



Anabaptist Network News

After Christendom



Five years ago, when we agreed with Paternoster to produce a series of books on the theme of 'After Christendom', we did not anticipate that they would sell as well as they have or attract so much interest. But it is now clear that they are being widely read and discussed. They are on theological college reading lists, are quoted frequently in other publications and we receive invitations to speak on the issues raised in the books. Post-Christendom is becoming a reality in our culture, so this series appears to be timely.

We are glad that the fourth book in the series, *Youth Work after Christendom* by Jo & Nigel Pimlott, is now available. This was launched in July in Birmingham at an excellent and well-attended event, jointly hosted by the Anabaptist Network, Frontier Youth Trust and the Midlands Centre for Youth Ministry.

Two further books are nearing completion. Alan and Eleanor Kreider anticipate that they will complete *Worship and Mission after Christendom* by the end of the year and Lloyd Pietersen might finish *Reading the Bible after Christendom* even sooner. So we look forward to both books being published during 2009. Two further titles have been agreed by the authors and will shortly be offered to Paternoster for approval. We will say more about these in the next newsletter.

We're also exploring two other ideas that might extend the reach and impact of this series. One idea is to offer **After Christendom study days** to churches, theological colleges or other organisations. The authors of the various books (Jonathan Bartley, Nigel & Jo Pimlott, Lloyd Pietersen and Stuart Murray) are willing to teach sessions on a mix-n-match basis. The hosts decide what topics would be most useful to them and we put together a day programme with the authors working as a team. We have already had one invitation since we put this information on the website. If you are interested in hosting such an event, please let us know.

The second idea is to invite people to contribute 'After Christendom' **papers** on various subjects that can be posted on both the Anabaptist Network and Post-Christendom websites. We have had proposals for further titles in the series that will not work as whole books but could work well as papers or articles. If you have anything you would like to offer along these lines, please let us know.

If you have not yet discovered them, have a look at the extra resources on the website – www.postchristendom.com. There are samples of all four published books, a summary of the first two books, a study guide and suggestions for further reading. There is also the opportunity to post comments and questions.

All the books in the series can be obtained from Christian bookshops or, if you prefer, ordered from Metanoia Book Service: www.menno.org.uk/metanoia.

Events

15 November 2008
LMC: Cross Currents
day: *Getting Going on Growing Green*

26 November 2008
LMC: Cross Currents
day: *Threatened with Resurrection?*

15-31 January 2009
Christian Peacemaker
Teams tour with Gene Stoltzfus

8-13 February 2009
LMC: Bridge Builders
Transforming Church Conflict

21-22 February 2009
Second weekend of the *Crucible* course in Birmingham

27-28 May 2009
Anabaptist Theology
Forum

2-5 June 2009
LMC: Bridge Builders
Church Leadership and Family Systems

Great Lakes x2

Ali Phelps reports on two contrasting visits she made in the summer (one to old friends of the Network):

For complicated reasons, our carbon footprint sky-rocketed this year, and I found myself a wide-eyed traveller in very different landscapes. Lakes, huge lakes, were a spectacular feature of our journeys in North America and Rift Valley Africa: Lake Michigan, Lake Catastrophe, and Lake Tanganyika ... It was curious to see two transport signs, seven and a half thousand miles apart, 'Great Lakes Express' (USA) and 'Transportation des Grands Lacs' (Democratic Republic of Congo), and to experience the dramatic contrast between the wide smooth freeways and efficient railroads of one country with the rocky potholed tracks and useless tangled post-war metal of the other.

In Elkhart, Indiana, we were guests of Alan and Eleanor Kreider and there was a community barbeque on the first day of our visit. Alan had told us that they lived in a poor and multi-racial neighbourhood. This was hard to believe at first sight as we saw well-kept detached houses with wide green spaces and no litter. Everyone was in very good spirits at the barbeque: sunshine, laughter, food and drink were plentiful. Alan seemed to be in charge of the lottery (!) and had worked hard to persuade local businesses to donate prizes – beauty treatments, restaurant meals, movie tickets. Each prize was greeted with much delight, but the greatest joy, to my surprise, was for a large supermarket coupon. The winner was a young mother, and as we chatted, I began to realise the high costs of ill health, depression, uncertain employment and social isolation and the great importance to her of such a barbeque and such a prize.

Three weeks later, and a continent away, I witnessed further joy at money for food. At 6am every Saturday morning, the Uvira church folk gather for 'Upendo' (Swahili for love) to pray at the home of someone in need. The scene is charity magazine poor: red mud brick huts with corrugated iron roofs. We meet in a courtyard between households; the neighbours bring out all their stools, benches, mats and chairs for the forty or so worshippers. We sing, pray, listen to Scripture and resonate with the energetic a cappella choir amongst the sights and sounds of a neighbourhood beginning a new day – cocks, children, water at the shared tap, goats, pans.

And then one of the deacons goes quietly round with a covered bowl, collecting money for the family. Very, very few of this congregation have a regular income, yet somehow young and old find something to give. More singing, more praying, blessings for a new working and school day. The church leaders then take the sick man and his wife into the house to pray privately and present the gift. They tell us how much he used to help the church with his carpentry skills and what a devastating shock it was to his family when he was unable to work. He is probably in his fifties, he is smiley and knows the words to the songs, but he moves stiffly and doesn't recognise people. His wife is overjoyed at the church visit – she had felt abandoned by her husband's employer of thirty years – and repeats her thanks and praise to a faithful God.

Great Lakes USA, Great Lakes region East Africa: worlds apart in so many ways but the settings for two scenes of deeply appreciated inclusion, and of real gratitude for food money. And I am the richer for having seen God's love in action in these contrasting communities both longing for better times.

Future Events

We are now in the process of planning events for 2009 and 2010. We anticipate book launch events in autumn 2009 for the new books in the 'After Christendom' series. We are talking with the Northumbria Community about a follow-up to the popular conference on new monasticism. And we are wondering about another residential event in 2010. Other ideas are also in the frame – but we welcome further suggestions. Please contact us if you have proposals or would like to host or help organise an event.

Study Groups?

One of the early priorities of the Network was to encourage the development of 'study groups' in various places – opportunities for people to find others interested in radical discipleship and to learn together.

Over the years groups have begun, waxed and waned, ceased and re-formed. There are fifteen groups currently listed on our website. They are not centrally controlled but depend completely on local initiative. They can use resources from the Network, but they decide what to study and how often to meet.

But is 'study group' the best term to use? Does this make them sound too academic? Does this put some people off? Anabaptism emphasises practice, not just study for its own sake. Should they be 'resource groups', 'discipleship groups' or something else?

It's up to each group to decide what it wants to call itself, but we are planning to refer to these from now on simply as 'regional groups', leaving each group to decide how it presents itself. We have used the term 'local' study groups too in the past, but with only fifteen in operation this is stretching the term 'local' too far!

The full list of regional groups can be found at: www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/196. If you'd be interested in joining one – or starting a new 'regional group', please let us know.

New Regional Group

Whatever they are called, **Phil Wood** is hoping to start a new group in the Chilterns (where we had a group some years ago). The first meeting is on 7 November in Wallingford – which may be before you receive this newsletter.

'Whether you're mad about Mennonites,' Phil writes, 'passionate about peace or raring to be radical, a warm welcome to the new Chilterns Anabaptist Group.' The evening will begin with a simple vegetarian meal. All enquiries to Phil Wood on 01491 837045 or 07903 534285 or at marpeck@hotmail.com

The Network Steering Group

New readers of this newsletter may not know that the Anabaptist Network is coordinated by a small steering group, which meets three times a year to plan events, reflect on our priorities and activities, and do any administration necessary to keep things running.

Some of us have been involved in this since the Network began in 1991; others have joined the steering group more recently. All are volunteers. Who are we?

Jonathan Blakeborough is a medical doctor who works as tutor at Hull York Medical School.

Trisha Dale is a freelance copy editor living in Oxford.

Tim Foley is the Europe director of Mennonite Mission Network.

Andrew Francis is a community theologian and writer.

Noel Moules is director of the Christian training programme Workshop.

Stuart Murray Williams is a freelance trainer and consultant.

David Nussbaum is CEO of the environmental organisation, WWF.

Martin Parkes works for Christian Aid and lives in Bristol.

Ros Parkes has just finished working for the Red Cross, is exploring new work options and lives with Martin!

Ali Phelps is a college tutor and lives in Leeds.

Lloyd Pietersen is Senior Lecturer/Research Coordinator in New Testament Studies at the University of Gloucestershire.

Jo Rathbone is the project co-ordinator of Eco-Congregation.

Karen Stallard is a church planter with Urban Expression.

Vic Thiessen is the programme director of the London Mennonite Centre.

You can contact any of us via the contact form on the Anabaptist Network website.

Root & Branch Partners

Christian Peacemaker Teams

Christian peace activist Gene Stoltzfus will be in the UK this January, speaking about nonviolent intervention in contexts of conflict and injustice.

Gene Stoltzfus was the director of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) since its founding in 1988 until September 2004. CPT trains and places violence reduction teams in high conflict situations like Iraq, the West Bank, Columbia and various native communities in the United States and Canada. Teams and peacemaker delegations have worked in Chiapas, Vieques, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. Investigative teams have also visited Chechnya, Afghanistan, Congo and the Philippines.

Gene travelled to Iraq immediately before the first Gulf War in 1991 and spent extensive time in Iraq again in 2003, consulting with Muslim and Christian clerics, families of Iraqi detainees and Iraqi human rights leaders, and talking with American administrators and soldiers.

Gene's commitment to peacemaking is rooted in his experience in Vietnam as a conscientious objector with International Voluntary Service during the US military escalation there from

1963 to 1968. He recalls that watching the helicopter personnel unloading their cargo of bloodied bodies in Saigon set him 'on the search to make sense of life and death where the terms of survival, meaning and culture don't forbid killing. I had to ask myself whether I was as willing to die for my conviction as the Vietnamese and American soldiers all around me were being asked to do.'

If you want to invite Gene to come and speak between 15 and 31 January, ring 0845 450 0214 or email cpt.unitedkingdom@gmail.com.

Urban Expression

With teams already in London, Manchester and Glasgow, Urban Expression is investigating the possibility of deploying teams in other cities. We are looking for new team members and leaders.

Crucible

The *Crucible* course, run by Urban Expression and Workshop (with partner Above), has started its fourth year, again based in Birmingham. The next weekend is on 21-22 February. Spaces are still available, as are bursaries. Further details at: www.cruciblecourse.org.uk or ring Stuart on 0117 330 7826.

Workshop

Workshop has now started its 26th year! The new style Workshop with its themed weekends is running at all the centres across the country (London, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Bristol). Please pray that many people from a wide cross-section will do the weekends; that the regional teams will really feel at home with the new approach; that the teams planning the as-yet untaught weekends will have wisdom in putting them together; and that all participants will find the learning experience significantly life-changing. For details see www.workshop.org.uk email admin@anvil.org.uk or ring 0114 2888816

London Mennonite Centre

Two Cross Currents courses coming up soon:

15 November: ***Getting Going on Growing Green*** with Jo Rathbone (Anabaptist Network steering group member and project co-ordinator of *Eco-Congregation*. How do we get going on environmental issues? What kinds of actions should we and our churches be taking?

26 November: ***Threatened with Resurrection?*** with Simon Barrow. What would the church's mission look like if a refusal to kill was seen as a core Christian identity marker established by baptism? This will also be the launch of Simon's book with the same title.

Both courses run from 9.30 until 4.00, include lunch and cost £20 (£10 unwaged). Details from www.menno.org.uk or ring 0845 450 0214.

Bridge Builders

Forthcoming courses:

Transforming Church Conflict: A Foundation Course for Leaders (8-13 February 2009). A new running of the highly acclaimed foundation course, which explores conflict transformation for churches and Christian leaders.

Church Leadership & Family Systems (2-5 June 2009). Running for a fifth year, this course introduces participants to family systems theory to create opportunities for personal growth into mature leadership through examining one's family background and considering implications in church life and leadership.

More information at www.menno.org.uk

Metanoia Book Service

If you act soon, you could find a bargain in the Metanoia autumn sale, which runs until the end of November. Books by Walter Brueggemann and the New Interpreter's Bible Commentaries are the main items on offer. Will Newcomb also recommends a novel about Menno Simons, *The Fugitive* by Myron Augsburger. More details at www.metanoiabooks.org.uk or 0845 450 0214.

Contact Us

For further information about anything you have read in this newsletter, please contact us. And if you have information or news items you would like included in the next newsletter, let us have these items no later than **31 December 2008**.

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

Anabaptist Network Trust (registered charity 1021760)
Website: www.anabaptistnetwork.com; email: admin@anabaptistnetwork.com
14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ, England