



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society November 2018

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The Wizard and the Prophet

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

I heard this story about a microbiologist, who was conducting an experiment in a petri dish. What he did was put some microorganisms in the petri dish, added a whole lot of nutrient “goo” to feed them and then watched what happened. Well, if you're a protozoa, and you've got food, what do you do with it? You eat it. That's what they did. They ate and ate and ate and so they multiplied many, many times over to the point that they expanded to the edge of the petri dish. At that point they would either drown in their own waste, or exhaust the resources of the dish so that very bad things would happen to the population of protozoa.

What this experiment did was allow the microbiologist to demonstrate that there are limits in the system, and that these limits are fixed. This sets up a bit of a dilemma in the world of science, because in a Darwinian worldview the same rules apply to everybody. That means that all species will continue to grow until such a point that they reach the limits of their environment and then bad things will happen to them. It's actually neither good nor bad, it just is the natural order of things. The population gets too big for the environment and then there are just natural consequences.

The thing is that this experiment was foundational in the environmental movements of the 20th Century. People around the world saw the global population increasing, and wondered at what point would we be like the protozoa in the petri dish. Just how many people could this planet support? In Charles Mann's book, “The Wizard and the Prophet” he says that it is out of this concern came two groups of people whom he calls – you guessed it - “wizards” and “prophets.”

The Prophets basically take the position that we need to conserve our resources, and restore the world to its natural order. They will point out the negative consequences of our actions. For example, the use of fertilizer in Pakistan, India and other neighbouring nations has indirectly destroyed 21,000 square miles of water in the bay of Bengal. Essentially the water no longer has any oxygen in it, so nothing can live in it. It's dead water, and that's not good. The Wizards say that technological advancement and innovation actually saves lives, and that the world is our toolbox, a blank canvas to use as we see fit. They'll also be sure to point out that the fertilizer was actually quite a success. The crops grew so much better that the Wall Street Journal estimated that one billions lives were saved from starvation. That's a lot of lives saved. Even if that number is off by half, would you sacrifice the 21,000 square miles of water in the Bay of Bengal for 500 million lives? 250 million? It's a lot of dead water, but it's also a lot of lives.

If you're into this kind of debate and exploration of how to manage the future, you'll find “The Wizard and the Prophet” an interesting read. It tackles several interesting issues of the day from the perspectives of people who in their respective fields that are either “Wizards” or “Prophets.” I think Mann has written this really well because he's not demonizing the Wizards as greedy capitalists who don't care about the environment, or the

Prophets as tree-huggers that don't care about people. He's showing us what both sides have to offer and the difficulty in actually doing anything, because either way there are consequences.

I've been mulling these ideas over the last few weeks and thinking about how they relate to various spiritual concepts, and also in relation to how people see religious organizations. I think most tend to think of religion and spirituality more in terms of "prophet" than "wizard." Ministers, priests and the like are much more likely to tell people that the path to salvation is to "conserve" and return things to their original order. As the Tower of Babel story attests, we can't actually innovate our way to heaven. Maybe environmentalists and preachers have a lot in common!

Despite the wizards we find in the Bible, innovation within spiritual traditions is generally given a thumbs down. It's a safeguard of sorts because of our tendency to innovate things that are outside God's original plan, which is to say that we actually innovate more problems instead of solutions. We weren't supposed to "innovate" and create new gods to worship, nor "innovate" new rules as to what is right and wrong. When we look at the Bible stories we see plenty of this ... creation of the golden calf, worshipping Baal, as well as the religious authorities burdening the people with new rules and regulations, while at the same time turning a blind eye to some rules that actually need to be followed.

I think that just like dealing with issues in this world, when it comes to spirituality there is a need for both prophet and wizard. The Lord is both. He's a prophet, calling us back to Him, which is like the environmentalist call to return the Earth back to its original, pre-industrial age state. Get rid of the pollution! Just as my generation has been given a polluted world, we're given hereditary evil that isn't our fault and the Lord wants us to get rid of *that* pollution.

Yet the Lord is a Wizard too. Over the last 50 years we've seen the global population increase by billions, and yet the percentage of starving people has decreased from about 30% to around 9%. It's a good example of getting more out of the system. The Lord does the same. Think about the teachings in the Writings about Islam, and how the Lord has permitted polygamy within it because essentially if He didn't He'd lose the people to no religion at all, which would result in all those people not going to heaven. So He innovates and creates, or at least permits, new spiritual systems so as to keep people on the path. These systems still provide the essential guidance we need, and reign in at least some of our less desirable attributes. So not all innovation is bad.

There is a cost to this though because people do learn things in other religions that simply aren't true, which can have a negative impact on their long term spiritual health if they cling to them too tightly. Just like with the fertilizer example, there's some damage done with the permitting of other religions, but there are a lot of lives saved by them as well.

If the Lord is both prophet and wizard, how about us? Should we try to be both? I think so. In the Bible we find that the prophets are also wizards. They're two sides of the same coin. Elisha tells the people to return to their true order and follow the Lord, but he's also a bit of a wizard when he saves the Israelites from an invading army by blinding them and

leading them back to their king. Elisha saves the enemy army. He keeps more people alive. I think we too are wizards in a similar way when we forgive people the things they've done to us, when we choose to see the good in others, and love our enemies because in those examples we are expanding our worldview to include more people with our system.

Overall I think that this idea of prophet and wizard is just another example of how we can use the natural world to confirm for ourselves some deeper spiritual teachings. Some of the same principles are in play both in managing the future of the Earth as well as managing the future of our spiritual lives. No matter what you do, mistakes will be made, unintended consequences will result, but as long as you're trying the Lord sends prophets and wizards your way to further your journey on the path.

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Society Meeting

We've scheduled a society meeting for **November 4th**, which as usual will happen after church. There are the usual things to discuss at this time of year, such as what services we want to offer during the Christmas holiday and summer break. With Julian no longer at Roseville the Carols at Candlelight service won't happen this year!

Beyond that there is another big issue that needs to be discussed. Essentially the gardens behind Baringa need some extra attention. The Working Bees have been very successful at beating back the weeds in the front of the property, but the back still remains a mess. Doing something back there has been casually kicked around for a while now, but part of the consideration now is that we'd like to put a plaque up in the gardens to honour Norm Heldon. But if we're going to honour him in that way, we want his gardens to look good! So what are your thoughts and suggestions on this? Do you know a gardener or a team of gardeners we could consult and/or hire? How do we maintain whatever it is that we do? If you've got some great ideas, let us know! If you can't come to the meeting, feel free to email me or call and I'll be happy to convey your thoughts at the meeting. Thanks.

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Continuing a Tradition – Roseville Pulpit Swap

As you well know by now, **Rev Howard Thompson** is running the show up in Roseville these days, and I mentioned to him that Julian and I had been doing a pulpit swap this time of year and wanted to see if he was interested in doing likewise. Suffice it to say that he happily agreed, so on **November 18th** Howard will be here preaching. Hope you can come!

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Perth Trip

It's time again that I head out to Perth for a weekend. This time I'll be there **November 9-11**, and the idea is that I'll be running a joint service in coordination with Rev Trevor Moffat. As usual there will be the offering of a couple of classes plus the Sunday service. They keep me busy out there!

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Our Next Bishop

At the clergy meetings in June the clergy nominated **Rev Pete Buss Jr.** to be the next executive bishop starting July 1 2019. After the nomination, he interviewed with the board, who affirmed the nomination. The next step was to get an affirmation from the membership of the General Church. Ballots were sent out in mid-July to every General Church member via two different methods. The ballots provided an anonymous “voting number” for each individual member. Ballots were sent by email to any member for whom they had a valid email address. These ballots provided a link which could be used for voting immediately. Ballots were also sent by the postal system bulk mail service, which of course take longer to arrive - in the US and internationally, but has much greater coverage. People could then respond either electronically or by mail.

The result of this is that Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. has been affirmed as the next Executive Bishop. He received 1,445 “yes” votes, to 304 “no” votes and 5 “abstain” votes for an 82.38 affirmative percentage.

Congratulations to Pete and we now look forward to his leadership, beginning July 1, 2019. You'll get a chance to meet up and talk with Pete next year as he's going to be in town for regional clergy meetings ... see more on that below.

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Regional Clergy Meetings

Next year, we will be hosting the regional clergy meetings in Sydney. Some of you may recall that in 2016 I attended regional meetings in Japan, and in 2013 they were in South Korea. For 2019 it was between China and Australia, and quite frankly it is a lot easier to get people in and out of Australia for a few days of meetings than China. Not to mention that I think a lot of the ministers wanted the opportunity to come to Australia. All of the ministers from the Asian countries are part-time, volunteer ministers, so the regional meetings are a way in which the General Church says “Thank You” to them for all the work they do. As a result, our meetings are generally a bit more flash than those held in the US and Canada.

What we've set up is for the meetings to run May 30 to June 3, 2019. These dates were chosen because they work for people to get time off of work, but also because the Vivid light show should be happening in Sydney which will give them something fun and cheap to do in the evenings. I was able to get rooms booked at the Tank Stream hotel down near Wynyard station, so it will make for easy access to all of the city for any excursions.

The basic plan as I see it is that people will arrive on Thursday the 30th, and we'll have full meetings on Friday and Saturday. Sunday the clergy will come down to Hurstville to have worship there, and I'm thinking we'll do some sort of a lunch afterwards. Then we'll take them on an excursion somewhere, maybe the ferry to Manly, or something like that. I also have this expectation that somewhere along the line I'll smoke some meats for the event, maybe I'll cater a dinner downtown or maybe it'll be part of the post-church lunch. If you've got any catering ideas, I'm interested to hear them, and that said, breakfast is

provided for at the hotel. I'll give another reminder of all this in the months ahead, but I hope you'll take the opportunity to meet these ministers as I'm sure they would love to meet some Australian New Church people.

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Movie Night for Grown-Ups

Hallowe'en parties, movie nights, piñatas ... Why should kids have all the fun?! Join us on Saturday, **November 17th**, for an evening of adult socializing and entertainment. We'll begin at 7pm with nibbles and sips, then settle down to watch a movie, "Flywheel", which is about "A dishonest used car salesman who decides to become the salesman that God wants him to be - with surprising results." Bring a plate and/or bottle of your choice to share around. - And bring a friend!

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Not Too Late to Sign Up for the January Retreat!

Maybe you're sitting around at home thinking, "I'd really like to go to the camp, uh, retreat in Jindabyne this year, but it's probably too late because we were supposed to register by September 1st. Shame ... I would have liked to have gone." Well, you're partially right. Yes, we did want people to register by September 1st, but there are still some open spots, so if you want to join in, drop us a line! The best way is to go to www.newchurch.net.au and fill out a booking form or contact Carolyn Heldon on 0434581994.

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Birthdays

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

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