

Anabaptist Network Newsletter

February 2004

Post-Christendom

Are you weary of hearing about postmodernity and the challenges this cultural shift poses for the church in Britain? This is a significant issue, but there are lots of books, websites and conferences exploring these challenges and opportunities.

What about the other cultural shift, which might be even more significant, but on which there is so much less research and reflection? This is the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom:

- *From the centre to margins:* in Christendom the Christian story and the churches were central, but in post-Christendom these are marginal.
- *From majority to minority:* in Christendom Christians comprised the (often overwhelming) majority, but in post-Christendom we are a minority.
- *From settlers to sojourners:* in Christendom Christians felt at home in a culture shaped by their story, but in post-Christendom we are aliens, exiles and pilgrims in a culture where we no longer feel at home.
- *From privilege to plurality:* in Christendom Christians enjoyed many privileges, but in post-Christendom we are one community among many in a plural society.
- *From control to witness:* in Christendom churches could exert control over society, but in post-Christendom we exercise influence only through witnessing to our story and its implications.
- *From maintenance to mission:* in Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo, but in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment.
- *From institution to movement:* in Christendom churches operated mainly in institutional mode, but in post-Christendom we must become again a Christian movement.

As Christendom unravels and post-Christendom becomes a reality, many Christians are searching for fresh ways of thinking about discipleship, church and mission. And the Anabaptist tradition – which for nearly 500 years has been critical of the Christendom mindset and offering alternative perspectives – is proving a valuable resource.

The Network co-sponsored a day conference on post-Christendom in November 2002, at the end of which several people asked for further help in exploring this issue. We are now able to respond to this request and to the growing interest in post-Christendom as the context with which Christians in western culture need to come to terms.

We have reached an agreement with Paternoster Press to produce a series of books called '*After Christendom*', in which crucial aspects of this major cultural shift will be investigated.

Stuart Murray Williams has written the first book: *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. This is due to be published on 19 March – for further information or to order a copy, please contact us. Other members of the Network will be writing further titles in the series.

Alongside this series, our website will be hosting a discussion forum so we can explore further the issues raised. To participate in this forum, go to www.anabaptistnetwork.com/AfterChristendom.

Root and Branch

We mentioned in the October newsletter that six Anabaptist-oriented groups had met together to explore ways of working more closely together. These were the Anabaptist Network, the London Mennonite Centre, Urban Expression, Workshop, Ekklesia and the Wood Green Mennonite Church.

We met again in November, this time joined by a seventh group – SPEAK (a network of students and young adults who pray and campaign about issues of social justice). Relationships are growing and we are discovering ways to support each other and cross-fertilise our diverse activities.

We also decided to adopt '*Root and Branch*' as a name for what we do together. This will not be a new organisation but a 'network of networks' – all of us committed to radical discipleship. We are planning to send out monthly 'Root and Branch' emails with news items, articles and stories drawn from all of the organisations. If you would like to receive these (or have items to contribute), please email jon@xalt.co.uk

Resource houses

We expect by the end of this month to establish 16 Network resource houses in different parts of the UK, so that our resources are available more widely. Hosts store these resources and welcome visitors to borrow (and return) whatever they are interested in.

We have been gathering resources and are grateful for a consignment of books and some financial help from the USA to augment what we have been able to put together. Many thanks, too, to some of those reading this letter for gifts of cash or books. If you can help further, please contact us. We plan shortly to distribute resources we already have and to add to these over the coming months. The resource houses are located as follows:

- Chris & Catherine Horton: 81 Compton Road, Wolverhampton WV3 9QH (01902 424214) chris@horton.nildram.co.uk
- Joan & Barry Williamson: 74 Albert Road, Leyland PR25 4YJ (01772 455158) joanbaz@mac.com
- Glennis Attwood: Brantthorpe House, Ryecroft Way, Glusburn, Keighley BD20 8PT (01535 632880) royattwood@lineone.net
- John Woffenden: 148 Highthorn Road, Kilnhurst, Mexborough, S. Yorks S64 5TX (01709 585034)
- Duncan Johnstone: 58 Hinton Road, Kingsthorpe, Northampton NN2 8NX (01604 842347) jhnst2@aol.com
- Derrick & Margaret Faux: 58 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick, West Midlands B67 5EB (0121 434 3597) belonging@tiscali.co.uk
- Andy Potter: 71 Northumberland Avenue, Cliftonville, Margate, Kent CT9 3LY (01843 223200) andywithsarah@lineone.net
- Simon Mattholie: 13 Abbots Ann Road, Winchester SO22 6ND (01962 884769) simon.mattholie@btconnect.com
- Mary Wilson: 1 Parmin Way, Taunton, Somerset TA1 2JU (01823 277573)
- Ian Milligan: 230 Kenmure Street, Pollockshields, Glasgow G41 2JF (0141 423 0883) millydyer@connectfree.co.uk
- Tim Foley: 2 Market Lane, Portadown, Craigavon, Co. Armagh BT63 3JY (07966 391729) timf@clara.co.uk
- Harry Sprange: Moffat Cottage, Heriot Street, Inverkeithing Fife KY11 1ND (01383 413925 – but contact by letter preferable)

- Chris Walton: Ringsfield Hall, Ringsfield, Beccles, Suffolk NR34 8JR (01502 713020) info@ringsfield-hall.freemove.co.uk
- Karen Stallard: 20 Garnet Street, London E1W 3QT (020 7265 1727) karenstallard@boltblue.com
- Simon Barrow: 8 Lower Avenue, Exeter EX1 2PR (07939 139882) simon_barrow@hotmail.com
- John Weaver: South Wales Baptist College, 54-58 Richmond Road, Cardiff CF24 3UR (029 2025 6060) johnweaver@the-baptists4.ndo.co.uk

These details are also listed on our website. If you want to make use of these resource houses, please contact the hosts directly.

New research assistant

We are very pleased to welcome **Tim Nafziger** as the Network's new research assistant. Tim, who arrived in the first week of January and is here for a year, brings useful skills and experience with him, including journalism and website expertise. He is developing our website in various ways and will be helping us communicate more effectively within and beyond the Network.

Tim will be visiting various parts of the country as he sets up the Resource Houses, so let us know if you would like to meet him.

Anabaptism Today

The February 2004 issue includes the following:

- An article by Bob Allaway on children in the church.
- Churches as multi-voiced communities: an exploration of the fifth Network core conviction.
- Karen Stallard tells the story of an emerging church in East London with Anabaptist values.
- An article by Ruth Gouldbourne on an early Anabaptist fellow-traveller, Caspar Schwenckfeld.
- Four short articles on the subject of Anabaptists and politics in preparation for the Network's conference in March.

Complimentary copies of *Anabaptism Today* are available on request. Back issues are available at half price (£2). An index of authors and subjects can also be supplied.

Study groups

Study groups meet in various parts of the UK:

Bristol: Ruth Gouldbourne, Bristol Baptist College, Duncan House, The Promenade, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3NF (0117 946 7050)

Oxford: Trisha Dale, 4 Mistletoe Green, Oxford OX4 7FY (01865 773403)

North London: Vic Thiessen, 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ (020 8340 8775)

South London: Alun Morinan, 37 Piquet Road, London SE20 7XY (020 8778 7018)

West Midlands: Derrick Faux: 58 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick, West Midlands B67 5EB (0121 434 3597)

Yorkshire: Jonathan Blakeborough, 20 Arundel Grove, Woodthorpe, York YO24 2RZ (01904 703710). *Now in Leeds/Bradford and York/Hull.*

Edinburgh: Jim Purves, Bristo Baptist Church, Buckingham Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3DJ (0131 332 3682)

Portadown: Tim Foley: 2 Market Lane, Portadown, Craigavon, Co. Armagh BT63 3JY (07966 391729)

Three new study groups

Three new study groups have registered with us since the last newsletter:

Leyland: Joan & Barry Williamson, 74 Albert Road, Leyland PR25 4YJ (01772 455158)

Lockerbie: David & Mary Kirkman, 1 Kettleholm Cottage, Kettleholm, Lockerbie DG11 1BU

East London: Karen Stallard: 20 Garnet Street, London E1W 3QT (020 7265 1727)

We are also aware of interest in starting groups in Liverpool, Belfast and Dublin. Please let us know if you are interested in joining one of these or starting a group elsewhere.

Anabaptists and politics

On Saturday 20 March 2004 we are organising a conference in Northampton to explore Anabaptist approaches to politics: '*Subversive manifesto: is there room for radical Christian politics?*' The enclosed leaflet gives more details. If you plan to

come, please register soon, as places are steadily being booked.

London Mennonite Centre

Spring seminars include:

6 March 2004: The Nonviolent Atonement

J. Denny Weaver will present the main arguments of his book *The Nonviolent Atonement* and lead a day of lively discussion which should appeal to scholars and laypeople alike. The seminar will consider important but controversial questions, which challenge us to rethink what many see as the very heart of their faith, including: Did a wrathful God demand Jesus die in our place to satisfy a divine requirement? Does this traditional and commonly accepted view of the atonement promote violence and the worship of a violent God? Can the God revealed to us in Jesus be violent? How do Jesus' life and resurrection fit into this? Should the satisfaction/substitutionary view of the atonement be abandoned altogether?

24 April 2004: Challenging Our Response to International Conflict

Keynote speaker Dr. Paul Oestreicher

The 'information age' has led to a growing public awareness of world issues. At the same time, there seems to be a growing awareness of ways to work for peace in areas of international conflict, along with more attempts to implement them. Yet many conflicts continue to escalate. What responses to international conflict should pacifists promote? How should the military be involved in these responses? What is the relationship between conflict, the military and the environment? Join us for a stimulating day of lectures and discussions on Christian responses to international conflict.

Both seminars run from 9.30am to 4.30pm and cost £20 waged, £10 unwaged (including lunch). Prior booking is essential. For more information or to book, contact Jane Collett on 0845 450 0214, email crosscurrents@menno.org.uk or download a booking form from the London Mennonite Centre website: www.menno.org.uk

Bridge Builders offers mediation services and training/consultancy in conflict transformation for churches. Its director Alastair McKay writes: 'As some of you know, I was joined at the beginning of this month by a new colleague. Charletta Erb is from a Mennonite family in Iowa. She has just graduated from Goshen College in the US with a degree in Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies, where she studied with Carolyn Schrock-Shenk among others. I am delighted to have Charletta

assisting me for the coming year – and hopefully longer.’

22-26 March 2004: *Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church*, led by Alastair McKay and Kirsten Zerger, at the LMC.

28 June-2 July 2004: *Skills Training for Mediation in the Church*, led by Richard Blackburn and Alastair McKay, in **Dunblane, Scotland**.

19-23 July 2004: *Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church*, led by Alastair McKay and Dave Brubaker, at the LMC.

21-23 September 2004: *Conflict Management for Senior Church Leaders* led by **Speed Leas**, one of the foremost church consultants in the USA, at the LMC.

11-15 October 2004: *Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church*, led by Alastair McKay and Carolyn Schrock-Shenk, in the **Midlands**.

For further details, please contact Jane Collett (tel: 0845 450 0214; email: jcollett@menno.org.uk).

Anabaptist theology forum

The Anabaptist theology forum is not meeting in March as usual, but members are participating in a European Mennonite theology forum being held in London on 4-5 March.

The group has launched a web-based discussion forum to enable on-line debate on various ethical and theological issues. The first two topics are human sexuality and war. This can be accessed via the home page of the Network’s website: www.anabaptistnetwork.com/IntroducingTheAN.htm

Urban Expression

Urban Expression is an inner-city church planting agency with Anabaptist values that works through self-funding teams.

There are currently five centres in East London (the story of one of these is told in *Anabaptism Today* this month), and we are in the process of

recruiting a new team to start work later in 2004. Do you know anyone who might be interested?

Urban Expression Associates (a wider network of urban church planters in other cities who share our values) has recently been formed. If you are involved in urban church planting and might be interested in this, we’d like to hear from you.

For recent news and further information, please write to us at Urban Expression, P.O. Box 35238, London E1 0YA or visit the revamped website at: www.urbanexpression.org.uk

Advance notice

28-30 May 2005 is a long way ahead, but we want to give notice that there will be another Network residential conference then. This event will run from Saturday mid-morning to Monday lunchtime (it’s a bank holiday) to avoid traffic problems.

Theme, programme and speakers are not planned at this stage. But we have booked the venue. We will be using Barnes Close, near Birmingham, the venue for our last residential event in 2002. We enjoyed this centre and appreciated the hospitality we received. Last time we filled the centre, so we have booked all the rooms again, but space will be limited. To guarantee your place, book soon by contacting us at the address below.

About this newsletter

Thrice-yearly newsletters from the Anabaptist Network are sent free of charge to subscribers to our journal, *Anabaptism Today*, and to others who are on our mailing list because you have asked to be or have attended events we have organised. The newsletters report on recent activities and contain news of future events arranged by the Network or our partner organisations.

However, if you are surprised to receive this and would prefer not to receive future issues, please inform us and we will remove your name from the distribution list.

Do also contact us if you would like to receive email versions of this newsletter, a complimentary copy of *Anabaptism Today*, or if you want further information about anything.

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