

A critical reflection on the Anabaptist contribution to mission in Britain in the context of Post-Christendom

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'Persecution never did, never could give any lasting wound to genuine Christianity. But the greatest it ever received, the grand blow which was struck at the very root of that humble, gentle, patient love which is the fulfilling of the Christian law, the whole essence of true religion, was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a Christian, and poured in a flood of riches, honours and powers upon the Christians, more especially upon the clergy.'

John Wesley (cited by Stone 2007:118-119)

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the current context for mission in Britain in the light of the claim that this country is now entering a new epoch in which the church is no longer closely intertwined with state and society. It will be argued that this centuries-long relationship has been a problematic one, which has significant implications for mission by a church now finding itself increasingly on the margins of a society over which it had once been able to exercise considerable influence, if not outright control. However, it will further be proposed that Anabaptism, a Christian tradition historically marginalised thanks to its rejection of any symbiotic relationship between church, state and society, offers distinctive insights to the wider church which may enhance the task of mission in this period of transition and uncertainty.

Britain as a Post-Christendom Context

When seeking to define the contours of the contemporary context for mission in Britain, it can be argued that one of the most striking features of the religious landscape of the Western world is the contrast between the current reality and what Jenkins (2002;1) describes as the centuries-long legacy of the story of Christianity having been inextricably bound up with that of Europe and European-derived civilisations overseas. Thus, until recently the overwhelming majority of Christians have lived in 'White nations' and there has been the stereotypical perception of Christianity as the religion of

the West (Jenkins *ibid*;2). Contrast this with Baroness Williams recent description of many modern Western societies. For Williams (2003;28) what now characterises much of the West is the disconnection of a vague aspiration to spirituality on the one hand, and both knowledge of Christianity and adherence to Christian institutions on the other. Indeed, her opinion resonates with that of other commentators from both beyond and within the West. Thus, whilst Kirk (1999;227) insists that latent popular religiosity exists, Ramachandra (1996;25) speaks of the ‘past-Christian West’. Frost (2006;5) is clear that the Christian church is experiencing a sharp and dramatic deterioration in its influence and impact on Western society, and although church attendance continues to decline across the West, this is nowhere more obvious than in Europe and Britain. Ustorf (2001;134) considers that European Christianity is facing its biggest recession since the rise of Islam, whilst Wessels (1994;5) talks of the de-Christianization of Europe, a situation in which large parts of the continent are alienated from Christianity and the church. Commenting on the situation in Britain, Clark (1984;157), regards Christian belief as having been pushed to the very margins of our society.

With regard to the specific context of Britain, although Davie regards British religion as a distinct variant of the general European type (1994;3), nevertheless she considers that the parameters of faith are very similar to ‘our European partners’, such that despite marked differences in language, denomination and in the very diverse legal arrangements between church and state, ‘there is a common thread which binds together almost all European societies in terms of their religious behaviour...shared legacies [that] go back as far as Constantine’ (2002;2). However, she also suggests that Britain constitutes ‘a collection of distinct variants’ where each nation within Britain has had their own particular qualities of religious life (1994;3). Indeed, Wallis and Bruce (1992;17) note that there has been a history of the Scots and Welsh having a greater attachment to religious institutions as a way of resisting English domination. Nevertheless, although there has been a history of discernible differences between the three countries, Brown (1992;45) is clear that after assessing the data relating to church adherence per capita, the overall trends for England, Scotland and Wales since 1900 have

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been so similar as to suggest a common twentieth century experience.

Moreover, not only do more recent trends suggest that previous differences are now much less significant, such that Scotland and Wales are no longer distinctively more religious than England, but that in all three countries organised Christianity is in grave difficulties. Smith (2000;36) regards the decline of institutional Christianity in modern Scotland to be to such an extent as to leave a vacuum, whilst Brown (2001;4-5) notes that the Church of Scotland has estimated that its own demise will occur in 2033 thanks to membership loss. Chambers claims that religious observance in Wales is declining at a faster rate than anywhere else in the UK (2003;74), and that even where it persists it is Anglicized thanks to the growth of Anglican and New Churches and thus is no longer distinctively Welsh (ibid; 81-82). Meanwhile, in some English counties it is estimated that as few as 3% of people regularly attend church (Brown 2001;3). Looking at Britain as a whole, Brierley (2000;236), a church statistician, is clear that, 'The tide is running out. At the present rate of change we are one generation from extinction.' Indeed his future projections suggest that where church attendance was estimated to be 8% of the population in 2000, by 2040 it will be a mere 2% (2005;4), and possibly as low as 1% (2005;129). Thus, on the one hand it is appropriate to acknowledge the variegated nature of British society, in which there are not just national, regional and socio-economic differences, but also some areas which are 'vividly multi-ethnic' as a result of immigration, whilst other places remain mono-cultural (Barrow 2003;10-11). Nevertheless, on the other hand one would suggest that it is not inappropriate to consider Britain as a single entity in the context of mission, a context characterised by the marked decline of institutional Christianity.

However, whilst there are therefore strong arguments for treating Britain as a single religious entity within a wider European framework, rather than opting for separate analyses of its constituent nations, one can argue that Northern Ireland, legally a part of the United Kingdom, yet clearly at the very least geographically separate, retains a distinctive religious culture and as such would need to be the subject of a separate study.

Notwithstanding the current unprecedented power-sharing agreement between the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, one would still wish to echo Wallis and Bruce's view (op.cit;16) that the issue of national sovereignty remains unresolved in Northern Ireland and religion remains the basis of (or at least significantly contributes towards) divergent national aspirations. One would therefore wish to suggest that exclusion of Northern Ireland from a British study is not only justifiable, but as a unique society within the British Isles its exclusion is advisable.

Taking mainland Britain as a whole, there is evidence to suggest that the current situation is not only one in which institutional Christianity now finds itself at a very low ebb, but that the changes in the religious landscape are of a wholly different order. Robinson (2001;12) considers the situation within the wider West not only to be one where its ties with Christianity are now significantly loosened, but that Western culture appears to have embarked on a long period of disowning its Christian spiritual heritage. Within the British context, Brown (2001;2) considers that the trend is not merely one of church decline, but a much more fundamental shift whereby Christianity is no longer the means by which people construct their identities and sense of self. Similarly, Bruce (1995;70-71) is clear that not only have the Christian churches have lost their ability to shape popular thinking, but in so far as many people in Britain continue to think that 'there is more to the world than meets the eye', their images of the supernatural are no longer structured by Christian precepts but are 'amorphous and idiosyncratic'. Similarly, Avis (2003;vii) considers that conventional religious practice has been giving way to a range of self-selected, privatised and experimental responses to a rather nebulous sense of the sacred. With regard to specific examples of this phenomenon, Davie (1994;90-91) cites the 'Anfield Pilgrimage' as an illustration of the fact that much residual religiosity in Britain is difficult to square with Christian orthodoxy, whilst Barrow (2003;9-10) sees the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, as a significant example of how traditional faith has either been reduced to 'attenuated shadows' or has been relocated into a significantly different frame of reference. Further evidential support appears to come from the Coventry Diocese's 'Beyond the Fringe' research project of Summer 2003. Summarising

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the findings, Spencer (2005;16-18) concludes that although respondents were asking significant metaphysical questions, there was a general feeling that Christianity was irrelevant with regard to those questions and organised religion was commonly seen as a wholly self-referential topic unconnected to everyday life. In the light of such evidence, Nichol's assertion (1999;242-243) that the current situation remains characterised by much 'passive Christianity', which therefore suggests there is 'a large reservoir of sympathetic expectation out there waiting to be tapped', may therefore be overly optimistic. Even Nichols (ibid;243), however, recognises that the value placed on Christianity, by young people in particular, is depreciating. For Brown (2001;197-198), British culture is actually pioneering new discursive territory which, although it may not lead to the extinction of either the churches or of a residual belief in God within the population at large, nevertheless he is clear that, 'the culture of Christianity has gone in the Britain of the new millennium. Britain is showing the world how religion as we have known it can die.'

However, if indeed Britain is taking a lead within the West in pioneering new discursive territory unencumbered by historic Christianity, there remains the issue of how this step-change should be conceived. Gibbs and Coffey (2001;32), for example, refer to a rapidly changing cultural context which is 'post-Christian'. However, Ellul (1975;23), who claims he was one of the first to speak of a 'post-Christian era' as early as 1937, is clear that this latter term should be interpreted to mean that Christendom is now a thing of the past. Indeed, it can be argued that to designate the current situation as merely post-Christian is to fail to take into account the very particular relationship with Christianity that Britain has shared with other parts of the West, a relationship which was such that the Western world and the Christian church 'shared a common destiny' (Robinson op.cit;12). Thus the relationship between Christianity and British society has not merely been one where there has been the historic legacy of significant, but at times variable, proportions of the population consciously opting to follow the Christian faith. Rather, that as a European and Western society Britain has also been part of Western Christendom, an entity which Casanova (2003;22) considers to be a particular form of religious regime

which has very few parallels in other world religions, or even in the oldest and most traditional forms of Christianity, the Eastern Churches.

Nevertheless, Kreider (1999;xiv) notes that there has been little attempt to define Christendom as a term or to discuss it systematically as a phenomenon. It may be recalled, however, that following Constantine's declaration that Christianity was to be the religion of the Roman Empire, the result was that after nearly three centuries of intermittent, but sometimes very severe, persecution by the civil authorities, Christianity came to be in alliance with the powers that be, and thus a pattern of relations between church and state and between church and society came to be established, namely 'Christendom' (McLeod 2003;1). Where Nichols (op.cit;1) defines Christendom as a society where the historic Christian faith has provided not just the cultural framework for living, but also the official religious form of the state, Ustorf (2003;218) distinguishes Christendom from Christianity by defining the former as a civilisation in which Christianity is not only the dominant religion, but this dominance has been backed up by social or legal compulsions, recognising that there have been other Christendoms, for example, Ethiopia. Within the Western context Carter (2006;14) defines Christendom as the concept of Western civilisation as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to the Christian faith, which has been seen as the soul of Europe or the West. Therefore, the foundation of Christendom was a theocratic understanding of society and a close, though sometimes fraught, partnership between church and state (Murray 2004a;84). However, not only was Christendom a partnership of church and state, but also involved a symbiotic relationship between church and society (Bosch 1995;28). Thus, Frost (op.cit;5) considers Christendom to be a socio-political entity. Although Christendom has assumed many different forms and has managed to persist even in countries in which there has been no state church, such as the United States (Carter op.cit;16), nevertheless it has shaped and sustained the life of an entire civilisation (Clark 2005;58). In this context, Hall (2002;1) insists that the transition from Christendom to post-Christendom is as monumental as the fourth century Christendom shift itself. Given this more complex legacy, therefore, it can

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be argued that Britain, along with other Western societies, should not only be viewed as undergoing a significant downturn in organised Christianity, nor even moving rapidly to a post-Christian future. Rather, that the current situation should be viewed in the context of the Christendom era, an era which a growing number of commentators suggest has not only been in decline for some time (though there are differences of opinion as to when its decline began), but has now ended or is drawing to a close.

Thus, Clark (2005;59) notes that scholars dispute when Christendom's decline actually commenced. McLeod (op.cit;16) has distinguished between those scholars who locate the key developments in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (or indeed earlier) and who emphasise the role of the Enlightenment, those who highlight developments in the period between the French Revolution and the Second World War and who focus more on the role of urbanisation and industrialisation, and finally those who argue the most significant changes have taken place since World War II, or even since 1960. For his part Murray (2004a;178-179) considers the process to have been a gradual but inexorable one over the four centuries that followed the upheaval of the Reformation, with the cultural shifts of the 1960s resulting in a precipitate collapse over the last few decades. With regard to the timing of Christendom's actual demise, as early as the 1940s Butterfield (1949;135) considered that politically and socially Christendom was beginning to wane. However, whilst a number of contemporary commentators feel that Christendom has now ended (Walls 1996;259, Leech 2001;229, Smith 2003;62, Frost op.cit;7), others are of the view that we are witnessing Christendom's denouement (Clapp 1996;17, O'Donovan 1996;194), in which not every part of the West will experience the pressure of the 'post-Christendom trend' equally at the same time (Carter op.cit;7). Thus Gibbs and Bolger (2006;184) note that the process of moving to a post-Christendom climate is more advanced in northern Europe, Australasia, and Canada than it is in the United States. From within the British context, Avis (2003;10) is clear that the society still has one foot in Christendom, and likewise Murray (2004a;3) notes, 'We are not quite there yet. We are in a lengthy transitional phase. Christendom took centuries to develop and will not collapse over night... post-Christendom is coming and we cannot continue as

if Christendom will endure forever.’

Nevertheless, whatever the differences of opinion as to timing, one can argue that viewing the current context in the light of Christendom coming to an end takes appropriate account of the West’s specific historical legacy rather than simply designating Britain, or other comparable societies which appear to have rejected institutional Christianity, as ‘post-Christian’. On the other hand, one could argue that given that Christendom’s demise is to a large extent characterised by the marginalisation of Christianity, that therefore ‘post-Christian’ is not so inaccurate. Indeed, Murray (2004a;4) acknowledges that the terms ‘post-Christendom’ and ‘post-Christian’ have been used interchangeably. However, he suggests two reasons for not designating the aftermath of Christendom as ‘post-Christian’. Firstly, whilst accepting that the demise of Christendom means the Christian story is becoming unfamiliar (ibid), even so he suggests that calling the period after Christendom ‘post-Christian’ assumes that the church will be unable to respond creatively to the challenges ahead and that a more dynamic form of Christianity will not subsequently emerge (ibid;8). Using the term ‘post- Christian’ therefore prejudices the outcome (ibid;9). Indeed, Robinson (op.cit;x) agrees that it is not yet possible to predict the outcome one way or another. Secondly, Murray (2004a;8-9) suggests that the term ‘post-Christian’ is also unhelpful in the current context since it assumes that Christendom was actually Christian, whereas persistent voices throughout previous centuries queried whether Christendom was as Christian as generally believed. Thus, although there are those like Robinson (op.cit;20) and O’Donovan (1996;192) who consider the emergence of Christendom as a missionary triumph for the early church, the latter is clear that Christendom was not without error (ibid;193), not least because of its record of persecution (ibid;221). Other commentators, however, are more overt in their critique of Christendom’s Christian credentials. Thus, Yoder considers Christendom to have been a total religious-cultural package in many ways more marked by Greek, Roman and Germanic cultures than by the Bible (1998;248), and the Christianity it propagated around the world was not Christian enough (ibid;257), whilst for Ramachandra (op.cit;213-214) the establishment of Christendom led to Christianity

becoming a religion under imperial patronage, thereby damaging its very essence.

To sum up, the foregoing discussion suggests that Western Christendom, not least in Britain, is coming to an end, even if it has not already done so. Although ‘post-Christendom’ may not comprehensively describe the culture that will replace Christendom (Murray 2004a;4), nevertheless there are good grounds to suggest that as a term it is more appropriate than ‘post-Christian’, not least because it reminds us that we are still living in the shadow of Christendom (McLeod op.cit;2), and that whatever its rights or wrongs, we are its heirs (Newbiggin 1986;101). However, it is also clear that whatever significant benefits Christendom has bestowed, other aspects of its legacy remain controversial, if not problematic. Indeed, if as Murray (2004a;9) suggests, ‘Christendom’s past will haunt post-Christendom’, this would imply that for both faithful and effective mission that it is important to reflect on the legacy of Christendom, so that those elements of the legacy that are found to be a distortion of the gospel and a barrier to mission be repented of and appropriate action taken. Moreover, if the current context is characterised not only by the very marked marginalisation of Christianity, but is also an in-between period, one of liminality (Roxburgh 2006;198-199), in which the Christian story has not been replaced by another story but by scepticism (Murray 2004a;19-20), it can be argued that post-Christendom represents an entirely new mission context (ibid; 287), but one where there may be more questions than answers (ibid;22). Therefore, to reconfigure the task of mission in the light of an appraisal of the Christendom legacy may be a crucial first step into an otherwise uncertain future.

The Legacy of Christendom for Mission in Post-Christendom

Prior to exploring Christendom’s legacy for mission in post-Christendom, it is appropriate to address what Taylor (1998;1) on the one hand regards as the perennial difficulty of coming to an agreed definition of mission, and on the other hand the plethora of definitions of evangelism (Bosch 1991;409, Brueggeman 1993;7, Klaiber 1997;15). In response to this potential impasse, it may be recalled that over the past half century since the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (1952) there has been a

decisive shift embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions towards understanding mission as *missio Dei*, whereby mission is first and foremost God's activity, which embraces both the church and the world (Bosch 1991;389-391, Crutchley-Jones 2002;95,100). Whilst there are problems with the pliability of the concept of *missio Dei* (Taylor op.cit, Hoedemaker 1998;34), nevertheless as a notion it has helped articulate that God is the deepest source of mission and that neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission (Bosch 1991;392). Rather, the church has the privilege of participation in the *missio Dei* (Bosch ibid), where mission is the total task God has set the church (Bosch 1991;412, Stott 1992;341, Kirk 1999;24), should be broadly defined (Cottrell 1998;3), and is multidimensional (Bosch 1991;512). Mission is therefore wider than evangelism (Bosch 1991;411, Stott op.cit;342), the latter being that aspect of mission concerned with proclaiming salvation (Bosch 1991;10-11), and bringing people to faith in Christ (Cottrell op.cit;1).

However, whilst mission is ultimately God's prerogative, it is always at risk of being distorted or misdirected (Shenk 1993a;9). Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging the inherent ambiguities within the human element of mission, the following discussion suggests that unfortunately the flaws of the Christendom era far outweigh any positive legacy and as such need to be addressed, not least because 'the coercion, control and domination that there were part of the Christendom model of church and mission carry within themselves the seeds of the modern repudiation of Christianity in Europe' (Ustorf op.cit;218). Moreover, Murray (2004a;22) is clear that in the emerging context of post-Christendom the wider church would be advised to look to those traditions who dissented from the Christendom project and dared to imagine Christianity without it. In this regard, given its own experience of Christendom, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Anabaptist tradition has tended to disparage, if not caricature, the former as an 'unholy alliance' of church and state (Roth 1999;83), with the Christendom shift seen as a 'great reversal' (Yoder 2001;135) or 'Constantinian detour' (Driver 1997;17). Emerging during the late Middle Ages when Christendom's presence was deeply engrained and self-evident to most Europeans (Roth 1999;83), Anabaptism's insistence that faith involved a

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voluntary choice, and that all of life should be judged according to the standard of the New Testament, drove a wedge into the fusion of Christianity and culture that had been a defining feature of Christendom (ibid;92). Denounced as seditious anarchists who were destroying the foundations of European society (Roth ibid), they were persecuted by both Protestants and Catholics, murdered or driven out because they attempted to create an alternative (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989;41-42). In Britain, the Anabaptist experiment was particularly short-lived. Two Flemish Anabaptists were burned at the stake in 1575 and their fellow refugees were deported (Murray 2001;1), after which for most of the next four centuries Anabaptism has played no part in British church history (ibid;3), re-emerging only in the wake of North American Mennonite relief work in England during World War II (Kreider 2003;2). However, despite this truncated history, contemporary British Anabaptists, along with their co-religionists worldwide, are able to offer the following critique of Christendom's legacy for mission in post-Christendom, as a tradition native to Europe yet marginal to it, now speaking to a Europe in which Christianity is becoming marginal (Kreider 2006;211-212).

Although commentators within the Anabaptist tradition recognise that Christendom also made a positive contribution to human flourishing, they are unequivocal that it is essential for future mission to Britain and other parts of the West that the history of Christendom and its legacy for mission be thoroughly re-evaluated (Murray 2004a;19, Shenk 1999;130). Thus, on the one hand Murray (2004a;240) acknowledges that Christendom enabled Christian values to permeate Western culture, including the political and legal spheres, and that such contributions should not be undervalued, and Kreider (1999;99) recognises the positive artistic and intellectual contribution. Nevertheless, the latter is clear that other relics of Christendom are 'ugly and unworthy' and for many people will be an impediment to coming to faith (ibid;100). Yoder (1998;260-261) insists that it is not enough for the wider church merely to acknowledge Christendom's passing but that disavowal is essential. Indeed, Murray (2004a;212) regards disavowal as more appropriate than simply demonising or dissociating oneself from Christendom, yet (2004b;7) is concerned that many Christians are resisting the paradigm shift into post-

Christendom, denying its demise and employing old tactics to defend the old paradigm.

Indeed, it is first of all in the area of tactics and methods that the Christendom legacy is held to be a barrier to future mission. Both Kreider (1999;100) and Murray (2004a;9-10) are clear that Christendom has bequeathed a folk-memory of Christian control that causes many Westerners to resist and to perceive Christianity with either boredom or revulsion. Although Murray (2004a;124) concedes that changes in the church were already underway in the second half of the third century as a result of church growth and increasing respectability, nevertheless he insists that the Christendom shift was decisive for how the church subsequently came to operate. Thus, the fundamental transformation of the church's position under Christendom, moving from a position of marginality and persecution to one of receiving imperial favour, led to a new self-understanding, such that instead of taking the incarnation and cross as their model, the church now looked to the political-military realm (Shenk 1999;109). In other words, vulnerability was replaced by an authoritarian, top-down approach. For Murray (2004a; 200-203), the legacy of this approach is a mindset within the contemporary church, which endures despite its more recent history of decline and marginalisation. He argues that it includes the persistence of triumphalist theology and language, especially in the hymnody, the preference for authoritative pronouncements, and the partiality for respectability and hierarchical church government. Further characteristics are the predilection for large congregations that can support a 'professional' standard of ministry and can also exercise influence on local power structures, together with the assumption that Christianity should be accorded centrality and privileges (ibid). Meanwhile beyond the church, popular prejudices, often expressed in familiar phrases, reflect specific Christendom practices (Murray ibid;205). For example, the phrase 'the church is only after your money' is an echo of the tithing system (ibid). Thus, the church of Christendom has never been able to shake off its image of being implicated in the power structures of society and the masses have looked elsewhere for succour (Shenk 1995;64).

Moreover, not only was the self-understanding of the church radically altered, but

the nature of mission changed accordingly (Shenk 1999;109). Thus, mission both within and beyond Christendom was accomplished by top-down methods, including coercion and offering inducements (Murray 2004a;86). As Christendom expanded within Europe, missionaries were sent with the support of the state to bring about mass conversion (Gallardo 2001;148), in a context of military, political or strong social pressures (Shenk 1954;40-41), and thus many of the tribes of Europe were 'converted' under duress (Shenk 1993b;21). During the Middle Ages, a violent and coercive mission strategy was used in the Crusades beyond Christendom and against Jews and dissenters within Christendom (Murray 2004a;130). Later, as European empires expanded across the globe, Christendom-style mission was exported to this new context, and thus the spiritual conquest of Prussia and Livonia pointed ahead to the aggressive conversion of the Americas, adding significantly to a legacy of coercive mission and cultural imposition (Murray 2004a;218-219). However, Anabaptist missiologists concede that the modern missionary movement was certainly less coercive than the conquistadors (Murray 2004a; 222), and that its interaction with diverse cultures and climes soon taxed its Christendom assumptions to breaking point (Shenk 2001b;163). Thus, the 'Great Century' of missions, 1800 to 1914, was replete with episodes where mission clashed with the state and missionary leaders were increasingly mindful of past abuses and misuses of political power in the service of evangelisation (Shenk 1999; 143-145). Nevertheless, at home the partiality for top-down methods in mission has persisted (Murray 2004a;202). This tendency is particularly in evidence where evangelistic 'campaigns' are concerned, with much of the language and methods of twentieth-century evangelism hailing from the revivalist 'crusades' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (ibid;223-224). As a result, evangelism today is deeply unpopular, both within and beyond the churches (ibid;225). Not only does asking Christians to name images, techniques or attitudes associated with evangelism consistently uncovers strong antipathy and discomfort (ibid), but society at large is justifiably suspicious (ibid;224). Although Shenk (1995;66) notes that evangelistic techniques and methods multiplied rapidly in the twentieth century, commenting on the impact of the Billy Graham missions to post-war Britain, he is clear

that even carefully planned campaigns tend to reach relatively small numbers of people who do not already have some connection with the church and the gospel. Moreover, Murray (2004a;3) suggests that the disappointments of the Decade of Evangelism in the 1990s indicate that traditional methods of evangelism are now obsolete. Thus, Shenk (1995;86) concludes that coercive mission was foundational to Christendom and has stained the collective memory, and the seeds sown have produced a harvest of cynical disdain for Christianity.

However, not only has Christendom bequeathed a legacy in which both church and mission are held in low regard because of the history of abuse of power, but other aspects of the church's mission have been seriously compromised, not least the relationship between church and mission. Since under Christendom the whole of society was Christian by fiat, the church's missionary presence was an anomaly in a society that was considered to be a *corpus Christianum* (Shenk 1993b;22). Thus the church's understanding of mission was reformulated, so that mission was understood to be an activity directed to peoples beyond the pale of Christendom (ibid), whilst within Christendom, although mission was not abandoned (Murray 2004a;130), it is reconfigured as 'evangelisation', enlivening the latent faith of the masses who are presumed to be already in some sense 'Christian' (Shenk 1995;61). Indeed, this territorial formulation, with its dichotomy of mission to 'heathendom' versus evangelisation within Christendom, remained influential in missiological theory until after 1945 (Shenk 1995;50). Moreover, in the modern period, beginning under the influence of powerful orators such as Whitefield and the Wesleys, evangelism became a specialised ministry largely separated from the church (Shenk 1995;55), and despite the establishment of 'home missions', congregations remained firmly maintenance-orientated (Murray 2004a; 224). Thus, under Christendom church and mission were divorced from each other twofold. Not only was what happened 'out there' considered to be 'missions' and what happened in the West was 'church' (Shenk 1995;52), but within Christendom the church's orientation was towards maintenance rather than mission, with mission (as evangelism) carried out by specialists, not congregations (Murray 2004a;86). Moreover, not only were

the churches within Christendom insulated from any challenge that might have come to them via the missionary activity beyond Christendom and which might have stimulated fundamental ecclesial reform (Shenk 1999;123), but church history and theology have continued to be taught as a Western affair (Shenk 1995;51-52), with academic theology largely oblivious to mission as a proper theological theme (Shenk 1993b;25). Indeed, for Shenk (1993b;24) it is no surprise that with the collapse of the structures of Christendom on the one hand, and a failure to recover a missionary ecclesiology on the other, that the church in the West is in serious decline.

Indeed, not only has mission under Christendom been deformed thanks to the history of abuse of power and to its divorce from ecclesiology, but the Christendom synthesis led to the emasculation of the prophetic or counter-cultural elements within mission. Thus, although the church can be lauded for seeking to transform the whole culture by applying the Christian story to all aspects of life through engaging in mission in partnership with the state, and to its credit the church urged policy changes in the direction of justice and humanity, this was difficult to manage with integrity (Murray 2004a;131-132). Unfortunately, such were the benefits and temptations of the relationship that it deteriorated into one of legitimation and uncritical support of the state by the church on the one hand (Murray *ibid*), whilst the church came to view itself as chaplain to society on the other (Shenk 1995;6). Yoder (1998;195-197) is clear that although the sacral society of Christendom began to unravel in the wake of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the relationship between church, state and society has simply morphed over time into a series of 'neo-Constantinian' alliances in which the church remains subservient to the state or to a particular vision of society. Moreover, 'as the Constantinian stance resuscitates from stage to stage', at each metamorphosis of the relationship, the capacity of the church to critique the wider society has diminished (Yoder 2001;144). Indeed within this increasingly subservient relationship, the church has continued to draw the controlling images of its self-understanding from society rather than from the New Testament, images not just from the Roman Empire and from feudalism, but in the later manifestations of Christendom from western imperialism,

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modern democratic institutions and voluntary associations, and now latterly corporate business, the world of entertainment, consumerism, education and psychotherapy, among others (Driver 1997;18-21). Thus, the dominant model, periodically protested by various dissenting movements, has been that of collaboration with the surrounding culture (Shenk 1995;28).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a church that was viewed as intrinsically part of the socio-political order has promoted an uncritical gospel (Shenk 1993a;12), in which the political dimension of the Christian faith has often been suppressed (Bartley 2006;154), and evangelism has tended not to be politically, socially or economically disruptive (Murray 2004a; 225). Instead, evangelistic practice has been almost exclusively individualistic, largely bereft of the universal scope which characterizes the biblical vision, and has offered a privatised view of salvation (Driver 1993;199). For Driver (1997;42), these are ‘fruits of Constantinianism’ and the otherworldly and individualistic elements of the Augustinian heritage that followed in its wake. Thus Augustine is seen as the originator of a deviant eschatological itinerary that has dominated Western Christian mission, despite ‘so-called sectarian reactions to this so-called mainstream’, in which Jesus’ justice, holiness and peace will only come at the last judgment (Shank 1993b;230-231). Indeed the roots of this problem are not merely eschatological, but also lie in Christendom’s Christology (Shank *ibid*). Shank (1993a;39,41) is clear that Christendom has been structured on a spiritual, heavenly Christology which has emphasised the static and ahistorical dimensions of Jesus, whilst giving much less attention to the human, temporal dimensions (1993a;39,41), including the political, social and economic dimensions that were intrinsic to his messianic agenda (*ibid*;55). For Shenk (1999;119), the issue is not merely Christological but ultimately one of allegiance, since the effect of the Christendom shift was that the church’s primary allegiance to Jesus was compromised and made relative to Caesar. Indeed, within Western post-Christendom there is the paradox that whilst Jesus may have retained the reputation of being a social critic and agitator amongst certain radical circles beyond the church (Yoder 1994;1), within much of the Christian mainstream Jesus is simply not relevant to social ethics (*ibid*;5). Thus,

given this legacy, Murray (2004a; 231-232) concludes that society now assumes that the gospel is a boring reaffirmation of establishment values and that evangelism is an invitation to add a religious veneer to life, and therefore as 'good news' lacks newsworthiness. Therefore, to summarise the Anabaptist perspective, Christendom is leaving behind a difficult legacy and context for mission in post-Christendom, not least because of the alienation caused by the church's reputation for being part of the governing establishment and a history of top-down, if not coercive mission strategies. Moreover, Christendom led to the effective divorce of church and mission, together with an approach to mission and evangelism which has tended to lack a prophetic or counter-cultural edge, promoting an other-worldly, apolitical Christ.

However, one can critique the Anabaptist perspective on a number of grounds. Firstly, one could argue that its interpretation of the Christendom shift and the role and theology of Augustine is over-simplified. On the one hand, it can be argued that the marginalisation of at least certain aspects of the human Jesus cannot simply be blamed on the Constantinian-Augustinian legacy. Thus, Frost and Hirsch (2003;118) note the impact of early Christianity moving away from its Hebraic roots and seeding itself in Hellenistic-Roman culture. Although Sanneh (1989;6) recognises that the successful translation of Christianity from its initial Judaic phase into Hellenic culture was one of the great paradigm shifts marking the course of Christian history, he suggests that the church was tempted to deify that culture and in particular its metaphysical outlook (ibid;1). For Frost and Hirsch, not only was Hellenic culture more speculative in its thinking than Judaism, resulting in the church becoming 'intoxicated by ontology' at the expense of ethics, discipleship and mission, as exemplified by the ontological focus of the early Christian creeds (2003;119-120), but the matter-spirit dualism of Hellenism encouraged the church to find the humanity of Jesus problematic (ibid;122).

On the other hand, Snyder (2001;80) points out that Augustine's own context was actually a time when the church found itself in a position of relative weakness, when Christians and pagans were mingled at all levels of public life (Newbigin 1986;103), and

the Empire itself was under threat, such that ‘the barbarians were waiting outside the gates’ (Newbigin *ibid*;134, citing MacIntyre). Indeed, Snyder (*op.cit*) suggests that Augustine can be viewed as a counter-system thinker, understanding the kingdom as a Heavenly City struggling against the Earthly City, whilst Forrester (2001;110-111) is clear that Augustine refused to deify any political order, including that of the *Pax Romana*, and saw speaking truth to power as an essential aspect of the mission of the church. Nevertheless, the counter-system soon becomes the system (Snyder *op.cit*). Moreover, in the difficult context in which Augustine found himself, although he was clear that love must be the basis of society, he was convinced that peace is only possible when there is order through proper government (Newbigin 1986;103). However, one can argue that seeking peace through order may lead to an undue reliance on coercion, which is difficult to justify in the light of Jesus’ own teaching on loving enemies. Thus, although Murray concedes that Augustine was unsure about the place of the Empire in God’s purposes (2004a;78) and recognises the remarkable depth and breadth of Augustine’s theological legacy (*ibid*;82), he is unwilling to endorse the latter’s justification of coercion and ‘just persecution’, and regards Augustine’s approach of urging of Christian soldiers to love the enemies they killed to be a dualistic one (*ibid*;80). Moreover, he is clear that in later centuries many were to invoke Augustinian thinking in order to justify inquisition, torture and execution (*ibid*;82). Therefore, one would wish to suggest that the whilst the critique of the Christendom shift and the legacy of Augustine offered by some Anabaptist commentators needs to be more nuanced, nevertheless it is appropriate for the tradition to highlight the significance of the Christendom shift and the contribution of Augustine with regard to the subsequent history of coercion perpetrated by the Western church.

Indeed, a second ground for critiquing the Anabaptist perspective is that as an interpretation of the Christendom legacy it is not unique, but is now shared by others within the wider church. Thus, Kee (1982;4) is clear that at the heart of Christendom project there is the relegation of Jesus in favour of Caesar, such that the norms of Christ and the early church were replaced and what Constantine believed came to be called

Christian. Hence, he regards Constantine's decision to favour Christianity as far from being a victory for Christianity over the Roman Empire (ibid;1-2), but rather the infiltration of Christianity by an imperial ideology, since when a long tradition has built up incorporating alien values (ibid;166-167). However, there are commentators who insist that the missionary task was not derailed by Christendom, but rather that the focus of mission was the perpetual challenge of ensuring that Christ's victory over the state was protected from subversion, and who see the turbulent history of church-state relations within the West as proof of such an assertion (O'Donovan 1996;196-197). Nevertheless, other non-Anabaptist commentators suggest that although the intention of Christendom was mission, the reality was often ambiguous and contradictory, and ultimately a drastic adulteration of the gospel (Forrester op.cit;112). For Forrester (op.cit;114), it is the subtle transformation of mission from speaking truth *to* power into speaking truth *from* power which constitutes the basic ambiguity of the Christendom project. Thus, the church was led astray by the exercise of power and by association with the political powers (Ellul 1975;20-21). Indeed, from the outset the Christendom synthesis was orientated to win over the rich, the powerful and the centres of control, resulting in 'neo-Christianity' (ibid; 214), and leaving a legacy of 'deep-seated and understandable resentments against ecclesiastical authorities and systems' within the wider society (Butterfield op.cit;136). Similarly, Frost and Hirsch (op.cit;116-117) suggest that wherever Christendom has manifested itself it has succeeded in inoculating those cultures against the 'raw, unadulterated gospel'.

Furthermore, despite the heroism and self-sacrifice on the part of many western missionaries in the modern era (Ramachandra 1996;216), such that the last four hundred years of Christian missions cannot be simplified to a uniformly evil tale of 'guns and Bibles'(ibid;215), the sanctification of violence and coercion in mission during much of the Christendom era is both acknowledged and regretted as one of Christendom's greatest tragedies (Smith 2003;30). Commenting on the Celtic mission to Britain, Bradley (1993;20) criticises contemporary hagiography and outlines the top-down methods employed, concluding that Celtic missionaries very effectively 'worked the system'. It is

also acknowledged that the use of force has tarnished the image of mission (Kirk 1999;23), leaving a legacy of guilt (Moltmann 1983;72). Likewise, the Christendom assumption that its population was in some sense already Christian, the perception that mission applied to traditionally 'non-Christian' countries and that what was required for the West was evangelism, together with the separation of mission and theology, are also recognized to be part of a problematic legacy (Bosch 1995;28-29). Indeed, Bosch (*ibid*; 31-32) is clear that both mission and missiology remain peripheral in the West, whilst Van Engen (2006;91) considers that the tendency for theology to be done from a Western or Eurocentric perspective is also part of the Christendom legacy. Within the specific context of Britain, Walcott (1997;81-82) is clear that until the Decade of Evangelism, churches felt they could shrug off mission and mission studies as primarily not their concern.

An additional area of common ground is that the symbiotic relationship between the West and Christianity has made it difficult for Western Christians to adopt a missionary stance vis-à-vis their own society (Newbigin 1986;9, Bosch 1995;33). Thus, there has been the ongoing tendency to incorporate cultural values uncritically, leading to further refinements of neo-Christianity (Ellul *op.cit*;214), such that the relationship between Christianity and the modern West has essentially been one of accommodation (Smith 2003;24). For his part, Newbigin (1983;23) regards British Christianity as an advanced case of syncretism. Finally, Stone (2007;122) highlights Christendom's legacy in promoting a privatised gospel and its impact on evangelism. He argues that the subversion of Jesus' lordship by obedience to the supposedly Christian state made it inevitable that Christian witness came to be dissociated from the intrinsically material and political dimensions of that lordship, resulting in the latter's eventual transformation within the predominant consensus in modernity into a private, inward and dematerialised experience. Thus, much contemporary evangelism, far from challenging the racism, individualism, violence and affluence of Western culture, actually helps sustain an unjust order (*ibid*;13). Therefore, the foregoing suggests there is much convergence between Anabaptist and other commentators within the wider church, amounting to a shared

concern that Christendom's mode of mission, an unfortunate combination of the coercive and accommodationist, has bequeathed a difficult legacy for mission in post-Christendom.

Nevertheless, one can also critique this shared assessment of the Christendom legacy. Firstly, it can be argued that the problem of a privatised gospel is not only due to the legacy of Christendom's marginalisation of Jesus, or at least certain aspects of his life and teaching, but also due to the impact of the Enlightenment, which was itself 'in part a legitimate and proper revolt' to the excesses of Christendom (Newbigin 1983;52). Newbigin (1986;19) is clear that the Christian churches, particularly Protestant churches, responded to the challenge of the Enlightenment by withdrawing to the private sector, with the result that post-Enlightenment Western Christianity became privatised and anthropocentric (ibid;40-41). Similarly, Abraham (1989;69) insists that evangelism must now be rescued from the shallow anthropocentrism and individualism into which it has tumbled in the last two centuries. Secondly, one can argue that the above assessment fails to take sufficient account of other positive legacies from the Christendom era, not least the legacy left by more radical elements within the church. Thus, within the British context Hattersley (2004;410-411) considers that John Wesley's 'Second Reformation' created a new church, which during the hundred years following his death helped build a new nation. For Robinson (2001;37-40) the Wesleyan revivals, together with the smaller, more localised revivals that were to follow and the accompanying Evangelical surge across the denominations, led to the revitalisation of a previously moribund wider church. Thus (ibid), an Evangelical coalition, characterized not only by converting zeal and a strong social agenda, which included active political involvement in order to change society, both set the agenda for the wider church and encouraged the renewal of its life and witness during the nineteenth century. Indeed, from an Anabaptist perspective, Shenk (1995;13-16) sees in Wesley's desire to reach the alienated masses and his campaigning against social and economic injustice, a significant counterpoint to the dominant tradition. Moreover, both Shenk (1993a;10) and Shank (1993b;231-232) consider the early Methodist movement (together with the beginnings of other movements like the

Waldensians, Lollards, Hussites, Moravian Brethren, early Anabaptists and early Pietists) to be an example of what the former calls a ‘messianic resurgence’ (Shenk 1993a;10), part of a ‘common thread of perseverance’ which despite the cost contradicted Christendom and attempted to take the spirit of the New Testament and the Christ of the Gospels as the last and definitive word (Shank 1993b;232).

However, from beyond the Anabaptist constituency, Stone (op.cit;119 n.4) considers that in many respects Wesley himself was deeply Constantinian in his thinking, as illustrated in his views on God and the monarchy. Hattersley (2004;409) also concedes that Wesley was not a thoroughgoing or consistent iconoclast, that autocracy was his ideal of government and that Methodism was created in his image, not as reflection of its members’ hopes and aspirations. Moreover, nineteenth century Methodism encouraged the working poor to be ambitious, industrious and respectable, qualities which made them the indispensable backbone of imperial England (ibid;410), leaving the Ranters and Nailers to attempt more radical alternatives (Gamble 1991;32-33), whilst Evangelicalism in general gave spiritual legitimation to self-improvement (Bruce 2002;35). Thus, on the one hand one would wish to acknowledge the radical beginnings of the Methodist and Evangelical movements, their desire to reach the masses, and their concern for social reform. On the other hand, one would also wish to suggest that the extent of their subsequent social conformity, rather than non-conformity, lends support to Carter’s analysis that these traditions have tended to operate within a Christendom framework (op.cit;168,173). Indeed, from an Anabaptist perspective, Shank (2001;220) views those Free Churches who function as uncritical supporters of socio-economic and political patterns as merely acceding to the Christendom synthesis.

Nevertheless, although one may have good grounds for critiquing the Christendom ethos of those traditions within the British church which have historically been evangelistically and socially more activist, such an assessment needs to be set alongside Anabaptism’s own difficulties with mission within Christendom. Where early Anabaptism was characterized by missionary zeal and a sense of ‘sent-

ness' (*Sendungsbewusstsein*) (Shank 2001;204), in which mission was constitutive rather than an addendum to the church (Shenk 2001;8), the experience of severe persecution led to subsequent generations focussing not on mission, but on self-preservation (Yamada 2001;195), and theological quietism (Dyck 2001;31). Thus, faced with massive repression, passion for mission was replaced with the idea of the Church of the Remnant, in which the faithful must withdraw to sheltered areas and perpetuate themselves (Durnbaugh 2003;234). Anabaptists became *die Stillen im Lande*, the quiet in the land (Ruth-Heffelbower 1991;61). Within Europe the tradition lost much of its distinctiveness (Ruth-Heffelbower *ibid*;62), whilst in the North American context it lapsed into a 'mini-Constantinian rural ghetto culture' (Yoder 2001;8). Hence, Anabaptism did not catch up with the modern missionary movement until the end of the nineteenth century and did not re-examine the implications for mission of its commitment to peace until the 1950's (Gallardo *op.cit*;152). Moreover, not only did the movement lose missional momentum, but there were fewer innovations in worship and some community-building processes turned sour, with church discipline becoming perfectionist, and thus Anabaptism offers a warning as well as resources to churches in post-Christendom (Murray 2004b;215).

However, whilst recognising the clear difficulties the tradition has had in sustaining its mission and corporate life in the past, since the mid-twentieth century Anabaptism has sought to renew itself, working to recover its original vision (Roth 1995;viii-ix), whilst critiquing its own participation in the modern missionary movement (Ramsmeier 2001;182-183). Murray is clear that Anabaptism has been able to recover its initial mission dynamic, resulting in new and distinctive global initiatives (2004a;220), so that having developed into a worldwide network of churches, it now offers its own particular perspective (2006;11). Even so, Anabaptist missiologists freely acknowledge that representatives from other ecclesiastical traditions have been grappling with the issue of mission in the current transitional period that is leading to post-Christendom (Shenk 1993b;31). However, advocates of Anabaptism from within the British context consider the insights and resources of the tradition to be of ecumenical significance for a whole church which now has to confront the sectarian reality of being a voluntary minority

which no longer holds the centre ground (Wright 1992;19-20).

Mission in Post-Christendom - Witnessing to a ‘Gospel of Peace’?

Taking stock of the current context for mission in Britain, Murray notes that the recent proliferation of mission activities is perhaps unsurprising in a context of persistent decline (2004b;136). Nevertheless, he is concerned that high-profile initiatives, despite disclaimers, may simply reflect desperation to preserve threatened influence and to reaffirm the church’s social position rather than amounting to a true disavowal of the Christendom legacy (ibid;136). Indeed, for commentators within the Anabaptist tradition what is required for mission in post-Christendom could be said to amount to an inversion of much of the Christendom legacy. Thus, whereas Christendom tended to marginalise Jesus, mission was often deformed and relegated behind maintenance, and the church was largely separated from mission, what is needed in post-Christendom is a paradigm shift in which mission *is* the agenda and is recognized to be the initiative of a missionary God, rather than an agenda item bolted onto existing structures (Murray ibid). God’s mission gives the church its reason for being (Barrett 2006;183), and all mission endeavours must be submitted to the priority of God’s missional purpose (Shenk 1993b;18). Hence, churches need to be reconfigured so that they fully embrace a missional ethos expressed in their core values and nurtured in their corporate life, and therefore reshaping the church for mission means that missiology must precede ecclesiology (Murray 2004b; 137). However, Anabaptism is not simply endorsing the ecumenical commitment to *missio Dei*, nor simply echoing what McFee (2006;134) recognises to be the emerging ecclesiology of ‘missional church’ that is influencing many other traditions, but in addition commentators within the tradition insist that missiology must be based upon a particular understanding of Christology.

Thus, Shenk (1993b;28) is clear that God’s saving mission is most fully disclosed in Jesus as Messiah, and thus the model of mission established by Jesus is the prototype for all faithful mission (Shenk 1993a;12). Nevertheless, although it is acknowledged that it is both understandable and unavoidable that a culturally diverse church will generate a

variety of Christologies (Shank 1993a;37,41), members of the tradition insist that there are neglected *sine qua non* dimensions of Christology which should no longer be marginalised (ibid;42), dimensions which were fundamental to Jesus' own understanding (ibid;75), but were neglected by the dominant theological traditions during the Christendom era (ibid;76). Thus, for an adequate Christology it is essential to affirm that Jesus' mission as Messiah was not merely religious, but political, social and economic (ibid;55), and that the messianic means was *agape* servanthood (ibid;71). Thus, Jesus is not merely a God-Man whose divine status calls us to disregard his humanity (Yoder 1994;52). Rather, that in his divinely mandated (messianic) prophethood, priesthood, and kingship he is the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships (Yoder ibid), yet his lordship is kenotic, characterized by servanthood and humility (Finger 2004;286-287), rejecting both the conventional trappings of power (Shenk 1993c;169), and the recourse to violence (Gonzalez 2005;136). Whereas within the wider church the servant motif has often been largely limited to seeing Jesus' death as a vicarious expiation for sin, Anabaptist commentators are insistent that the servant way is inherent to the way God rules (Driver 2005;91). Thus, since the incarnation unveils the very nature of God's kingdom and God's intentions (Kraybill 2003;19), without such a fully-orbed Christology the distortions of mission under Christendom were inevitable (Shank 1993a;76).

Hence, it is argued that by 'taking our cues from the norm given to us in God's Messiah' (Shenk 1993b;31) an alternative model of mission emerges in which the fundamental missionary stance is that of the servant (ibid;32). Indeed, for Shank (1999;189) only a servant church, one stripped of the accoutrements of privilege and power, can be a true instrument of God's mission. Just as Jesus operated through invitation rather than imposition (Murray 2004a;237), discouraging the disciples from resorting to coercive tactics to win converts (Shenk 1993b;29), any use of coercion or manipulation, however indirect, is antithetical to the message of the kingdom (Stutzman 1999;197). Nevertheless, whilst it is necessary to resist the misuse of power, it is also necessary to resist the temptation to timidity (ibid;191). Instead, in its apologetics the

church should follow Jesus' confident example as apologist for the kingdom of God and therefore be unafraid to assert that Jesus is Lord of all (ibid;190). Thus, Anabaptism's 'dirty little secret' is that it shares with Christendom the vision that all of life should be integrated under Christ's lordship, but cannot accept that such a vision can be imposed before its eschatological time (Schlabach, cited by Hauerwas 2000;44). However, given the kerygma's historic ties with imperialism, there also needs to be a stress on sensitivity (Finger op.cit;287). Indeed, not only is sensitivity required in post-Christendom, but it is also suggested that mission should be conducted in a spirit of repentance. Thus, Shenk (1993b;33 n.7) is concerned that the church in the West has yet to respond to the Christendom legacy 'repentantly, but with missionary intention.' On the other hand, Murray is struck by the humility, vulnerability and openness within many emerging churches in the British context (2004a;256), something which he feels many inherited churches would do well to emulate (2006;123), and which contrasts markedly with the 'this-is-the-answer' strategies of late Christendom (2004a;256). This would suggest that, Anabaptist-influenced or not, the attitude of many emerging churches aligns with an Anabaptist analysis of what is missionally appropriate in post-Christendom. However, Murray (ibid;46-47) notes that by no means are all emerging churches driven by missional passion, but some view mission, and especially evangelism, as discredited. One would therefore suggest that for such churches, viewing mission as servanthood may help to dispel their misgivings.

Moreover, not only does the Anabaptist tradition draw from its understanding of Christology a model of mission based on servanthood, but its understanding of mission is also driven by a Christology that emphasises the Messiah as peacemaker. Thus, Jesus as Messiah is the personification of peace (Driver 2005;219), and the gospel of Jesus Christ is 'the gospel of peace' (Ephesians 6.15) that must shape every aspect of the Christian life (Kreider 2006;213). It is also acknowledged that there have been other Christian groups across the centuries, including St Francis, the Quakers and the Catholic Worker Movement, who have seen peace as central to their identity (Kreider and Kreider 2000;11). However, it is felt that the key failure of the Christian mainstream during the

Christendom era has been its inability to perceive the centrality of peace within the New Testament writings and to the gospel, so that instead of remaining a true peace church it not only participated in warfare, but failed to avoid coercive tactics in its own mission and promoted a distorted message of salvation (Sawatsky 2006;70,77). Thus, the *eirene* (peace) in the New Testament is that Christ is not only our peace in the sense that Christ provides access to God, but he also creates a 'new peace reality' of formerly alienated peoples, which goes beyond the Old Testament understanding of *shalom* as wholeness (Sawatsky *ibid*;72-73). Moreover, Driver highlights the contrast between the New Testament's use of a wide variety of images to communicate the meaning of the work of Christ in its missionary situation (2005;11), and the tendency of the Western church, probably more due to the influence of the Roman legal code than to Paul's use of legal imagery, to pour content into its understanding of the juridical metaphor (*ibid*;191), so that an abstract 'saving transaction' overshadowed the ethical components of Christ's saving work (*ibid*;31). However, in place of this Christendom legacy the cross of Christ should be seen as the essential organising centre from which the ethics of the kingdom emerge, modelling self-giving, servanthood and love of enemies (*ibid*;249). Thus, peace and justice are rooted in the atoning work of Christ and are therefore integral to the gospel (*ibid*;248), and mission must be cruciform, so that to be an emissary of the God who reveals himself most fully in Jesus is to lay one's life on the line on behalf of the enemy (*ibid*;252-253). Peace is therefore not merely a component of mission, but a key over-arching theme.

In line with such an understanding of the gospel and to be faithful to Jesus' example, it follows that the church's mission includes the call to active peacemaking (Sawatsky *op.cit*;76), which confronts injustice non-violently but resolutely, since to leave the status quo unchallenged is to become a collaborator with injustice and to deny the gospel (Ruth-Heffelbower *op.cit*;115). The gospel of peace cannot be proclaimed by withdrawal from society (Miller 1993;150), and therefore the church is called not just to love peace, but to make peace in a dangerous world (Ruth-Heffelbower *op.cit*;127). As such, one might add that the gospel of peace presents a critique to both much of

Anabaptist history as well as to the wider church's collusion with violence. However, a consistent peace commitment that challenges the West's culture of 'military consumerism' and the maintenance of the present unjust world order may well not be popular within the wider society (Murray 2004a;272), which clearly has implications for the church's mission. Nevertheless, peace is integral to all aspects of mission, including evangelism. In the light of the gospel of peace there can be no neat division between evangelism and peacemaking, so that those who evangelise, by the nature of the gospel they proclaim must also be peacemakers, and authentic Christian peacemakers must also be evangelists (Driver 2005;249), rather than Christians who appear to be more interested in peace and reconciliation than in Jesus and reconciliation with God (Kreider and Kreider op.cit;10).

Moreover, not only is Jesus' model of servanthood and non-violence seen to be the appropriate antidote to a past history of imperialistic mission, but the incarnation is also seen as the model for an authentic whole-life approach to mission. Thus, Murray is clear that the church's image is a major stumbling block to mission (2004b;160), with society finding many churches as unconvincing as their message (2006;138). It is therefore essential in post-Christendom that the gospel is incarnated authentically (ibid). For McFee authenticity demands that comportment is as essential as any communication (2006;136), and both works and words must point to Jesus' lordship (ibid;133). However, Shenk (1999;28) considers that the thinking of both conciliar and evangelical Protestants has tended to be controlled by a flawed 'word and deed' paradigm. Thus (ibid;23-24), although early twentieth century models have largely been superseded, in which liberals tended to focus on social action as the form of Christian witness and so-called fundamentalists emphasised the priority of proclamation, nevertheless for the past several decades both wings of Protestantism have continued to operate within a paradigm of a twofold witness, consisting of word and deed, proclamation and service, each element co-existing in a relationship of vital tension. While some may argue that these two halves are inextricably linked and that no priority of one over the other can be established, others say at least on theoretical grounds, that a logical priority must be given to evangelism.

Still another view within this paradigm is that evangelism is clearly the priority, but ministries of compassion are also a legitimate part of all Christian witness. Nevertheless, however word and deed are construed to relate to each other, they are still seen as discrete components which in some way have to be properly balanced, an understanding which has neither precedent in the Bible nor in most of church history (ibid;28). However, for Shenk (ibid;28-29) the basic flaw in the paradigm is that it focuses on the parts rather than the whole. The solution, however, is to refocus on Jesus' ministry in which both his teaching and action pointed to the kingdom, yet should not be seen as discrete elements, and therefore the church should move away from a piecemeal reading of Jesus. Moreover, the Anabaptist tradition has always insisted that words about faith only take on a depth of meaning insofar as they are embodied in deed (Roth 1999;98). Through their appropriate actions, therefore, local congregations are 'performing the kingdom', demonstrating its relevance and offering hope (Stutzman op.cit;190-191). Murray (2004b;157-158) also supports an approach to mission which deliberately blurs the boundaries between evangelism and social action, but suggests that in a networked society the emphasis needs to be on churches concentrating on equipping their members to live authentic and attractive Christian lives and to share their faith by engaging with people in their own context. Indeed in post-Christendom, where interest in spirituality does not readily translate into churchgoing, such a centrifugal approach is essential in place of the traditional centripetal approach that expects 'seekers' to come to church services (Murray 2006;61).

However, notwithstanding Shenk's critique of the dichotomous tendencies within modern Protestantism, Anabaptist commentators are also aware that a number of factors have been at play which are nevertheless encouraging the return to a more holistic approach to mission. Thus, on the one hand, when reviewing the British context, Murray (2006;81) suggests that for most of the twentieth century Evangelicals tended to equate mission with evangelism or, at least to assert its priority among the church's tasks. On the other hand, he is clear that in the final quarter of the twentieth century many Evangelicals have recovered the more holistic model of mission that inspired their forebears. However,

he also sees in the importation of church growth ideology the countervailing tendency. Shank (1999;27) also notes that non-Western Evangelical leaders have emerged who have challenged the twentieth century formulations of their co-religionists in the West, not only because of the very different socio-political contexts in which they live, but also because those from Latin America have been exposed to the liberation theology movement and its vision of a theology that embraces all of life in the name of the gospel. Similarly, Shank (1993a;40-41) recognises that the wider Western church has been influenced by the challenge posed by liberation theology's emphasis on the political dimensions of Jesus' mission and his identification with the marginalised. He also notes the influence of a theological thrust in certain Western circles in the direction of the kingdom of God, yet insists that the Christology of the same circles continues to lag behind thanks to the 'flywheel of the past'.

Nevertheless, although Anabaptists affirm the essential continuity of word and deed, evangelism remains essential to mission, not only because Christianity is an evangelistic faith, but also that without evangelism the church will decline to a point where it is incapable of sustaining the other dimensions of mission (Murray 2004b; 163-164), be it engaging in political, social justice or ecological initiatives (Murray 2006;130). Moreover, pursuing authentic worship and community without evangelism means driving a typical Christendom wedge between church and mission (Murray 2004a; 228). What is needed, therefore, is that evangelism is rehabilitated (Murray 2004b;164), which means not only renouncing imperialistic language and making truth claims with humility (Murray 2004a;229), but must include genuine dialogue and the willingness to learn from those to whom they are witnessing (Finger op.cit;285-286), especially in the case of members of other faiths given Christendom's record of intolerance (Murray 2004a;234, Yoder 1998;256,258). Indeed, it must be recognised that the evangelisers will themselves be evangelised through their evangelising activity (Driver 1993;208). Thus, the emphasis must be on evangelism as a relational activity rather than on technique (McFee 2006;132). It is also the task of the whole church (Finger 2004;273). Furthermore, contrary to the individualism of much evangelism in late Christendom,

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although evangelism involves the call to personal faith (Finger *ibid*), the aim of evangelism is to make communities of disciples (Driver 1993;209) and to initiate people into the reign of God (Barrett *ibid*;181). Evangelism must therefore include honesty about the cost of such discipleship (Ramsmeyer *ibid*;184), recognising that in post-Christendom conviction and rugged discipleship will be necessary for survival (Murray 2006;134), and must be explicit about the nature of God's reign (Driver 1993;207). Thus, unlike much contemporary 'need-orientated' evangelism that tends to leave the status quo unchallenged, evangelism must be reconnected with social justice (Murray 2004b;162), and therefore authentic evangelism cannot be separated from prophecy and will both affirm and challenge people's present culture where appropriate (Murray 1993;7). Indeed, whilst recognising Anabaptism's tendency to emphasise being counter-cultural at the expense of cultural attunement (Murray 2004b;110), nevertheless for Murray (1993;7) the 'Constantinian experiment' illustrates that it is ultimately self-defeating to dilute the gospel in order to gain the maximum number of adherents, since the end-result may not be a people who are salt and light.

However, although rehabilitating evangelism may be essential, this does not mean that other dimensions of mission are unimportant. Murray is clear that there still needs to be a strategy for social and cultural engagement in post-Christendom (2004a;242), as well as authentic political engagement (*ibid*;250), yet insists that as marginal communities churches must use their limited resources strategically (*ibid*;242). On the other hand, although social engagement may be more modest than in Christendom, being on the margins means that the church is free to rediscover a prophetic minority stance and has the opportunity to take risks and pioneer initiatives that mainstream institutions cannot or will not consider (*ibid*;243-244). However, the evidence suggests that many churches remain embedded in conventional Christendom thinking when it comes to social engagement. Thus, although Bartley recognises that churches are keen to pursue social programmes, but have less and less of their own money to spend (2006;135), he is critical of the 'new deal' between churches and government in Britain, regarding it as a form of 'Christendom redivivus', since it perpetuates the Christendom dynamic via a relationship

with government which gives the church a new authority based on its ability to deliver services as a voluntary agent of the state (ibid;145-149). Such an arrangement leaves very little room for a radical stand or appropriate independence, since by and large the church has to accept government targets and is in danger of simply appearing to be giving its blessing to many of the government's policy goals (Bartley ibid).

With regard to political involvement as part of the church's mission, the Anabaptist tradition is clear that it must be circumscribed by the absolute priority of obedience to God and the kingdom (Wright 1995;20). Thus, if Jesus is Lord, Caesar's authority is limited (Murray 2004a;248), and the church performs a profoundly important political service when it asserts God's sovereignty (Wright 1995;18). Moreover, the Bible is viewed as ascribing only a necessary but limited role to the state (Wright 1994;11), and the state must also be viewed eschatologically, since it will one day disappear when the rule of Christ is finally consummated (Bartley 2006;229). However, where earlier Anabaptism tended to reject overt political activity, because of its perceived reliance on coercion and violence, and therefore the tradition has tended to make its contribution to the political process from the fringes of society, within contemporary Anabaptism there are those who recognise the implications of such disengagement, not least because it runs the risk of simply perpetuating the coercion and violence to which they are opposed (Gardiner 1994;2-4). Thus, there are commentators within the tradition who advocate a prophetic presence within the political system itself (ibid;4). Nevertheless, whilst it is appropriate to work for the minimising of all violence wherever possible, including the use of force by government, it is also recognised that the political sphere has its own limitations with regard to what it can actually achieve (Wright 1995;20). Moreover, although he suggests that the Christendom instinct to seek privilege, power and political influence appears to remain deeply ingrained within the wider church, Bartley (op.cit; 162) is clear that such a strategy will become ever less plausible for a shrinking and fragmented church. Therefore, it is argued that in post-Christendom churches need to take the opportunity to redefine their political engagement, placing a limited confidence in the state and maintaining an appropriate critical distance, whilst modelling the political

strategies they advocate (Murray 2004a;250), so that the political authority of the church will no longer be based upon political power, but upon authentic witness (Bartley op.cit; 228).

However, in seeking to reflect critically upon the Anabaptist prescription for missional engagement in post-Christendom, it can be argued that the evidence suggests that many of the proposals outlined above would no longer be contested by missiologists and commentators within the wider church. Thus, Nussbaum (2005;153) contends that there is no safer whipping boy among missiologists today than the concept of Christendom and that the long derided Anabaptist view of the separation of church and state has finally become the majority view, so that it is now widely recognised that true mission does not impose itself through political power. Indeed, there is also wide agreement that Christology must determine missiology, which in turn must determine ecclesiology, and thus the priority for mission in post-Christendom is for a return to the 'Founder of Christianity... and to recalibrate our approach from that point on' (Hirsch op.cit;142). Bevans and Shroeder (2004;330) suggest that Catholic, Evangelical and Pentecostal documents on mission maintain a very strong Christocentric focus, whilst Moltmann (op.cit;72) defines mission as participation in Jesus' own messianic mission, and maintains that in mission the church must continually test its aims and methods against those of Jesus. Kirk (1997;52) notes that the former Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches emphasised that mission is appropriate only if carried out in Christ's way, because the way of Christ is the standard by which all mission is to be judged. Moreover, within Anabaptism, theologians would affirm that their attempt at a fully-orbed Christology is not necessarily unique to the tradition. Thus, Yoder (1994;vii) judges his work *'The Politics of Jesus'* to have been a summary of widely known contemporary scholarship.

Furthermore, in answer to Shenk's critique of Protestantism, Newbigin (1989;131-132) sees in the Gospels and the life of Jesus an indissoluble nexus between deeds and words, and thus mission must be both performatory and declaratory. Similarly,

whilst for Tomlin (2002;69) it is essential that truth claims must be embodied, Morisy (2004;24-25) is clear that the church must resist the temptation to view evangelism and social action as separate enterprises, but instead must 'walk the talk' (ibid;6) by emulating Jesus' practice of boundary-breaking compassion (ibid;x). Moreover, she acknowledges the need for servanthood in mission when she proposes that it is only when the church is stripped of power that it begins to get the gist of the gospel (ibid;ix), whilst Walls (op.cit; 261) sees in the fading of territorial Christianity the opportunity for God-ordained vulnerability. For his part, Kirk (1999;53) is clear that mission 'in the way of Christ' must include evangelism, compassion and justice, with the latter requiring political engagement (ibid;54), a task which itself has prophetic, servanthood and evangelistic dimensions (ibid;215-217). He is also unequivocal that mission means following Jesus in his response to violence (ibid;54). Therefore, just as it is for Anabaptism, for Kirk (ibid; 144-145) the gospel is a gospel of peace and a message of costly reconciliation, so that overcoming violence and building peace is an indispensable aspect of mission, and evangelism is incomplete unless it addresses the problem of violence. Nevertheless, peace which is not built upon the righting of social and economic wrongs is an illusion (ibid; 143), and must also include peace between human beings and the environment (ibid;145), and therefore, peace, justice and the integrity of creation belong together (ibid;166-167).

Conclusion

Thus, the foregoing suggests that there is a significant convergence between the Anabaptist understanding of what is required for mission in post-Christendom and the conclusions reached by commentators within the wider church. However, although Bosch (1991;118-119) also advocates that peacemaking is an essential ingredient of mission, Kirk (1999;143) is clear that peacemaking is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the major works of mission, and when it is mentioned he notes that it is often coupled with justice, but then largely ignored, whilst reconciliation is usually associated with Christ's atonement. He therefore concludes that peace has not usually been related to mission (ibid). Moreover, commenting on the British context, Murray (2001;10) notes that with the exception of the Quakers, the country lacks a strong 'peace church' tradition, so that an

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emphasis on peace has yet to be embraced by most churches. Thus, one can argue that Anabaptism's stress on peace as an overarching theme of mission renders it a thought-provoking conversation partner in the wake of Christendom's unfortunate history of coercion.

Indeed, although there may be other significant areas of agreement between Anabaptism and representatives from missiological circles within other traditions, nevertheless it can be argued that elsewhere within the wider church 'Constantine continues to remain the emperor of our imagination' (Clapp 1996;22). Thus, Smith is convinced that Christendom assumptions continue to dominate how the task of mission and evangelism is understood (2003;3-4), and that the temptation for those of a more conservative disposition is to adopt a 'business as usual' approach (ibid;10). Likewise, Hirsch (2006;16-17) is concerned that most of the new thinking regarding the future of Christianity in the West simply focuses on the issue of theology and spirituality in a postmodern setting whilst uncritically relying on 'missiological tools from the Christendom toolbox'. Furthermore, Clapp (ibid;20) cites Britain as an example of a context where there is evidence of retrenchment in the face of Christendom's demise. Indeed, not only are there commentators who, if they had the opportunity, would seek to recreate 'Christendom as State' (Nicholls op.cit;83), but others who advocate 'a greater partnership in the national mission' via what they consider to be the 'bridgeheads' of the established churches of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, which they hope will result in enhanced national recognition and a reaffirmed national responsibility for other churches, especially the Free Churches (Avis 2001;89-91).

Moreover, there is also evidence to suggest that some major Christian denominations and organisations within Britain, whilst not necessarily remaining uncritically wedded to the Christendom project, are at least ambivalent in their response to the challenge of post-Christendom. Thus, Hull (2006;36), in response to the Anglican report '*Mission-shaped Church*' of 2004, accuses the Church of England of merely lamenting over its broken territorial status and of viewing its own mission merely in

terms of creating more churches, whilst clinging to its imperial past. However, one can argue that this may be too harsh a criticism, given that the report acknowledges the demise of Christendom (Cray et al 2004;84), emphasises Christ's own kenosis as a pattern for relationships (ibid;88) and the need to be appropriately counter-cultural (ibid; 1). Nevertheless, it is clear that the Anglican church continues to see that its central mission purpose is to be 'a Church for the nation' (ibid;35). Although for some this may appear an innocuous aim, merely to be interpreted as the laudable desire to be available for all, it can be argued that it is also open to other interpretations, including the desire to retain a Christendom-type relationship between church and society within England. Indeed, for Hull (op.cit;8) the above statement indicates that the Church of England wishes to remain a 'land church' which has a divinely-given territorial mission.

Furthermore, ambivalent responses are also to be found in significant networks beyond the established churches. Thus, on the one hand the UK Evangelical Alliance's '*Faith and Nation*' report (2006a;10) is clear that the legacy of Christendom is still much debated, yet acknowledges that Anabaptist emphases are becoming more popular among Evangelicals. Moreover, the Alliance urges Evangelicals to take up the challenge of holistic mission (ibid;12), whilst warning of the risks involved with any partnership with the state and making it clear that the wider church must be appropriately counter-cultural and prophetic in mission (ibid;138). On the other hand, at the launch of above report the Alliance (2006b) called on Prince Charles to become the 'Defender of the Christian faith' when he is crowned King, thereby challenging his previously expressed wish to have a multi-faith title, 'Defender of Faith'. Such a response by the organisation would appear to indicate that it wishes to retain at least a symbolic constitutional privilege for Christianity and that it is still prone to Christendom-type reflexes. Thus, it can be argued that notwithstanding any apparent consensus among missiologists and other commentators which may now critique Christendom assumptions and their impact on mission, nevertheless at a more popular, denominational or organisational level responses may be somewhat more variegated. Therefore, given such evidence of persistent retrenchment or ambivalence, one would wish to suggest that the Anabaptist tradition, with its particular

insights and experience of living on the margins of Western society, offers a welcome contribution to the ecumenical debate with regard to the future of mission in the challenging context of post-Christendom, not least in Britain.