrong is one thing, but it is a totally different endeavour to actually come up with the *right* answer!

So how do we get the right answer? Well, Swedenborg actually writes a fair bit about the creation of the universe, and it's actually closer to the Genesis account than perhaps you realize. He lays out some essentials saying "...it is clear that, without knowledge beforehand of the spiritual world and its Sun, and about correspondence, the creation of the

universe by the one infinite God cannot be comprehended at all; and it is due to this that there have appeared hypotheses, based upon naturalism, about the creation of the universe, that are foolish” (Canons 7). For the casual reader, it may seem that Swedenborg is being a bit arrogant calling others “foolish,” but the fact is it is a reference to his own pre-theological scientific works that tried to understand the universe but didn’t account for God, a spiritual sun and correspondences... so he’s including his own prior endeavours as “foolish.” Essentially he’s warning us all not to make the same mistakes he did.

That we need to have God in the equation is probably the most obvious. Theories on the origin of the universe always run into a problem of turning back the clock to some starting point, but are still stuck with the questions of, “Well, what was before this? Where did this stuff come from to start with?” Good questions, because you can’t have something from nothing, so everything starts from something, and that something gets traced back to the Lord. He is the Alpha and Omega, you know, the beginning and the end, and for this article we can put emphasis on the *beginning*. So everything starts with Him. But what next?

I think the next question is, “What problem does a spiritual sun solve?” As I understand it, we are to understand that life, real life, comes to us through it. The spiritual sun is like a step down transformer. The Lord Himself is too powerful for us to be near, so we have to have something between Him and us. I think it helps to understand that the spiritual sun isn’t an object that is separate from the Lord, rather “It is the emanating Divine love and wisdom which appear as the sun in that world” (DLW 86). It is in this emanation that all of the spiritual world receives life, which passes through the spiritual and into the natural. I think what we’re supposed to take from this idea is that the entire spiritual world has life from this sun in a similar way that nature in our world has life from the sun of the physical world.

But just putting an “emanation” of life out there doesn’t actually create anything. There has to be an intention. *True Christian Religion* says that the universe was created by Divine Truth, which would be a bit of a shock to Pilate who didn’t even know what regular truth was, let alone Divine Truth.

We read:

Hardly anyone at this day knows that there is any power in truths; for truth is supposed to be nothing more than a statement uttered by someone in authority, which ought for that reason to be obeyed; thus truth is supposed to be like a mere breath from the mouth or sound in the ear; and yet truth and good are the principles of all things in both worlds, the spiritual and the natural; also they are the means by which the universe was created, and through which the universe is preserved, and the means as well by which man was created; therefore these two are the all in all things. (TCR 224)

So there you have it! The universe was created by a combination of the Lord emanating love, and speaking the universe into existence. Simple, right? I think there’s actually more truth to the Genesis creation account than we give it credit for, but I don’t think you’ll find that in any cosmology text books any time soon. While this still feels pretty abstract to me,

I think the quote above makes us really re-think what truth is. The western, post-modern world sees truth as relative, and goes down the whole “my truth” versus “your truth” kind of thing, but that’s not the picture we get here. The truth is like a rock! The truth isn’t flexible, but is powerful, and it isn’t just some abstract concept.

But there’s one other essential element to creation that was mentioned in the *Canons* quote, and to me it is the key in all of this: it is the correspondential relationship between the two worlds. This world exists because the spiritual world exists. Because even if you believe that God exists, and the spiritual world exists, there’s still that looming question of how does the natural world exist? The science of correspondences tells us that everything we see here is a reflection of some greater spiritual reality, and everything we see is a manifestation of that reality. How that works in mechanical terms, well, we aren’t told that, but given that getting a passing grade for Calculus 3 in university was a struggle, my guess is that I wouldn’t understand it even if I was told.

The spiritual basis of the universe is going to be the real ongoing problem for cosmologists, because they can send up all the telescopes and instruments they want into the vast reaches of space, but they’re never going to find the spiritual. Sure, they can find evidence that allows them to see what the universe looked like in the past, but eventually they’re going to run up against a wall because the universe is finite.

If you’re managed to read this far, and you’re not feeling like you’ve got this whole “creation of the universe” idea locked down, well, don’t feel bad. The Writings tell us that we have to think outside of time and space to really understand it, and I don’t know about you, but that’s not what I do best. I don’t think cosmologists are likely to do it well either, so while they can celebrate the images of the JWST, they’re probably going to have to suffer through some more theories that will be eventually proven wrong until they come to the conclusion that materialist theories have their inherent limitations, and so long as they continue without an Alpha, a spiritual world, and a correspondential link, it is going to be a fool’s errand.

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NCIA Council of Ministers Meetings

Back in June I went to Bryn Athyn to attend General Church clergy meetings, and now it is time to attend the New Church in Australia clergy meetings. This will be a shorter set of meetings that will run from September 5-8 near Port Macquarie, and while there are a few different issues that will be discussed, I think it is safe to say that the underlying theme will be the future of the church.

Churches around the world, not just Swedenborgian churches, are struggling with in person attendance post COVID, and wondering what to do next. The church is in a tough space these days in my opinion because more and more people distance themselves from organizations that do not reflect and conform to who they are, yet the calling of a church is to transform the individual not the organization... so it is hard to figure a way forward. I’ll let you know next month what we come up with.

Pastor on Holiday

While it is true that the pastor took some holiday time in the US recently, the pastor's wife and son haven't done any travelling in quite some time. The pastor's wife has wanted to go and visit Darwin for a long while, so guess what... the Beiswengers are headed to Darwin. We leave on September 24th, returning 3rd of October. There will be a lay service on the 24th September, but no service on the 2nd October.

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The Eagle and the Crow

Recently in church I gave a message about the importance of thinking from higher perspectives. The Lord met His disciples after the resurrection on an appointed mountain, and so He calls to each of us to meet him on a mountain, which is to say we have to elevate our thoughts to meet with Him. This following story about the eagle and the crow that I found online demonstrates this same idea in a different way.

The only bird that dares to peck an eagle is the crow.
The crow sits on the eagles back and bites his neck.
The eagle does not respond, nor fight with the crow;
it does not spend time or energy on the crow, instead
he just opens its wings and begins to rise higher in the heavens.
The higher the flight, the harder it is for the crow to breathe and
eventually the crow falls off due to a lack of oxygen.

Learn from the eagle and don't fight the crows, just keep ascending.
They might be along for the ride but they'll soon fall off.
Do not allow yourself to succumb to the distractions....
keep your focus on the things above,
keep learning, growing and continue rising!

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What Was God Doing Before the Creation of the Universe?

In my research for the lead article, I came across an interesting quote in the *Arcana* (8325) that I thought I'd share with you. It warns about the problems of contemplating what the Lord was doing before the creation of the universe, but what in particular jumped out at me were these markers at the edge of the universe, markers that eat us when we think about this stuff! I find the concept of an edge of the universe fascinating, but statues that eat us just is too strange to not share around. Enjoy.

For example, a natural man inevitably falls into a nonsensical way of thinking about God when with notions involving the passage of time he contemplates what God was doing before the creation of the world, that is, what He was engaged in from eternity up to then. Nor can he be extricated from that tangled knot until notions of time and space are banished. When

angels contemplate that eternity they never do so with notions of time but with ideas of state.

In the next life two statues appear, partly of flesh and partly of stone. They are stationed on the edge of the created universe, in front over to the left. They are said to swallow up those who contemplate what God was doing from eternity before He created the world. The swallowing up represents the consideration that since a person cannot contemplate anything without notions involving space and time he cannot extricate himself from the difficulty unaided. He does so only with the aid of God, either by ceasing to contemplate the matter or by banishing notions involving time.

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Blast from the Past part 1

Hurstville New Church has been around for over 100 years at this point, and over the course of its existence there has been an interesting trend where the church has had more American pastors than Australian pastors. In particular one local boy, **Garry Walsh**, who was raised coming to this church, made good, joined the ministry, and served here for a few years from 2002-2005. Garry and his wife **Laurel** will be back visiting in Australia in September, and while much of the time they're going to be on a road trip, we are hoping that we'll see them here on the 18th of September. Garry kindly offered to preach, but he is on holiday, and so I told him to relax, just come and enjoy himself.

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Blast from the Past part 2

Are you interested in ancient artefacts? A long, long, long time ago, in the year 1974... a time before there were smart phones, reality TV shows, and extra charges for luggage at the airport, Hurstville New Church welcomed a new pastor: **Rev Mike Gladish**. He was a young man with a wife, three kids and great ambitions who served the church here for seven years. These days he's an old man, with a wife, six kids, a bunch of grandchildren and I think still has great ambitions... but this ancient relic from the past is finally coming back to Australia and will once again grace the chancel of our church and making a guest preaching appearance on October 23rd. Mark your calendar. We hope you'll be able to stop by and join us for this service.

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Owen Heldon** (6th), **Carolyn Heldon** (8th), **Klaire Horner** (9th), **Liam Johnson** (10th), **Sylvia Hicks** (13th), **Karen Evans** (13th), **Jeffrey Heldon** (15th), **Phillipa Horner** (15th), **Azalea Robson** (19th), **Phillip Walsh** (29th), **Lily Heldon** (29th August)

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