

Spring 2006

Anabaptist Network News

Monologue Preaching or Interactive Learning?

There are a number of good reasons to ask questions about the dominance of monologue sermons in most churches:

- Is this dominance congruent with the teaching style of Jesus and the early churches?
- Is it an unhelpful legacy of the clerically dominated and performance-oriented Christendom era?
- Are multiple sermons effective in creating mature learning communities?
- Can church leaders produce week after week after week the quality of sermons we need?
- Is a diet of unchallengeable monologues culturally appropriate today?
- What are we missing out on by our over-dependence on this practice?
- What can we learn from emerging churches that are moving away from monologue sermons to more interactive forms of learning?

Within the Anabaptist tradition, although sermons have always been a feature of church life, there has been a strong and persistent commitment to a multi-voiced approach. This might mean inviting questions and/or comments after sermons. It might mean a communal approach to biblical interpretation. It might mean working together to create learning experiences.

We recently added to the Anabaptist Network's website some resources on interactive learning and alternatives to monologues (if you're interested, see www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/321). A couple of people have read these and have contacted us to ask whether we can offer seminars to equip churches and preachers to develop alternatives to the monologue. We are open to doing this if there is sufficient interest, so please contact us if you'd like to participate in such seminars – or offer to host one.

Newsletters by email?

We are trying to cut down on postage – both for environmental reasons and to save costs. So can we ask you, if you currently receive this newsletter by post, whether you would be willing to receive it in future as an email attachment?

We appreciate that not all of our readers have access to email, and that others would much prefer to receive a paper copy of the newsletter rather than reading on-screen or having to print it off. We are happy to continue sending it to you in this way. But we just thought we'd ask in case some of you are happy to make the change. If you are, please email us at admin@anabaptistnetwork.com and we will send future issues to the email address you give us.

In the meantime, whether you are receiving this newsletter by post or email, we hope you find its contents interesting, and we look forward to seeing some of you at one or more of the events coming up in 2006.

Stuart Murray Williams

Events

25-26 February 2006

Second weekend of the *Crucible* course in Birmingham. Subject: *The Urban Challenge*.

13-17 March 2006

A Bridge Builders course: *Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training for Senior Church Leaders*.

25 March 2006

Anabaptist Network day event at Annan on *Practical Anabaptism*.

8-9 April 2006

Third weekend of the *Crucible* course in Birmingham. Subject: *Emerging Church*.

1 July 2006

Anabaptist Network event in Birmingham on *Faith and Politics after Christendom*.

4 November 2006

Anabaptist Network/Methodist conference: Cliff College, Calver, Derbyshire.

14-15 December 2006

Anabaptist theology forum. Main subject: *Environmental Ethics*.

26-28 May 2007

Anabaptist Network residential conference at Barnes Close, near Birmingham.

Network Events in 2006

On Saturday **25 March** the Anabaptist Network study group in Lockerbie is organising an event in Annan. The subject is *Practical Anabaptism*. For further information contact David Kirkman: 01576 510440 or kirkmansare@tiscali.co.uk

On Saturday **1 July** the Anabaptist Network will host a conference in Birmingham on *Faith and Politics after Christendom*. Speakers will include Jonathan Bartley, Andrew Bradstock and Alan Storkey. Further details enclosed/attached with this newsletter.

On Saturday **4 November** Cliff College (Calver, in Derbyshire) will host and co-sponsor a day event exploring the Anabaptist and Methodist traditions, especially their approach to *Christian discipleship*. Further details will be available on the website and in the next newsletter.

On **14-15 December** the theology forum will be meeting. Our guest speaker will be Dr Michael Northcott, author of several books including the acclaimed *An Angel Directs the Storm*. He will be speaking on environmental ethics.

Advance notice: the next Anabaptist Network residential conference will be on **26-28 May** at Barnes Close, near Birmingham (same venue as the last two). Guest speakers: Alan & Ellie Kreider. More details to follow.

News and Resources

New study group: Cheshire: a new Anabaptist study group has been launched. Brian & Jenny Haymes are convening this group, which met for the first time in January, and they welcome enquiries from anyone interested. For details, contact brian.haymes@ntlworld.com. The next meeting will be on 16 March.

Virtual study group? Would you be interested in participating in a study group but you live far away from any of our groups? Someone living in Cornwall has suggested setting up a 'virtual study group' (using email) for those out of reach of the groups. If you might be interested in this, contact david@pountain.demon.co.uk.

Theology forum: the forum met again on 15-16 December, when the main topic was 'Christian Perfection'. Some of the papers presented then are available on the Network's website.

Creating church on the margins: this was the subject of a day conference in Melton Mowbray on 14 January, hosted by East Midlands Baptist Association and co-sponsored by the Network and Urban Expression. Stuart Murray Williams and Juliet Kilpin were the speakers and about 80 people participated.

Conference in Prague: an international event at the Baptist theological seminary explored the theme 'Anabaptism and Mission' at the end of January. Ian Randall presented a paper giving a British perspective on this. We hope to be able to place the papers on the website.

Crucible: this course, jointly sponsored by our Root and Branch partners Urban Expression and Workshop (and Above), explores church planting, urban mission and emerging church. The next weekends are on 25-26 February and 8-9 April, and further participants are welcome. The course will run again in Birmingham during 2006-07. For further details and dates, please see www.cruciblecourse.net.

On the Road: if you have not seen it before you might be interested in the regular journal of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand. Called 'On the Road', you can sign up to receive it by email free of charge. The journal is packed with articles and book reviews – ideal for anyone still suffering withdrawal symptoms after the demise of *Anabaptism Today*. Contact: <http://www.anabaptist.asn.au/Newsletter.htm>.

www.anabaptistnetwork.com

There are two new contributions to our 'Drawn to Anabaptism' series, in which Christians from various denominations explain how Anabaptist insights interact with their own tradition. There are now Baptist and United Reformed Church articles on the website. If you are a member of a denomination not yet included in this series, let us know if you'd like to contribute an article.

An extended version of Alun Morinan's article on the peace tax campaign that accompanies this newsletter will also shortly appear on the website. And an abbreviated version of a paper Lloyd Pietersen presented at an international biblical studies conference in the autumn can be found there too.

If you are interested, you can now sign up for a monthly email, alerting you to anything new on the website.

Core Convictions – Revised

The Anabaptist tradition has generally been wary of creeds and fixed statements of faith, concerned at imposing interpretive grids on Scripture and of conveying the idea that there is no possibility of our understanding developing in fresh ways. But Anabaptists have produced various confessions, setting out a summary of distinctive values, convictions and practices. These statements are always provisional and subject to review in light of fresh insights.

In the late 1990s the Anabaptist Network issued a statement of **Core Convictions**. The Network is diverse, with no official membership or criteria for involvement. We realised that not everyone would necessarily sign up to everything in this statement.

But these statements expressed the convictions and commitments of many of those who had been involved for some years. In the spirit of the Anabaptist tradition, these statements were offered as provisional rather than final, and we committed ourselves to reviewing them from time to time.

During our May 2005 residential conference we explored the convictions in various ways and several proposals were made for revisions. In January 2006, after some months of discussion, the steering group agreed the following revised version (the revisions are in bold):

1. Jesus is our example, teacher, friend, redeemer and Lord. He is the source of our life, the central reference point for our faith and lifestyle, for our understanding of church and our engagement with society. We are committed to following Jesus as well as worshipping him.

2. Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. We are committed to a Jesus-centred approach to the Bible, and to the community of faith as the primary context in which we read the Bible and discern and apply its implications for discipleship.

3. Western culture is slowly emerging from the Christendom era when church and state jointly presided over a society in which almost all were assumed to be Christian. Whatever its positive contributions on values and institutions, Christendom seriously distorted the gospel, marginalised Jesus and has left the churches ill-equipped for mission in a post-Christendom

culture. As we reflect on this, we are committed to learning from the experience and perspectives of movements such as Anabaptism that rejected standard Christendom assumptions and pursued alternative ways of thinking and behaving.

*4. The frequent association of the church with status, wealth and force is inappropriate for followers of Jesus and damages our witness. We are committed to vulnerability and to exploring ways of being good news to the poor, powerless and persecuted, **aware that such discipleship may attract opposition, resulting in suffering and sometimes ultimately martyrdom.***

*5. Churches are called to be committed communities of discipleship and mission, places of friendship, mutual accountability and multi-voiced worship. **As we eat together, sharing bread and wine, we sustain hope as we seek God's kingdom together.** We are committed to nurturing and developing such churches, in which young and old are valued, leadership is consultative, roles are related to gifts rather than gender and baptism is for believers.*

6. Spirituality and economics are interconnected. In an individualist and consumerist culture and in a world where economic injustice is rife, we are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously, caring for creation and working for justice.

7. Peace is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, we are committed to finding non-violent alternatives and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society and between nations.

The first revision recognises that openness to suffering and commitment to costly discipleship has been integral to the Anabaptist tradition. It may seem alien in Britain, but martyrdom is the experience of Christians in many places today.

The second revision recognises the significance of shared meals with the Anabaptist tradition and suggests that this is the natural context for sharing bread and wine together.

Needless to say, this version is as provisional as the earlier one. We welcome any comments. Is there anything essential missing (recognising that this is not intended as a *comprehensive* statement of faith and practice)? Does anything need rewording?

New Books

Due for publication on 12 March 2006 is Stuart Murray's ***Changing Mission***, commissioned by CTBI as an Anabaptist perspective on the so-called 'emerging church' scene. Cost: £8.99.

The anticipated publication date for Jonathan Bartley's ***Faith and Politics after Christendom*** is 1 July 2006. We will launch this third book in the 'After Christendom' series at the conference in Birmingham. The book will cost £9.99.

These books, and many others, will be available from Metanoia Book Service: 0845 450 0214 or email metanoia@menno.org.uk

Urban Expression

Our partners Urban Expression are celebrating the reduction of their East London teams from 7 to 5 – on the basis that two new churches have now been planted! New teams are emerging in Manchester and Glasgow, and they intend to place further teams soon in East London. If you are interested see www.urbanexpression.org.uk

Autumn Courses in France

There are three opportunities to share with like-minded others in half-board week-long courses at a rural retreat house in south-west France, with free time to walk, talk and enjoy the French countryside.

The first is a theological reading party, 'Yoder's Wisdom' (7-14 October 2006), which looks at two key books by John Howard Yoder, foremost C20th Mennonite theologian. The second week for 'church leaders' is 'Radical Church' (14-21 October), which explores the values needed to be Jesus' Church in our post-Christendom era. The third, 'Soul Searching' (21-28 October) is for Christian seekers to help create a 'workable' spirituality for daily living, via exploration of five contemporary western Christian spiritualities.

All three weeks are led by Andrew Francis, the Anabaptist Network's first development worker. Details are available from Andrew on 01793 705484 or on www.chezlespelerins.co.uk.

London Mennonite Centre

Cross-Currents event: Dissident Discipleship by David Augsburg. Book launch and seminar on 8 April, 2006.

European Mennonite theological forum: Vic Thiessen is organising this event on 22-23 June 2006 at the Guy Chester Centre, Muswell Hill. Topic: 'Is God Non-violent?'

For details, contact victiessen@menno.org.uk.

Bridge Builders

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training for Senior Church Leaders

13-17 March 2006, Hertfordshire

A residential course equipping Christian leaders with practical skills for responding constructively to conflict. Cost: £675.

Church Leadership and Family Systems
5-9 June, London

Introduction to Family Systems Theory, applied to church congregations. The course will be led by Richard Blackburn. Cost: £290.

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training
26-30 June, London

A residential course to help develop Christians' understanding of church conflict and to learn methods to facilitate resolution and transform conflicts, particularly through mediation. Cost: £585.

For further information on any of these courses, call 0845 450 0214 or email: bb@menno.org.uk

Contact Us

For further information about anything you have read in this newsletter, please contact us using the details below. Or you can ring Stuart Murray Williams on 01865 250914.

Please let us know if you change your address, if you would be willing to receive newsletters by email, or if you no longer wish to receive them.

And if you have information for inclusion in the next newsletter, please let us have this by 30 April at the latest.

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