Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand

Newsletter

Issue 5 **July 1999**

The shape of the 21st century church & the relevance of the Anabaptist tradition

Articles by Graeme Garrett & Chris Marshall

Tim Costello's book reviewed

Hursts report on the AAANZ Conference & other news on the Association

The Bruderhof in Australia

Homepage on the Internet
(http://www.northnet.com.au/~gbaker/).

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From the Editor's Desk

About this issue

There is no doubt about it, this issue strikes out into new territory, with two feature articles, some significant news on the future of the Association and a review of a book by a committee member, and significant Australian Christian, Tim Costello.

I haven't delivered on my promise of articles from the conference for this issue though - the articles are still on the way but they should certainly be here for the November issue.

My thanks as editor go to Graeme Garrett and Chris Marshall who provided me with feature articles which from different angles, explore the future of the church. Chris Marshall will be known to many readers of this newsletter for his previous contributions on New Testament issues. This time he has given us a more personal reflection but still scholarly reflection on his encounter the Anabaptist tradition and what it has to offer with its vision and practice of the church.

Graeme Garrett is an Anglican priest and a lecturer in theology at St Mark's Institute in Canberra. In a reading of the times in which the church finds itself, and in a reflection on the theology of the Trinity, Graeme points toward a form of church life which has a family resemblance to that advocated by Chris Marshall. There is a passion and personal engagement in both pieces which deserves a vigorous reflection and response. This is material to share around and use for discussion groups.

Publishing Schedule

The current plan is to publish one more issue of the Newsletter this year in early November. Next year my intention is to move to a quarterly publication schedule commencing late February.

What about a title?

After eighteen months this newsletter does not yet have a title of its own. It would be good if we could commence with the first issue of the year 2000 with the Newsletter appearing under a distinctive and appropriate title, something, which expresses the spirit of the Anabaptist tradition.

Doug Hynd (Editor)

Making it on the Web - Third Way Café

An Internet web site where the menu includes current events from a christian perspective and information on Mennonites.

www.thirdway.com

Letters to the editor

Dear Gary

I would like to introduce myself, Stephen Tanuwijaya. I am a pastor of the Agape Indonesian Christian Fellowship, Church of Christ. I was ordained by the International Indonesian Christian Fellowship, Pasadena USA which is affiliated with Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference in California, last year.

I am happy to know that there is Anabaptist group in Australia. I have spent some time to find out without any success until this morning when I was informed by Rev. Handoyo from Pasadena and I visited to your homepage. I regretted that I missed your meeting in Wollongong.

Now, my church is part of the Churches of Christ in NSW. We affiliated about 2

months ago. Our web http://welcome.to/jki_agape, but most of the information is in Bahasa Indonesia. I hope my name can be put in your mailing list.

God bless you!
Stephen

Presidents Page

Reflections on the Conference

"Is Anything Too Wonderful for the Lord?" Mark Hurst's opening meditation set the mood for our Wollongong AAANZ Conference by asking the question Yahweh raised in challenging Abraham and Sarah to believe the impossible and walk by faith believing that a 90 year old woman could bear an heir in accordance with God's promise.

So too the fledgling Anabaptist movement in Australia and New Zealand, though small and spread over more than 5000 km of land and sea could ask the same question of God, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord". Can God use us as salt and light in Australian and New Zealand? For an (all too short) few days attendees from ACT, NSW, VIC, WA, the ACT and the USA ranging from babies to (almost) senior citizens, ably led by Mary Hurst became an Anabaptist community in praise and worship, and by Mark Hurst in exploring together the pathways of reconciliation and the way forward for the church in the 21 century.

Historically we learnt from Graham Chatfield the path our Anabaptist brothers and sisters trod in the 16th century. Graham was able to show that the 16th century Anabaptist way of reading Scripture in community and taking historical passages seriously has radical implications still applicable today. What was radically new in the 16th century, the Anabaptist view of the church as a redeemed community of transformed people living counterculturally has real applicability today at a time when Christendom has lost its meaning in our pluralistic society.

An important part of our conference time together as an "Anabaptist community" was spent in listing goals we would like to achieve. Included amongst these goals were,

- the desire to link with other groups involved in reconciliation ministry,
- the need to link with other Anabaptists worldwide,
- the affirmation that regional representatives in Sydney, Melbourne, Sheffield, Auckland, Armidale and Perth would make attempt to make regular contact with people in their areas and build up the networking concept
- the dissemination of articles from an anabaptist view via other Australian christian publications
- the further development of our web site for promotion and contact.

"Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" I don't think so.

Ian Duckham

PS. I would like to express my thanks on behalf of all Association members and supporters to the members of the committee who served during the first year of the Association.

Particular thanks go to Colin Isaac as President and Diane Coleman as Secretary for all that they contributed. Getting the Association up and running with minimal resources and operating with a committee scattered across 4 time zones and 5, 000 km was a substantial achievement.

Our thanks and prayers go with them.

1999 Home Church Gathering

1-4 October
Trinity Christian School, Canberra

For details contact:
Jill Crisp: 02 62882561

Communicating with the committee

A new committee was elected at the Annual General meeting held at the conference in Wollongong on Sunday 14 June.

Executive

President: Ian Duckham
Vice President: Doug Hynd
Secretary: Ross Coleman
Treasurer: Gary Baker

Committee members

Bessie Pereira
Tim Dyer
Tim Costello - Public Officer
John Cox
Chris Marshall

Minutes of the AGM will be circulated to members of the Association shortly.

We try as a committee to use electronic means of communication and the internet as much as possible to kept in touch with each other. I have enclosed our email addresses to enable you to contact any of us by that means.

Gary Baker: gbaker@northnet.com.au
Tim Costello: csbc@vicnet.net.au
Ian Duckham:
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Tim Dyer: southland@vision.net.au
Doug Hynd: hyndd@dynamite.com.au
Chris Marshall: c.marshall@xtra.co.nz
Bessie Pereira: bessiep@jeack.com.au
John.Cox@ipaustralia.gov.au
Ross Coleman: Coleman@wolf.net.au

Treasurer's Report

The balance of the AAANZ Inc account at the 15.7.99 was $756. Donations received for the visa application appeal of October 1998 have amounted to $3,000. This amount came from 11 one of gifts and 3 periodic donations (which have contributed $700 to date). Thank you for these donations.

The recent AAANZ Conference made a small profit ($10.00). Two legal payments have been made. In November 1998 $1900 was paid from the Anabaptist Network account. Recently $2,000 has been paid for dispersments in regard to the visa process and further legal work.

It is anticipated that legal expenses associated with the visa application could run to a further $3,000. An appeal for financial support is included as an insert with the Newsletter. Regular donations during 1999 would be very helpful in enabling us to reach this target. A direct debit arrangement is possible. Please contact me for details. Regular contributions starting now would be very much appreciated and would speed up the legal process.

Donations made out to the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc (or AAANZ) can be sent to the Treasurer, PO Box 1514 Armidale
NSW 2350 Australia.

Shalom
Gary Baker (Treasurer)

News

The following report was sent by Mark Hurst to Mennonite news media as a report on the Association conference held recently in Wollongong.

Anabaptists Meet Down Under

The Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) met in Wollongong, Australia for its second national conference and its first Annual General Meeting since its incorporation as a religious association on the long weekend in June, the eleventh to the fourteenth. Adults and children gathered from several Australian states for a time of teaching, fellowship, worship, business, and fun.

Graeme Chatfield, a church history professor at the Baptist theological college in Sydney, presented two talks on sixteenth century Anabaptism. As well as painting this historical picture, he told about his personal journey to Anabaptism.

Mark and Mary Hurst, mission workers with Eastern Mennonite Missions in the USA, gave two talks on peacemaking and one on "Anabaptist Perspectives for the Church Today". The Hursts were in Australia and New Zealand on a seven-week trip visiting people throughout the association and speaking in churches, small groups, universities, and theological schools.

The AAANZ was born as the Anabaptist Network at a similar gathering in Tasmania, Australia in 1995 and became incorporated this year. A national committee that holds regular phone conferences handles most of the business of the association. The Wollongong gathering allowed some of these people who have been speaking to each other on the phone and by e:mails to meet for the first time face to face.

A newsletter has been created as well as a homepage on the Internet *(http://www.northnet.com.au/~gbaker/)*. Regional coordinators were chosen and the decision was made to hold national conferences every year to eighteen months with the next one scheduled in Melbourne sometime after the Sydney Olympic games.

Many of the participants arrived at the conference feeling down from a hectic year of trying to get the AAANZ organised and running into one hurdle after another. The Hursts opened the conference with the story from Genesis eighteen about God appearing to Abraham and Sarah and telling them they would have a son. Sarah laughed at the thought of a ninety-year-old woman having a baby but God's response was "Is anything too
hard for the Lord?"

The message of hope that we worship a God who can produce babies from ninety-year-old women permeated the rest of the conference and sent the participants home feeling confident that nothing is too difficult for the God they worship.

Mark S. Hurst

3 July 1999

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Reflections on a visit down under

The following comments come from a letter from the Hursts at the close of their seven week visit to Australia and New Zealand.
Some comments about our time in Oz on this trip: We met many people who are suffering from contact with "evil" in the systems around them -- educational, economic, and religious. People are struggling to live out their faith and are copping it from the institutions they are a part of.

This quote from Rodney Clapp's book ***A Peculiar People*** *speaks to this issue:*

"...we are all complicit in a system that depersonalizes, that sometimes degrades and too often does violence. And whatever we do, the injustices of the system will not end tomorrow ...might not a tiny act of courage today lead to greater acts of courage later?...even in their feeblest manifestations, decent Christian care, the Christian language of the creed and the Christian practice of forgiveness make a strike against any principality and power that would dishonor community and destroy wholeness, preventing life as God gave it and calls it to be...Church as a way of life is incremental obedience, passion subdued but sustained over years. It is discipleship for the long haul, over a road that is inevitably bumpy and includes detours, switchbacks and delays." (p.199)

May God give us the grace and strength to support each other on the road of discipleship.

Shalom,

Mark & Mary Hurst

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News on the invitation to the Hurst's to return to Australia and New Zealand

Mark and Mary Hurst were able to have two very productive meetings with the immigration lawyer during their visit to Australia.

With clear and well focused advice from the lawyer the committee was able to take a number of steps which bring the prospect of Mark and Mary returning to Australia to take up their ministry a good deal closer. An official invitation was extended, letters confirming an agreement with the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions was confirmed and correspondence sent to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. A letter applying for status as a religious organisation was also forwarded to the Australian Taxation Office.

The immigration lawyer is now confident of success for the application with the possibility that the Hursts could return as early as January 2000.

The committee is now actively seeking further financial support for the visa process - up to $3000 beyond what has been already raised may be needed. A copy of an appeal for financial support is included with this newsletter. Your active financial support and prayer support would be very much appreciated.

Decisions now need to be made about the location of the Hursts and the development of a resource centre when they return to Australia. the choice seems to be between Sydney and Melbourne. Please pray for the committee for wisdom as they make some critical decisions over the next few months. Please remember the Hursts as they raise support in the USA and Canada and as they plan for the return and sort out family arrangements.

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Bruderhof in Australia

(The following article announces the establishment in Australia of a community which is both a contemporary expression of the Anabaptist tradition and at the same time has its roots in the earliest days of the radical reformation. The article was received from the community after a meeting between members of the community with Mark and Mary Hurst during their visit to Armidale. Editor)

The roots of the Bruderhof go back to the time of the Radical Reformation of early 16th-century Europe, when thousands of so-called Anabaptists left the institutional church to seek a life of simplicity, brotherhood, and nonviolence. One branch of this dissident movement, known as Hutterites after their leader Jakob Hutter, settled in communal villages or Bruderhofs ('place of brothers') in Moravia.

In 1920, Eberhard Arnold, a well-known lecturer and writer, left the security of his Berlin career and moved with his family to Sannerz, a tiny German village, to found a small community based on the practices of the early church.

Despite persecution by the Nazis and the turmoil of World War II, the community survived. Amid increasing difficulties in Germany (and expulsion in 1937), new Bruderhofs were founded in England in the late 1930's. In 1940 a second migration was necessary, this time to Paraguay, the only country willing to accept our multinational group.

During the 1950's branch communities were started in the US and Europe. In 1960-61 the South American communities were closed, and members relocated to Europe and the US. Today there are Bruderhofs in New York, Pennsylvania, southeastern England, and NSW Australia.

Yes, that's right – there are a handful of us in Oz! We're making a go at it on a rural property near Inverell. Although there are more cattle and sheep than Bruderhofers here so far, we would warmly welcome guests to swell our ranks for fellowship and work for a day or two.

We'll also keep a stock of books and resources from the Plough Publishing House available to ship domestically to anyone who is interested. (That will save you shipping charges from the UK!).

The basis of our communal life is Christ's teaching in the New Testament, especially the words about brotherly love and love of enemies, mutual service, nonviolence and the refusal to bear arms, sexual purity, and faithfulness in marriage.

Instead of privately holding property or assets, we share everything in common, the way the Early Christians did as recorded in the Book of Acts. Each member gives his or her talents, time, and efforts wherever they are needed. Money and possessions are pooled voluntarily, and in turn each member is provided for and cared for.

Though many of our members are single adults, the family is the primary unit of our community. Babies and small children receive daily care in our 'Children's House' while their parents are at work; preschool, kindergarten, and primary grades are educated in our own schools.

Teenagers attend local schools and then move on for further education or technical/vocational training. Young adults are encouraged to leave the community for at least a year – to "stand on their own feet" and see how the rest of the world lives – before deciding whether or not to become a community member. Many of us were not raised in faith-based intentional community, but joined from other walks of life.

While we have come together from many cultures, countries and lifestyles, we are all brothers and sisters. We are conscious of our shortcomings as individuals and as a community, yet we are certain that it is possible to live out in deeds Jesus's clear way of love, freedom, and truth – not only on Sundays, but from day to day. We believe our planet must be conquered for a new social order, a new unity, a new joy.

Our bread and butter is earned by the manufacturing of Community Playthings (play equipment and furniture for children) and Rifton Equipment for People with

Disabilities. Our work is far more than a business venture, however. From doing the laundry to assembling products in our workshops, it is a practical expression of our love for one another.

While reaching out beyond our movement is an essential part of our lives, our primary concern is not to make new Bruderhof members. Our intent is to listen to the heartbeat of our time and witness to the possibility of living in unity, regardless of colour or culture.

Peace and Justice are central themes of our witness, and because they start at home, they are rooted near the basis of our life together. Our movement struggles forward against the stream of contemporary culture, but God has held us together through times of persecution, internal struggle, and spiritual drought. We entrust our future to him.

Danthonia Bruderhof

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The Plough

Free Subscription Periodical
Plough Publishing is owned and operated by Bruderhof members and sells books on radical Christian discipleship, community, marriage, parenting, social justice, and spiritual life. We also publish a small periodical, The Plough, with articles on current issues the mainstream media tend to ignore, and reflective pieces on personal and social transformation and growth. Sample copies of The Plough are available on request.

The life and witness of Julie Banks

Many of the readers of the Newsletter will already be aware of the death shortly after Easter of Julie Banks from cancer, shortly after her return with Robert from Los Angeles.

She had worked in a joint husband and wife ministry with Robert for over thirty years in the planting and nurture of house churches. It is a ministry that has had few parallels in my experience.

There was a directness and down to earthness about her faith and spirituality which was distinctive and had a profound influence on the lives of most people with whom she came into contact.

I was privileged to attend a memorial service for her on the Begbie's farm amongst the hills of the Great Dividing range less than an hour outside of Canberra. Around 60 people from Canberra came to share together there memories and stories of her life and walk of faith, to plant some trees and pray together for Robert and their sons Mark and Simon.

There is moving account of Julie's life and witness in the latest issue of *Zadok Perspectives* by Belinda Holt.

Robert who had been a strong supporter of the Anabaptist Association is now teaching at the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute at Macquarie University.

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A world wide perspective
courier

A Quarterly Publication of Mennonite World Conference seeks to nurture community, communication and cooperation in the worldwide Mennonite family. For subscriptions contact Mennonite Press PO Box 307 North Newton Kansas, 67117, USA.

House church conference

The next House church conference will be held as Trinity Christian School in Canberra over the October long weekend.

The theme of the conference is **Home Church: Inheritance and Possibilities.**

The conference will take the form of working groups to explore some of the influences and predecessors, including the Anabaptists, the early Wesleyans, and Basic Christian Communities. This will be followed by a panel exploring how this inheritance can be brought forward into the future. There will be plenty of free time to make and renew friendships and share experience and resources.
For details contact:
Jill Crisp: 02 62882561

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The church in the 21st century: a contribution to the 1999 Canberra ecumenical symposium

by Graeme Garrett

We all know that large intellectual and cultural shifts are taking place in the world. The life of the church is not immune from these swirling winds of change. Most of us feel a sense of dislocation. Familiar ways of 'being church' and worshipping God often seem hollow, lacking the kind of vitality that challenges our thought and renews our life. Looking at the broad picture, it seems that religion is increasingly practised on the margins of our society. It struggles gamely, but often without much visible success, to be noticed amid the glittering speed of media action, the relentless march of corporate power, and the dominant influence of market-managed public policy.

I want to note a few of the more prominent features of what we like to call these days the 'postmodern condition'.

Globalization

It is clear that we now need to think at a planetary level in politics, economics, technology, conservation and even entertainment. Almost none of the major issues facing the human race—peace, disarmament, the ecological crisis, poverty and population, racial prejudice and the status of women and children, and of course refugees—can be addressed within the framework and resources of any one tradition or nation by itself.

Religion, politics, science, law, sexuality all now move in a global context. New kinds of human identity, universal in intention and inclusive in practice, are needed if a sustainable and tolerable human future is to emerge.

Pluralism.

But there is the understandable counter-tension. It finds expression in the need for

roots. Particular cultural and ethnic groups resist the swamping uniformity of global forces. Australian society is increasingly characterised by a diversity of races, religions, languages, life-styles, sexual preferences, family configurations, artistic styles and ethical traditions. Multiculturalism has become our preferred political term for this phenomenon (even John Howard!). Prominent amongst these different streams of human orientation is the urgent voice of the indigenous peoples of this land. Like the biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9), we seem to be in a situation of fragmentation, adrift amid a confusion of languages, world-views and moral contexts. No shared story or history furnishes an overarching framework into which all these differences can be safely nestled and all disputes fairly settled. 'Truth' and 'reality' seem to be irrevocably linked to particular languages, specific communities and idiosyncratic traditions.

What appears self-evident to a European educated Christian concerning, say, the symbol of the cross of Christ in relation to an understanding of God, seems anything but obvious to an Indonesian speaking Muslim. Such relativism is scary for those of us who have been brought up to think that truth—especially our deepest truth—was just that, true. And that meant true for anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere. Postmodernism returns a resounding no to such confidence.

Declining Church power

A lot of this stuff means that the church in Australia is losing its place of privilege and numerical superiority. If we once had the edge in matters ethical, religious, and even to a certain extent political, this is passing, except perhaps in the area of welfare and, to a lesser extent, education. The church is now one voice among a number competing for attention. What we think and say may still get a hearing from time to time. But it doesn't command automatic respect and influence. It has to take its chances along with other voices in what is given weight.

The Ecumenical issue

It seems to me that in such a context, ecumenical relationships within (and beyond) the Christian church will become more significant in the 21st century. It will probably become increasingly important to be clear about what makes us *Christians*, and why we think it worth while to identify ourselves with the Christian faith, than it will be to be clear and insistent on what it means to be Anglican, or Catholic, or Baptist. Not that I think this implies some kind of uniformity or loss of particular traditions in the church. But what now divides us in our denominational traditions is less significant than what unites us in distinction from other perspectives, religions, or philosophies in the debate about what it will mean to be human in 21st century.

No doubt many other things need to be said. But this will do for now. The question is: what are the ways forward for us?

Identity

I have time only to focus on one issue. And I have chosen that of *identity*. As the 21st century arrives, with all the change, upheaval, future-shock, technology, pluralism etc, that will come with it, I think we are faced with the challenge to be clear about what our *identity* as Christians amounts to in *this* sort of world. Who are we? And why would anyone (us included) be interested in taking seriously this ancient view, the Christian view, as a possible way to live a human life in the new millennium?

This is first and foremost a *theological* question. It has to do with God. The church is defined as church by its faith in *God*. It always has been. But not any old view of God. It is faith in the God who (we are bold enough to claim) has made an identity statement of God's own. To put it bluntly,

(so we hold) God has said, 'this is me; this is who I am', in the person and destiny of Jesus Christ. The church is that bunch of human beings who think this historical figure, and the witness borne to him in the scriptures, offers the most lucid insight available into the fundamental nature and meaning of reality.

In the middle of all the swirling, changing, conflicting views of truth, of meaning, of hope, the church claims that in the story of Jesus Christ, God, the final source and goal of all that is, has made a huge self-revealing comment. And that needs to be taken seriously.

As church we may have many things to say and do in the world. But this thing, the God story of Jesus Christ, is the heart of identity for us. We need to be as clear about it as we can because from it flows our life as a Christian community and our various lives as individual Christians in the wider world.

Perhaps it is no more than a theologian's bias, but I sometimes feel that the church today (my branch of it anyway) is pretty much in pragmatic mode, even damage control mode. We are acutely aware of living in the midst of big changes, many of which seem inimical to our institutional interests.

I sometimes feel that the church today ... is pretty much in damage control mode ...

We are losing numbers and profile and power. So we have to 're-invent' ourselves, be on the look out for new ways of operating, of gathering, of marketing ourselves. And the criteria of 'what to do' seems to be 'what will work'—what will get the young people in, or balance the budget, or keep the punters in the pews, and so on. In short what will help the *organisation* survive into the 21st century. The Harvard Business School's latest theory of management often seems to be the inspiration for decision making and policy.

Now I do not want to knock pragmatics. I am aware of the criticism made against theologians—out of touch, theoretical, ivory tower types. There is truth in that. Christian faith is a religion of incarnation. It has its feet firmly in the earth. It is concerned with action, change, commitment in the rough and tumble of everyday living. This is God's world, even though it stands sorely in need of redemptive grace. We have better learn to heed the words of Jesus 'to be wise as serpents' as well as 'innocent as doves' (Matt 10:16). So I am not knocking practical action in the church on the individual, institutional and mission levels.

But I do want to put in a word for the other task. We are called to live as Christians in a world where it can no longer be taken for granted that to be a Christian is what, at bottom, everybody is anyway. The old Christendom model is gone. To be Christian now takes a deliberate and often counter-cultural effort. It is a stance held against the stream and in the face of alternatives, often quite virulent alternative options of life, and thought, and ethics.

Our situation is not unlike that of the church of the first 4 or 5 centuries of the Christian era.

In this sense our situation is not unlike that of the church of the first 4 or 5 centuries of the Christian era. For most of that time, too, the church was a minority opinion in the world. There were numerous other established views of human life. The Synagogue on the one hand, and Hellenistic, gnostic and pagan religions and philosophies on the other. The problem facing the church was the identity issue. What distinguishes the church from these other views? Is it a distinction worth living for and (at times) dying for?

Why not be a platonist, or a stoic, or a gnostic or a cynic or a good member of the Synagogue? Is there something important in the Christian revelation that makes it worthy to stand its ground over against these other views, and if so what is it? What is the implication of believing that God's own being has plunged, with no escape mechanism, into human history in the person of Jesus the Christ?

The early church's struggle with this question is a long, jagged, fascinating story to read. We have no time to go into it now. But the outcome was a new and radical understanding of God, different from the OT view of Yahweh and from the Greek views of God as the first cause or prime mover or what have you.

Those early Christians thought of God as trinity. The living God, they argued, is a unity in complexity and complexity in unity. God as creator of the world. God as redeemer of the world. God as life-giver in the world. Father, Son, Holy Spirit was the classic formula, though its non-inclusive language makes that way of putting it problematic in our time.

It is as if the church, faced again with a sharply pluralist situation, is forced to ask the question of its basic identity.

I find it intriguing that at the end of the 20th century there has been a marked upsurge in theological writing on the trinity, and that by the best minds in the church, the Barths, the Rahners, the LaCugnas, the Moltmanns. It is as if the church, faced again with a sharply pluralist situation, is forced to ask the question of its basic identity. Who really is God as we understand it? And then who are we in worship of this God?

We need to think hard about this question. Otherwise we will not know who we are or what we are doing in these times, as Christians that is. The church is that community which believes God is active and present in the world. But God as revealed in Christ. The trinitarian God, creator, redeemer, life-giver.

We don't have time to develop this now. Let me sketch an outline in closing. To believe in God as Father or creator is to believe, and to live the belief, that this world is fundamentally a gift, and very much a gift of love. Before all our human actions, decision, politics and economics, before we get anything started at all, the world is gifted to us from the hand of another (God) as a good and gracious and living gift. As a community who believes this, and celebrates it in worship, we will try to live as a people whose basic disposition is gratitude. In short, we will be a eucharistic community. We are thankful for discovering and receiving life in all its diversity as a deep, good and generous gift from beyond ourselves.

But we also understand ourselves as related to God who is redeemer, Jesus Christ crucified and risen. That means amongst other things that we will be hard-headed realists in the world. The world is a broken place. A good gift at bottom, to be sure. But a gift that has been violently handled by us human beings. So violently handled that at times it is devilish hard to see it as a gift at all. It seems more like a threat, a war, an oppression, an evil.

The magnitude of dark and malignant evil in the world has been vividly played out in recent weeks, as the names of Kosovo, Denver, and East Timor testify. This aspect of experience links us with the God of the cross, the God who is not on high somewhere, a spectator of the suffering of the world. But God who takes the suffering of the world into God's own life and somehow, we believe, breaks the vicious circle of vengeance that marks our politics, with a love which refuses to pay back in kind. If this is God, too, we are committed as a community to compassion, to the struggle for justice, and to the difficult, difficult business of learning forgiveness,

both to offer forgiveness and to receive it. Of learning when it is appropriate to say and act, 'it's OK'. And learning when it is appropriate to say and act, 'we're sorry'. We strive for this because in the light of the resurrection we know such generous and recreative compassion is as unkillable as God.

Finally, as those who confess faith in the trinity we believe that the Spirit of God, the Spirit of life and love and peace, is abroad in the *whole* world. Not just in the church. And certainly not just in our little lives. The Spirit of God breathes through all of the creation, through all the broken and struggling life of the planet. Believing this, we will try to live as an ecumenical people in the broadest sense, a people sharing a common home, the home of the Spirit, with all creatures under heaven. We will try to live as a community of hope, which believes that the future is not closed and finished, that new possibilities, new options, new justice, new mercy, new peace can and will make appearance in God's world. And believing we are called by God to be a part of this work of the Spirit wherever it is being manifest.

A lot more needs to be thought about this stuff, of course. But the single point I want to make in this context today is that it is vital to continue to hang together as Christians in our efforts to listen to the word God speaks, the word in which God identifies Godself in the world. For in knowing God, we come to knowledge of ourselves, who we are, and how we can live well in God's earth.

we are called to be a people of hope, creativity and ecumenical openness.

The church is a strange and often struggling group that believes that God is as God says: Creator, redeemer, life giver—one ultimate reality in three distinctive dynamics. If this is true, then the world really is a good gift of God. And we are called to be a eucharistic people, who live with thankful hearts. If this is true, then the world, though broken and violent, is cradled with undying love in Christ. And we are called to be a people of compassion, justice and mercy. If this is true, then the world is a place of renewal by the Spirit in line with both this gift and this love. And we are called to be a people of hope, creativity and ecumenical openness.

If we can be a people like this, then I think the church will have a distinctive place in the world of the 21st century. There are plenty of views of life around that radically differ from this trinitarian one, and lead to a very different human praxis and politics, to say nothing of eschatology and theory of death. But there are plenty of views that overlap in one way or another with this and share much common practice and vision. I think the church of Jesus Christ will have much to do by way of both cooperation with some and resistance to others in the new age of global pluralism we are now entering.

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FOLLOWING CHRIST IN LIFE: THE ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE TRADITION

by
Chris Marshall

To say we were converted by a cook book would be going too far. But it was the *More with Less* recipe book, Together with John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, which my wife and I read as university students, that first triggered our interest in the Anabaptist tradition. Both books were produced by Mennonites and both gave expression, in different ways, to the same fundamental Mennonite conviction

— that to be a Christian means following Jesus, that following Jesus means taking Jesus' ethical teaching seriously, and taking Jesus seriously means a lifestyle of simplicity, service and peacemaking. In the heyday of student radicalism in the early 1970s, discovering the authentic Christian radicalism of this long-established but little known faith tradition was very timely.

To say we were converted by a cook book would be going too far...

Three decades later we count that tradition to be one of the most formative influences on our understanding of Christian faith. Our lives have been immeasurably enriched by participation in two Mennonite congregations, attendance at several Mennonite conferences, a period of sabbatical leave at a Mennonite seminary and, above all, by enduring friendships with Mennonite Christians in different parts of the world.

First Contact

After completing my initial theological studies in 1980, I was accepted for post-graduate work in New Testament at the University of London. We decided to spend three months in North America en route to Britain. Thinking this would be a good opportunity to meet some real live Mennonites, I obtained addresses of three Mennonite organisations from the U.S embassy in Wellington. One was near Chicago, which was on our itinerary, so we arranged to pay them a visit.

Our first few weeks in America were very unsettling. We encountered various expressions of church life, but didn't much like what we saw. Whether it was the smooth consumer religion of the mega-church in Los Angeles we visited, or the manipulative showmanship of the countless televangelists we watched, or the overt racism of the small mid-western Presbyterian church we attended with some distant relations, the American Christian scene seemed bizarre indeed.

What we found most disturbing however was the boisterous "God and country" nationalism that permeated church as well as society. I remember watching one well-known TV preacher, whose theology was "thoroughly orthodox" I was assured by an American friend, commemorate the 4th of July with a sermon entitled, "I am the American flag". In return for a reasonable donation to his ministry, I could have got a transcript of his message and a lapel badge of the Stars 'n Stripes! Reluctantly I decided against it.

With all this fresh in our minds, we turned up at the Mennonite World Conference headquarters in Lombard, near Chicago. We were given a gracious welcome and spent the afternoon in conversation. At one point I asked the Director what he thought of the religious nationalism so pervasive in what we had seen of the American church. "Idolatry", was his simple reply. I recall writing in the visitors book: "Wonderful to meet kindred spirits".

Mennonite Fellowship - London

We arrived in London later that year and spent the first few months finding our feet. We visited several churches in our neighbourhood, including All Souls Langham Place, but could find nothing that really suited. One weekend I went with a friend to a conference celebrating the fifth birthday of the evangelical magazine *Third Way*. One of the speakers was Alan Kreider, the Director of the London Mennonite Centre. I was most impressed by him, and the following Sunday we attended the worship service of the London Mennonite Fellowship in Highgate, North London. As strangers in a foreign land, spiritually it felt like coming home. We fitted, in a way we had not experienced before. We remained active members of

that church until we returned to New Zealand four years later.

What was it about this small Mennonite fellowship we found so special? Many things, but the one that stands out was its wholistic, integrative theology. Here was a church that held together many of the concerns we had come to believe were integral to Christian faith, but which in our experience Christians so often set against each other — joyful worship with sensitivity to pain, thoughtful biblical teaching with openness to the Spirit, evangelism with social commitment, scholarship with spirituality, ethical seriousness with humility and gentleness, Christian community with an acceptance of people's individuality, enjoyment of cultural activities with non-conformity to the world. These things are often seen as mutually exclusive; Christians split asunder what God has joined together. The London Mennonite community modelled a natural and attractive integration of them.

In his own life and ministry, Jesus embodied the wholistic embrace of God's kingdom. He addressed with equal concern the spiritual, physical and social dimensions of life.

Perhaps what made it easier for this church to achieve such integration is the radical christocentrism of the Mennonite tradition. In his own life and ministry, Jesus embodied the wholistic embrace of God's kingdom. He addressed with equal concern the spiritual, physical and social dimensions of life. Mennonites characteristically look to the story of Jesus for their model of Christian conduct. They strive to follow Jesus' example and obey his teaching. So if Jesus displayed an inclusive wholesomeness of life, you would expect those who follow him to do likewise — although this is rare, even in most Mennonite churches.

There is a real sense, of course, in which all Christian traditions are christocentric. That's what makes them "Christian" in the first place. But in the mainstream traditions, *doctrinal* christocentrism has tended to eclipse *ethical* christocentrism. In other words, what one believes *about* Christ has been more important than whether one actually *obeys* him. Christ has functioned more as the central link in the doctrine of salvation than as the central paradigm for Christian values and praxis. Tellingly the church's historic creeds are all but silent on ethics in general, and the strenuous demands of Jesus in particular. It is this that has allowed the church historically to bear the name of Christ yet do the work of the devil at the same time. In the interests of doctrinal orthodoxy, the church has raised armies and waged war, tortured heretics and burned witches, persecuted dissenters and compelled conversions.

Tellingly the church's historic creeds are all but silent on ethics in general, and the strenuous demands of Jesus in particular

Sixteenth century emergence

In a way, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition emerged as a 16th century protest movement against coercive Christianity. It championed the novel idea that the church should be a voluntary community of genuine believers, not simply the religious face of civic society. Over against the prevailing practice of baptising every infant into the national church, be it Catholic or Protestant, the first Anabaptists insisted that baptism was a *believer's* rite of entry to the community of faith. It was a visible expression of an intentional commitment to discipleship. The term "anabaptist" means re-baptiser, and was coined by opponents of the movement. It was a term of reproach, indeed a theological-legal charge of serious consequence. But the movement's leaders denied they were rebaptising anyone.

Rather they were baptising for the first time, since they claimed that "christening" — where infants are deemed Christian by accident of birth — was not true Christian baptism. The term "Mennonite" derives from the name of a second generation Anabaptist leader, Menno Simons, who helped regroup and strengthen a movement traumatised by persecution and dispirited by some early misadventures.

The Radical Reformation

When people today think of the Protestant Reformation, they usually to think only of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. But the 16th century was a confused and confusing time, and alongside the major reform movements existed a variety of more radical groups. These groups had differing outlooks and agendas, whether mystical, apocalyptic, theological, political or just plain criminal. Many of them were dubbed "anabaptist" by their opponents, whatever their specific beliefs or programme. Because of this, mainstream church historians in the past often dismissed Anabaptism as the lunatic fringe of the Reformation. In reply, Mennonite historians insisted that a distinction had to be drawn between normative or "evangelical Anabaptism" that emerged in the heart of the Zwinglian Reformation in Zurich 1525 and other, more fanatical groups which claimed or were given the Anabaptist tag without possessing all the necessary credentials.[1]

Early anabaptism

There is general agreement today that both interpretations are misguided.[2] Early Anabaptism was a complex and disparate phenomenon, and it is equally simplistic to tar all groups with the same extremist brush as it is to reserve "anabaptist" for the initial Swiss movement alone. But for our purposes, it is sufficient to note that it was the protest raised by individuals such as Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz at the slow pace and caution of the Zwinglian Reformation in Zurich in the early 1520s that provided the decisive impulse for the emergence of a "believers church tradition" within the reforming currents of the day. This tradition, for all its early and long term diversity, has nurtured a distinctive vision of Christian life that differs in certain crucial respects from that sustained by the major ecclesiastical traditions.

The Anabaptist Vision

In what follows I will pick out several distinguishing features of the Anabaptist approach to faith and witness.[3] I will also comment briefly on the relevance of these understandings for the contemporary western church, particularly at this time as it comes to terms with the demise of "Christendom" (by which I mean that synthesis of church and culture that prevailed in western society from the time of emperor Constantine in the 5th century until very recently).[4]

In characterising the Anabaptist vision in this way, I do not wish to imply that any of the items mentioned are unique to Anabaptism. Other traditions have also stressed the importance of one or more of these features, sometimes as the legacy of the Anabaptist Reformation, sometimes independently of it. What sets Anabaptism

1 So H. S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision", in G. F. Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957), 35

2 See J. M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, KA: Coronado Press, 1976[2]), 1-29.

3 For Anabaptist sources and history, see W. Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline. Selected Primary Sources* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1981), and C.J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1967).

4 On this, see D. W. Smith, *Transforming the World? The Social Impact of British Evangelicalism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 111-114.

apart, I believe, is the way it combines these convictions into a single coherent conception of Christian life and derives from them certain ethical obligations, such as non-violence, not typically acknowledged by mainstream traditions.

I am also not wanting to suggest that every Anabaptist or Mennonite community, past or present, has understood or embodied the Anabaptist vision in the same way. Like all Christian traditions and denominations, there is diversity, as well as compromise, failure and atrophy within the Anabaptist fold. Conversely there are countless individuals, congregations and communities outside the Anabaptist tradition that are better advertisements for the Anabaptist vision than are many of their Mennonite counterparts.

By "Anabaptist vision" then, I am utilising what social scientists call an "ideal type". That is, it is a generalised, simplified portrait of how the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition conceives of Christian commitment and witness, a conception that corresponds to observable reality yet which cannot be equated with any single Anabaptist community or historical expression of the tradition.

(i) The Centrality of Jesus

I have already commented on how Anabaptism insists on an ethical, not just a doctrinal, christocentrism. It affirms that the essential mark of Christian identity it is not simply a correct theological evaluation of the person and work of Christ but a conformity to the way of life taught and demonstrated by Jesus in the gospel records.

Ethical christocentrism also serves in Anabaptism as a crucial hermeneutical principle for deciding how the scriptures are to be applied today. This principle has a two-fold application. On the one hand, whatever in scripture agrees with Jesus' teaching and example may be accepted as God's word for today. Whatever contradicts the teaching of Jesus — such as war and killing — is no longer God's word for the new covenant community. As Menno Simons put it: "All Scripture must be interpreted according to the spirit, teaching, walk and example of Christ and the apostles".

On the other hand, in order to understand what is written *about* Christ in scripture and what is consistent with his teaching and spirit, one must first walk *with* Christ on the path of costly obedience. Hans Denk, another early Anabaptist leader, expressed this memorably: "No one can claim truly to know Christ unless one follows him in life". This has been termed the "hermeneutics of obedience", the belief that knowing the truth of scripture is contingent upon obedience to Jesus' call to discipleship.[5]

The Anabaptist emphasis on the centrality of Jesus for ethics and hermeneutics, as well as for salvation and theology, has a significant contribution to make to the contemporary church. Many Christians today look to Jesus for salvation but elsewhere (including secular consensus) for ethics. The hermeneutical axiom that we can only know the truth insofar we live the truth is also of direct relevance. This insight has come to the fore in much recent biblical and theological scholarship. It is also peculiarly suited to the post-modern secular

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5 B.C. Ollenberger, "The Hermeneutics of Obedience", in W. M. Swartley (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Elkhart IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 45-61. See also M. Augsburger, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in Mennonite Theology* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1967); W. Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles and Practice", and J.H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists", in W. M. Swartley (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 5-10 & 11-28 respectively.

context in which we live, with its emphasis on experiential truth and "walking the talk".

(ii) The Essence of Christianity is Discipleship

The early Anabaptists demanded a consistency between inner experience and outer lifestyle. They were critical of the official Reformation for failing to produce true Christian living in its adherents. Although both Luther and Zwingli intended to produce such an outcome, "the level of Christian living among the Protestant population was frequently lower than it had been before under Catholicism".[6] Both Reformers expressed concern over this and both toyed with the idea of establishing a true Christian fellowship separate from mass nominal Christianity, but both decided against it. The Anabaptists however proceeded to organise churches composed solely of those committed to full discipleship.

For the Anabaptists, the heart of Christian life was not justification by faith or divine election or the inward work of grace — though they accepted such ideas — but rather the concept of "following Jesus".

For the Anabaptists, the heart of Christian life was not justification by faith or divine election or the inward work of grace — though they accepted such ideas — but rather the concept of "following Jesus". As Karsdorf explains, "No other Christian movement between the apostolic era and the modern mission period has articulated and demonstrated more clearly the meaning of discipling than have the Anabaptists. While mainline Reformers rediscovered the great Pauline term *Glaube* (faith), the Radical Reformers rediscovered the evangelists' word *Nachfolge* (discipleship). People cannot, they maintained, call Jesus Lord unless they are his disciples indeed, prepared to follow him in every way. This was the message they preached, the code they lived by, and the faith they died for".[7]

This contention that active discipleship is the essence of Christian identity offers an important corrective to the "cheap grace" and "easy-believism" that afflict so much of the contemporary church. Belonging to Christ demands moral distinctiveness, not just theological orthodoxy or cultural conformity.

(iii) An Ethic of Peace and Non-Violence

Not all early Anabaptists were committed to non-violence or "non-resistance" as they called it. Some Anabaptist sects were positively militant. In 1535, a group of revolutionary Anabaptists seized the city of Münster and proclaimed the advent of God's kingdom on earth, forcing baptism on its inhabitants and putting some resisters and opponents to death. By the 1560s, however, a principled rejection of violence had become the dominant ethos of the movement. It was considered one of the primary ways believers could imitate Christ. A corollary of this was a refusal by many Anabaptists to swear oaths, since this not only violated Jesus' command against oath-taking and devalued truth (Matt 5:33-37) but also entailed acceptance of the principle of state coercion.[8]

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6 Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision", 40, 42.

7 H. Kasdorf, "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission", in W. R. Shenk (ed.), *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984), 53.

8 See E. Pries, "Oath Refusal in Zurich from 1525 to 1527: the Erratic Emergence of Anabaptist Practice", in W. Klaassen (ed.), *Anabaptism Revisited* (Scottdale: Herald Press,

This resolute Anabaptist commitment to biblical non-violence, in a day when both Catholic and Protestant churches not only endorsed war as an instrument of state policy but even employed it themselves as a method of religious aggrandisement, provoked violent repression of the movement. Anabaptists were frequently killed by the authorities for their refusal to kill others.

In a century even more bathed in blood than was the 16th century, there is an urgent need for Christians to rediscover the call to Christian non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi once said that "the only people on earth who do not see Christ and his teachings as non-violent are Christians".[9] Anabaptists, like the Quakers, are instructive exceptions to this sad state of affairs.

(iv) The Church as a Visible Believing Community

The Anabaptist vision rests on a particular ecclesiology (or doctrine of the church). It conceives of the church as a gathered community of genuine believers, living under the authority of Christ, visibly distinct from both the unbelieving world and from nominal or apostate Christianity, both of which dwell "outside the perfection of Christ", to quote the Schleitheim Confession of 1527. There are several corollaries to this understanding of the church.

The first is *voluntary membership*. The mainstream Reformers essentially retained the medieval idea of a mass-church, with membership of the entire population from cradle to grave, enforced by law and coercion. The Anabaptists however insisted on voluntary membership, based upon individual conversion and freely chosen commitment to discipleship. Arguably the modern democratic principles of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism in religion derive ultimately from the Anabaptist Reformation.[10]

A second corollary is *believers' baptism.* The first Anabaptists repudiated infant baptism because it was the primary symbol of a state church and because it denied the essential prerequisite of voluntary and personal commitment to Christian living.

Another corollary is *separation from the world.* The early Anabaptists insisted on such separation both because it is a biblical prerequisite for discipleship and because they judged the contemporary social order, based on violence and coercion, to be alien to the spirit of the gospel. Under the impact of bitter persecution, this emphasis on separation hardened into a dualistic "two kingdoms" theology that effectively abandoned the world in favour of the Christian ghetto. Such a position is unacceptable for any church that proclaims Christ's universal lordship. But at its best, the notion of separation captures the familiar New Testament injunction that believers resist conformity to this present evil age and be transformed in their mindset (Rom 12:1-2).

Separation carries the corollary of *a suffering church.* When Christians practise non-conformity to the world they become, as Conrad Grebel put it, "sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter". Just as Christ suffered for challenging the evil structures of his day, so those who are loyal to Jesus will suffer for doing likewise, and will do so without inflicting revenge. Catholic, Lutheran and Zwinglian authorities alike strove to throttle Anabaptism by torture, banishment and grisly execution. Thousands died.

1992), 65-84; Klaassen *Anabaptism in Outline,* 282-89.

9 Quoted in W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 216.

10 So P. Peachy, "The Modern Recovery of the Anabaptist Tradition", in G. F. Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957), 332

Radical congregationalism

A fifth feature of Anabaptist ecclesiology is its *radical congregationalism*. From its inception, Anabaptism was markedly anti-clerical and non-hierarchical. It placed emphasis on servant leadership and the responsibility of every believer for ministry, mission and discernment. "For the Anabaptist, the church was neither an institution (Catholicism), nor the instrument of God for the proclamation of the divine Word (Lutheranism), nor a resource group for individual piety (Pietism). It was a brotherhood of love in which the fullness of the Christian life ideal is to be expressed".[11]

The local congregation was also regarded as the proper context for biblical interpretation. This represented an innovation in the history of hermeneutics.[12] Roman Catholicism stressed the hermeneutical privilege of "the Magisterium" or church hierarchy. Mainstream Protestantism gave emphasis to the role of the orthodox theologian, the scholar-teacher. Anabaptism invested interpretive authority with the gathered community, under the leading of the Spirit.[13]

In all these respects, the first Anabaptists believed they were restoring the church to its New Testament condition. They sought not so much the *reformation* of church as its *restitution*, a return to its primitive, pre-Constantinian form. It is, of course, naive to believe it is possible to reconstitute *the* New Testament church (if such a thing ever existed!) But in these post-Constantinian days, the Anabaptist conviction that the church's effectiveness is to be measured, not by the influence, power or prestige it exerts in wider society but by its faithfulness to the pattern of communal life and mission enjoined by its founding documents, and especially by its consistency with the story of Jesus, remains as relevant and as radical as ever.

Concluding Comment

For me, the genius, attractiveness and relevance of the Anabaptist vision lies in the way it integrates several crucial truths: the primacy of Jesus as the supreme paradigm for Christian life, the call to a radical discipleship that touches upon ethics as well as personal spirituality, the church as a counter-cultural community, based on voluntary membership, servant leadership, mutual care and corporate ministry, and dedication to the way of peace and non-violence.

Increasing numbers of Christians today, from a wide diversity of backgrounds, would affirm many or all of these items, in some shape or form, as essential ingredients of Christian commitment. For such people, Anabaptism offers a satisfying integration of them, as well as a wisdom born of long historical experience of attempting to live out this vision in a violent and hostile world. As Christendom unravels before our eyes and the western church is forced by this fact to rethink its true role in society, Anabaptism is an idea that has found its day.

REVIEWS

Tim Costello, *Streets of Hope: Finding God in St Kilda.* (Sutherland: Albatross; St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998)

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11 Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision", 53.

12 Yoder, "Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists", 11-28

13 C.J. Dyck, "The Anabaptist Understanding of the Good News", in W. R. Shenk (ed.), *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984), 38.

Anyone who has heard Tim Costello speak about his experiences in ministry and have wished to know more will be happy to see the appearance of this book. *Streets of Hope* provides an informal account of much of his ministry, ranging from theological study in Switzerland through to his time as Mayor of St Kilda. This book, according to his own description, is a story about community and integration or integrity; two themes that ought to catch the attention of any Anabaptist. Costello's ministry has straddled a number of communities and roles (in pastoral work, the courtroom and local government). (And who can forget that humorous appellation: 'leader of the opposition' in Victoria.) The account of how he and his family have, in their "passion for holism", sought to keep these varying strands of their lives together while living with a diverse range of people makes for stimulating, encouraging and often humorous reading.

There is little that can be said in the way of criticism of this sort of book. It may only be that one cannot include everything in a single book and so some may not find what they are hoping for. If you are seeking some sustained, detailed theological reflection on issues of church and society, that book is still coming. (Also, if you are looking for harsh words concerning the Federal Treasurer, they are not to be found here either!) What you will find is an engaging social commentary told through personal stories. Themes such as the effects of privatisation and consumerism, sexual mores, the corrosion of local government, gaps in the welfare state and the varying forms of ethos present in our society are explored through the microcosm of St Kilda.

What is of interest in this book to someone concerned with Anabaptist themes? For someone who (perversely) 'thinks' a great deal about community, as many of us do, I found Costello's book a challenge to my own temptations to romantic or perfectionist thoughts about 'community' and who makes up and contributes to such. The stories that he relates about his time at St Kilda, always told without being in any way patronising or romantic, concern all manner of struggling people who show that they are not there simply to be 'helped' but to become partners in the fellowship of Christ - albeit often in idiosyncratic ways! Such stories are helpful antidotes against any legalistic appropriation of the notion of 'distinctive Christian identity' - that is, to insist on middle-class 'fruit' on those tender new shoots on the vine.

This book is also a welcome counter-example to the idea that those influenced by the Anabaptist vision are necessarily sectarian. The Costellos live out a faith that is committed to integration and to crossing those public/private and secular/sacred boundaries, impelling them into the politics of wider society as much as to the upbuilding of Christians in their faith. The story of the Costellos and their friends and partners in ministry serves as an inspiring example of the further possibilities for committed Christian witness and action in the Australian urban context. One of the many lessons to be learned in this story is that creative Christian ministry (most?) often takes 'accidental' form, being a result more of a sustained, self-giving presence than detailed planning.

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Book Notes

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective Herald Press, 1995

This confession is the work of the Mennonite church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. The twenty

four articles and summary statement was accepted by these churches in 1995 as their statement of faith for teaching and nurture in the life of the church. The commentary sections were endorsed as helpful clarification and illustrative application of the articles of the confession.

A helpful and accessible contemporary statement of faith from the Anabaptist tradition.

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The following book notes were supplied by the Bruderhof community - they draw attention to some interesting publications which should be of interest to readers of this Newsletter.

Against the Wind: Eberhard Arnold and the Bruderhof **by Markus Baum**

This is a story, told in full for the first time, of an uncompromising revolutionary for Jesus Christ. Eberhard Arnold (1883-1935) was not afraid of the truth. A man for today's seekers, he faced life's essential questions head on, and once he had struggled his way through to an answer, he tried to live it.

Against the Wind explores the forces that shaped Arnold's life and his influence on other spiritual leaders of his day – Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Martin Buber among them. It recounts his renunciation of private property and military service, and explains his abhorrence of conventional piety on the one hand, and his love for the early Church fathers on the other.

Most of all, Against the Wind gives flesh, blood, and personality to a man whose unwavering conviction and contagious faith made him at once hated and admired, a man whom some called an enemy of the State and others a modern Saint Francis. Arnold walked resolutely against the prevailing winds, even as Nazism engulfed Germany. The Bruderhof community movement, which carries on his commitment to integrate faith and social action, is a witness to his continuing legacy.

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Cries from the Heart by **J. C. Arnold**

In times of crisis we all reach out for something, or someone, greater than ourselves. Believers call it prayer, non-believers just do it. These are stories of people just like you, people who have been through the same trials and even worse. You'll see yourself in their frustration and longing, their moments of anguish and inexplicable peace. Available from Plough.

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Death Blossoms: Reflections of a Prisoner of Conscience **by Mumia Abu-Jamal**

When Mumia Abu-Jamal's first book appeared in 1995, its searing indictment of racism and political bias in the American judicial system fueled nationwide controversy. Now, in this new collections of short vignettes and reflections, he examines the deeper dimensions of existence. The result is a powerful testament to the invincibility of the spirit of life. Available from Plough.

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Resources

a Common Place: A publication of Mennonite Central Committee

An attractively produced quarterly which introduces the people, programs and vision of Mennonite Central Committee. e:mail: dlf@mcc.org
Website: http://www.mennonitecc.ca/mcc/

Recent Australian commentary

Some recent theological articles in Australian magazine and journals.

"Church, State, meddling clerics Tim Costello" **Eureka Street** June 1999, pp32-34

A member of the Committee of AAANZ discusses his role in politics. which highlights the role of the church as a distinct community.

"Postmodernism and Public Theology" Ian Barns **Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World** Vol 2 No.1 May 1999, pp.63-78.

The christian faith is presented as the basis for a distinctive basis for approaching the situation created by post modernity. The church for Barns is an alternative political community as a kingdom polity. Dense but an important piece.

"Dealt a lay hand: a few tricks and no trumps? Towards lay theology and lay empowerment in the church" by Lynlea Rodger ***St Mark's Review*** Autumn No.177, Autumn 1999 pp.3-10.

A paper which provides a poweful argument for a new vision and practice of the church.

Christian Mission and Modern Culture

Trinity Press International is publishing a significant series on Christian mission in contemporary culture. The series examines modern/postmodern culture from a missional point of view. Titles include:

Write the Vision: the Church Renewed by Wilbert R Shenk

Believing in the future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture by David Bosch

The Mission of Theology and Theology of Mission by J.Andrew Kirk

Trinity Press International
PO Box 1321
Harrisburg, PA 17105, USA
morehouse@morehousegroup.com

Mennonite Central Committee Resource Catalogue

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The Anabaptist Association of Australian and New Zealand

Background to the Association

The initiative for the establishment of the Association came out of a meeting in Tasmania in May 1995 of christians from a variety of denominational backgrounds who had been influenced in a variety of ways by the anabaptist tradition. To provide a means of building on the contacts established at the meeting the Anabaptist Network of Australia and New Zealand was formed which became the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand following its incorporated. in 1998.

Purposes of the Association

The purposes of the Association are:

1. to nurture and support the Christian faith of individuals and groups in Australia and New Zealand who identify with the Anabaptist tradition.
2. to network and link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith.
3. to provide religious services including teaching, training, pastoral care, mediation, and counsel to its members and others interested in the Anabaptist tradition.
4. to provide resources and materials relating to the tradition, perspectives, and teaching of Anabaptists to both the Christian and general public.
5. to convene conferences and gatherings which provide opportunity for worship, teaching, training, consultation, celebration, and prayer in the Anabaptist tradition.
6. to extend the awareness of Anabaptism in Australia and New Zealand assisting individuals, churches and groups discover and express their links with the Anabaptist tradition.
7. to provide an opportunity for affiliation for churches and groups who wish to be known in Australia and New Zealand as Anabaptists.

What is Anabaptism?

Anabaptism is a radical Christian renewal movement that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth-century Reformation. Whilst Anabaptism was a grass roots movement with diverse expressions in its early development, its enduring legacy usually has included the following:

- baptism upon profession of faith
- a view of the church in which membership is voluntary and members are accountable to the Bible and to each other
- a commitment to the way of peace and other teachings of Jesus as a rule for life
- separation of church and state
- worshipping congregations which create authentic community and reach out through vision and service