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## The New Church Newsletter

### Hurstville Society August 2024

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#### **Has Physics Been on the Wrong Track for 100 Years?!**

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

I don't know how many of my readers watch or listen to the Joe Rogan Experience, but it's a podcast on Spotify and YouTube that attracts millions of viewers. I think part of the appeal is the wide range of guests, and Joe's willingness to give space to new and/or unconventional ideas. I typically catch some 5-10 minute clips of the podcast on YouTube every now and again, but recently Joe had a guest on that after watching a couple clips I went and watched the entire 3 hour episode. It was... interesting.

The guest was Terrance Howard, and he's best known as an actor in a bunch of TV shows and movies that I've never watched. Yet he starts off the podcast interview by saying, "I didn't come into this world the way everybody else does." Oh really? No, he wasn't claiming to be placed here by aliens, but rather he makes the claim that he remembers being in the womb and telling himself repeatedly to not fall asleep and forget who he is.

That is unusual, but not necessarily a big deal in and of itself. Where things get interesting is that when he's five years old he starts having dreams that are directing him towards learning geometry. Over the years it seems that eventually he learns how to lucid dream, and in doing so finds a "mansion" that gives him access to "all knowledge." Now, that can sound a little crazy, but at the same time a lot of people who have a near death experience say that they too have access to all knowledge in that state. They just can't seem to bring it all back with them!

Anyway, Terrance Howard then goes on laying out all of his ideas over the next three hours and 2 minutes. There's a lot of stuff there, and there have been a lot of people who have been refuting his ideas, saying he's crazy. I guess that's par for the course these days though. For me, I think he's wrong about some things, but at the same time, he may have some interesting things right.

One of the things he talks about is the "ether." The "ether" is a concept that's been around for a long time. Basically, classical science regarded it as a super-fine substance that existed everywhere. For example, there was no vacuum in outer space,

rather space was filled with ether and ether was the medium that light and gravity travelled through. However, evidence for the presence of such a medium was not found in the Michelson–Morley experiment, and this result has been interpreted to mean that no ether exists.

Terrance Howard thinks that this conclusion was a mistake, and that as a result modern physics has been going down the wrong path for over a hundred years. The ether is real he says!

“Why are you telling me about this?” you may be wondering. I’m telling you about this because Swedenborg references the ether quite a bit. In Swedenborg’s pre-theological work “The Economy of the Animal Kingdom,” he wants the reader to have a rational, logical understanding of how the universe works. He’s developing what will later become the doctrine of degrees, making the point that everything has a cause that is prior to it. Essentially he states that ether “is prior to the air; more universal, less compounded, and more perfect” (EAK 68).

But we find the ether not just in the pre-theological works, but all throughout the Writings as well. This following excerpt from *Last Judgement Posthumous* #320 is along the lines of what Terrance Howard was saying.

There are three natural atmospheres arising from the sun of the world, and there are three spiritual atmospheres arising from the sun of heaven, which is the Lord. The three natural atmospheres arising from the sun of the world are the purer ether, which is universal, from which is all gravitation; the

middle ether, which forms the vortex around the planets, in which are the moons and the satellites, from which is magnetism; and the ultimate ether which is the air. By these three atmospheres all the corporeal and material things of the earth are held together, which are so composed as to be applicable to those three degrees.

The three spiritual atmospheres arising from the sun of heaven, are those in which are the angels of the three heavens. In the two higher atmospheres are the angels of the Lord's celestial kingdom; in the third and the first natural, which is pure ether, are the angels of the Lord's spiritual kingdom, and in the atmospheres following those two which are the middle and the ultimate ether, which is the air, are men while they are in the natural world.

If you prefer something that wasn't published posthumously, we have this from *Divine Love & Wisdom* #158:

As the sun of the natural world is pure fire, and therefore dead, the heat proceeding from it is also dead, likewise the light proceeding from it is dead; so also are the atmospheres, which are called ether and air, and which receive in their bosom and carry down the heat and light of that sun.

The point is that Swedenborg is consistent throughout everything he writes that there is no "nothing," no vacuum. There's always *something* that a lower element is traveling through. For example, speech and hearing require air for the sound to travel through it. So, you might be wondering, what does the ether do? What travels

through it? Glad you asked. It seems that he's saying that light travels through the ether because he says "sight is not possible except by means of an atmosphere purer than air" (DLW 176). Later he writes that "ether and air are receptacles of heat and light," so assuming that air is a receptacle of heat, then ether would be the receptacle of light (DLW 223).

This idea is consistent with some of the scientific views of Swedenborg's time, so critics will say that all of Swedenborg's works are not timeless works of Divine inspiration, but merely products of the biases, inclinations and time of the man who penned them. As you might guess, I see it differently.

I see it differently not just because Swedenborg claims that what he wrote is Divinely given to him, but because there is an inescapable logic to the idea that everything has to have a prior cause. Plus it also makes sense that *everything* travels through *something*. Terrance Howard says that the Michaelson-Morley experiment went wrong because they could not get out of the ether, as in, they couldn't step outside it. "Because it's everything around us so they couldn't tell a difference" when they did their measurements, "so they assumed there was a void - that there was no ether there." It's like a fish trying to prove water I guess.

But because Terrance Howard made so many interesting claims, the host of the podcast invited Eric Weinstein to the show to talk with Terrance about his theories. Eric is a highly educated mathematician, and he said the following to Terrance: "You're trying to say, 'Look, first of all the vacuum isn't a vacuum it's roiling

with activity, right? The void isn't a void. Stuff is happening, virtual particles are coming in and out of existence. There is no vacuum, right?' You're very much in tune with modern physics" (my emphasis).

This really surprised me, because it sounds like modern physics is changing its thinking, and is coming back around to the idea that there is no vacuum, and therefore the ether is real in one form or another. Modern physics may not be at the place of describing the ether as Swedenborg does, but that just may be a matter of time.

At the end of the day it seems that Terrance Howard is right: modern physics has been on the wrong track for 100 years, and they know it. This is another example though of something that the New Church would have done well to proclaim as truth all this time. After all, we say Swedenborg only wrote what God told him to write, and he wrote about the ether in 110 different passages throughout the Writings. It should have been us proclaiming that science was going down the wrong path, not an American actor.

### **Clergy Meetings Recap**

Due to the fact that there was an assembly this year, this year's clergy meetings were short and sweet. We started Tuesday morning, and were finished by lunch on Thursday. What I enjoyed more than the brevity of the meetings though was the general sphere and "vibe" of the event. I think that was due to the lack of controversy. Nobody was pushing an agenda this year: not the laity, or the clergy.

However, there were some interesting presentations. There was one on miracles in the modern world by Rev Jacob Borketey, which I particularly appreciated. Basically he was fighting against some in the New Church who have said that miracles don't happen anymore, but what the Writings actually say is that miracles don't happen *like they used to* anymore. We still have miracles! They just happen on a personal level, not so much a parting of the Red Sea variety. I've been making the same point for years, so it was nice to have somebody make a scholarly presentation on it.

Your former pastor, Erik Sandstrom, offered a paper on "The Holy City and Earthquakes." He pulled together some interesting teachings that talk about the timing of the various revelations given, bringing to light just how much the Lord worked to protect the evil from themselves while giving the rest of us as much light as possible. There's a lot of interesting material here, and I do hope that I can turn it into a class in the months ahead.

Other than paper presentations, there's other clergy business that gets attended to... things like the Bishops give us updates on how they see things, we learn of some new initiatives that are just starting, and of course there's opportunity to connect with other clergy in between the sessions and at meals. This as you might expect is what I think the best part of the meetings actually is.

### **Assembly Recap by Rev Mac Frazier**

I wrote this to my fellow clergy, but then decided to share it openly as a form of thank you to everyone involved in making the 2024 General Church Assembly happen.

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I went to Bryn Athyn mildly pessimistic about both the Clergy Meetings and the Assembly, if I'm being frank. I went out of a sense of professional obligation, but somewhat reluctantly. But then the meetings were pleasant. I have some quibble with how our Council interacts with the Trustees at the crossover point of these meetings every year, but on the whole I enjoyed more hours than I didn't.

And then the Assembly. Wow. I got a lot more out of some of the workshops than I'd anticipated I would. And all the worship services were delightful and enlightening and just what I needed. Yes, the full cathedral singing verse three of "Jerusalem the Golden" a cappella was incredibly moving, and the Lord's Prayer in Swahili shared by an impromptu choir of one-day volunteers was especially beautiful! The vespers and holy supper and morning worships were also good.

But maybe above all that for me was the tone of the crowds as I moved from event to event. So many people so happy to greet one another as New Church brothers and sisters was a little overwhelming at times--in a good way. Given all the tensions there have been, it was truly wonderful to be reminded that we can be united in charity as a church.

And the fact that this took over 200 volunteers, and those volunteers all seemed to be joyously giving, right down to the corps of young men driving shuttles non stop each day. It was a logistical triumph for the organizers, but more it was a testament

to a spirit of love of use and love for the Lord's church to see all these people freely giving to make this huge event happen.

And speaking of young volunteers--the range of ages was good to see. As I said in the final discussion session of the regular clergy meetings, I have serious fears about the future of the General Church. But seeing so many younger people enthusiastically participating in so many ways boosted my hopes for the future. As some of y'all know, my brother Scott and his wife Nicole host a regular open brunch at their house for young people who go to church on Sunday in Bryn Athyn. This most recent Sunday being the conclusion of the Assembly, their brunch crowd hit record numbers, with many new faces that aren't normally there. And it was delightful to see all these visitors there. But what really struck me, as I looked out over the sea of happy people with their beignets, bacon and coffee, was that I was seeing the future of the church. SO MANY college students and young adults, gathered in a feast of charity, talking about the church (and other things of course), forming a community of shared love for the Lord and the neighbor...my heart burst.

We've got some serious challenges to deal with. But as Pete Buss, Sr., demonstrated in his workshop, the Lord is right here, down here with us, holding each of our hands and walking with us. He is not far, and He is doing good things in and through the people who are His church.

Thank you, Bryn Athyn staff and volunteers, and thank you presenters from all around the world, for an uplifting and useful gathering of the church.

And thank you, Lord. I know I needed this, and believe many, many others did, as well.

### **The Passing of June Kirsten**

A week before I was going to head off to the US for meetings and the Assembly, I got a call from Nacole Lorschy, the granddaughter of June Kirsten. June had passed away, and Nacole was asking if I was available to conduct the memorial service. While \*I\* was available on the date she wanted, the funeral home was not available that day, so the service got bumped a week to a day when I was away. However, as all of this was being sorted out, I did some research on June in preparation for a memorial service. As a result, I thought I'd share a couple of excerpts from the service as well as some of the things I learned in my research. Let's start with this from her service:

“June was described to me as a kind and generous woman who was chatty and extremely social. She was also strong and selfless raising her children on



her own. June's greatest joy in life was spending time with her family especially her grandchildren who she adored throughout her life. June enjoyed wonderful health and she remained active up until the last two years and she was still living independently until the age of 98 June's life was rich and full and she lived it well she passed away on Monday the 17th of June surrounded by her family at the remarkable age of 99.”

In 1974 June married Theo, and were married here at the church by Rev Doug Taylor. It was them who bought the organ for the church so there could be organ music at their wedding. Theo “was the absolute love of her life... Theo and June adored each other and had beautiful relationships with Theo's two children and their families. Life for Theo and June was filled with travel and both of them enjoying many parts of the world together. If I was to name them all, I couldn't, but America, Asia, Holland, Scotland, England, they had warm holidays in Hawaii in Fiji... I loved seeing that. They had fun.”

One of the things that came up in the service, and also in my conversations with people about June, was that she took a keen interest in the lives of others. She absolutely loved social events, whether they were at church, at the retirement home, or a big family gathering. She was known to move from table to table to have a chat with everybody, knew everybody's name, wanted to know how they were. Everybody knew her as a friend.

What I found interesting though, is that while she hadn't attended church in many years, basically since Theo passed away in 2006,

she apparently loved reading the church newsletter. Her granddaughter told me that she still had a strong New Church faith, and enjoyed the newsletter as a way of keeping in touch with the faith as well as the people in the church that she attended for 30+ years.

I was surprised that she apparently cared as much as she did, because when I had reached out to her over the years she wasn't interested in a pastoral visit. Former pastor Erik Sandstrom said to me that he had similar experiences with her. He and I both had just figured she didn't have much real interest in the church, but I wonder if we were wrong.

I say that because one of the themes that came up with June was that she didn't want to put anybody out. While she was interested in them, it seems that perhaps she thought that she didn't have anything interesting to offer them. She didn't want to be a bother. So perhaps that was why she pushed back on visits. I say this because in speaking to one of her friends, he said that her last words to him were, "Don't worry about me, I'm all right."

I think she is all right now. Actually, she's probably doing better than just "all right." One thing that was very clear was that June loved Theo. Adored him. Theo had a stroke in the 80s, and June really honored her part of loving him in sickness. Now, after nearly 18 years, she is reunited with him – a healthy version of him - and they can start up their adventures again. I really appreciate a partner who sticks with their spouse throughout the good times and the bad. The church teaches that the love of marriage is one

of the fundamental loves of heaven, and I can't help but to think that it was the church's teachings about marriage that was her fundamental love of the church. It certainly was fundamental to June's life, and I'm sure now she's enjoying married life more than she ever had before.

If you have any interest in watching the video of her memorial service, let me know and I'll send you the link.

### **Spring 2024 Women's Weekend: Hornsby, Nov 15-17 by Jenn Beiswenger**

We're doing it again! Ladies, mark your diaries: you're cordially invited to join other New Church-minded women across Australia and New Zealand for our spring women's weekend. We'll be gathering Nov 15-17 at an Airbnb in Hornsby, NSW and via Zoom. There will be a nice combination of fun and inspiring sessions on offer, including a guest speaker chiming in from the U.S. and once again assembling birth kits for disadvantaged women in developing countries – plus down-time to visit with our sisters and explore the area (and go for a dip in the on-site pool!?). If this interests you and you haven't already signed up, please let Jenn know ([jenn@beiswenger.net](mailto:jenn@beiswenger.net)). The deadline isn't until October, but the sooner we know who's coming, the sooner we can start planning our weekend -- and the sooner we can all get excited!

On the subject of assembling birth kits, we will need to raise \$1000 to pay for the supplies, as in previous years. Since we're planning this well in advance, there's no urgency yet; watch this space for further details! *Thanks in advance for your consideration!*

## **Trying a New Approach with the January Retreat by Julian Duckworth**

### Tuning Into Inner Life

As well as living in our body and living in the world, we all live inwardly in our personal life. You inside you. You might call this our 'being'. It's this that is the whole focus of spiritual teaching and practice. It's this which is the gift of God to us and where God works with us to bring us to love heaven. It's the world of our loves, thoughts, intentions, freedom and choosing. It shapes our outward life, and it's the whole of our eternal life.

Swedenborg's teachings address this inner focus all the time, helping us to understand how it goes. Living in busy worldly lives can close us down from even noticing this inner life, let alone dealing with it. This means we can miss out on nurturing it. Why not come along to the Retreat where we are going to concentrate on bringing it to the surface and see if for what it is.

We are not going to have traditional talks, and just sit and listen but it will be all more personal and a sharing of our inner life. Some new ways of using the Writings will be presented that you may find helpful. As we become more aware of our inner life it brings the Word alive in us, opening up endless help from the Lord. This then helps us to deal with everyday life, with our feelings and how we cope with and help other people.

Do come and be a part of this new approach.

## **Shakespeare's Psalm: A Strange Story**

You're probably familiar with William Shakespeare, you know, the incredibly famous British playwright. However did you know, he also wrote part of the Bible? Okay, so maybe I'm twisting the truth a little bit here, but there's a bizarre coincidence that some people think proves he did. Bear with me.

The words "shake" and "spear" combined have four vowels and six consonants, right? So when written together, it looks like "46." Well, some very bored person in 1902 decided that was good enough reason to flick to Psalm 46 of their Bible and see if there was anything interesting in there. Surprisingly enough, they actually found something.

If you happen to have a King James Bible lying around, flick over to Psalm 46. Now count the words from beginning until you get to the 46th. The word is "shake." If you now count backwards from the last word in the Psalm, you'll find the 46th word from the end is "spear." Even odder, the King James version of the Bible was translated in around 1610.

Take a guess how old Shakespeare was at that time? That's right, 46. All this adds up to one crazy coincidence, and it's led some people to believe that Shakespeare had a hand in writing it. I'm not so sure, but I can't deny it's weird.

### **Quotable**

We often hear that "Life is short, better enjoy it." How about "Eternity is long, better prepare for it."

## Birthdays

Happy Birthday to Emily Kermond (7th), Rhonda Hall (12th),  
Rebekah Horner (17th), Larah Walsh (21st), Lily Heldon (29th)  
Ralph Horner (30th)

### ***What's "new" about the "New Church?"***

A very common question, to be sure. Well, it all started just over 200 years ago... the main branches of the Christian church had become less correct, and one man named Emanuel Swedenborg had written volumes about how Christianity was missing the point. Some readers of Swedenborg realised he was right, and formed a new organisation that would strip away the centuries of politics and tradition and get back to what Christianity was supposed to be about: loving God and loving each other. Everything else could be seen as merely a difference of opinion if those two main principles reigned supreme through this new church.

As a result we believe in a positive Christianity, one where we look to the best in ourselves and others while still holding ourselves accountable to a higher standard and taking responsibility for our lives. Nowadays we're not so much "new" as we are "different." We still keep the name, and yet make every effort to incorporate the ideals that were instrumental in being "new" over two centuries ago.

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