



ON THE ROAD

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SEEKING A COMMUNITY
OF PROMISE”

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On The Road

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COVER SYMBOL: The lamb in the midst of briars is a traditional Anabaptist symbol. It illustrates the suffering Lamb of God, who calls the faithful to obedient service and discipleship on the road. This particular rendition is from *Hymnal A Worship Book*. Copyright 1992. Reprinted with permission of Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, PA, USA.

THE VIEW FROM EPHESIANS FOUR

MARK AND MARY HURST

...to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service

“And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

- Hebrews 10:24-25

There is value in getting together. We were not created to go it alone but to live in community with others. Meeting together provides an opportunity, according to the author of Hebrews, “to provoke one another to love and good deeds.”

The AAANZ holds a conference every two years to bring together people from Australia and New Zealand. Visitors have joined us from the United States, the Philippines, and East Timor. It has been a rich time of fellowship, teaching, and encouragement for those who attend. The 2007 conference theme was “Living Anabaptism.” In this issue of **ON THE ROAD** we hope to pass on some of that richness

through the publication of several of the talks given at the most recent AAANZ

conference held in Western Australia.

Reading an article is not the same as hearing an oral presentation or

being with a group to instantly discuss what you have heard. Maybe you can gather a group together in your area, read the articles together, and discuss them. Who knows, maybe you will provoke each other to love and good deeds. We hope so.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DOUG SEWELL

The Circles Grow

Telling our story and growing the Anabaptist network has been the main focus for 2007 of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand. I have noticed an impetus across the network for people to be more proactive and to get involved. The emergence of new cells of interest in Christchurch and Auckland is particularly exciting to report. So the circles grow.

The speaking tours of Professors Ray Gingerich and Vernon Jantzi of Eastern Mennonite University have stimulated dialogue with people from outside of the network. The increased interest has resulted in several radio broadcasts in Australia. The Encounter program called The Anabaptist Vision on ABC National Radio has brought the Anabaptist network and values of Christian non-violence to the attention of the listening public. Presenter Gary Bryson describes Anabaptism as “a theological vision that informs the practice and faith of Christians of many different traditions and also a vision to redefine the church.”

Contemporary Anabaptism is emerging as a significant movement for change. Its strength lies in



its ability to blend a life of community with the work of reconciliation founded on a faith in Jesus. When Jesus and community and reconciliation are combined faith becomes whole and engages with the real stuff of life.

The challenge I feel for the network is to be able to explain its values and convictions in a way that can be understood and not perceived to be just another group or sect. What distinguishes a movement from a group is that it

includes and encompasses a rich diversity of expressions and it is able to capture the collective imagination. Anabaptism suffers from being hard to explain simply as often people get hung up with a name. Yet there is a legacy that the radical reformation brings which provides not only a valuable connection with the past but a springboard for the future.

The executive of AAANZ has recently made some important decisions that will reshape our future. We recognise that we are not the only ones who are on a journey of discipleship and have a lot to learn from others who have been on that road for a lot

longer than most of us. To broaden and strengthen the network we have agreed to partner more with other groups who share similar values. This will mean dialogue at first and perhaps some shared strategies. To start with, AAANZ has agreed to partner with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) who are seeking to set up an Australasian regional base supported by their team from New Zealand. The power of CPT is in the willingness of a Christian group to go to places of conflict to be a peacemaking presence and to show the alternative way of non-violence.

Protestantism has traditionally grown by new groups beginning and separating themselves by their distinctions and differences, which has often resulted in divisiveness. I see a way forward which will bring strength to the growing network as people from a wide variety of backgrounds connect and discover that we actually share a lot more in common than what we may have first imagined. The common thread that ties a network together is a willingness to share and learn from each other.

To enable the network to grow I will be writing to every person who receives the AAANZ Mailing and On The Road. I will be asking each one to consider helping in that process.

* TO GROW - I will ask you to invite one other person to join as a member. Membership bestows a sense of ownership that is vital to growth. In 2007 we aim to double our membership.

* TO TALK - I will ask you to tell us what is important to you about the network. This will help enable closer bonds between individuals within the network.

* TO EXPLAIN - I will ask you to tell us what are the important values of Anabaptism to you. We want to create more resources and the website to simply and clearly allow people to understand contemporary Anabaptism and how to get involved.

* TO PARTNER - I will ask you to suggest other groups that we could work with. We want to connect and work in partnership more with others.

“Seek Peace and Pursue it...” Psalm 34:14

DISCIPLINING AND DISCERNING IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

NATHAN HOBBY

In 1983, a man named Ben Patterson wrote, “I fear the church of Jesus Christ means too little to its members for it to discipline them.” Church discipline is a dirty word in churches today. It makes us think of cults or fundamentalists. If it’s practiced at all, it’s applied to sexual sin or doctrinal error but not greed or gossip. The person doing the disciplining is usually the minister or the elder. Even churches that emphasise the priesthood of all believers don’t include disciplining as one of the roles of all believers.

But Anabaptist Marlin Jeschke wrote: “The answer to bad church discipline is good church discipline, not *no* church discipline.”

Discernment goes with discipline, and it’s not very popular either. Individuals’ issues are left entirely up to the individual’s conscience. Church business and spiritual matters are largely decided by the leaders, perhaps with ratification from an annual meeting of the members.

In this article I’m going to put forward the idea that discipline and discernment are two key parts of



the church’s life. When we practice them as Jesus intended, we get closer to being the type of people God wanted us to be. The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century saw these two parts of church life as essential to their vision of Christianity, as important as pacifism. I think we should too. The main part of my article focuses on looking at what Jesus had to say about discipline and discernment in Matthew 18:15-20. What I have to say owes a big debt to John Howard Yoder and to

Stuart Murray.

A. Matthew 18:15-20

“If another member of the church sins, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let

such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Matthew 18:15-20 has two logical parts to it. In verses 15-17, Jesus tells us the procedure to follow when our brother or sister in the church sins. The first Anabaptists called the procedure in Matthew 18:15-17 the Rule of Christ. In verses 18-20, Jesus broadens this authority to discipline to include the idea of the authority to decide what's right and wrong – discernment.

Discipline presupposes that we have already been discerning things together as a church. And then in order for discernment to be carried through and acted on, it requires us to disciple each other. So the two parts may seem disconnected at first, but the connections will become clearer.

What sins need to be confronted?

The NIV, the NRSV and the Good News Bible translate Mt 18:15 “When your brother or sister sins against you.” But they all have a textual note which says “Some manuscripts do not have *against you*.” These are some of the earliest manuscripts. The Jerusalem Bible translates “If your brother does something wrong.” The standard Greek text – the 21st edition of Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece* - does not have the words for “against you.”

In Luke 17:3, a parallel text, Jesus says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him.” The rebuke is not limited to personal offences. Neither is it restricted to personal offences in the writings of Paul. In Galatians 6:1 we read, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”

It makes a difference. Do we only have responsibility to talk to our brothers and sisters when we are the victims? Or do we also have a responsibility to help them whenever we see them doing something wrong? I suggest that the earliest manuscripts are probably correct and that “against you” does not belong in Matthew 15:15.

If we have to confront even sins that aren't against us, what sins does that include? Anything that

causes offence. Anything that breaks fellowship. Anything that is taking the brother or sister away from God. Anything the community has agreed to hold each accountable for.

Step one – Challenge one another

The first step, of going directly to your brother or sister, avoids shame and gossip. It goes against our culture. We don't like to confront things. We don't like to be honest. We would much rather complain about a person behind their back than face to face. Other people are more likely to agree with us about the person!

An Anabaptist house church pastor named Lois Barrett writes: “You may find that the other person feels you also were at fault. Perhaps mutual confession is needed. Or perhaps the brother or sister did not realise that he or she had offended you and is now willing to amend you. If so, the matter can stop here.”

Don't go while you're angry; don't go to vent your rage. But don't wait too long before you say something. It will only get harder.

The second half of verse 15 tells us the goal of the Rule of Christ – “If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.” The goal is not punishment but restoration. Many of the abuses and misuses of church discipline

come about when church discipline is used to punish rather than restore, or when it jumps straight to excommunication in the name of keeping the church “clean.” When our goal is reconciliation, we are going to be gentler and more humble.

We get a great picture of regaining our brother when we remember the parable Jesus told earlier in the same chapter – the shepherd going all out to get back the sheep who strayed from the flock.

Step two – Take a witness

Sometimes you can't work it out between you. You can't agree on whether the person is actually in sin. This might be because the church hasn't discerned the issue enough – the binding and loosing hasn't made clear what should be done – we're going to cover that later. Don't give in to the temptation to just let the matter go. You need another perspective – and that is why, in the second step, we bring in one or two others – someone with more spiritual wisdom or experience, someone who can listen carefully to both sides.

We have an echo of Deuteronomy 19:15 here – “A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” This provision was designed to



Jarrod McKenna leading a workshop

protect people accused of crimes. Stuart Murray writes: “The role of witnesses in church discipline, then, is double-edged. They may support the challenger, but they might exonerate the person being challenged. Perhaps the situation has been misread. Perhaps other factors need to be considered. Perhaps there is fault on both sides... The goals of this small group meeting are to help both parties express their perceptions, to work towards the issues being resolved and, if possible, to enable reconciliation to take place.”

Step three – Tell it to the church

If the conflict still can't be resolved with the help of one or two others, the matter is made public before the church. But what sort of church does Jesus have in mind? I have to say, it's not the type of church we commonly

see. Stuart Murray writes: “The kind of community envisaged by Jesus in his teaching on mutual admonition is a church whose members are sufficiently involved in each other's lives to notice spiritual and moral problems, and where relationships are strong enough to risk misunderstanding or offence.”



This is done not in a service where only a couple of people speak, but in an open meeting where the word of God might come to anyone and they can speak. We need to remember the meaning of the Greek word we translate church – it is *ekklesia*, and its original sense is “a gathering.” The normal meaning of the word implied something like a public gathering to do community business. Art Gish writes: “The *ekklesia* is God's people gathered to do business, to make decisions in the light of Jesus Christ. The New Testament takes the common word and gives it a new content, making Christ the centre of the decision making body.”

Step four – Treat the offender as an unbeliever

Paul writes to the church at Corinth to tell them that they must expel the immoral brother who is having sex with his stepmother. He gives us a picture of how the fourth step of the Rule of Christ would work: “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5, NIV)

Paul's concern is the offender's reconciliation; that he might realise the seriousness of what he has done and repent. So, even at the fourth stage, the purpose is still to win the brother or sister over. If the offender refuses to listen to even the church, we are to treat him or her as a tax collector or a pagan. The traditional ideas of excommunication don't stack up to this direction. How did Jesus treat tax collectors and pagans? He ate at the table of tax collectors! He treated them as people in need of good news, in need of conversion.

The church is recognising what has already happened – the offender has broken with the fellowship and is no longer a member. They are now treated as an outsider in need of conversion, in need of hearing the good news. What that outside status will mean will need to be talked about and decided by your church.

The reality is that by this stage, the offender will usually have left of their own accord.

Step five - Restoration

Jesus doesn't explicitly mention restoration as a separate step, but he says it's the goal of the process. Sometimes restoration won't happen. But it is your hope and prayer that it will. Restoration should be as public as the

discipline process was. It needs to come about as a result of obvious repentance. The church should then forgive the person and welcome them back into the church. Marlin Jeschke writes about the church that used the parable of the prodigal son as their model. When a man who left a congregation returned in genuine penitence five years later, they literally gave him a new sports coat, had a gold ring made for his finger and had a feast of veal with him.

Restoration should be full and final, with the person welcomed back into full church membership.

Binding and loosing

“Bind” and “loose” were two words with special meaning for the Jews. They were used to describe the process of trying to work out how the Law applied to a particular situation. If a rabbi decided a law did apply to a particular situation, he was “binding” it. Jews were obligated to apply it. If he decided it did not apply to a particular situation, he was “loosing” this law. Jews were “loosed” from the obligation to apply it.

In his essay, “Binding and Loosing – a paradigm for ethical discernment”, Mark Allan Powell writes: “For example, the question was raised whether one might be guilty of stealing if one finds something and keeps it without searching for the rightful owner. When is such a

search required, and how extensive must it be? The Talmud states, 'If a fledgling bird is found within fifty cubits of a dovecote, it belongs to the owner of the dovecote. If it is found outside the limits of fifty cubits, it belongs to the person who finds it.' To use Matthew's terminology, the decision was that the law ("Do not steal") was bound when the bird was found in proximity to its likely owner; one who keeps the bird under such conditions has transgressed the law and is guilty of sin. But the law is loosed when the bird is found at a distance from any likely owner; the law against stealing does not forbid keeping the bird in that instance."

Throughout Matthew's gospel, we have examples of Jesus binding and loosing. I've taken these examples from Powell's article.

5:21-23: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement." Jesus is binding the law prohibiting murder as applicable to anger and insults as well.

5:27-28: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus is binding the law prohibiting adultery as applicable to lustful thoughts as well.

5:31-32: "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." Jesus binds the prohibition against adultery as applicable to divorce and remarriage, and does so by saying that the Scripture that allows for divorce was a concession granted in recognition of "hardness of hearts" and that it never expressed the actual intent of God – quite an incredible thing to say about the Scriptures.

But Jesus also looses his own prohibition of divorce for those instances involving infidelity, both here and in 19:9. In 5:43-48, Jesus binds the commandment to "love your neighbour" as applicable also to loving your enemies. In 12:1-8, Jesus looses the ban on working on the Sabbath to get food when

you're hungry. He says that the way Pharisees bind the law in the same situation "condemns the innocent." In 15:3-9, Jesus binds the command to "Honour your father and mother" as applicable to caring for your parents in old age.

We are given authority by Jesus to carry on this process in the church, to work out what the Scriptures call us to do in particular situations. Some of the questions we decide by binding and loosing will be personal ones; other questions will be practical and moral questions for the church. When we do this, we

are finally using the Bible as it was meant to be used – 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Yoder comments: One of the most enduring subjects of unfruitful controversy over the centuries has been whether the words of Scripture, when looked at purely as words, isolated from the context in which certain people read them at a certain time and place, have both the clear meaning and the absolute authority of revelation. To speak of the Bible apart from the people reading it and apart from the specific questions that those people need to answer is to do violence to the very purpose for which



More conversations

we have been given the Holy Scriptures... [The] most complete framework in which to affirm the authority of Scripture is in the context of its being read and applied by a believing people that uses its guidance to respond to concrete issues in their witness and obedience.

The complicated ways we define the Bible objectively begin to lose their importance as we try to apply it, as we work out whether it applies to a particular situation or not. What is the link to the first part of the passage, the Rule of Christ?

In verse 17, Jesus uses the word "church," which we just talked about as a gathering for business. If we remember that this is what the word ekklesia meant to the readers, then we can see the link. I can paraphrase verses 17 and 18 like this: "If the offender refuses to listen to them, tell it to the decision-making-gathering, so you can decide he is

no longer part of the gathering. Whatever decisions your gathering makes, they reflect God's will."

For Jews, "Bind and loose" also suggested the power of letting someone be a part of the community or not – often in response to whether they obeyed the decisions of the rabbis. In Matthew 16:9, Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom and tells him that whatever he binds on earth will be bound in heaven – a clear reference to the authority to decide who's in or out of the church.

B. The meaning for the church today

Like the rest of the world, churches don't usually follow Jesus' command in Matthew 18. What are the immediate applications?

Go directly to our brother or sister when we're offended. It sounds like a small thing, but it would actually make a huge difference to the life of churches. Too often, instead of telling the person who has offended us, we tell someone else and get this third person on our side. Gossip and bitterness replace honesty and love. In fact, the failure to follow Matthew 18 holds churches back from developing true Christian community.

In going directly to our brother or sister, we prevent conflict from escalating. We develop honesty between each other, and we begin to truly understand each other. For example, I might be getting angrier and angrier that each week a newcomer to our church argues passionately against theological points other people make during discussion. My first impulse is to complain to others in the church who would agree with me that he is argumentative and difficult. But instead, I decide to talk to him about it, just between the two of us. He tells me that he had no idea that was the way he came across; the only way he is used to talking about theology is in a debating style like he was taught when he studied at university. I tell him that our Sunday meetings are more aimed at encouraging each other to follow Jesus than at debating theology for its own sake. He says that in future he will be less

argumentative and more focused on encouraging. I come away with a better understanding of why he is the way he is; he understands our church's expectations better.

Bring big decisions to the church. Too often we're like the rest of the world, thinking that as Christians we're morally independent of each other, and need to wrestle with our own conscience to come up with the answers to the questions in our lives. But what we do affects the others in our church, especially as we develop closer community. We have to work out how far we are willing to take this, but at

the very least we should be taking big decisions to our church for prayer and discernment. The advice will not be binding, but it is likely to be helpful. Jesus says that it will reflect what God wants. The sort of decisions might include – "My lease is running out. Where should I live?" (When I asked this of my church, they suggested I move closer to the rest of them, rather than closer to work; I did so and it helped build up the life of our church.)

"I'm thinking of changing jobs." (Perhaps your church will ask you what effect the new job will have on your family life, the amount of time you have to serve God, your leisure time. Perhaps someone in the church will know about

an even better job opportunity. Too often though, we assume that the job is more important than church. If a job takes us to the other side of the city and we have to leave the church, then that's okay; we can find another church. We make the decision in private and turn up some week and announce it. It shouldn't be like that. Church life should be more important in your life. Maybe you should find a job to suit the church where you are called to serve.)

The biggest challenge is trying to make room for it in your church context. It requires other members of the body to give time, thought and prayer. So for a start, you have to convince the others in your body that it matters, that you need their input for your decisions. In a house church, the appropriate time for discernment is often in the sharing time of the



sharing cups of tea and conversation



worship meeting. But it's hard even in a house church to make sure it gets the priority it should. It sometimes means throwing out your plans for a particular meeting and giving someone the time they need for discernment.

It's even harder in a conventional church. Let's be realistic and admit that a typical Sunday worship service is set up all wrong for it. If you're going to stay in a conventional church, then the midweek small group is one place for discernment. But you might have to change the structure and assumptions of the small group. Are you there just to study the Bible in a smaller group, or is the group going to take on the full body life? Are you going to make time to get involved in each other's lives and discern important issues? Another option is that you might call together a group of people from your church after a Sunday meeting and ask them to talk and pray with you about something.

Discerning Christian ethics as a church is another task. We have to work out together as a church in what ways Jesus' life and words and the example of the early church are "binding" on a particular situation. We work out what following Jesus means so that we can then help each other when we sin by not living up to it. The sort of issues you will want to discuss together and come to consensus in the Holy Spirit will include things like the following questions (there is overlap with the previous point; often moral issues arise in the context of decisions) – What should our attitude to money be? ("I'd like to buy a house so I can stop renting, but the prospect is taking over my life!") "I'm divorced and I want to remarry; are Jesus' words in Matthew 5 binding?"

Confession is a practice which pre-empts the Rule of Christ. Rather than waiting to find your brother or sister in sin, you seek each other out and confess whatever is on your mind. One benefit of this is that it encourages a relationship of honesty. If your brother ever does need to confront you, you will be more open to it, because you're constantly talking about sin and forgiveness. Find a discipleship partner. If you are committed to meeting every week or two to confess sins to each other, it's much easier. You don't have to seek someone out each time you find yourself committing a "big" sin.

C. Relationship to other church practices

1. Baptism into a new humanity: brings the believer into the world where binding and loosing

happens. Reconciling to each other through the Rule of Christ can be thought of as the glue which holds together the different people. Also, part of the baptismal commitment should be declaring that you are open to correction and committed to restoring your brother or sister who is caught in sin.

2. The fullness of Christ is about the way every believer is gifted, every member of the body has a part to play. Like the fullness of Christ, binding and loosing recognises that every believer is a priest. Restoring the priesthood of all believers means practising the fullness of Christ and binding and loosing.

3. Happens before the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was an actual shared meal with economic and social meaning. The practice of the Anabaptists in the 16th century was to not eat together until they were right with each other, based on Jesus' injunction in Matthew 5:23-24 to be reconciled to your brother or sister before offering anything at an altar.

4. The Rule of Paul overlaps a lot with the fullness of Christ and with binding and loosing. Yoder takes the title "The Rule of Paul" from 1 Corinthians 14. Paul tells the Corinthians that if anyone in the congregation gets a word from

God, everyone else is to be quiet and listen. So the Rule of Paul is an open meeting where the church recognises that God could speak through any of the people in the gathering. It is the basis on which you can have a meeting for discerning and discipline.

D. Questions for discussion

How do people in your life usually handle conflict? What works well?

Try summing up the idea of Matthew 18:15-20 put forward. (Don't evaluate it yet; just sum it up.)

Are you convinced that Jesus intended us to go directly to a person who offends us? Are there some cases where it is okay to talk to a third person before the offender, in order to sort out your feelings?

What sort of decisions would you like to be able to bring to your church for discernment? How would you like the process to work? (I.e.: How many people would there be listening to you; would it be a part of a church meeting or midweek meeting or something else; what influence would their advice have on you?)

- **Nathan Hobby** is a novelist living in Perth. He has written a simplification of John Howard Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* (www.geocities.com/savageparade/poj)



Teresa and Margaret in conversation

"FULLNESS OF CHRIST" THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AMONGST THE BODY

DR. JOHN OLLEY

Back in the '70s the term "Body Life" became prominent through Ray Stedman's book,¹ and in a variety of ways the image, along with talk of the ministry of every believer, of 'every member empowerment', keeps cropping up in a variety of discussions. Still actual practice so often deviates and old patterns persist! This is a good reason for the reminders and different emphases that John Howard Yoder brings in speaking of the work of the Spirit in the life of the whole body and the participatory ministry of all, not just a few 'ministers'. It also calls for some analysis as to why change seems slow!

"The Fullness of Christ" involves every member of the body

The title "Fullness of Christ" comes from Ephesians 4:13. It is good to read the wider context of this familiar passage, coming after the affirmation of the triumphant ascension of Christ 'to fill the whole universe': *11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (TNIV).*

Here is the goal of all growing up together, being involved in ministry or service, each part being different but all working together. There is also attention given to teaching. Incidentally, it is often forgotten that the English word "member" originally referred to a part of the body!

The same empowering of all, working together for the common good, linked with the work of the Spirit, is in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12 (e.g., v.



7: "to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good") and Romans 12. Similar is 1 Peter 4:10, "Each one of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms", so it is not simply a Pauline goal. The varied ministry of all, working together, is a clear Scriptural vision, flowing from the grace of God, the gift of Christ and the work of the Spirit.

Important to Yoder is the way Paul counters those who thought of their ministry as 'special'. All gifts have equal dignity, although some are more important, especially 'prophecy' (Yoder glosses as 'rational edification' – that can be debated!). Yoder also draws attention to the need for 'order' which he elaborates as 'listening to one another'.

In reflecting on church history Yoder rightly speaks of a later shift to individual leaders and power, and more attention given to ritual roles. He challenges the priority given today to a few who are specially recognised (usually male and monarchical), and critiques the parallel growth of the 'giftedness' of individuals. Paul's vision is both anti-hierarchical and participatory. Further this is not a modern democratic structure where individuals come together in social contract, rather it is the work of the Spirit who empowers variously and binds all together. In Ephesians 4 it is a result of the victory won by Christ over the powers of sin and death.

But how is this to be worked out today in the life of the Church? Often two images are contrasted: 'every member empowered, with universal ministry', and a structure focusing on a few 'ministers' or 'religious specialists'.

The place and responsibility of leaders

Let me affirm: If one is to be true to the scriptural vision of the fullness of Christ, the goal must be 'every member empowered, with universal ministry'. Any move away from this is in the wrong direction! But the issue is, how is this to be implemented, developed and sustained? Here it is helpful to look at issues of leadership.

In July 2003 Nigel Wright, a British Baptist, Principal of Spurgeon's College, who shares many

Anabaptist perspectives, presented a paper to the Baptist World Alliance Heritage and Identity Commission meeting in Rio de Janeiro. He interacted appreciatively with Yoder's *Body Politics*, affirming Yoder's vision as to how "the practices of the church, rooted in the redeeming work of Christ, have potential for re-envisioning a wider society which breaks free of confining and disabling understandings of group relationships". Yet he sees Yoder neglecting the "degree to which there are indeed special gifts and ministries which are given to some and not to all. Moreover, the achievement of the ministry of all is intimately related to the freedom of some to exercise their enabling ministries effectively".

My own journey would endorse that final sentence. Here I believe is the way forward in bringing about the biblical vision which Yoder articulates. The question is, how do leadership and the ministry of all go together, not in tension but as a necessary partnership? Leadership that fails to enable, encourage and enhance the ministry of all is a deviation from Scripture, as is also the ministry of all that neglects or restricts the ministry of leadership by some.



Ian Packer speaking

Descriptions of leadership in the New Testament

Let me share some of my experiences in this journey to elaborate and suggest some pointers for reflection and discussion:

While teaching in Hong Kong in the '70s I was asked to give some bible studies on "leadership" to a group of South East Asian Theological College Principals. To start, I decided to do a concordance study on all the words I could think of linked in any way with 'leading'.² There were for me surprises:

(1) While the Greco-Roman world of the first century had many titles for office holders with several terms for 'honour' and 'rule', the New Testament uses these only for Jewish and Roman leaders and for Christ. Within the Church the overwhelming term is diakonos 'servant', along with episkopos 'overseer', focusing on responsibility and care. It seems that the Lordship of Christ prevented terms being used of others in the church, while Christ's servant pattern, including suffering, became a pattern for the church to follow.

(2) Further, in contrast to the hierarchical and status-bound structures of contemporary society, and practices of patronage where those in power

benefited from their office, the New Testament, following Christ, rejected status terms and highlighted the importance of every person's ministry, always 'for the common good'.

Status was important in Greco-Roman honour/shame based society. How different is God's pattern, shown in Christ who died the most shameful way possible and who by example gave equal status and honour to all! A child had no standing in Jewish society, but to Jesus 'whoever takes a humble place—becoming like this child—is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt 18:1-4). A couple of months ago Steven Bradbury writing in the Scripture Union Encounter With God notes (17/10/06) spoke of Paul's words to Philemon re Onesimus, the slave, 'a status-less piece of property': receive him 'both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord' (Phm 16). Note also 1 Pet 2:17: "Honour all people, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the king" (not all English translations reflect the double use of ὁμίαι).

(3) Paul addresses his letters to churches as a whole. In these there is only one reference to specific 'offices', in the greeting opening Philippians: "To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons". Nevertheless there is

recognition of different responsibilities, and of course there is the way Paul exercises his own authority.. There is respect not for an office per se but for what is being done: "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you (or 'are over you') in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work." (1 Thess 5:12-13).

What does it mean when we read in Ephesians 5:18-21 that one result of the filling of the Spirit is "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"? Here I find helpful the teasing out by Cranfield in commenting on Romans 13 ("submit to authorities"): "submit" is different to "obey", it involves "putting oneself under": "the recognition that the other person, as Christ's representative to one (cf. Mt 25.40, 45), has an infinitely greater claim on one than one has upon oneself and the conduct which flows naturally from such a recognition".³ It includes the responsibility and tasks given to another by Christ and so enabling them to fulfil their role. Significantly the first relationship in which Paul elaborates is husband-wife. Today is Elaine's and my 45th wedding anniversary – one of the delights, and struggles, has been learning what 'mutual

submission' involves! We give thanks to God for the work of his Spirit as we have journeyed together, and through this greater understanding of how this works out in the church. "Mutual submission' is what happens in 1 Thess 5:12-13: the people who are 'over you' are working hard for your benefit – don't make their work harder! Is this why Eph 5:21 so much emphasises 'out of reverence for Christ'? If it is the ascended Christ through the Spirit who provides the variety of gifts, then submission to Christ means we submit to the exercise of the gifts he has given to others, as well as using the gift he has given me 'for the common good'.

Working with but transforming or subverting of societal patterns

Let me jump to a few years ago when as part of a group within Global InterAction (formerly the Australian Baptist Missionary Society) we were exploring issues of leadership in various cultures.⁴ Part of the process was looking at leadership in Greco-Roman and Jewish society and in the early church. Interestingly groups amongst whom GIA works often have features that are closer to first century Graeco-Roman (Mediterranean) than to Australian society (e.g., issues of honour, patronage, status, family responsibilities, collective decision-making and integration of secular and religious life).

One of the strengths of Yoder's earlier *The Politics of Jesus* was his interaction with contemporary Greco-Roman thought, showing how societal patterns were transformed by Christ. Recent scholarship investigating Greek inscriptions has thrown new light on leadership patterns and values in both Graeco-Roman and Jewish society. It has illuminated how NT language and teaching on leadership relates to cultural practices.

Particularly helpful is the 2000 survey and analysis of current scholarship by Andrew Clarke.⁵ A comprehensive analysis of first century patterns illustrates how people were appointed as leaders due to their wealth, family connections and benefactions, with accompanying honour and benefits. Clarke then looks at the diversity in Paul's letters: 1 Corinthians – a community divided over its leaders; 2 Corinthians – a community boastful of its leaders; Romans – a community with leaders preoccupied with status; Philippians – a community with leaders preoccupied with politics;

1 & 2 Thessalonians – a community influenced by pagan culture; Galatians – communities with proud leaders.

In each case Paul subverts societal attitudes in the light of the gospel of Christ.

Teaching on the ministry of all is intertwined with words on leadership.

I wonder what Paul would write to churches in Australia today? I mentioned at the start how the term "Body Life" was made popular by Stedman and many speak on implementing "every member ministry".

However, all too commonly this has been institutionally focused, performing roles in existing structures! Thus 'lay ministry' has meant exploring what ministries in the church 'lay' people can do and 'filling positions'. Only occasionally does one hear of the role of leaders to equip and enable people for their ministries in the world or of structures that teach new believers and explore their gifting.

More recently our local church has been grappling

with how best to implement the ministry of all for the mission of the church. We have been helped by discussions and emerging practices in New Zealand and now in the Baptist Churches of WA. Time precludes much comment!

Let me say simply that for centuries Baptists have spoken of the ministry of all – and that has been linked with congregational government- and at various levels this leads to committees. However we have not been good in giving people freedom to exercise their gifts. We have been good at giving responsibility and accountability, without authority and freedom to act. We have been good in the church, as in society, at saying, "I don't approve of the way you are performing your ministry. You should do things my way (but we're not game to add, even though I don't have the gifting or responsibility you have)".

What we are seeking to implement is a ministry-led team model. This seeks to say, "God has called the church to participate in his mission and for this he provides a variety of gifts and ministry. We want to recognise that a person has ministry for which God has given them a gift (or potentially a gift, developed through on-the-job training and support), we recognise that by giving authority to exercise that ministry, but with accountability within guidelines. We say to one another, "You are free to exercise your



Holy conversation

ministry, within guidelines and accountability, the way you believe under Christ to be best. Further we will seek to equip and encourage you.”. The guidelines include working together for the common good – with common beliefs, values and goals. This applies to all ministries, including that of leaders – we seek to enable leaders to lead, overseers to oversee, shepherds to shepherd. It sees that the key role of leaders is in ‘overseeing’: coordination, direction, teaching, equipping and enabling, and so they are given freedom to do that! There is always the danger of an authoritarian approach if not linked with “mutual submission”, recognising the gifting of all – but there is also danger in not allowing gifts associated with oversight and teaching. I’m not saying this is the only way but it is seeking to be responsive to work of the Spirit in providing various gifts. However an area that needs to be developed, explicit in Ephesians 4, is the structures that enable people to be taught and to discover and explore their gifted ministry.

Participatory ministry, every member empowerment, is the goal – but I believe this will not happen without the enabling, coordinating guides/episkopoi.

The Team that succeeds.

Travelling back the other week from Kazakhstan, I was interested to read an advertisement article in the British Airways magazine. Entitled “How to make a success of change—and why leaders make all the difference”, it was by a consulting firm⁶ whose slogan was “Leaders in Change Leadership”. Research across the public, private and non-profit sectors showed that “leadership accounts for almost 50% of the difference between success and failure”. The Chief Executive, Deborah Rowland, commented that “Our leadership framework in essence supports leaders in the shift from the age-old controlling form of leadership—“shaping” — towards being better able to “frame”: to set strategic direction, give others the space to take greater responsibility, and use their personal insight and authority in more subtle and effective ways” (emphasis mine). Obviously this is a better way as it is closer to the pattern God has set for his church, and hence for the world!

Some have suggested that in Australia sport is a religion – so perhaps a sporting analogy may help! A good coach knows, develops and maximises the

gifts of all the players and helps them play together for the good of the whole - and the attaining of goals! Further, the player who acts as an individual, or who resists the guidance of the coach, is a danger to the team. Our son is a basketball coach and on one occasion another coach said to him, “Our team had the better players, but you won because you played as a team”. The goal is to maximise the strengths of all, which involves team members recognising one another’s abilities and playing together, submitting to the role of a coach. Also, a successful coach is concerned for all team members, listening to them, and has no favourites, one who sees potential and develops each person in a way appropriate for them. “Body politics” parallels are obvious!

So, as one looks at the variety of patterns in churches, how do we move forward? Here I take heart from one phrase in Ephesians 4: “until we all ...

become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. We have not arrived, and as in the growth of the human body there are many factors and dimensions – but the Spirit is at work, the goal is in view. The test of any change is, does it move the body towards the goal?

I sense that across the church there is need to reaffirm the variegated ministry of all within the one body.

For some there is need to be reminded that not all have the gift of leading, guiding, overseeing, teaching – and so they should free and support such people to do that, submitting to them in the exercise of those roles.

For those in leadership this means putting in the forefront the task of empowering others to exercise fully their gifts, in turn submitting to them in the exercise of those gifts. Also the range of gifts has in practice been so limited that people need help to even see their gifts and ministry as leaders look beyond institutional roles to the wider mission of God for which gifts are given. This is often hard for leaders who want to see everything done ‘their way’. Occasionally I hear a person say, “If only people would give me freedom to lead”, but not often is this linked with their willingness to give others freedom to exercise their gifts! Submission is only seen one way. All need to be alert to the insidious danger of ‘status’ and of ‘doing my thing’. All gifts are to be exercised corporately, for the common good.

Finally, looking outwards: Yoder sees this participatory mutuality as God’s ultimate pattern for



sharing food preparation

the whole of humankind. "The universal ministry, divine and human, is to be accessible and visible to others." The church is a pointer to the future. Thus how the church conducts its corporate life is a witness to the world of the transforming power of the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and the giving of the Spirit. In a society so conscious of status symbols and self-advancement, with political (and business) structures that rely on numbers, factions, power struggles and bargaining, along with community ambivalence towards leaders, the church body points to 'the fullness of Christ', giving dignity to one another and to the work of all, working together with diverse ministries for the common good, supporting one another to the glory of God who loves diversity exercised in unity.

Questions for discussion

What have been some of your experiences of the participatory ministry of all?

Discuss the statement that: the achievement of the ministry of all is intimately related to the freedom of some to exercise their enabling ministries effectively.

Share experiences of enabling leadership that has freed people for mutual



small group discussions

ministry and mission.

The coach-team metaphor is understood in Australian culture. In what ways is this like and yet unlike the images provided by Paul?

¹ Ray Stedman, *Body Life* (Regal Books, 1972; revised and expanded by James D. Denney, Discovery House, 1995).

² J.W. Olley, "Leadership: some biblical perspectives", *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 18, 1 (1977): 1-20.

³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Vol. 2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979): 662.

⁴ 'Leadership—A Resource Paper', in Graeme Chatfield, ed., *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance* (Eastwood: Morling Press, 2005), 66-88.

⁵ Andrew Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers* (First Century Christians in the Graceo-Roman World; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶ Rowlandfisherlexonconsulting.

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BAPTISM AND A NEW HUMANITY

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THEMES FROM JOHN YODER'S *BODY POLITICS* (CHAPTER 3)

DR IAN BARNES

I became a Christian at the age of eleven. It was one of the most surprising things that ever happened to me. At that time my mother was the Matron of a Methodist boys' hostel in Albany and I had started going to Sunday School and evening services. I began to wonder what Christianity was all about, so I asked my older brother who was about to become a missionary to explain it all to me. Although I'm sure he gave a good explanation, it didn't make much sense to me. His more effective response was to take me along to the evening gospel service at the local Baptist church. There I heard of the stark choice between following Jesus or Satan. Although I didn't respond to the altar call in the service, afterwards I went to the minister and said that I wanted to give my life to Jesus. What was so surprising was the changes that took place within me. Suddenly I had a desire to read the Bible, a sense of joy, and an eagerness to become involved in Christian activity, which included visiting old folks in the local hospital: none of which I had at all anticipated. A couple of weeks later, I was baptised, as a public and formal recognition of my conversion. Yet I was deemed by the church elders to be too young to be received into church membership. I have often reflected on this, wondering why it was that I was regarded as old enough to be accepted by Jesus, but too young to be a member of the church community.

It is something of a paradox that even though baptism is so important in the New Testament and that the different practices of baptism have been a source of division and conflict between and even within churches, in fact little emphasis is given to baptism in the shaping and sustaining the practice of Christian discipleship. In part, that's probably because in some traditions, baptism has been reduced to the somewhat perfunctory rite of "christening" infants, whilst in more evangelical and charismatic traditions, the rite of baptism is little more than the formal sign of the much more important inward transformation.

Yet, as I've just noted, baptism is obviously of central importance in the New Testament. As Paul puts it in his various letters (Romans 6, Galatians 2)



baptism enacts our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. It defines the terms on which we live as Christian disciples:

... don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6: 3-4)

When we think about baptism our thoughts usually turn to ourselves and what it means for us as individuals, our struggle to be faithful Spirit-filled Christians and so forth. The central drama is our drama, and God is there "just for us." This orientation reflects the powerful influence of a predominantly individualistic understanding of the Christian life that has been one of the unfortunate legacies of the long years of Christendom. As the Catholic theologian, Susan K Wood comments:

For a number of reasons associated with Christianity becoming a majority rather than a minority religion and the disintegration of a unified rite of initiation, the communal meaning of baptism was replaced by a more individualistic focus. This individualistic focus emphasized the salvation of an individual through the removal of sin and the bestowal of grace rather than incorporation into an eschatological community identified as the body of Christ.¹

As John Yoder observes in his chapter on "Baptism and the New Humanity," this individualist frame blinds us to the larger historical reality into which baptism incorporates us:

It is not enough to say that each of us is individually born again and baptized, with the result that all of the born-again individuals are collected in one place, commanded by God to love one another and plant churches, with no more reason for discrimination. Paul says more than that: he says that the two peoples, two cultures, two histories have come to flow into one new humanity, a new creation. The order is thus the reverse of our modern expectations.

There is a new inter-ethnic social reality into which the individual is inducted rather than the social reality being the sum of the individuals.²

So we need to think about baptism, not primarily in terms of what it means for us as individuals, but rather in terms of the larger salvation narrative into which we are incorporated through baptism. In this larger narrative, the death and resurrection is not simply a single event that has occurred for the salvation of each individual sinner. Rather it is the climax of God's purpose for Israel, for humanity and for the creation, crystallised in the confession that Christ is Lord of all things. (Colossians 1: 15 -20)

At the heart of the Christian story is the paradox that in his scandalous and humiliating crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the hope of Israel that God would send his Messiah to establish his promised everlasting kingdom – but in a way that went both wider and deeper than Israel could ever have imagined. In and through his resurrection Jesus brings about that new humanity, new world and new creation that has always been God's purpose.

Interestingly, some American evangelicals are trying to recover this larger canonical narrative vision. For example Webber and Kenyon et al have published something of a manifesto: 'A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future'. Here is an excerpt:

On Church's Worship as Telling and Enacting God's Narrative: We call for public worship that sings, preaches and enacts God's story. We call for a renewed consideration of how God ministers to us in baptism, Eucharist, confession, the laying on of hands, marriage, healing and through the charisma of the Spirit, for these actions shape our lives and signify the meaning of the world. Thus, we call Evangelicals to turn away from forms of worship that focus on God as a mere object of the intellect or that assert the self as the source of worship. Such worship has resulted in lecture-oriented, music-driven, performance-centered and program-controlled models that do not adequately proclaim God's cosmic redemption.³

A new humanity: Five aspects of baptismal identity

So in baptism through our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus we are incorporated into this new creation, and from now on our "identity" is drawn from this new reality, and no longer just from our natural, historical circumstances. In this talk I want to consider five aspects of this new human identity that is given to us by Jesus.

- A new global community of persons: In baptism we are incorporated into a new humanity, the global people of God, sharing one Lord, one faith and one baptism that unites the diversity of ethnicities,

nationalities and cultures into a wonderful new 'multi-cultural' unity (Ephesians 2: 11 – 22; Galatians 3: 26 – 28)

- A new social identity: The social life into which we are inducted inverts the seemingly universal tendency for human communities to create hierarchies of domination and subordination, based on family, ability, class, gender and so forth (Philippians 2: 1 – 11; 1 Corinthians 1: 18 – 31;

Colossians 3: 12 - 25)

- A new political or civic identity: In this new society each baptised person becomes an active, participating member of that "civic" or public body of the church. Various people have commented on the way in which Paul's words to the Ephesians blends together civic and domestic language: no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household⁴. This new civic identity is reflected in the household teachings in Ephesians, where the responsible agency of both senior and subordinate partners is appealed to (wives as well as husbands, children as well as parents, slaves as well as masters).

- A new moral and psychological identity: Belonging to the people of God gives us a sense and experience of self and moral agency, found not through the assertion of personal freedom or desire, or development of natural talents but through the inward working of the gift and grace of God (Ephesians 4: 17 – 32).

- A new experience of embodied life: Finally to be baptised is to regard our bodies as not our own,



celebrating together

but to be lived in the anticipation and hope of resurrection, and no longer defined simply by the gifts, talents or weaknesses of our natural body (2 Corinthians 5: 1- 10; 1 Corinthians 6: 18 – 20; Romans 12: 1; Hebrews 10: 19 -22).

A good deal of living a baptised life is living out this anticipation of new life in the midst of the old – something in which we continue to experience the suffering and cross of Jesus as well as a taste of the freedom of Jesus. There are several aspects of this pattern of life – a baptised life - that we need to be mindful of:

The first is that it is **drawn from, or based on Christ** – Jesus is the one who defines what it means to be human (Hebrews 2: 5 -11). Thus the most basic Christian anthropology is drawn not from “creation” by itself, but from an understanding of created being redefined by Jesus. As Christoph Schwoebel puts it:

The revelation of God in Christ is the foundation for what it means to be human. This implies, secondly, that the true humanity of Christ is understood as the paradigm for true knowledge of human being. If

Christ is the Second Adam is seen as the paradigm of what it means to be human, this means that the true pattern for understanding human being is not the factual existence of humanity, but the new humanity of Christ in whom humanity is created and restored⁵.

The second is that it is a life **lived in the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit**. (Romans 8: 1 – 17) It cannot be lived otherwise. It is always a gift, always something that comes to us from the divine Other. We look to God the Spirit to indwell our lives and circumstances. We receive our very selves as a gift from God (2 Corinthians 3: 15 – 18; 1 Corinthians 13: 8 – 12). This is one reason why the enactment of the Eucharist is so important in sustaining our following of Jesus.

The third is that **baptism is a social practice**. Through baptism we are incorporated into the body of Christ and it is in relation to others that we experience the work of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4)



sharing meals

Fourthly, like the other practices Yoder discusses, baptism is **not a separate “religious” practice**. It is a material and political practice, a way of being in the world. Living a baptised life entails living “ordinary lives” of subsistence, work, body care and social interaction. What makes them different is that they are oriented towards Christ.

Fifthly “baptism” is **a form of mission**. In as much as believers are called to live out their baptism in the midst of people and institutions and cultures that may be hostile to Christ. (Philippians 1: 27 - 30)

Sixthly, in our post-Christendom world, baptism is **lived out as culture that has already been deeply infected with the gospel**. One of the legacies of the Christendom era is that our western culture has absorbed some of the key social and

political implications of baptism, yet now seeks to live these out with little or no reference to their source in Christ.

The challenge of a post-Christian global humanism: a new humanity without Christ?

I want to talk a bit more about this sixth point, and the challenge that the ideals, rhetoric and fragility of a globalised secular humanism

pose for followers of Jesus as we seek to live out the reality of our new humanity in Christ.

For many people it is now a global humanism, not Christ, which has come to express our common humanity. Our common humanity transcends the particularity of race, class, creed and religion, including that of Christianity, which many people now see as just one religious tradition amongst many. The ethic of a common humanity continues to inspire the many different efforts to bring about greater human equality, protection of various human civil, political and social rights, and improvements to the basic living conditions of billions of people on the planet.

Particularly within western modernity, this enlightenment faith affirms a fundamental social egalitarianism against older systems based on class or gender hierarchies. Its core ideals are those of democracy, equal opportunity, affirmative action, anti-discrimination and so on.

A western liberal modernity also affirms an inclusive, democratic form of politics, based on

universal franchise, the freedom of speech and the protection of the rights of free association.

Liberal modernity also affirms the freedom, autonomy and responsibility of the individual self: the right and the natural capacity of individuals to choose what they want to be, to pursue whatever vocations, desires and interests they wish, no longer constrained by custom, tradition.

Finally, liberal modernity is marked by a particular attentiveness to the life of the body, to enabling and enhancing its potential. Late moderns are obsessed with the possibilities of transforming their bodies, but of course this hope of transformation has been transferred from Christ to that of technology.

The fragile ideals of liberal modernity

However, in each of these aspects of a globalised western humanism, there is an obvious fragility.

The ideal of a common humanity is threatened by new forms of nationalism and by the resurgence of old forms of tribalism, racism, and prejudice.

Within late modern societies, the ideals of equality are threatened by new systems of hierarchy, based on wealth, education, networking power and by forms of “status anxiety” as more socially mobile middle class families become caught up in climbing the ladders of aspiration and opportunity.

Despite the universal support for democracy, even in mature democracies there is a sense of alienation and cynicism as citizens feel excluded from effective participation by self-perpetuating elites that control the major political parties.

Even the core ideal of the freedom of the self is threatened as people experience the increasing social and personal fluidity of modern urban life, with greater “ontological anxiety” and the insecurity of more fleeting and provisional personal relationships.

Finally, the preoccupation with the body beautiful in western culture has become, for many, obsessive, pathological and idolatrous, and yet, despite all this attention and support, the abuse of human bodies becomes a bigger and bigger problem.

How should we respond to this?

The continuing power of a vision of a new humanity “without creed or religion” (think of John

Lennon’s secular hymn, “Imagine”) together with the privatised nature of Christian faith, has meant that many Christians have simply absorbed a humanistic understanding of the human person. Despite having a personal relation with Jesus and the hope of a life with God after death, many Christians think of social and political life in terms of the secular languages of human rights, personal freedoms, democracy and so forth. Other more conservative Christians, mindful of the fragility of these ideals react against them and embrace the language of Christian nationalism and traditional forms of hierarchy and authority.

How should we respond?

First, we need to humbly acknowledge, as John Yoder does, that it has been “Enlightenment humanism” rather than the Christian churches that have done the most to preach the ideals of social egalitarianism, human rights and a fundamental common humanity that transcends ethnic and nationalistic differences. We cannot but acknowledge that those “outside the faith” have in certain respects been clearer practitioners of the social expression of



sharing meals

the gospel than church traditions have been (although this should not be overstated, as we are mindful of the sacrificial ministry of missionaries, Christian philanthropists and campaigners for welfare reform).

However, secondly, we need to recognise that the Enlightenment vision of a new humanity can be critically deconstructed and ultimately lacks, of itself, a clear foundation, and that as Christians we need to recover the alternative vision of a new humanity that is grounded in the social practice of baptism into Christ. As Yoder points out, the ideals of universal human equality can be deconstructed as the rhetoric used by social groups seeking to gain power held by an existing establishment:

The equality of all people as they are created certainly is not self-evident. Most people in the world, including most North Americans, do not really believe it. The founding fathers said, “All men are equal,” but they meant all land-owning white men – excluding all women, black men, Native American men and poor men.⁶

In our present times, the language of a universal humanity can also be deconstructed to facilitate the spread of a globalised consumer culture,

enabling the colonising of the world's cultures by the institutions, practices and ethos of a global capitalism, in which there is no discrimination against those who can pay for the goods and services of the global economy.

What is alarming is that as a culture of enlightenment humanism moves further away from its Christian roots, its lack of any clear ontological basis for the grounding and shaping of moral personhood becomes more clearly evident. This results in a pervasive nihilism, fuelled by the promotion of celebrity, violence and desire by various forms of electronic media. There are forces of reaction, dismissed as "fundamentalisms," but these alternatives, including radical Islam, may be able to sustain some kind of moral life against the acids of late modernity.

Thus it is urgent that western Christian communities repent of our accommodation to the world view and practices of our late modern culture, and recover the alternative narrative and social practices through which the vision of a new humanity in Christ is to be lived out. A Christ centred vision and practice of a "new humanity" is significantly different from that of enlightenment humanism. I shall mention just two fundamental differences:

First, our identity as human beings, with its associated rights and responsibilities is at the deepest level not a natural possession, or a fact of "creation," but a gift that comes to us through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than making our human-ness more provisional or uncertain, it is actually more sure and certain. In his discussion on "Inter-ethnic inclusiveness beyond the church," Yoder comments that what freed Americanism from racism was not:

...a notion of equality through creation, but the good news of redemption. It was strengthened by a sober theological judgement on selfishness and sin, as in the vision of Abraham Lincoln. This vision of a covenant of justice, which the nation had not lived up to, could condemn and call to repentance. Both in the thought of the abolitionists and then in that of Lincoln, it saw equal dignity as a gift of grace, not something with which we are born.⁷



sharing meals

Second, our identity as members of a new humanity it is not a "badge" of membership, but first and foremost an identification of its source. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5: 16 – 17, we now see everyone in relation to Christ. Because of Christ, each person, whether they be Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female has worth and dignity, as one for whom Christ has died. To be a "Christian" is not to acquire another ethnic, national or even religious identity. It is rather to indicate that over and above all such particular identities, who we are is found in relation to the risen and ascended Christ, the lord who is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:11)

In fact, to find our true selves through baptism into Christ does not erase the particular differences that mark us in terms of our ethnicity, our gender, our cultural traditions. As Will Cavanaugh argues in his essay, "The World in a Wafer," to belong to the global people of God does not dissolve our particularities into an abstract humanism, or market oriented cosmopolitanism, but reframes these differences within an order of mutual submission and love.⁸

Living in a way that is faithful to our baptismal calling isn't something that is straightforward – simply a matter of trust and obedience, motivation, love and discipline. It also requires of us wisdom, discernment and insight, and that's something that we should be able to foster in a community of conversation, nourished by the Eucharistic ethos of our lives together.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12: 1-2)

¹ Susan Wood, 'Baptism as a Mark of the Church' in *Marks of the Body of Christ* (eds Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999, 25 – 43 [28].

² John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five practices of*



the Christian community before the watching world, Nashville, Discipleship Resources, 1992, 30.

³ Robert Webber, Phil Kenyon et al, 'A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future' (<http://www.ancientfutureworship.com/index.html>. Accessed Dec 2006)

⁴ Bernd Wannewetsch, 'The Political Worship of the Church: A Critical and Empowering Practice' *Modern Theology* 12,3 (July 1996) 269 -299

⁵ Christoph Schwoebel, 'Human Being as a Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology' in *Persons Divine and Human* (eds) Christoph Schwoebel and Colin Gunton, Edinburgh T&T Clark 1991, 141 - 165

⁶ Yoder, *Body Politics*, p 35.

⁷ Yoder, *Body Politics*, p 35.

⁸ William Cavanaugh, 'The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization' *Modern Theology*, *Modern Theology*, 15, 2 (April 1999). See also John H. Yoder's chapter on 'Revolutionary Subordination and Love' in *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1967.

- **Dr Ian Barns** convenes the Newbigin Network, dedicated to recovering the gospel as public truth. He is a Senior Lecturer in Ethics and Technology Policy at Murdoch University.



AAANZ executive committee members present at the Perth Conference January 2007
(l to r: Margaret, Ed, Doug H., Doug S., Bessie, Gary, Brad)

Dear Friends of AAANZ,

Greetings from the new Executive of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand. Thank you for your interest in the Anabaptist network as a reader of the AAANZ Mailing and On the Road. I'd like to tell you a little about what is happening and ask for your input and support.

Mark and Mary Hurst our staff workers are in the USA during 2007 taking well earned study leave. The profile of the network is being lifted through the tours this year of visiting Anabaptist speakers. There is a strong desire to see the network increase its reach. Membership bestows a sense of ownership that is vital to growth. We invite you to join now.

AAANZ has set goals for 2007 that ask for your personal involvement:

TO GROW I ask you to join and to invite one other person to join as a member. In 2007 we aim to double our membership, which stands at about 70 plus another 300 readers who receive the Mailing.

TO TALK I ask you to tell us what is important to you about the network. This will help enable closer bonds between individuals within the network. We also want to foster in each major city a Regional Reference Group to discern ways of growing the network.

TO EXPLAIN I ask you to tell us what are the important values of Anabaptism to you. We want to create more resources and the web site to simply and clearly allow people to understand contemporary Anabaptism and how to get involved.

TO PARTNER I ask you to suggest other groups that we could work with. We want to connect and work in partnership more with other groups who share with us similar values and convictions.

Please complete and return the Membership Application by July 31. We are not asking for membership fees so everyone can join.

Very importantly we need financial support to continue and grow. When Mark and Mary return we want to set them up with a new home base. We face a budgeted shortfall of over \$12,000 and at this time only six of our members give in a regular way. I am sure others would like to give too but haven't had the opportunity or known how. A Support Pledge Form is available from aaanz office at aaanz@iprimus.com.au. A monthly direct debit from your bank account to the AAANZ account is the most reliable way to ensure a flow of income or consider a one off gift.

Please also tell us how much you can help by giving.

Wishing you God's Peace,
Doug Sewell

The Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc.

The purposes of the Association are:

- To nurture and support the Christian faith of individuals and groups in Australia and New Zealand who identify with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To network and link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith.
- To provide religious services including teaching, training, pastoral care, mediation, and counsel to its members and others interested in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide resources and materials relating to the tradition, perspectives, and teaching of Anabaptists to both the Christian and general public.
- To convene conferences and gatherings which provide opportunity for worship, teaching, training, consultation, celebration, and prayer in the Anabaptist tradition.
- 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.
- 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 grassroots 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

AAANZ

c/o Mark and Mary Hurst

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AAANZ Homepage on the internet

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