

Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand

Newsletter

Issue 1

March 1998

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Editorial

The Anabaptist tradition and the Radical Reformation which lies behind it has had little visibility within the Australian Christian community, let alone the wider society. The incorporation of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and News Zealand, reported on below, is an important initiative which will serve to give this Christian tradition a theological presence and a pastoral voice under the Southern Cross.

The mandate for the Newsletter is included in this issue. While the mandate is set out in formal terms, what results will I hope be a newsletter which is not formal but lively and passionate. As editor I want to assist the members of the Association by putting out a publication which both grows out of the life of the varying worshipping communities represented by its readers and also serves those communities.

The newsletter is intended to be a means for encouraging dialogue, sharing experience and reflection, a publication that creates and nurtures community as well as challenges and inspires. Contributions, however short and in whatever format will be warmly welcomed.

I would particularly appreciate suggestions for a title for the Newsletter which both captures its Australasian identity and resonates with the history of the Anabaptist tradition.

I plan in later issues to take advantage of such things as desk top publishing to make the newsletter more attractive in terms of its presentation. For the time being getting the newsletter out and the dialogue going are priorities, hence the simplicity in presentation. There is perhaps a certain fittingness in that.

In addition to news about the Association the bulk of the first issue is devoted to an article which addresses a theme which is central to Anabaptist identity.

My thanks go to Chris Marshall and Gary Baker for their assistance and encouragement in getting this first issue out.

As the report of the teleconference which inaugurated the Association indicates Gary Baker will be sharing the editorial responsibilities for the Newsletter.

Doug Hynd

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Association news

Background to the Association

The initiative for the establishment of the Association came out of a meeting in Tasmania in May 1995 which initially took the title of the Anabaptist Network of Australia and New Zealand. The report from that meeting noted that the contacts of the participants with the Anabaptist tradition were diverse.

Some of us have fellowshiped with Anabaptist congregations, other have experienced meaningful dialogue with Anabaptist missionaries, still others have been attracted to the insights of Anabaptism through theological and historical studies.

Out of these varied contacts and experiences we share a common desire to see the Anabaptist vision of discipleship and church life, nurture and resource communities, local churches house churches and individuals across Australia and New Zealand and encourage and empower Christian service in the world.

Events since that gathering have pushed those involved in the Network to move towards the establishment of a more formal structure by way of incorporation of an Association.

How the Association will function

A telephone hookup on the evening of Tuesday 9 March resulted in the passing of motions to establish the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand and to formally incorporate the Association under the Victorian legislation. The meeting approved the statement of purposes and the rules which will govern the operation of the Association. The purposes of the Association are set out later in the Newsletter. Tim Costello was elected as public officer of the Association

A committee was elected with representatives from several states, the ACT and New Zealand with the following membership:

Chris Marshall (NZ)	c.marshall@xtra.co.nz
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It was agreed that the committee should probably be limited to ten people to make telephone conferences manageable. There would have need to be a balanced representation between the States and Territories. The final committee membership was to be determined by the persons nominated to the committee so as to achieve desired balance in representation.

The committee will be meeting shortly to determine the allocation of responsibilities including the roles of Secretary and Treasurer.

All members of the Association have agreed to prepare a curriculum vitae and to forward it with a photo to Colin Isaac by the end of March 1998 to be included in the association directory. to be circulated to all members. Because so much of the work of the Association was going to be conducted over the phone it was thought that this would be a helpful step.

It was further agreed that Gary Baker and Doug Hynd be appointed editors of the Association Newsletter.

Staff search

One of the key issues that has to be tackled by the committee is consultation with the network to determine the criteria for the staff to carry out the networking and pastoral functions required to carry forward the work of the Association.

The committee is working on these issues as a matter of urgency.

There will be some financial costs associated with that process. All financial contributions will be very much appreciated. Till a Treasurer is appointed contributions could be forwarded through committee members.

Purposes of the Anabaptist Association of Australian and New Zealand

The purposes for which the Association is established 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, perspective's, 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

Newsletter mandate

The **Newsletter** of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand is the official publication of the Association and supports the purposes of the Association as set out in the Statement of Purposes, in particular to:

- link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith;
- assist individuals, churches and groups to discover and express their links with the Anabaptist tradition; and
- extend the awareness of Anabaptism as a form of Christian communal practice, discipleship, and theological reflection in Australia and New Zealand.

Newsletter contents

The newsletter will be published in print and electronically on a quarterly basis and may include:

- News of the Association and its activities, including seminars, gatherings and conferences sponsored by the Association, or related to its purposes.
- Information on resources available from or through the Association.
- Reports on research related to the aims and purposes of the Association.
- Reports of relevant activities of members of Association
- Letters, editorial comment and articles on current issues from an Anabaptist perspective.
- Reviews on books, teaching materials, films etc relevant to the purposes of the Association.
- Conference/seminar proceedings run by the Association and/or research papers may be published as a supplement to the newsletter.

News News News

John Howard Yoder 1927-1997

John Howard Yoder died on 30 December 1997, the morning after celebrating his 70th birthday and a life of theological scholarship and Christian service. His contribution to theology amounted to nothing less than a revolution in the terms in which the relationship between Scripture, ethics and church life is now discussed and understood across the English speaking world.

My personal memory of Yoder is based on participation with him in a seminar held at St Mark's Institute in Canberra, probably during 1990. He modelled his commitment to conversation and dialogue by systematically taking notes on the conversation and critiques of his own presentation. I wish I could remember more of what he had to say on that day, but the impact of his practice of listening to conversation partners has stayed with me as an abiding memory.

A collection of essays by Yoder *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* has just been published by Eerdmans. It is unlikely that this will be his last published contribution. A recent bibliography of Yoder's writings revealed that much of his work has yet to be published. I suspect that the full impact of his scholarship on the wider church may not be felt for some considerable time to come.

Articles on Yoder's life and theological impact that have come to hand so far are:

“With Jesus on the low road” by Gordon Hauser *the Mennonite* March 3 1998 p.16

“A faithful teacher in the church” by Ted Grimsrud *the Mennonite* March 3 1998, pp.8-9

“Remembering John Howard Yoder” Erland Waltner *Canadian Mennonite* January 19 1998 p.9

“John Howard Yoder 1927-1997 Radical Catholicity” by Michael Cartwright *Christian Century* January 21 1998 pp.44-46

Anabaptist world wide spread

The Mennonite and Brethren in Christ World Directory 1998, published by the Mennonite World Conference shows over one million baptised members, in 192 conferences in 60 countries. The centre of gravity for the conference has shifted to the southern hemisphere, with 582,000 members in Africa, Asia and Central and Southern America. (“Anabaptists now number more than one million world wide” *Gospel Herald* Dec 30 1997, p.9)

Anabaptist Network in the UK

The Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom has given birth to a congregational network of “conversation partners”. More than 50 representatives of 23 congregations throughout England, Northern Ireland and Scotland met 31 January 1998 at the Mennonite Centre in London.

During its seven years the UK Anabaptist Network has organised conferences, developed home based study circles, provided resources on Anabaptist concerns and published a quarterly journal.

The new organisation will work under the rubric of the Anabaptist Network, joins congregations from Anglican, Baptist, evangelical-charismatic, Mennonite, United Reformed and Wesleyan traditions in ways they can be shaped by Anabaptist convictions. The new entity will provide resources articulate common beliefs across denominational divides, meet for fellowship, ask difficult questions and connect congregations that had become alienated from their own historic faith communities. The development of a network rather than creating a new denominations frees the congregations to maintain existing links while developing new links.

(“Crossing denominational divides in U.K. - Anabaptist group becomes congregational network” *the Mennonite* February 24 1998, p.5)

Through the Eye of the Needle: Faith and Discipleship

The feature article for this issue is by Chris Marshall who is Head of New Testament Department, Bible College of New Zealand and one of the initiators of the Association. He provides a biblical study on one of the key themes of the Radical Reformation - discipleship. This article was originally published in *Faith and Freedom: A Journal of Christian Ethics* Vol.3 No.4, December 1994 and is reprinted by permission of the editors.

Some years ago I received a letter from an American Mennonite missions executive. In it he spoke hopefully of developments he saw taking place in evangelicalism: "I am impressed Chris with the increasing interest among evangelicals around the world in discipleship. They have become tired of the shallowness of some of the aspects of fundamentalism and are looking for quality that touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice. In some ways I feel we have come to the kingdom for such a time as this and I am sure this is true in your country too".

My correspondent was not suggesting that discipleship, something long emphasised in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, is a completely new idea to evangelicals. The "discipling" of new believers, of leading them into a deeper personal relationship with Christ, has always been stressed by evangelicals. But the perception that discipleship is something that "touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice" has not been so obvious. Evangelicals have tended to view discipleship more as an individual, spiritual affair, a matter of personal piety rather than corporate lifestyle or social commitment. But things are changing, my Mennonite friend believes. Evangelicals are recovering a fuller, more biblical understanding of discipleship. For in the Gospels, as we will see, discipleship is unquestionably something that "touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice".

Discipleship in the Gospels

Discipleship is a central theme in the Gospels. The term occurs hundreds of times in the Gospel narratives. Alongside introducing Jesus and clarifying his significance, all the Gospel writers are deeply concerned to communicate the meaning and implications of discipleship. Christology and ecclesiology, to use theological jargon, are inextricably united in the Gospel accounts. What then is discipleship all about?

It is clear that Jesus summoned *all people* to repentance and faith in light of the dawning of God's kingdom (Mk 1:14-15). He sought a positive response to his message and a personal allegiance to himself as bearer of that message from all his hearers. But within this general summons, he called certain individuals to the more exacting commitment of discipleship. That commitment meant leaving family and home to follow Jesus physically on his journeys around the countryside proclaiming the kingdom, as part of his "ministry team".

This means that Jesus had two main kinds of supporters: *local sympathisers* who embraced his message but did not join him on his itinerant ministry; and *disciples or followers* who accompanied him on his travels and who were personally authorised to minister on his behalf. The mutual sharing and fellowship of this group of men, women and children compensated for the loss suffered those who had left all to follow Jesus (Mk 10:28)

The inner circle of this of this group comprised the “Twelve” disciples or apostles specially appointed by Jesus in Mark 3:13-14. The Twelve were distinguished from the wider body by a combination of greater personal intimacy with Jesus (“to be with him”) and a special commissioning to preach, exorcise and heal as Jesus’ authorised representatives (“to be sent out”, cf. Mk 6:7f,30). They also had a symbolic role, constituting a backward reference to Old Testament Israel and a forward reference to the new messianic community. Despite their special role however, the Twelve possessed no special dignity or authority within the larger body of disciples. Whenever they tried to arrogate such to themselves, conflict developed and Jesus gave corrective teaching (e.g. Mk 9:33ff; 10:35ff).

Discipleship, then, is only one form of positive response to Jesus described in the Gospels. Not all who repented and believed became disciples. Most did not. Yet the Gospel writers concentrate most attention on the experience of the disciples because they provide the clearest illustration of what it means to encounter the kingdom of God. They exemplify most powerfully how a commitment to the way of Jesus “touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice”.

Becoming a Disciple

The first thing Jesus does in Mark’s Gospel after commencing his public ministry is to call together a community of disciples to share in his mission.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him (Mk 1:14-20)

It is clear from this, and similar, accounts that becoming a disciple was a two-sided event. It involved a *call* from Jesus and a free *response* to that call.

The Call of Jesus: Discipleship always began with Jesus taking the initiative, calling those whom *he* wanted and laying down the conditions *he* required them to meet. Those called had no prior preparation. In fact Jesus delighted in choosing individuals who, by contemporary standards, were *least qualified* for the job. He chose fishermen, not learned experts in religious affairs. He chose small town Galileans, not sophisticated urbanities from Jerusalem. He called tax-collectors, individuals regarded as “unclean” outcasts in Jewish society because of their collaboration with Rome in exploiting God’s people. At the same time he chose violent, dangerous Zealots, fanatical nationalists who would as soon assassinate Romans (and tax-collectors!) as handle their coinage (Have you ever wondered how Matthew the tax-collector and Simon the Zealot got on in Jesus’ community? And we think *we* have problems with Christian unity!).

In both these respects, Jesus stood apart from other teachers of his day. Greek philosophers and Jewish rabbis also had disciples. But in those cases, the disciple would approach the master and ask to join his school, and would typically be an able, studious individual, well equipped for higher learning. Not so

with Jesus. He nominated his own disciples and paid little regard to their “natural equipment”. Why? Because Christian discipleship is pre-eminently a *gift*, an unearned privilege, a relationship conferred by grace. The ability to succeed in discipleship is received, not achieved. “Apart from me”, Jesus tells his disciples in John, “you can do nothing” (15:5).

The Response to the Call: Discipleship is a gift. But it is a gift which must be positively embraced. Jesus did not dragoon people into the cause of the kingdom. His call, though authoritative, was not irresistible. It could be refused (Mk 10:21f) — and for good reason! Accepting the call involved some very hard choices. It meant accepting the conditions of discipleship Jesus laid down, and those conditions were not easy. What were they?

In Mk 1:15, Jesus demands a twofold response to his proclamation of the kingdom of God — repentance and faith. In the following story, the fishermen respond to Jesus’ call to discipleship in a twofold way — they leave all and follow Jesus. In other words, what the twin demand of repentance and faith meant for those summoned to discipleship is exemplified in the double response of the fishermen. Becoming a disciple involved a fundamental act of *repentance*, expressed in their “leaving”, and a radical commitment of *faith*, expressed in their “following”.

Discipleship as Repentance

In biblical tradition, “repentance” or *metanoia* is not just a change of mind or opinion, as it was in secular Greek, nor is it primarily a feeling of remorse or sorrow for wrongdoing, as in popular usage today. It is not just an inner attitude or emotion. Repentance entails the redirection of one’s entire manner of life. The term suggests an about-face on the wrong road and the taking of a new road. It requires a *turning away* from an existing way of life, with all its values, ambitions, priorities and allegiances, and the *turning towards* a new way of life, with a new set of values, ambitions, priorities and allegiances. In short, *metanoia* is a whole-hearted conversion, a change of lifestyle in both its spiritual and moral dimensions. It is something that “touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice”.

For the four fishermen, conversion to discipleship required practical, costly changes. It required them to make a decisive break (“leaving”) with the existing social order in three main areas of existence. First, they abandoned their possessions and means of livelihood; they left their boats and their nets (vv.18,20). Discipleship had definite *economic* implications. Secondly, they relinquished their positions of human authority and control; they left behind their hired servants (v.20). Discipleship had implications for existing patterns of *social status and power*. Thirdly and most demanding of all, the fishermen detached themselves from family ties and traditions, the primary source of identity and stability for first-century Palestinians; they left their father Zebedee in the boat to go after Jesus (v 20). Discipleship had costly ramifications for *family life and kinship responsibilities*.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus was a wrenching experience. But why? Why did Jesus require such a radical conversion of his followers? Why did it involve such an emphatic break with life as usual?

One common explanation for such ethical radicalism is that Jesus expected the end of the world to be imminent. He considered the coming of God’s eschatological reign on earth to be so close that there was no need for his disciples to be involved any longer in the institutions and commitments of the prevailing social order. Time was short; extreme measures were needed for extreme times. As it turned out however, Jesus was wrong about the closeness of the End and, by implication, the ethical radicalism he demanded

of his followers can no longer be sustained today. The response of the fishermen cannot be seen as a viable pattern for Christian disciples today. Which is most convenient!

There is some truth in this explanation. Jesus' mission *was* characterised by a sense of eschatological urgency, and this in part accounts for the rigorous nature of discipleship. But it was not so much the temporal imminence but the totalitarian character of the impending kingdom that explains Jesus' radicalism. I would suggest that Jesus placed such severe demands upon his followers because he wanted his company of travelling disciples to serve as a symbolic demonstration that God's kingdom lays claim to the whole of one's life and requires the radical transformation of everything one is and one does.

Jesus' disciples had to make a categorical break with life as usual because life in God's kingdom, now breaking into the present, required an fundamental recalibration of their social, political and economic values and commitments. That is why, later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus gives ethical teaching that corresponds directly to, and redefines the values of, the three spheres of existence the fishermen left behind in order to follow Jesus

- They had to make a break with their possessions and livelihood because within the new order of God's kingdom, a wholly new attitude to wealth prevails.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." (10:23-27, cf. 12:40f)

- They needed to leave behind their hired servants because within the kingdom community there is to be a new attitude to social power, prestige and authority

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." (9:35; cf.10:31)

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (10:42-45)

- The break with family was necessary to show that in the messianic community an entirely new concept and experience of family comes into being.

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my

mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (3:31-35; cf. 10:29-30; 13:12)

In short, those entering discipleship had to leave behind the world as they knew it in order to enter a *new world*, with a new — a disturbingly new — vision of life. The discipleship community was to be a living, breathing demonstration that God was making a new way of life possible. It served as a concrete incarnation of God’s kingdom on earth, a colony of the new age planted in the midst of the old age, challenging by its very existence the structures of the old age with a different vision of reality.

It had to be this way. Discipleship *had* to be radical. Otherwise there would have been a yawning credibility gap at the heart of Jesus’ message. How could Jesus have gone about announcing the inbreaking of God’s cosmic reign on earth, the climactic fulfilment of all human history, while allowing his followers to carry on their normal lives as though nothing had changed! The enormity of the message *demand*ed a response of corresponding magnitude. The colony of the kingdom, the community of disciples, needed to look and to live differently to surrounding society, or else it would give a lie to Jesus’ claims.

And yet, as already noted, Jesus did not expect the same expression of commitment from everyone who embraced his message. Localised sympathisers did not leave their jobs, homes and families; they remained a functioning part of the existing social order. Still the transforming agenda of the kingdom, most starkly visible in the company of disciples, was also apparent in the lives of local supporters. They too began to redistribute their wealth (Lk 12:13-21; 19:1-10, cf. 3:10-14); they used their homes and possessions to serve the goals of the kingdom (Mk 11:2-7; 12:41-44; 14:3-9; Lk 8:1-3; 14:12-14; 22:7-13); they honoured their children as equal recipients of God’s grace (Mk 10:13-16); they cared for the poor and the sick, the prisoners and the oppressed (Mk 9:38-41; Matt 25:31-46; Lk 10:37).

Discipleship as Faith

So far we have suggested that the radical conversion required of Jesus’ disciples was because he intended the messianic community to be a living demonstration of the transforming nature of God’s kingdom. Personal, social, economic and political values could not remain unaffected. Following Jesus “touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice”.

But there was another reason why Jesus required such a drastic commitment from his followers. Their almost suicidal renunciation of all means of human security placed the fishermen in a situation of radical dependency, even of human powerlessness. They had divested themselves of all that gave them control or power over their own lives and over the lives of others in order to follow Jesus. The realities of their former life were not totally repudiated. Simon and Andrew still exhibited familial concern (Mk 1:30; cf. 7:10-13; 10:2-12) and evidently retained their house (1:29) and maybe their boat (3:9, 4:1,35). But these resources were now put at the disposal of the kingdom and were no longer their primary means of support and identity. They were replaced by a new sense of dependency on God’s provision and protection, and in a political and economic environment that was often dangerous and unpredictable. It was an unwillingness to live at such extreme risk that disqualified the rich man, despite his obvious piety, from following after Jesus (Mk 10:17-22).

Because their commitment to follow Jesus plunged the fishermen into a total lack of material and personal security, the essence of their following was *unconditional faith* — a relationship of total

dependence on Jesus for all that was needed. The measure of this faith was their preparedness to entrust their destiny into Jesus' hands, both in this life, where it would bring suffering and deprivation (Mk 8:34f; 10:29; 13:9-13; 14:27), and in relation to the future kingdom, for which they looked to Jesus for their inclusion (cf. Mk 8:36ff; 10:30,37; 13:26f).

As well as material dependence and confidence in Jesus for ultimate salvation, the faith of the fishermen expressed itself in submission to his formative power over their lives. The goal of their following was to become "fishers of people" (v 17). This was not simply a prophecy of their future task (cf. 13:10) but the commencement of a continual process of transformation into persons they were not before. And fundamental to this process of character-formation was a relationship of radical trust in Jesus. The ethical radicalism of the disciples flowed from, and was empowered by, a profound commitment to a character-forming, personal relationship with Jesus.

Conclusion

Where does all this leave us today? From the perspective of the Gospel narratives, "radical discipleship" is a tautology. There is no other kind of discipleship than radical discipleship. It is radical because it "touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice". It is radical because it requires a thoroughgoing conversion of one's personal, social and political values and commitment and a risky dependent faith that looks wholly and solely to Jesus for identity, provision and protection. The most strenuous commands of Jesus, such as those requiring redistribution of wealth or a non-violent response to aggression, presuppose such conversion and faith.

The radicalism of Jesus' first disciples cannot be dismissed, then, as an example of misguided eschatological enthusiasm. To do so is misunderstand why Jesus assembled a discipleship community in the first place. On the other hand, it is true that the economic dispossession and itinerant lifestyle of these first disciples was a response specific to, and appropriate for, the unique circumstances of Jesus' historical ministry. Subsequent generations of believers are not required to imitate in detail the economic divestment and subordination of family ties required of them (there is little evidence of such imitation by Christians in the later New Testament documents, though cf. 1 Cor 13:3). They are not a blueprint to be replicated, but a model to learn from. As the foundation of the messianic community, they are a paradigm for all Christians, not in the sense that we copy them in specifics but in that, like them, we allow the reality of God's kingdom to challenge and transform every dimension of our lives so that we too become living proof that God has made a new corporate way of life possible. It is incumbent on all who claim to be disciples of Jesus today to show how discipleship is a personal faith relationship to their Lord that "touches relationships, reconciliation, ethics and justice".

Review Section

Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical/ John Howard Yoder edited with an introduction by Michael Cartwright Eerdmans, 1994

John Howard Yoder, who died recently, see the News columns in this Newsletter for details, is perhaps best known in Australia for his contributions to New Testament ethics, particularly in *The Politics of Jesus* and his articulation of the claims of non-violence as central to Christian discipleship in such works as *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just War Thinking*. Yoder's extensive involvement in debate on ecumenical and ecclesiological issues and his explanation of their inextricable inter-linkage has not yet received the attention and acknowledgment that it deserves.

Michael Cartwright, the editor of this volume, has performed an important service by making accessible a collection of essays which give us access to Yoder's contributions on ecumenical and ecclesiological issues as an outstanding representative of the stream of ecclesiological practice and ecumenical critique that has its roots in the radical reformation or the believers' church.

These essays are important because cumulatively they make clear why the tradition which Yoder represents has been apparently absent from the mainstream of theological dialogue over the past decades. The problem is not one of bad faith in the ecumenical movement but of the fact that the terms in which the debate has been conducted and the framework of proceeding has eliminated the fundamental distinctives of the radical reformation from consideration. These essays bring together a

sustained argument as to why this is the case while at the same time demonstrating the connection between Yoder's practice of ecumenical dialogue and his vision of the church.

The volume contains seventeen essays, three of which were previously unpublished. Four of the essays had originally appeared in the volume of Yoder's essays entitled *The Original Revolution* while the remainder were gathered from a variety of journals and periodicals. The essays are introduced by the editor in an essay entitled 'Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's vision of the Faithful Church'. The volume concludes with select bibliography of Yoder's work on ecumenical and ecclesiological issues. Each essay is accompanied by a brief account of the context in which the essay originally appeared and a summary of the main issues raised.

Cartwright's introductory essay canvasses Yoder's work as a theologian in a way that makes clear the integral connection between his ecclesiology and his contributions to social ethics. He sets out the conceptual matrix of Yoder's writings on ecclesiology and ecumenism and its main themes including "Apocalyptic/Eschatology and the Framework of Normalcy", "Church and World", "Before Constantian - After Christendom". The essay also canvasses the significant theologians with whom Yoder engages including Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, H Richard Niebuhr and Albert Outler, revisits the "Free Church" vision of the church and concludes with an assessment of what Yoder has to offer to the ecumenical dialogue.

Cartwright closes his essay with the following assessment.

... ultimately the importance of Yoder's essays on ecclesiology and ecumenism lies in the different kind of dialogue about the future of the church in relation to the past that he continues to foster within as well as between the various communions. By insisting that ecumenical discussions be anchored in a clear conception of the faithful church and thereby demanding that Christians be candid with themselves and the world about those times when the Christian communities have been faithless, Yoder pushes Christian to be accountable for discipleship. In the process Yoder has taught us that the way forward is ... to re-imagine the possibilities for the social embodiment of precisely the same apostolic practices in relation to which the otherness of the church was not only visible once upon a time but can become visible again as "the new world of the Kingdom on its way" in our own time and place. (p.48-49)

Most of the essays are substantial pieces of work which are intellectually demanding and were prepared for presentation at meetings of theologians and church leaders. One intriguing inclusion of quite a different character, is a study guide on the issue of 'binding and loosing' in Matthew 18:15-20 for use by church congregations. The outline grapples with the issue of 'fraternal admonition' within the congregation, an outline which explores issues of forgiveness, authority, discernment and the centrality of the local congregation. The significance and embodiment of much of the theological argument in the other essays could be unpacked by a discussion based on this study guide.

These essays taken together invite us to ecumenical conversation as a form of dialogue which is essential to the character of a church which is faithful to its locus in Jesus Christ. These issues are not marginal ones, for ecumenical junkies, if there are any left. The challenge of unity as discerned by Yoder is summarised in the following terms:

The given unity of Christians in Christ will be given as we accept it in faith: in faith that dares to take the brother and sister seriously to the point of grappling with them in true conversation, in faith that will love and serve fellow believers across every border to the point of subordinating (Jesus said "hating") other loyalties; in faith that will be ethically responsible for them to the point of demanding of fellow believers the same full obedience we demand of ourselves. (p.230)

This is a collection of essays which gives voice to a non-mainstream tradition but which just might have the potential to refocus and reinvigorate ecumenical discussion in a way which links it to the life of the local congregation. Few other theologians of recent times have undertaken their work so clearly and self consciously as service to the church. Few too have engaged mainstream theologians with such a clear challenge on behalf of the Anabaptist tradition.

Douglas Hynd

(This is a slightly expanded version of a review originally prepared for publication by *St Mark's Review*.)

Resources

Recent books from Herald Press (1997)

Images of the Church in Mission by John Driver. A study of 12 biblical images for understanding the church - images of pilgrimage, of God's new order, of peoplehood and of transformation.

Congregational Discipling. A collection of articles by 12 people with denominational and conference leadership responsibilities within the Mennonite church.

Worship

'Worshiping with the Early Anabaptists' by John Oyer & Keith Graber Miller *Gospel Herald: The Weekly Magazine of the Anabaptist Church* September 2, 1997, pp.1-4,8. (Photocopy available)

Yoder

Much of the work of John Howard Yoder has not been formally published. An indication of the scope of his work can be found in "A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol 71 No.1, January 1997.

Inquiries about obtaining the bibliography can be addressed to Mark Thiessen Nation, London Mennonite Centre 14 Shepherds Hill, Highgate, London N6 5AQ, England.
Email: 100127.1371@compuserv.com
Fax:0181 341 6807

Hospitality

The republic of God is a great outdoor restaurant by Gordon Preece, *Zadok Paper* S91 Summer 1998. The paper focuses on the

need to demonstrate the reality of Christian hospitality as an alternative to a society which views all others as strangers to be feared. A revised version of an address given at the Zadok National Conference in Canberra in 1996.

Information on this and other Zadok papers is available from Zadok Institute for Christianity and Society, PO Box 289 Hawthorn, Vic 3122. Ph 03 9819 5450

Faith and Freedom

Faith and Freedom: A Journal of Christian Ethics is a publication of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of Australia and Baptist Inner City Ministries. From 1998 it will appear three times a year. Subscription \$25 pa. All correspondence, submissions, subscriptions and donations should be addressed to Faith and Freedom, PO Box 173 Bentley WA 6102
Phone/Fax (08) 9458 1632

Plans for the future include issues devoted to Bioethics Beyond 2000 and Postmodernity and Christian Practice.

Forgiveness

The debate over the stolen generation and the Wik legislation has raised issues of apology and forgiveness to centre stage in public debate. An article in *The Mennonite* February 24 1998 pp.8-10, by Michael Ross, a convicted murderer, provides a personal and poignant account of what forgiveness does and does not mean. "Forgiveness: What it is not, What it is" (Photocopy available)

“Nothing we do changes God - it just changes what we think about God. When we discover that the earth is not the center of the universe, it didn’t change God. It just changes us, and what we think. We have to be willing to allow what we think to change.”

*Madeleine L’Engle **The Other Side** March/April 1998, p.39*