



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society November 2017

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Bitcoin and Echoes of the Second Coming

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

It was about a year ago that I first heard about Bitcoin. I was listening to a podcast while driving, and I found the whole thing very interesting. At the time, the cost was around \$USD900 to buy a single Bitcoin. I thought to myself, "I'd like to buy one," but put it on the backburner figuring there was no urgency to the matter. A few months later I started following up on the idea, only to find that the price had gone to around \$2000, so I didn't want to buy it because it was now expensive! Well, now it's around \$6000! Because of the skyrocketing price of Bitcoin, it's been in the news a whole lot lately, and yet most people don't really know what it is.

What it is supposed to be is a digital currency. The idea is that you can have a Bitcoin wallet, which would be an app on your phone or computer, and you can buy and sell things with it. You go to a restaurant, and instead of tapping your debit card, you'd have some amount of Bitcoin deducted from your Bitcoin account. To a small extent, you can already do that with Bitcoin, but because the price is so volatile at the moment it isn't what most people are doing with it.

The question then becomes "Why would you want it?" There are some other things that separate Bitcoin from a traditional national currency. For one, there's a finite amount of it. Currently there are about 16 million Bitcoins, and that number will grow to about 21 million around the year 2041, but no more after that. So you can't print more of it, and unlike gold, you're not going to find a new place to mine it, which means you can't flood the market with more of it to affect the price.

Another piece of the Bitcoin sales pitch is that it is based on a "blockchain." As best as I understand it, a blockchain would be similar to having a computer memory chip on every piece of paper currency. That chip would have stored in it the name of every person in the world who held some of that currency, and how much of it they held. For each amount of Bitcoin, there is this piece of data that stores information about all the other pieces of Bitcoin. The blockchain is where this data is stored, and can be checked against all the other blockchains to prevent fraud.

It's hard to know where this is all going to go, and I'm not here to give out investment advice, but what really hits me about Bitcoin is how it is designed to decentralize the power in regards to currency. Because the creation of Bitcoin is done by a mathematical algorithm, and not by a central bank, you can't just print more of it. We've seen over the course of history that governments will take to printing more money to get themselves out of trouble. The opposite has happened too where governments have confiscated money in savings accounts in order to stimulate their economy. Bitcoin does not allow for that to happen.

Bitcoin also has a very secure network. Because there's no central Bitcoin computer, you can't just knock out one computer to destroy the whole thing. All the computers in the

Bitcoin network have the blockchain information, so you would have to destroy the entire network of thousands of computers around the globe to destroy Bitcoin. It would be like trying to destroy the Internet. It wouldn't be a simple task. This is creating a lot of headaches for governments who would like to shut down or at the very least regulate Bitcoin, but can't. Bitcoin can be traded without the permission of the government because of how it is set up.

There's a lot more to it, but what I'm trying to do is paint a picture of how this technology is taking power out of the hands of central, hierarchical institutions, and distributing it to the people. Whether you're into conspiracy theories or not, we cannot escape the reality that the governments of the world still hold a lot of power over the governed. Bitcoin and blockchain technology are just emerging, but a big part of their promise is taking away that power.

To me, this has echoes of some of the teachings in the Writings about the old Roman Catholic church. They too had consolidated their power in the world, and for quite some time ran everything in the Western world. Not only did they run the more mundane tasks of life, but the priesthood was teaching that they held the power to send people to heaven or hell. Your eternal fate rested in their hands! Or so they thought. It was based on these two verses from the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is talking to Peter:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mathew 16:18, 19)

This teaching was taken too literally, and as a result the church assumed that it had power to save and condemn souls. Most 21st century people do not believe that the Catholic church has the ability to determine our eternal fate, and this is a good thing. But the fact is that the Writings do teach about the spiritual death of the Catholic church, which was foretold by the prophecies in Revelation. One of the reasons the church died was because it has falsely assumed power that it did not have, and so in essence the power has been being returned to the people for 250 years now. It's not just the Catholic church either. Churches everywhere are losing their hold on people, and people are going to other sources to learn about God and spirituality. You don't have to look any further than the success of Swedenborg Foundation's “Offthellefteye” broadcasts done by Curtis Childs on YouTube to see that people have no problem with a non-ordained person dispensing the truth. Bible colleges and universities are also losing their ability to control what gets taught!

If you take a look around, you'll also notice that compared to 250 years ago, there are other areas where there has been a decentralization of power. Democracy itself is an example of that. Kings and Queens no longer rule like they used to. To me it seems that decentralization is one of the effects of the second coming. While I'm not sure where the whole Bitcoin thing will end up, I do think that going forward we are going to see more

and more use of this type of technology that takes power away from the few and gives it to the many.

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Live Streaming Update

It was on October 15 of 2016 that we had our first live-streamed service on YouTube. In total we have live-streamed 46 worship services the past 12 months, and one memorial service. As was expected, we haven't exactly set the internet on fire with our broadcasts, but that's okay. To my mind there are two different audiences to reach. Basically one audience is people that have had no contact with the New Church, and the other audience is people who have. The people that want a New Church service are easier to serve because they don't need fancy graphics, high resolution cameras, or other technological gizmos. They want the content and some of the tradition and atmosphere. However, the hope still exists that even in providing a basic worship service broadcast that some others will find something useful as well, and it appears that some have.

For the most part the earlier broadcasts have 10-20 views at this point, and the ones from about April onwards have collected 4-15 views. There are a couple of interesting outliers though. One is the service titled, "Ulysses, Sirens & the Bible." It's sitting at 59 views, and gets more views every month. Perhaps I need to do more services that have a take on Greek mythology! Also the service titled, "Why is Solomon's Wisdom Wise" has done better than average at 29 views.

All of this is good, considering that it's free and easy to run. With the NBN coming to Penshurst in the coming months we may be able to upgrade the quality of our broadcast. Currently the resolution is limited by the rather poor upload speeds we're getting now, but if that were to improve with the NBN, so would our video quality. If that happens, it may be worthwhile to get a better camera with a wide angle lens to raise the quality of the product. In the meantime this program has done what we wanted it to do, which is make our Sunday services available to people who cannot otherwise attend them.

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More Internet Outreach

Regular readers of this newsletter know that we include updates from the New Christian Bible Study website, and here's another:

"We're just wrapping up a highly successful translation-importing summer work session. With help from 5 high school and college students, some volunteers, and our core team, we imported 51 more translations of books of the Writings, in Korean, Japanese, German, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Russian, Dutch, and Czech. That brings the total number of translations to 233. We've got another 50 or so on-deck, waiting to be processed.

"So... we're now offering Swedenborg's works online, linked to the Word and to each other, in 17 languages, which are spoken by more than 3.7 billion people. There are still

big gaps in those languages, and we have whole new languages to tackle: Tagalog, Malayalam, Zulu and Sotho, and I'm sure the list could grow beyond that. We're seeing traffic of 115,000 users a month now, which is good – still growing strongly.”

I keep including these updates so that we can see that people ARE interested in what the New Church teaches. While we may be getting low numbers to our live-streamed services, other projects are doing a good job of going after people who aren't connected to the New Church. The good news is getting out there!

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Working Bee

We had another of our quarterly working bees in October, and once again a lot of good work got done that wouldn't have gotten done otherwise. Particular effort was paid to the back gardens where we have our outdoor worship services, which allowed us to kick off the outdoor worship season already. There was also some maintenance work done to the front gardens, along with an effort to collect a lot of fallen branches to be taken to a community mulching centre. All of these things add up to a nicer, tidier property that will serve us and the community all the better.

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Pulpit Swap

He's not retired yet! Our good friend **Rev Julian Duckworth** has once again agreed to do a pulpit swap with me, so he'll be preaching here on November 12th. Come out and enjoy him!

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Society Meeting

We had a meeting on the 22nd and took a look at what we will be doing over the next few months. As expected we will be doing the next spiritual growth program, aka Journey program, starting February 4th. It's called “Practicing Forgiveness,” and it will run for 6 weeks.

We also decided to continue our **Facebook** advertising efforts. We have increased the number of page likes from 187 to 224, and have had even more likes to the various messages that have been posted. The challenge is to turn some of this interest into participation. In my opinion, we just have to keep coming up with new posts that are interesting in hopes that somebody will say, “This church sounds like a church I want to go to.” Time will tell if that will happen, but we really don't need large numbers in order for the efforts to be successful.

There was also a motion that passed to fund a resurfacing of the Baringa **tennis court**. The current surface is literally coming apart needs to be replaced. We did some repairs to it about 18 months ago, but at this point we're beyond the ability to repair the surface any further. This should come as a welcome change for the various groups who use the court!

Perth Visit

In late September I had the opportunity to visit the folks in Perth. It was a very busy weekend, as there was plenty of visiting to do, along with two classes and two baptisms. I think the Sunday service was the single longest service I've ever conducted because we had a children's talk, followed by the two baptisms, then the adult talk and finally holy supper was offered. There was an excellent turnout for it, including grandparents that were in town from Ireland.

In addition we had two first time attenders to this service. One came because he was invited by one church member, and the other was a watcher of the Curtis Childs videos on YouTube. She had contacted the group before, but this was the first service she had attended. It all made for an excellent trip that was very worthwhile.

Movie night - for grown-ups!

The kids have enjoyed movie nights at the church from time to time, and now it's our turn. You are cordially invited to our adult **movie night** on **Saturday November 18th**, beginning at **7pm**, where we will watch the Christian film '**Facing the Giants**'. Here's a quick description: "*Facing The Giants* is the heart-warming story of a downtrodden Christian high school football coach who turns to God when everything seems to be going against him. Trusting God to do the impossible, Coach Grant Taylor and his Shiloh Christian Eagles soon discover how faith plays out on the field ... and off." Please join us - it's highly rated, so it should be good!

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Cliff Adamou** (2nd), **Jesse Horner** (3rd), **Brian Heldon** (8th), **Cathy Kermond** (11th), **Skye Horner** (11th), **Lori Heldon** (30th)