



## **The New Church Newsletter**

**Hurstville Society July 2021**

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## **The Stories that are Never Told**

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

Being a pastor is a good job. The hours are flexible, with the exception of Sunday mornings. I get to be with people on some of the happiest days of their lives, and it can be very rewarding to work with them through the most challenging times as well. In my case, I've been here nine years, and have made many good friendships as I've walked through life with the people here, watching the kids grow, parents become grandparents and saying "farewell 'til next time" to some of our more senior members.

One of the privileges of the job is that we pastors also hear your stories. Stories that we can't tell anybody else, stories that at times reveal your deepest, most guarded secrets and greatest fears. Sometimes it's a person telling me something that they think for one reason or another they can't tell their spouse. Sometimes it's a mischievous tale of what they got away with as a youth. I've heard stories that I would have never believed to be possible, stories of things that have happened to people that are so terrible that suddenly I have a new understanding of a person's pain, and why it is that they act in ways that I would consider inappropriate or worse. Yet, when I get to know people in these deeper ways it has allowed me to be more patient, tolerant and understanding of why they do the things they do.

Often times, in my mind I see clear solutions to the problems of their life. I do offer my solutions when asked, and to no ones' surprise they don't instantly turn their lives around doing everything I suggest. That's just not how things work. Sometimes I get impatient with the lack of progress, but I remind myself the Lord bends us, doesn't break us.

Now, why am I telling you all this you might wonder? Two reasons. One is to make the point that I really do hear things about people's lives that you probably don't. The other reason is that I'm about to dive into a more sensitive subject, and I think that pastors often have the reputation of people who are judgmental, out of touch, and who don't really care about other people. In my life experience, people will really only listen if they know that you really care... so I don't know if people realize it, but believe it or not, I care. I don't think I'm special or unusual in this regard, but in my experience pastors care for their congregations, cheering for the spiritual success of those under their care. This is an important point, because whether you disagree with me or not, I hope you believe me when I say that I'm not coming at this from a position of ignorance or hatred. With that said, here goes...

No doubt you've noticed all the "Pride" celebrations this month. Beyond just various banners and company logos being modified to incorporate rainbows, the LGBTQ world has notched another accomplishment. Laurel Hubbard was selected for New Zealand's weightlifting team, giving her the distinction of being the world's first transgender Olympian.

The claim by the New Zealand coach is “She’s a woman, that’s it” is backed by the fact that she went through a sex change operation in 2013 and as a result has produced a negligible amount of testosterone for the past 8 years. She’s allowed to compete in the games because she meets the current IOC eligibility rules which are based on two fundamental criteria. The first is that an athlete must identify as a woman four years before her first competition. The second is that, for a 12-month period leading into and including their competition, she must show testosterone levels below a specified amount.

There are a number of interesting articles out talking about this from a variety of perspectives, and from what I’ve read one of the common themes is how the rules are constantly being developed to create a level playing field so transgender people can compete in the gender of their choice. It seems that there still is a great deal of public concern that men who are identifying as women are going to have an unfair advantage and therefore destroy the records of female athletes around the world.

For me, my interest is more around wondering what happened that had Laurel Hubbard think that he was in fact a woman, and why do we as a culture believe such a claim. If you look at the statistics on LGBT people they report more childhood psychological and physical abuse by parents and caretakers, more sexual abuse, and more partner psychological and physical victimization in adulthood. Beyond that there are many studies that show that “Childhood Trauma (CT) leads to sexual disorders (SD) and several studies state that self-esteem is affected in patients with SD. Childhood trauma must be considered and determined in the goal of treatment of sexual disorders.”

What this means to me is that the odds are something happened to Laurel Hubbard for him to think he’s a she. Not just “something happened,” but something probably pretty terrible happened. What are we supposed to do when something terrible happens? Turn to the Lord. Ask for His help and guidance. Unfortunately these days most people are unaware of this saving technique, or if they do they only understand it in some sort of “I’ll pray to God and He’ll make this problem go away” kind of way. The reality is that we have to take His teachings about what is real, and what is right and true and integrate them into our life. This integration doesn’t happen by just hoping it will happen, but we have to almost militantly make it happen.

The fact is, most people treat spiritual teachings as irrelevant to their lives as such fail to see the power that they have to actually make their life and their world a better place. It’s funny in an ironic kind of way that happiness we all seek could be ours for free if we just realized the truth that was in our midst. I wonder what the world would be like if we really knew the lesson of Adam and Eve and didn’t trust our physical senses so much. I wonder what people would be like if they believed, as is the case, that our thoughts don’t originate in our own heads.

Maybe for Laurel, she's an exception, and there was nothing terrible that happened, but certainly at some point when she was a he, that he at least thought, "Am I a woman?" The teaching remains the same: turn to the Creator who made everything, including you, and you'll know the truth about who you are. In this case, specific teachings like these would be useful:

"[...]people are male and female, and since it is one thing to be masculine and another to be feminine, with the two qualities being so different that one cannot be converted into the other[...]" (CL 32)

Indeed, masculinity in the male is masculine in every part, even in the least part of his body, and also in every idea of his thought, and in every bit of his affection. So, too, with femininity in the female. (CL 33)

[T]here is nothing in the soul, mind or body which is not male in the man and female in the woman. (CL 46)

There are plenty of other passages that tell us that sexuality is a spiritual quality and that it is determined at conception, so unlike the "Earths in the Universe" question there just isn't any ambiguity. I understand that there are many who are affiliated with the New Church in some way or another that find very plain teachings like this very confronting because they don't leave much room for LGBTQ things to be orderly. These teachings are confronting because we all know LGBTQ people and we know them to be our friends or family who are kind, generous, and productive members of society. We want to support them in any way that we can. As a result, we tell them they're great just the way they are.

Yet I'm not convinced that approach actually leads to their happiness. I am a pastor, and I have heard the stories.

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## **Philip Island Camp Cancelled**

It was around this time last year that I remember observing all the state border closures and thinking, "We sure are fortunate that we didn't plan a church camp for January 2021. There's no way that was going to happen, but by July I think things should be back to normal." Wrong.

Only a few weeks ago I was still thinking that despite the Melbourne outbreak, that things would be brought back under control quickly and that we'd manage to have our camp. Wrong again. While cases did seem to get under control fairly quickly, there was still going to be issues with interstate travel, which would impact negatively on camp attendance when we really had a small group to begin with. Plus, I really didn't want people to be under a cloud of impending doom, worrying about whether or not they'd be able to get back out of Victoria even if they successfully got in. Camp is supposed to be about being worry free, and I just

didn't think we could provide that this time. As a result, I decided it was best to cancel.

It was a shame too, because I thought we had a pretty good schedule lined up. Curtis Childs from the Swedenborg Foundation's "Offthellefteye" channel had agreed to do a live Zoom session with us, as had David Glover from the UK who was going to give a presentation on how we see New Church teachings about death in the movies. Plus an assortment of presentations from the local ministers as well that I thought were going to be interesting and relevant.

Not all is lost though. These presentations will likely be presented at some camp in the future. At this point I'm not going to reschedule anything just yet though as I just don't think enough people are willing and able to book travel to make it all worthwhile.

That said, there are two options in my mind: one is a winter camp, say July 2022, in Queensland somewhere, OR a camp just about anywhere in January 2023. If you have a preference for one or the other, I'd like to hear it.

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## **New Church Day Celebrations**

Over the nine years that I've been here, we've had a situation where the majority of the kids who are attending are boys. But we're starting to have a changing of the guard as those once-little boys are now teenagers, and the young ones are now all girls! By my count we had seven girls age 7 and under with us throughout the morning which was wonderful. It certainly creates a different dynamic as girls in general were quite happy to do some of the crafty work of drawing heads for the great red dragon piñata, and constructing some New Jerusalems as well.



While the kids were working on all of that, the adults were busily preparing a **pot luck** lunch that had, as expected, made for a buffet style lunch where if sampling many different dishes is your thing, you were having a great time.

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### **Quarterly Working Bee**

Is it really that time of year again? Why yes, it is! Our kids will have their mid-year school holiday, then, on the first Sunday of the new term - **July 18th** - you are cordially invited to lend a hand in our quarterly working bee. The work we do is always important and helpful, but as we gradually approach our centenary event in mid-November, the sprucing-up-the-property work is that much more so! Please join us in weeding, pruning, other gardening or other Baringa maintenance chores after church on Sunday, **July 18th**, and accept our thanks in the form of verbal appreciation and pizza. Many hands make light work! -Thank you, in advance!

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### **Centenary Celebration**

What was that about sprucing up the church property for the centenary event in mid-November? You read correctly: if you haven't already, mark your calendar for the Hurstville New Church centenary celebrations over the weekend of **November 13th & 14th!** It is 100 years since the property on Dudley St was purchased and the church was built. On the Saturday there will be an afternoon tea, open gardens and open tennis court, and on the Sunday a special worship service and celebratory luncheon. Details to follow... but getting it onto your calendar is the first hurdle crossed. We hope to see you there!

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### **Women's Weekend - Spring 2021?**

'Tis that time of year again, when our last women's weekend is far enough behind us that it feels like maybe it's time to start thinking about having another one, in a few months' time. Would you be up for that?

Our Australian New Church women's weekends have been happening since 2019, some in person and others over the internet. It's a time for ladies from around the country to look at Biblical and spiritual topics together, serve the neighbour together and visit with each other and strengthen their bonds of sisterhood. They typically begin on a Friday evening (Sydney time) and run through Sunday afternoon. They're free if they're online, and at this point in time, it's probably safest to presume this one will have to be virtual, as well (*although local ladies are always encouraged to get together with their local peeps, if practically feasible!*). Does this appeal to you? Are you a woman interested in participating in such an event?

Determining whether we'll have a women's weekend this spring is the very first step in getting this ball rolling. If you are indeed interested, please contact Jenn Beiswenger ([jenn@beiswenger.net](mailto:jenn@beiswenger.net)) by **August 1st** to let her know, and she'll follow up with figuring out when, where and how. Thank you!

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## **Responding to Space, Science, and the Death of Imagination**

The Writings are great for answers. For many things there are very clear answers to the big questions. Is there a God? Yes! How many? One. Does He love you? All the time. But not every question has a simple answer and I think one of the traps that students of the Writings can fall into is this desire or hope to answer some question in such a way that we have the “final answer” or the “definitive paper” on the subject at hand. I’ve seen plenty of people attempt to write such a document on many subjects, such as whether women should or should not be allowed into the priesthood, or can one serve alternatives to wine in the Holy Supper, and several other questions. The endeavour is a trap, because as much as the author has great intentions of settling the debate once and for all, the reality is the paper/article/presentation fails to persuade everybody who encounters it because at some level there is some ambiguity in the teachings.

I fell into this trap over ten years ago when I was reading Robert Monroe’s book about his out-of-body experiences. While I hadn’t put together a formal presentation, I had the basic idea of “beings we can’t see” fairly well organized in my head as a solution to the “Earths in the Universe” problem. One day though, the moment arrived where I could share my elegant solution that would surely prove to be the definitive answer and nobody would ever wonder how to explain EU again! I was in theological school, and one of our teachers was challenging us to think a bit more critically about the Writings. I think his point was that we needed to make sure we didn’t get so over-zealous with our love for the Writings, that we would just gloss over what other people might consider to be stumbling blocks to their acceptance of the Writings as an authority over our lives.

As the teacher finished his plea to us, he threw at us one final challenge: how do we explain “Earths in the Universe?” He declared that he hadn’t come across a great solution to it yet! My ego swelled with pride, anticipating the intellectual victory that I would soon enjoy. I absolutely knew that I had the answer that surely would be heralded as “the answer.” I went home, wrote up a short explanation of the theory, sent it to the teacher and waited in anticipation for the acknowledgement of my brilliance.

As you might guess, I’m still waiting. Since then, I’ve offered my solution to others, and have generally found that people are less enthusiastic about it than I was and still am. So when I wrote it up for the April newsletter I really wondered what kind of response I would get. I was well beyond the idea that everybody was going to celebrate it as the greatest paper/article since Einstein and anoint me the Bishop of Australia, but I was curious as to just how it would be received.



In short, there's nothing I've written that has generated as many responses, and quite frankly, I was really surprised at the result. Several people reached out to me in one form or another in support and overall there was more positive than negative feedback. Still, some people didn't think it all added up. Fair enough. I'm a big boy and can handle it. I promise. Anyway, with all that said, I have permission to share with you what **Heulwen Ridgway** sent me, who spent the time to really write out and articulate her dissenting opinion. Enjoy.

Dear Todd,

I am responding to your article on *Space, Science and the Death of Imagination* in the Newsletter for April.

In the work *Earths in the Universe* (EU) Swedenborg records conversations that he had with spirits from various earths in the universe. However, current explorations and scientific data appear to show no possibility of life on the Moon and Mars and maybe anywhere in the universe. This has caused some people to doubt, even dismiss, the usefulness of EU to the New Church. However, it is not only EU but also *Arcana Coelestia* (AC) that tells us about spirits from other earths, and *Last Judgement* (LJ) talks of the human race on other earths.

Although I don't go along with your imaginative solutions to this apparent conflict between revelation and science, I am glad that you are not treating EU as a work that should be passed by on account of the differences. After all, Swedenborg said that he received nothing from any angel or spirit but from the Lord alone while he was reading the Word. Also that he was instructed to publish the works and AC, EU and LJ were all published by him in his lifetime. So why are there these differences? But, er, I have some problems with your suggestions.

You ask why the Lord could not "make humans in more than just one way....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." I think a non-carbon or alternative chemical human would negate the correspondence to the Divine Good and Divine Truth that the Lord used in His words to His disciples and that subsequently are His words that we use in the Holy Supper: "This is My body....This is My blood..." Although there is a deeper meaning, in my very natural understanding, that body and blood were His when He was on this earth and were surely carbon based, as were the representative bread and wine that He gave to the disciples in the last Supper and that we use in the Holy Supper today. As well, I believe that there can be no substitute since we are told that "...not even the least thing exists in man with which there is not correspondence." AC 4791. That is, correspondence with the Grand Man and so with the Lord, see also AC 4222, 4524, 4639. I cannot see that the correspondence would exist if another element were substituted for carbon.



You also agree with author Robert Monroe's conclusion that there are other "intelligent species" who live on a higher frequency from us and so are invisible to us. I cannot conceive that an invisible being would have correspondence with the Grand Man, which is the totality of all angels, where there is complete sharing with all other angels. How could invisibility be shared? You say, "...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.' " I don't think that is a fair example because our associate spirits are in the spiritual world and you are speaking of intelligent but invisible species that are in the natural world

You suggest that surely the Lord would be able to construct humans made in these other ways. I don't think He could as such alternative humans would be constructed contrary to His established Divine order for human beings. The Lord, being Divine order itself never acts against His own order.

It is noteworthy that EU is not the only one of Swedenborg's works to tell us about spirits from other earths. The first is AC where Swedenborg writes, "There were with me spirits from another earth (of which elsewhere)...I conversed with them about their manner of living, and the kind of conversation among them...While I was reading in the Word of the New Testament concerning the Lord, the spirits now described were present." AC 4799. Swedenborg describes their features and manner of speech, both of which were different from ours. Also that they conceal nothing and are incapable of pretence. They said they could not conceive of a life where thought and speech disagreed and how, if they did the same, they would be "torn asunder and perish."

I assume that in the *Arcana Coelestia* passage by "elsewhere" is meant *Earths in the Universe* and *Last Judgement*, both of which were written after AC. LJ 10 II states that "although the human race might perish on one earth...yet still they would continue on other earths." So, despite the differences between EU and the findings of science on Earth, AC, EU and LJ all tell us that the human race on our earth is not unique and that human life exists on many earths. LJ 10 II also states that "The human race is the seminary of heaven." From this passage it seems to me that this seminary is drawn from the human race on every earth where human life exists

From the AC passage we learn that those humans from another earth look and speak differently from us but are "real" humans, thinking, conversing and interacting as do we on Earth. We can also learn from that passage just how serious an evil deceit is; teaching from the Lord via humans far away on an earth somewhere in the universe. EU also provides us with a lot of teaching for life.

If a bridge is needed for the divide between revelation and science, here is my suggestion. Swedenborg says a few times in *Arcana Coelestia* that he could not explain something as it was beyond human ability to understand but that angels saw it clearly. Possibly what some on Earth see as errors and scientific impossibilities in EU, AC and LJ in claims about extra terrestrial human life, the angels

understand the meaning of clearly. So I suggest that the limitations of human understanding might be the reason that there appears to be a contradiction between Divine revelation and science. That fits with your words, Todd, "I think we need a bit more humility."

Best wishes  
Heulwen Ridgway, Canberra.

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### **Birthdays**

Happy Birthday to **James Kermond** (10<sup>th</sup>), **Babbette Horner** (14<sup>th</sup>) and **Danita Horner** (15<sup>th</sup>)      **Anna** and **Erik Heldon** (23<sup>rd</sup> June)

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