

## **The New Church Newsletter**

**Hurstville Society February 2023**



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## Edison & Tesla's Attempts at Contacting Heaven

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

There's an old joke that goes something like this... a man walks into a church in America, and as he explores it he comes across a little phone booth near the front of the church. The man has never seen this before. The pastor tells the man that there is actually one in every church, and with that phone he can call heaven, but... it's \$5,000 a minute. In disbelief the man starts stopping in at churches around the country and finding that, sure enough, the Heaven Phone is indeed in every church.

One day he takes a trip to Australia, and as is his custom at this point, he stops into a local church. Once again, he sees a phone booth near the front of the church, but this time something is different. It's free. There's no cost! Puzzled the man finds the pastor and says, "I've seen these phones all throughout the States, and they're \$5,000 a minute. Why is it free here?" The pastor laughs and says, "Because in Australia, calling heaven is a local call."

It's a good joke, well, *I* think it's a good joke, because we can all laugh about the obviously crazy idea of trying to phone heaven. Except, believe it or not, there have been a couple of world famous scientists who actually thought it was possible. Who were they? None other than Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla. The story I'm about to tell you is one I found on YouTube, on the channel "The Why Files," and it really is a true story. The video says that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century séances were very fashionable, and it was fairly mainstream to think it was possible to contact the dead. Edison was initially skeptical, and really wasn't into the idea when he had heard that Tesla was working on a radio to contact spirits. But then, Tesla started grabbing headlines, and patents. Now if you know anything about human nature you know that ego can be a very motivating force, so not to be outdone, Edison got to work on his own machine.

One night in 1920 at his lab, Edison gathered a group of scientists and friends to witness his latest experiment. It was a project he had been working on in secret. According to the story, the device looked like a projector, and Edison explained the light it projected would register any disturbance that went through it, no matter whether it was visible or not. This disturbance would be detected using a finely calibrated meter. To witness the experiment Edison invited scientists as well as psychics and mediums. The idea was that the latter would summon the spirits, and the former would be able to document them, proving that the Ghost Phone actually worked.

The mediums said ghosts were there, but the needle didn't move. After a few hours Edison thanked everyone, sent them home, and went back to work. Edison kept experimenting and refining the Ghost Phone. Unfortunately he died a few years later, but he insisted that in time he could get it to work. Interestingly, his estate deleted all mention of the Ghost Phone from his research, notes, and personal diary. We know he was working on it because he was quoted in newspapers talking about it, but nobody knows what happened to the research.

Tesla, on the other hand, got his Spirit Radio to work. The story goes that Tesla was in his lab building a crystal radio. If you're not familiar with these, crystal radios are a type of receiver that doesn't use external power. Instead, it just uses power generated from the electromagnetic waves it receives. What happened was that he started hearing sounds of voices, and it frightened him at first. He wrote:

"The sounds appeared to be human voices conversing back and forth in a language I can't understand. But I was alone in my laboratory at night."

As he got to thinking about it, he started to put together this chain of logic: humans create electricity, and anything that creates electricity creates an electromagnetic field, so therefore if we use the proper equipment it can be tuned into. Further, since energy can't be created or destroyed, only changed from one form to another, and if a soul is electromagnetic energy that can't be destroyed... when somebody dies, that energy should still be around! Tesla felt that if he could just find the right frequency, he could create a radio to listen to these disembodied spirits. So that's what he did.

One of the interesting things about Tesla was that, unlike Edison, Tesla did lots of research and writing before he actually set out to build anything. He actually filed patents for his Spirit Radio, and because there were patents, it meant that it could be built. And you know what? There are people who have used the plans and built it. It's not even expensive. It does pick up something, but whether or not you believe it is a spirit is up to you.

At this point the presenter in the video asks a great question: Why were Tesla and Edison so interested in this? He explains:

"During the time the Spanish flu was raging, and that pandemic was far worse than anything we've experienced the last couple of years, the world was still dealing with the pain and loss of WWI, so death was everywhere and affecting everyone. No matter how logical, scientific, and pragmatic you may be, when tragedy strikes, your feelings on the paranormal may change. Have you ever lost somebody close to you?"

Well, when you put it like that, suddenly the idea of a Ghost Phone or Spirit Radio doesn't sound so crazy. You can even understand somebody paying \$5,000 a minute to make that call. What gets me about all of this is that talking to heaven was supposed to be a local call, free to everybody – even Americans! Swedenborg writes about how people were designed to be able to communicate with the spiritual realms, and it used to be commonplace. But we lost that ability.

Why? Because we became so focused on this reality that we walked away from the teachings of the Lord which closed our collective minds to the spiritual realm, and thus closing off that communication. Just a couple of weeks ago I gave a church service that was looking at the story of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. The meaning of this story is simple: by "walking" through life, the love of the world and love of self attach themselves to us like dirt to our feet, which "hinders the influx of good and truth from the

Lord” (AC 3147). This is why we have to wash our feet. If we don’t, the good from the Lord is “either perverted there, or turned away, or stifled” (ibid).

I hear a lot about how we need to be good stewards of our planet, keeping the environment clean so that our children and grandchildren can drink clean water and breathe clean air. Fair enough. Well folks, we also need to be good stewards of our collective spiritual connection to God as well because spiritual filth and pollution is just as real and far more deadly. If you think about it, we just celebrated Christmas because the Lord came... and why did He have to come? Because people nearly severed the connection between God and man.

Our forefathers have made bad spiritual choices for centuries, so we’ve inherited some dirty feet that essentially create a barrier or a veil between this world and the spiritual, leaving us incapable of conversing with our loved ones on the other side. It was a miracle when the angel came to Mary, Joseph and the others. If you want to talk to your deceased loved ones you’ll need a miracle too because there’s no amount of money that can do it, even though we would consider it to be a priceless conversation. If we want to restore those open, free lines of communication, it isn’t going to come by way of a Spirit Radio, Ghost Phone, or even a special phone booth in the church. If we want to talk with angels, maybe we need to start with washing our feet. Then with the good influx restored we can begin thinking and acting more like them. Maybe then, they’ll answer our call.

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### **Journey Program – Shift, Starting February 5th 2023**

As is our pattern the last ten years or so, we kick off a spiritual growth program in February. This time we’ll use the program “**Shift**,” which came out in 2011 but by my records I’ve never used here. The program runs 7 weeks, and we’ll start with “Shift” themed worship services on February 5th. There will also be a discussion group, but we’re changing from our normal time to instead run these on **Wednesday mornings at 11am**. Here’s a description of the program:

Although painful at times, struggle often signifies the beginning of change. Whether it’s relationship issues, financial concerns, bad habits, we all struggle. And fortunately, we all have the God-given power to shift our focus, our perspective and our priorities, which can lead to exciting life changes. But why do this alone?

Shift is a seven-week spiritual growth program in which participants learn about themselves, about God, and about how to make shifts in their lives. The program draws on the Jacob story from the Old Testament. Here is your chance to offer your struggles before the Lord, and watch them turn to blessings.

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## **The Future of Virtual Retreats**

We weren't able to organize a church camp during the summer holidays this year, but we were able to pull together a virtual retreat that was hosted on Zoom and YouTube. I was looking at the viewership numbers this morning, and the various sessions show 17-21 views on YouTube, plus I was usually seeing about 6-8 people live on Zoom. There are probably some views where it is multiple people watching, so it probably isn't a stretch to say there were 30+ attendees for these sessions.

Those numbers aren't too bad, however, if you subtract ministers/presenters and their wives those numbers come down quite a bit. Not to mention that this is the total number of attendees from across the country. What I'm getting at is wondering if there is a way to do a virtual retreat that would be more appealing? What is keeping people away? Is it just that people are too busy this time of year? Are the topics unappealing? Are the presenters not interesting enough? I'd love to get some feedback.

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## **The Brisbane Visit Update**

You may recall that after the Council of Ministers meetings back in September it was decided that I should go to visit the Brisbane church to see what it is that they are doing right. Right now they are the largest New Church congregation in Australia, and have been able to bring in some new people over the last few years as well. With that in mind, it seemed reasonable to see if there are any "best practices" that we could adopt.

Yet this visit hasn't happened yet. After the meetings all of our local attention was turned to getting ready for the Centenary, then a run up to Christmas which was followed by a January break. Brisbane doesn't run services in January, so no point in going then. But we're about embark on a 7 week Journey program that will lead us up to Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter. Right after that I'll have regional clergy meetings in South Korea. The point being: it's been busy around here! So while this visit hasn't happened, and won't happen anytime soon, it hasn't been forgotten!

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## **Meaningful Contact**

Life is funny sometimes. Regular readers know that I had been creating YouTube videos explaining Bible meanings. About a year ago I stopped, feeling frustrated that I really wasn't getting the results I wanted. The last couple months though I've found myself coming back to the idea, thinking that the premise is good, I just need to figure out how to do a better job of it.

Anyway, the Lord decided that I needed a bit of extra convincing to get back on the project. What does He do? Well, out of the blue I got an email from a person who was a fan of the videos. She tracked me down by finding the church website, and sent me an email. She's from Texas, but she and her husband were on a cruise that was going to dock in Sydney.

So I met them downtown, and we had a nice visit while walking through the Botanic Gardens and finishing at the MCA cafe. It went so well that a couple days later Jenn and I spent the day with them in the Blue Mountains.

It was really nice to feel like those videos have served somebody! So much of the comments that I receive on them are people who are insisting on the need to take the Bible strictly literally, so it was nice to meet with somebody who had never even heard of Swedenborg but was into the idea of seeing the deeper, personal meaning to the Bible stories. As good as that was, now I'm also feeling like the Big Guy is saying that it's time to get back to work on that project.

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## **Easter Readings**

You are invited to sign up for Easter Readings! Starting February 22nd, daily emails will walk you through the Easter story, providing thoughts and questions to inspire reflection.

Accompanying the readings will be weekly online groups where you can share thoughts and insights with others in a relaxed and informal setting. There will be a bunch of these groups, so you can choose the one that best fits your schedule.

I'll be running one, but feel free to pick the one that suits you best. Also, this is a program that GC Outreach is going to advertise heavily to non-GC people, so it is a good chance to meet people who are brand new to the New Church.

Register here:

<http://www.newchurch.org/easterchurch.org/easter>

## **Birthdays**

**January: Margaret Heldon (9<sup>th</sup>), Kerry Lockhart (24<sup>th</sup>), Kaye Macfarlane (30<sup>th</sup>)**

**February: John Hicks (9<sup>th</sup>) and Mike Lockhart (11<sup>th</sup>)**

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