

Anabaptist Network Newsletter

November 2004

The Lost Message of Jesus

Over the past few months, some of you may have seen reports in the Christian press of some turmoil within the Evangelical Alliance provoked by the publication of a book by Baptist minister (and founder of Oasis Trust and Faithworks) Steve Chalke entitled *The Lost Message of Jesus*.

This book, which popularises the approach to the New Testament of the leading evangelical scholar N.T. Wright, has upset conservative evangelicals by questioning the 'penal substitution' theory of the atonement.

Steve's book is primarily a call to reconsider the radical message of Jesus as he announced the in-breaking kingdom of God. It does not actually use the terms 'atonement' or 'penal substitution'. But some evangelicals have been disturbed that he has challenged a doctrinal position they regard as non-negotiable and foundational.

The Evangelical Alliance, under pressure to make a response (and perhaps to discipline the author), decided to hold a public dialogue on this issue on 7 October. Steve invited Stuart Murray Williams to speak alongside him and over 700 people came to listen to the debate in central London. There is an excellent report on the evening on the Ekklesia website (www.ekkleisia.co.uk) and Stuart's paper can be found on the Network's website.

Readers of this newsletter may have diverse views (or none!) about 'penal substitution'. Although it is a relatively recent interpretation of the death of Jesus, it has become a hallmark of evangelicalism. However, many evangelicals – biblical scholars and church members – do not find this doctrine theologically or ethically defensible; more may now break cover and speak openly about this.

Members of the Anabaptist Network have taken interest in this debate because of the implications for discipleship, mission and our understanding of the character of God. As Stuart's paper explains, this is not just a technical theological debate about the meaning of the atonement.

We do not know how this discussion will unfold, or whether we will continue to participate actively in it. One possibility is to arrange a number of smaller dialogues in different locations. We would welcome any reflections you may have.

A network of churches?

The Anabaptist Network has thus far been a loose 'network of individuals' inspired by Anabaptist values and interested in Anabaptist perspectives on discipleship, church and mission.

On Saturday 2 October representatives of several churches met at the London Mennonite Centre to discuss the proposal of forming a 'network of churches' relating to each other via the Anabaptist Network. Notes of this discussion are available on request.

No decisions were taken, partly because we were aware of several others also interested in this idea who were unable to attend. But there was general enthusiasm for this proposal – as long as any such network of churches is as informal and relational as the existing network of individuals.

Anabaptist values and perspectives are inherently communal rather than individualistic, so forming a network of churches makes sense. The aim of such a network would not be to create a new mini-denomination, but to encourage churches to build friendships and share resources and experiences.

The Network's steering group met recently and welcomed the creation of a network of churches. We have some ideas as to how this network might operate, but we plan to continue consulting with representatives of other churches and hope to have further news in the next newsletter.

Please let us know if you have any thoughts on this or if your church might also be interested in becoming involved.

Residential conference 2005

How then shall we live?

Anabaptist lifestyle explored

The Anabaptist Network's **residential conference** is scheduled for 28-30 May 2005.

Further details and a booking form can be found in the enclosed leaflet. Spaces are limited, so book in soon to ensure a place.

Resources

Since it began in 1992, the Anabaptist Network has concentrated on providing access to resources for people interested in the Anabaptist tradition and its distinctive ethos of radical Christian discipleship.

This month we are publishing the 37th and final issue of our journal, *Anabaptism Today*. Regular subscribers tell us they will miss it but understand our decision to concentrate our limited energies on producing different resources for a much wider audience.

Further resources are planned, but we want to draw your attention to some of the resources already available through the Network.

Fit4Life

We are delighted to be the UK distributors of a new resource for churches, developed by a former member of the Network, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, and her colleagues in Australia.

Available in CD-ROM format, this training course (which draws gratefully on Mennonite material) is designed to help churches behave well and develop healthy practices.

The Fit4Life course contains numerous practical exercises for group work and covers:

- Church health and self-awareness
- Healthy communication
- Handling differences in healthy ways
- Healthy decision-making
- Clarifying role expectations
- Covenanting for health

Copies of the course are available for £10.00 from the Network at the address below.

Daily worship

Another former member of the Network, Eleanor Kreider, has been working with colleagues in the USA to produce Anabaptist-oriented materials for daily worship. The plan is to produce morning and evening offices for each day of the year.

The first sample of this material is now available for road-testing – two weeks' worth of morning and evening offices. It can be downloaded from

www.ambs.edu/prayerbook/index.php. Do try this out and let us (and Eleanor) know how you find this material.

Daily readings

Reading the Anabaptist Bible offers readings from the Bible and reflections (from sixteenth-century Anabaptist writers) for every day of the year. This collection, edited by C. Arnold Snyder and Galen Peters, is available from Metanoia Book Service for £19.00 (plus p&p).

Arnold Snyder has also written *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: the Anabaptist Tradition* – a new volume (2004) in the 'Traditions of Christian Spirituality' series published by Darton, Longman & Todd. This is available for £9.95 from Christian bookshops or from Metanoia Book Service.

www.anabaptistnetwork.com

We continue to develop the Network's website. Recent additions include:

- Selected articles from most back issues of *Anabaptism Today*.
- The full set of articles on the seven Core Convictions of the Network.
- Interactive maps showing the locations of the study groups and resource houses.
- An events' calendar.
- Additional sixteenth-century material for those interested in Anabaptist history.

Over the coming weeks we plan to add further material, including more sixteenth-century source documents and a downloadable study course on the fraught subject of 'church discipline'.

Anabaptism and Mission

For those interested in studying Anabaptism at a slightly more academic level, a new open learning module will shortly be available (in CD-ROM format) on *Anabaptism and Mission*. The module surveys the history and theology of Anabaptism and the significance of this tradition for mission today.

Written by Stuart Murray Williams, this module is available from Spurgeon's College, 189 South Norwood Hill, London SE25 6DJ (020 8653 0850). Email: enquiries@spurgeons.ac.uk

Study groups

Study groups meet in various parts of the UK. A list of groups and contact details can be found on the Network website.

NEW STUDY GROUP: a new study group (our first off-shore group!) began in October 2004 in **Jersey**. Contact details: Philip Wood, Craigie Lea, Mont Gras D'Eau, St Brelade, Jersey JE3 8ED (01534 746957) marpeck@jerseymail.co.uk

Resource houses

We have resource houses in different parts of the UK, from which you can borrow Anabaptist books and other resources. If you want to make use of these, please contact the hosts directly. A full list of resource houses can be found on the Network website.

THREE NEW RESOURCE HOUSES:

- Resource house 17 has recently been established in the home of Bob Allaway: 9 Forfar Road, London N22 5QE. (020 8888 7896) r.allaway@bigfoot.com
- Resource house 18 is located with Philip Wood: Craigie Lea, Mont Gras D'Eau, St Brelade, Jersey JE3 8ED (01534 746957) marpeck@jerseymail.co.uk
- Resource house 19 is the home of Andrew & Pat Francis: 81 High Street, Haydon Wick, Swindon, Wilts SN25 1HU (01793 705484) anmchara@tiscali.co.uk

Theology forum

The Anabaptist theology forum meets twice a year for 24 hours. This offers an opportunity to explore Anabaptist history and theology and various other issues in a relaxed environment.

The next Anabaptist theology forum will be held on 7-8 December at Offa House, near Leamington Spa. Subjects will include:

- 'Living out the difficult peace of Christ'
- 'Church after Christendom'
- 'Anabaptists, film and theology'

There may be spaces available on this occasion for those who have not attended previous events. For information, please contact us at the address below.

News from our partners

Root and Branch

The next meeting of *Root and Branch* (a network of networks for eight Anabaptist organisations) will be on 3 December. These organisations are:

- The Anabaptist Network
- London Mennonite Centre
- Workshop
- Ekklesia
- Urban Expression
- Wood Green Mennonite Church
- SPEAK
- Christian Peacemaker Teams

To receive monthly emails that contain articles and news from these organisations, please contact us or sign up on our website.

Urban Expression

A wider network of *Urban Expression Associates* has been forming – urban church planters in many cities who share common values. For more details see www.urbanexpression.org.uk

On 6 November we will have our first Associates' event. We are expecting over 55 adults and 20 children representing all the East London teams, Associates from various UK cities and emerging centres in Glasgow and Manchester. Our special guests are John & Olive Drane.

Wednesday 13 October was the inaugural meeting of the new reference group for **Urban Expression (Glasgow)**. The intention is to recruit 2 teams by September 2005 to work in under-churched areas in the north and east of the city.

Bridge Builders

Bridge Builders, directed by Alastair McKay, is the mediation and conflict transformation service at the London Mennonite Centre. For information, contact Alastair (or Charletta) on 0845 450 0214 or alastairmckay@menno.org.uk. Courses in 2005 include:

- **18-22 April 2005: Mediation and facilitation skills training** with Kirsten Zerger at LMC
- **24-27 May 2005: Family emotional process for church leaders** with Richard Blackburn at LMC

- **4-8 July 2005: Congregational conflict consulting** with Dave Brubaker at LMC

Advanced Workshop

The weekend of 2-3 October saw the launch of Advanced Workshop, a follow-on course from Workshop, the Christian teaching programme led by Noel Moules. Advanced Workshop has been developed by Lloyd Pietersen, who writes about the launch weekend:

‘19 students gathered at the Jenner Museum Conference Centre in Berkeley, Gloucestershire to hear introductory sessions on hermeneutics and Christian ethics and sessions on precritical hermeneutics, the theological ethics of Helmut Thielicke and the relationship between faith and reason.

‘The students displayed a remarkable desire to engage with the material, both in lectures and in group work, and many connections with specifically Anabaptist themes were made throughout the weekend.

‘The course will provide a Higher Education qualification in Christian Studies and focuses on apologetics, ethics and hermeneutics. A particular focus of the course is dialogue with leading scholars from other faiths. The course runs for one full weekend every two months for two years.’

For further information please contact Lloyd Pietersen, 7 The Brimbles, Northville, Bristol BS7 0RU (email: advancedworkshop@anvil.org.uk).

Christian Peacemaker Teams

CPT, the newest member of the Root and Branch network, may be unfamiliar to many readers. For an introduction to this organisation, have a look at their website: www.cptuk.org.uk.

Together with other groups CPT is sponsoring the visit to the UK of Peggy Gish (November 12-22). For further details, see the CPT website.

Peggy returned in mid-September from her fourth trip to Iraq, where she has been coordinating the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams. She first went to Iraq in October 2002, and she was in Iraq before, during and after the US invasion. CPT has

been helping Iraqi communities cope with the trauma of sanctions and war.

Peggy has been investigating prison conditions and working with detainees in Iraq since May 2003. She will be speaking about her experiences in Iraq and promoting her new book *Iraq: A Journey of Hope and Peace*.

Other news

- Andrew & Pat Francis have now opened their self-catering retreat house in South-west France; its new website is launched in November: www.chezlespelerins.co.uk. More information in the next newsletter.
- Available from January 2005, a new book by Stuart Murray: *Changing Mission: Learning from Newer Churches* (CTBI) – a journey through the ‘emerging church’ scene and its significance for mission and the future of the church. An Anabaptist perspective on a popular subject.
- Jeff & Debbie Wright are in the UK (9-18 November). Jeff is director of the Center for Anabaptist Leadership (Los Angeles). He will be speaking at two study groups, visiting some of our partner organisations and meeting members of the Network.

About this newsletter

Thrice-yearly newsletters from the Anabaptist Network are sent free of charge to everyone on our mailing list – either because you have asked to be on this list or because you have attended events we have organised.

From February 2005, following the decision no longer to publish *Anabaptism Today*, newsletters will also contain a single-page article and a short book review. We hope you will find these useful.

However, if you 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, buy back issues of *Anabaptism Today*, contribute an article, book review or news item, or for further information about anything mentioned above.

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