

Weekly Encouragement

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Once New

By Rev. Peter Eng



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"No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'" (Luke 5:36-39)

A line I hear on the radio strikes a chord in me. It is the reminder that "all music was once new."[®] Jesus recognizes that the one who has drunk old wine will prefer the old against the new. Of course, all old wine was once new. All tradition was once innovation. I am amused to hear the songs of the Beatles, Elvis, Abba, Supremes, etc., marketed as Oldies. They were the new popular songs when I was growing up.

When Jesus first taught, it was innovation. Today, the Christian community is one rich in

tradition. Despite the move from innovation to tradition over two millennia, Jesus has embedded a critical aspect that keeps his church from becoming atrophied in tradition. It is his teaching here in [Luke 5:36-39](#).

Unlike other religions, Jesus, does not burden his Church with the obligations to defend a political system; live under a certain legislature; exercise its faith in a specific language; or prescribe immutable religious customs.

Instead, Jesus explicitly gives us permission to change. He urges us to innovate.

In this passage, Jesus tells us there is a natural bias, by the establishment, to favor tradition rather than innovation. But there is a place for innovation; and for tradition. New wine has to be in new wineskins. That is where it should go. The new pitted against the old is a recipe for disaster. New wine becomes old, and good. But wasn't it good when it was new? Or wasn't it also good, but in a different way?

The urgent need for the Christian community is a faith that is relevant and compelling to a new generation.

The power generation.

The young people of any society power the community. The American church today is suffering from low numbers among the young adults. It is a disaster waiting to happen. This is our acid rain, lead poisoning, green house gas, global warming, danger of solar flare, comet strike, all rolled into one. It is a need so urgent that we are not exaggerating

when we say something has to be done about the low level of interest and excitement in our power generation. Most churches see this noticeable demographic dip in their church community.

This may not be the most urgent issue confronting a church, but it is surely the most important issue.

Young Adults are the power generation. They will power the economy; they will also power the Church of Jesus Christ. Sadly, they are also called the "Whatever Generation." Nowhere is this more true than in the church. Why? I don't have the answer to that question.

Jesus reminds us that each generation is new wine that has to be placed in new wineskins. The power generation of today has to find its own voice and its own passion. It is a generation that has to bring faith into focus for itself. It has to find God anew. The Boomers have always set the agenda for what is happening around them. Including what the power generation needs to do. By that action in itself takes away from the power generation.

The Boomer Generation has produced myriad little churches in rebellion against their parent's formalism or [sacerdotalism](#). Many of these little churches have not seen real progress even until today, but some grew into mega churches that rival an entire denomination in size. The loss of numbers in mainline denominations and the gain in these Boomer generated churches have resulted in a net gain in America and around the world.

What will the power generation of today produce? It would be foolish to predict. Who would have predicted the impact of the Boomer generation on the Christian community as a whole?

A contemporary Christian song says, "Oh God let us be a generation that seeks, that seeks your face, Oh God of Jacob." (Chris Tomlin, "[Give Us Clean Hands](#).") I enjoy hearing this call to a new generation.

The power generation faces pluralism, secularism, an educational system and a media that is hell-bent on taking us to a new moral low and making that the new norm. The challenges are scary.

I will only venture two very broad suggestions here. The power generation has to reach inwards for a spiritual walk with God that is intimate and surpassingly compelling. The power generation has to reach out and find its voice in this noisy world.

Whatever our challenges, and whatever the solution might be, it is not a tension between the old and the new. We do not have Jesus telling us not to change. As our world changes with increasing velocity, Jesus' call for this generation to put new wine in fresh wineskins becomes more urgent.

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.