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RADICAL REFORMATION, COMMUNITY, AND POST-CHRISTENDOM

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The idea of "post-Christendom" has been found increasingly in Christian thinking and writing in Europe since the latter part of the twentieth century. The view that the missional context in Britain and elsewhere in Europe is a "post-Christendom" one is seen by many as a reality to be acknowledged and, by some, even celebrated. In 1999, Alan Kreider, an influential Mennonite writer who was then Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, Regent's Park College, Oxford, wrote: "The setting for God's mission in the West will be post-Christendom . . . I believe that the experience of the West indicates that a unitary Christian society cannot be built without compulsion. And compulsion, as a result of our Christendom past, is impossible in post-Christendom."[1] Stuart Murray, who worked closely with Kreider, has written important books on church planting "after Christendom."[2] In *Post-Christendom* (2004), Murray expanded on his vision of church and mission freed from Christendom's attempts to impose faith by coercion. He argued that the way the church in Europe from the conversion of Constantine onwards pursued its mission was wrongheaded. In the sixteenth century, he stated, only Anabaptists believed that Europe needed evangelizing. This was an example to follow.[3] In this article, I wish to trace some of the influences on this thinking in Europe since the 1950s in particular, and some of the debates which have arisen.

1. Kreider, *The Change of Conversion*, 99.
2. Murray, *Church Planting*; Murray, *Post-Christendom*; Murray, *Church After Christendom*. He also writes as Stuart Murray Williams.
3. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 220 and 227.

The Radical Reformation

A major factor that has had an influence on post-Christendom thinking has been interest in Anabaptism. The sixteenth-century Anabaptists, as radical reformers, represented a distinctive alternative to Christendom. In 1949, Ernest A. Payne, a leading historian of Free Church life who was to become General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Britain and Ireland and also prominent in the World Council of Churches, published *The Anabaptists of the 16th Century and their Influence in the Modern World*, which indicated an intimate knowledge of earlier and more recent Anabaptist studies, both in German and English.[4] One factor which stimulated Payne to give more attention to the Radical Reformation in this period was the increasing availability of historical material. Payne took a keen interest in work being done by Fritz Blanke, Professor of Church History at the University of Zürich, who for years was European Protestantism's most sympathetic historian of Anabaptism.[5] Payne was also appreciative of a fellow-Baptist, Gunnar Westin, Professor of Church History at Uppsala University, Sweden. In 1954, Westin produced a substantial book on Free Church history, published first in Swedish, with a German translation in 1956 and an English one in 1958. A remarkable one-third of the 360 pages in the English edition dealt with the sixteenth-century Anabaptists and their successors, such as the Mennonites.[6] Westin's volume was reviewed in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* by Cornelius J. Dyck, who applauded the excellent handling of Anabaptist material, adding the somewhat bizarre statement that this was particularly significant in view of the writer's "relative isolation from the 'Anabaptist round table' in America."[7] The response could be that a European scholar might well have insights into European history that would not be apparent across the Atlantic.

4. Payne, *The Anabaptists*. For his Free Church historical writing, see Payne, *The Free Church Tradition*.
5. See Blanke, *Brüder in Christo*, published in 1961 as *Brothers in Christ*.
6. Westin, *The Free Church through the Ages*.
7. Dyck, "The Free Church through the Ages," 178–79.

Ernest Payne continued through the 1950s to encourage interest in Anabaptism. He offered an enthusiastic foreword to a book by Irwin Barnes, a British Baptist minister who became active in the ecumenical Conference of European Churches. Payne hoped the book would help to make the "thrilling story of Baptist witness on the Continent" more widely known. Significantly, Barnes's title, *Truth is Immortal*, was a translation of the Anabaptist leader and theologian Balthasar Hubmaier's motto, and although Barnes concentrated on Baptist life across mainland Europe from the nineteenth century, Payne pointedly spoke of Baptist witness "since the days of Hubmaier and the Swiss brethren."[8] In all of this, Payne's deepest concern was, as he put it, to seek "the recovery of something of [the Anabaptist] spirit."[9] It was Payne's informed consideration of Anabaptism which led to his being the only British contributor to a *Festschrift* for the Mennonite scholar, Harold Bender, in 1957, entitled *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*. In his essay "The Anabaptist Impact on Western Christendom," Payne's concern for authentic corporate Christian experience and witness was evident. He argued for the crucial importance of the Anabaptist witness in such areas as believers' baptism, evangelism, and religious freedom, ideas which, for him, marked a missionary church.[10]

Along with the scholarly investigation of Anabaptist and Baptist history and identity, meetings were taking place in the 1960s which drew together those from different denominations who practiced the baptism of believers only. Annual meetings of representatives of such churches were held at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschlikon, Switzerland. Normally representatives of seven denominations gathered, including Baptists, Mennonites, Free Churches, and Pentecostals. Payne took a particular interest in contacts between Mennonites and Baptists.[11] A parallel development was the way in which the movements of evangelical and charismatic renewal in Europe in the 1970s stimulated interest in the Anabaptists. Sources of radical thinking were being widely explored. The Mennonite Centre in London, which had been founded in 1953, became increasingly influential through the

8. Payne, "Foreword," 7.
9. Payne, *The Anabaptists*, 21.
10. Payne, "The Anabaptist Impact," 312.
11. Payne, "Contacts," 39.

work of Alan and Eleanor Kreider. A study group, convened by Alan Kreider and Nigel Wright, who was to become a lecturer at Spurgeon's College and later Principal, began to meet at the London Mennonite Centre. Contacts were also established with the Bruderhof ("place of brothers") community in Robertsbridge, East Sussex.[12]

Other developments across Europe in the 1970s contributed to the Radical Reformation dimension being studied and brought to the fore. A major conference of historians and theologians was held at Rüschlikon in 1975, and Anabaptist thinking was part of the agenda for the group of seventy people at this event.[13] There was also a joint commemorative service, marking 450 years since the Anabaptist movement began, in the chapel of the Grossmünster Church, Zürich. About 150 people affirming a common Anabaptist heritage attended. Those who led the service included the Grossmünster Church's Pastor, Hans von Grebel, a thirteenth-generation descendant of one of the first Anabaptists, Conrad Grebel; President Samuel Gerber of the European Mennonite Bible School at Liestal, Switzerland; Claus Meister, President of the Baptist Union of Switzerland; and Harry Maansus, Rector of the Swedish Baptist Seminary.[14] Three years later, the martyrdom of Balthasar and Elsbeth Hubmaier in 1528 in Vienna was remembered by groups across Europe. The European Baptist Federation Council, for example, meeting in Vienna in 1978, recalled "the prophetic witness" that had taken place in Vienna 450 years before. There was a desire to echo and live by Hubmaier's words, "the Truth which cannot die."[15] The challenge of an alternative to Christendom was central.

A Neo-Monastic Community Witness

A challenge from a communal perspective came from the Bruderhof community, which traces its origins to the work of Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935) and his wife Emmy (1884–1980),

12. For the history, see Kreider, "From Mennonite to Anabaptist."
13. Bowers, "Centenary History," 400.
14. European Baptist Press Report 1975.
15. European Baptist Press Report 1978. For more, see Randall, "Baptist-Anabaptist identity," 133–51.

together with Emmy's sister Else von Hollander, in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century. The core group which formed the first community (the name Bruderhof came later) in 1920, in Sannerz, a village in the state of Hesse (northeast of Frankfurt), was shaped by a radical vision of Christian communal life. As Eberhard Arnold put it, and Markus Baum in his biography of Arnold notes, the group drew together "reborn people who have accepted the life of the Sermon on the Mount." They were to be those who "radiate the spirit of Christ—people who witness for Christ with their entire being," and, crucially, "who give up everything to live simply and solely for love and for productive work." The group wanted to testify "that we are a church of Christ, a Lord's Supper fellowship."[16] There was a clear stress both on inner life and witness. Over a century later, the Bruderhof consists of over 3,000 people—families and single people—living in twenty-nine intentional communities of differing sizes on five continents. In 2012, the Bruderhof produced a document, *Foundations of Our Faith and Calling*, which has this statement: "To live for the kingdom of God leads to church community. God wants to gather a people on earth who belong to his new creation. He calls them out to form a new society that makes his justice and peace tangible." Thus, in the Bruderhof community, "private property falls away, and they are united in a bond of solidarity and equality." The communal church vision was traced back to Acts 2:38–39.[17]

It was in 1901 that Eberhard Arnold, having had an experience of evangelical conversion two years earlier, began to take an interest in movements of renewal and change in church history, especially the sixteenth—century Reformation.[18] The movement that most attracted Arnold was Anabaptism, although at that stage he did not plan to embrace Anabaptist practice. What he saw increasingly was that to follow in the footsteps of the Radicals of the Reformation was to take an alternative path to the Christendom model. He was disqualified in 1908 from sitting his doctoral examinations in theology because he had made known he was

16. Baum, *Against the Wind*, 126.
17. Bruderhof, *Foundations*, 5.
18. For the spirituality of the Bruderhof, see Randall, *Church Community*.

leaving the state Lutheran Church and was going to be baptized as a believer. In 1910, lectures Arnold gave in Halle, Germany, on "The Bankruptcy of Established Religions," attracted large audiences. Most of his work at this stage was speaking to students, especially through the Student Christian Movement, the *Deutsche Christliche Studenten Vereinigung*. He described in his 1910 addresses "official churchdom" as an organization that tried to include the biggest possible "body-count." Having rejected infant baptism, he condemned the way children were born into an ecclesial system that was "contrary to the will of Christ." He saw the "official church" as being in a "deplorable state," and even at its best it was a "false" ideal.[19]

In 1913, after further demanding meetings in Halle, Eberhard Arnold became seriously ill with tuberculosis and for the sake of his health he and Emmy and their children moved to the Tyrol. In this area, where Anabaptist communities had been present in the early sixteenth century, the Arnolds became fascinated by Anabaptist figures such as Hans Denck, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Jakob Hutter.[20] Many Anabaptists, including the Mennonites, encouraged mutual aid, but it was the Hutterites (called after Hutter) who implemented community of goods.[21] The early Hutterites had been rediscovered in Europe at the end of the nineteenth cen-tury through the works of Joseph von Beck, Johann Loserth, and Rudolf Wolkan, and it was ongoing and deepening interest in such examples of communal life that led to the establishment of what was initially a small community in Sannerz. Arnold spoke of the historical spiritual significance of this area of Germany, with the presence of the Cistercians in the thirteenth century, those practicing believer's baptism, and the Moravian community of Count Zinzendorf. The group that was formed in Sannerz affirmed evangelical spirituality, but also offered a definite ecclesial vision and future hope. Eberhard Arnold wrote to his sister, Hannah, in March 1925, stating that in line with evangelical conversionism he considered it was "impossible to emphasize the forgiveness of sins too strongly," while he also argued strongly that:

19. Arnold, "The Bankruptcy of Established Religions."

20. Arnold, *A Joyful Pilgrimage*, 17–18.

21. For the early Hutterites see, for example, Hutterian Brethren, *The Chronicle*; Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*.

> The coming kingdom is the determining element in the Bible. It is this kingdom of the future that must overwhelm and completely fill us. The Holy Spirit wants to come over us and fill us in order to lead us into the future kingdom; the Spirit is to bring to life for us Jesus' words about the world of the future; the Spirit is to lead us toward this, so that we become a living example, a parable, a visible testimony of the coming kingdom.[22]

In Eberhard Arnold's mind, the Bruderhof, as a neo-monastic com-munity (although that phrase was not used then), was one such "visible testimony."

Foundations of our Faith and Calling explains how in Germany "the community's ranks swelled with young people from all over Europe, eventually numbering 150."[23] After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, however, the community became a target of Nazi oppression. In 1937, the secret police dissolved the community at gunpoint. Members eventually came together and formed a community in England, which by 1940 numbered over 300 through the addition of many new British members. There was an increasing awareness of the community through its publications, notably the journal the *Plough*. But with the Second World War there was the threat that German nationals would be interned. Almost all in the community emigrated to Paraguay. This was a time of great hardship and difficulty. By the 1950s, however, a new phase in the life of the Bruderhof began.[24] In 1953, the same year as the Mennonite Centre was opened in London, the *Plough* was published again—after a lapse of twelve years—and the editors expressed the hope that the Bruderhof would be brought "into closer contact with seeking people in different parts of the world." This was not "propaganda for the Bruderhof." Rather, the desire was that the periodical would call all seekers "to the way of brotherhood that leads towards the coming order of God's kingdom."[25] An alternative way of being the church was in view.

22. Arnold, "To Hannah Arnold."
23. Bruderhof, *Foundations*, 22.
24. Bruderhof, *Foundations*, 22–23. For the Nazi period see Barth, *An Embassy Besieged*. For the period from 1933 to 1942 see Randall, *A Christian Peace Experiment*.
25. "Editorial," 1–2.

During the 1950s, in the period when there was a renewed interest in Anabaptism, the *Plough* engaged with the still-common ideas at that time of Europe as a Christian society. An article in 1955 contrasted the New Testament vision of a "holy community" with the way Christianity "became the official religion of Western civilization" and the church "ceased to understand it is called to enter into the sufferings of Christ's cross." Consequently "the power of God was taken from it." This article looked at the main churches of the sixteenth-century Reformation and was dismayed by their embrace of "earthly policy and power to uphold and carry on their Reformation."[26] In the following year, Llewelyn Harries, a Bruderhof member, wrote in the *Plough* that Christ's kingdom was "entirely different" from the way power was exercised in the world. Sources from the third and fourth centuries were cited to show that at that time taking the sword and being a Christian believer were incompatible. The "great world churches" were seen as having been unfaithful to this heritage.[27] A trenchant and prophetic article appeared in 1959 in which Christendom in Europe was described as having "lost her ability to believe" and the prediction was made that the churches of Europe "will need the gospel to be brought to Europe by Chinese, Indian or African missionaries."[28] The hope was for "new shoots" to spring up, while no hope was placed in "the Christian civilization." Gladys Mason, another Bruderhof member, took up a similar theme in 1960, contrasting Jesus's way of "peace, harmony and brotherhood" with privilege and self-seeking, which she linked with national and religious power. Her call was "to stake all, united in brotherhood," to realize "God's future for all mankind."[29]

Radical Spirituality and Mission

The publication in 1986 of Nigel Wright's significant book, *The Radical Kingdom*, introduced Anabaptist ideas about the church

26. Benson, "The Greatness of Our Cause," 2.
27. Harries, "Christian Pacifism," 66.
28. Viway, "The Love of Many," 7.
29. Mason, "Is There an Alternative?" 3.

and society to a wider evangelical/charismatic constituency, within which he was a significant voice. This was also a period when Lesslie Newbigin's thinking was spreading in Britain. In 1989, in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, he argued that Christendom could not be recovered, but nor could the days of the early Church. He wrote: "We are in a radically new situation and cannot dream either of a Constantinian authority or of a pre-Constantinian innocence."[30] In 1992, a new journal, *Anabaptism Today*, was launched, with Stuart Murray as editor. The newly-formed Anabaptist Network was behind the publication.[31] In the first issue of *Anabaptism Today*, Nigel Wright commended the Anabaptist movement as an example of a "dissenting minority which nonetheless has immense transformative potential."[32] In an issue in 1995, Murray wrote about Anabaptism as "a charismatic movement," and "Spirit, Discipleship, Community" were themes in this PhD thesis and subsequent book, published in 2000.[33] In the same year, in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Murray wrote about the "charismatic dimension" in the Radical Reformation seeming to have received "inadequate attention from Mennonite historians." His research showed him that the expectation of the Holy Spirit's empowering and intervention was apparent in Anabaptist documents, and "reports of Anabaptist gatherings suggest that charismatic phenomena were present at the heart of the movement as well as on its periphery." As he noted, a surprising number of

30. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 224. Newbigin, a Presbyterian, had been a Bishop in the Church of South India. He returned to Britain in 1974.

31. The Anabaptist network attracted many hundreds of people, with a wide range of denominational backgrounds: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Mennonite, Quaker, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, United Reformed, Pentecostal, Independent and House Church. See the contributors to Kreider and Murray, eds., *Coming Home*.

32. Wright, "Catching the Bell Rope," 19.

33. Murray, "Anabaptism as a Charismatic Movement," 7–11. His thesis, originally entitled "Spirit, Discipleship, Community: The Contemporary Significance of Anabaptist Hermeneutics," was revised and published as *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*.

British Christians involved in the Anabaptist Network came from charismatic churches.[34]

The Bruderhof community was concerned about unhealthy aspects of the charismatic movement, although remarkable phenomena were present in its early history.[35] The stance taken by the Bruderhof in the 1980s included warnings about making speaking in tongues a major teaching, and at the same time, a recognition that Eberhard Arnold had exercised a "prophetic" ministry. Extended coverage was given to this area by John Farina, associate editor for the Paulist Press, Archivist and Historian for the Paulist Fathers, and editor of the acclaimed *Classics of Western Spirituality*. Farina spoke of the response of the Bruderhof community to Hitler's "mass persecution, militarism, rabid nationalism and hate mongering." The "established Christian churches" had largely responded "with silence at best and outright complicity at worst." Arnold, the article maintained, "uttered an outright 'no' to all this"; he chose a "prophetic alternative," drawn from the "radical Anabaptist approach to the church-state question."[36] Farina, as a Roman Catholic, was pleased that Arnold, in his seminal book, *Inner Land*, drew from rich spiritual sources, especially the mystic, Meister Eckhart. *Inner Land* warned against "a passive contemplative life," but Farina noted that many great contemplatives of the Middle Ages, like Eckhart, were anything but inactive. For Farina, Arnold's neglect of that reality was due to a sense of spiritual urgency, rather than "the all too common evangelical prejudice against Catholics." It is also the case that Karl Barth and others did issue a condemnation of the evils of the Nazi regime, but Eberhard Arnold was wary of any "Reformed doctrine" that minimized the will as "a force for good."[37]

One of Eberhard and Emmy Arnold's sons, Heinrich, became the leading pastor in the Bruderhof community and guided it, until

34. Murray, "Anabaptism as a Conversation Partner," 559.
35. Randall, "The Communion of Saints," 59.
36. Farina, "Twentieth Century Apocalyptic," 19.
37. Farina, "Twentieth Century Apocalyptic," 20–21. *Inner Land* was Eberhard Arnold's most substantial book, the writing of which absorbed his energies on and off from 1913 to 1935. The first edition was published in 1914 as *Der Krieg: ein Aufruf zur Innerlichkeit*.

his death in 1982, through some major challenges.[38] In 1994, a range of his writings was brought together in a book, *Discipleship*. The main sections were on the disciple, the church, and the kingdom of God. The introduction noted that although Heinrich Arnold was called on in his ministry to address every aspect of spiritual life, personal and communal, the "visible thread" running through everything was "Christ and his cross."[39] The foreword to the book was written by the Dutch Catholic writer, Henri Nouwen, who linked what Heinrich Arnold wrote with community: "Every word he speaks comes from his experience in community, where discipleship is lived. It is in community that we are tested and purified. It is in community that we learn what forgiveness and healing are all about." Nouwen knew the Bruderhof and he could comment with confidence that Heinrich Arnold "lived community all of his life. He knew its demands and its rewards. Most of all, he knew that it is in community that we encounter the Christ of the Gospel." For Nouwen, *Discipleship* was "a prophetic book in a time in which few people dare to speak unpopular but truly healing words."[40] The major German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, wrote that he had not experienced a book like this except when reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with whom the Bruderhof interacted, and Christoph Blumhardt, who was an influence on the community.[41]

In the 1990s, Nigel Wright was engaging in his PhD with the thought of Moltmann and John Howard Yoder, and his thesis was later published as *Disavowing Constantine*.[42] In 1995, Wright wrote in *Anabaptism Today* on the radical tradition as being "respectful" to the state, but also "subversive." He argued that churches could be a major source of "inspiration, values and innovation" for society, drawing upon divine resources to "incarnate something new in the world."[43] At this stage, an Anabaptist Theologi-

38. For his life, see Mommsen, *Homage to a Broken Man*.
39. Ehrlich and Zimmerman, "Introduction," xv.
40. Nouwen, "Foreword," x.
41. Moltmann, "Review of Discipleship."
42. Wright, *Disavowing Constantine*.
43. Wright, "Respectful and Subversive," 19.

cal Study Circle began, which grew out of the Anabaptist Network. Those involved participated in a number of discussions in the period 1996 to 1999. The co-chairs were Keith G. Jones, who moved from being Deputy General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain to become Rector of the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS), Prague, and Alan Kreider. In February 1997, Nigel Wright discussed at a meeting of the Study Circle the questions that arose from the work of James W. McClendon, Jr., then scholar-in-residence at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA. The Study Circle was instrumental in arranging for McClendon to visit Britain a year later. He spoke to the Circle, at English Baptist Colleges and at the London Mennonite Centre. His talks were a particular stimulus to those thinking about the way forward for radical Baptist communities. It is significant that among his many publications, McClendon wrote an essay in 1991 entitled, "Balthasar Hubmaier, Catholic Anabaptist."[44] The spiritual vision was an expansive one.

From 1992 to 1997—in parallel with the specifically Anabaptist Study Circle—a study project entitled the "Missiology of Western Culture Project" drew together leading scholars to discuss the interplay of the Christian churches with the culture of the contemporary West. A colloquium was held in Paris in April 1997. Alan Kreider and others in a History section brought to the wider Project group of twenty-two scholars (from eight countries) a Radical Reformation bias which saw Christendom in a strongly negative light: from this radical perspective it was suggested that "the coercion, control and domination that were part of the Christendom model of church and mission carry within themselves the seeds of the modern repudiation of Christianity in Europe." The participants as a whole, however, considered that the complex and ambiguous issues involved defied simplistic analysis.[45] One of those writing in this period in defense of Christendom was Oliver O'Donovan, an Anglican who was Regius Professor of Moral and

44. McClendon, "Balthasar Hubmaier," 20.

45. McLeod, "Introduction," 1–27; Ustrof, "A Missiological postscript," 218; see Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom* for the papers of this conference.

Pastoral Theology, University of Oxford. In his *The Desire of the Nations* (1996), he argued for locating the Christendom ideal as "an aspect of the church's understanding of mission." He continued: "It was the missionary imperative that compelled the church to take the conversion of the [Roman] empire seriously and to seize the opportunities it offered." These were not merely opportunities for "power"; they were, as O'Donovan saw it, opportunities for preaching the gospel, baptizing believers, curbing the violence and cruelty of the empire, and forgiving former persecutors.[46]

Promoting Post-Christendom

The publication in 2004—and re-publication in 2011—of Stuart Murray's *Post Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* was to usher in a whole series of books, the "After Christendom" series, published by Paternoster or Wipf and Stock. Some have also been released by Herald Press. The Anabaptist Mennonite Network (AMN), which replaced the previous Anabaptist Network and was behind the publishing venture, was convinced that in the twenty-first century Christendom was unravelling. Post-Christendom was described as "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence."[47] Not everyone involved in the retrieval of the Radical Reformation was convinced with the "After Christendom" agenda. Nigel Wright suggested in 2003 that the discussion of mission and Christendom had "moved on." He continued: "The persuasion that Christendom was a bad idea is now commonplace but in being rejected the issues surrounding 'Christendom' are often oversimplified and unclear." Wright posited the possibility of "re-inventing Christendom," pointing out that if the loss of Christendom meant public policy was determined by a secularist worldview, he found it hard to rejoice in that. In a key passage he wrote: "Are we to abandon the powers to idolatry? Sometimes I gain

46. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 212.
47. Murray, "After Christendom Series."

from Anabaptist friends the impression that they are so keen to be free from Christendom that a godless state is exactly what they would prefer. By contrast, I want to contend that the vision of a non-sectarian state can actually be a Christian vision for the state."[48]

There was also new thinking about Christendom in a global context in this period. Philip Jenkins wrote *The Next Christendom* (2002), in which he outlined the remarkable expansion of Christianity in the Global South.[49] This was not a phenomenon that replicated the history of Europe, but its relevance to Europe was indicated by the missiologist Andrew Walls, who proposed in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (2002), following the lead given by Leslie Newbigin, that Western churches were in need of missionary assistance from the non-Western world.[50] Undaunted by Wright's critique and paying limited attention to global issues, the *Anabaptist Network Newsletter* in February 2004 spoke about seven significant (and inter-related) ecclesiaological shifts or transitions taking place in the West. These were repeated in subsequent literature: (1) From the center to margins: in Christendom the Christian story and the churches were central; in post-Christendom these are marginal; (2) From majority to minority: in Christendom Christians comprised the (often overwhelming) majority; in post-Christendom a minority; (3) From settlers to sojourners: in Christendom Christians felt at home in a culture shaped by their story; in post-Christendom—aliens, exiles, and pilgrims; (4) From privilege to plurality: in Christendom Christians enjoyed many privileges; in post-Christendom they are one community among many in a plural society; (5) From control to witness: in Christendom churches could exert control over society; in post-Christendom influence is only through witnessing; (6) From maintenance to mission: in Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo; in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment; (7) From institution to movement: in Christendom churches operated main-

48. Wright, "Re-inventing Christendom," 7.
49. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.
50. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, Chapter 3.

ly in institutional mode; in post-Christendom as a Christian movement.[51]

Following Stuart Murray's work, which set the direction for the "After Christendom" series, there was the publication of *Faith and Politics After Christendom* by Jonathan Bartley (2006). The description by the AMN made the rather sweeping statement that for the best part of 1700 years, "the institutional church has enjoyed a hand-in-hand relationship with government."[52] There was little recognition of the role of the Dissenting tradition. Bartley was the founder and co-director of Ekklesia, a think tank on religion in public life. He was to become the co-leader of the Green Party in Britain. The next book in the series was *Youth Work after Christendom* (2008), by Nigel Pimlott and Jo Pimlott, who were experienced youth workers. This was followed by *Worship and Mission after Christendom* by Alan and Eleanor Kreider (2009). At this point, an article by Murray on the terms "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian" appeared in the *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* and as part of that he made known more widely what was being attempted in the series of books. He spoke of the "nearly five centuries" during which "the often maligned Anabaptist tradition has questioned the legitimacy of the Christendom system and advocated alternative ways in which Christians can engage with their societies." The books being produced were designed to address the "challenges European Christians face now that Christendom (however this system is evaluated) appears to be in terminal decline."[53]

Murray noted that among those who might not fully embrace the post-Christendom analysis there was nevertheless a recognition that an emerging culture would require fresh ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. He referenced, for example, the work of Bob Jackson, who wrote primarily for the Church of England.[54] More attention was paid by Murray to what he called an "insightful and provocative contribution to this debate" in Nigel Wright's

51. Murray, "After Christendom Series."
52. Anabaptist Mennonite Network, "Review of Faith and Politics," 4.
53. Murray, "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian," 195–208.
54. Jackson, *Hope for the Church*.

book *Free Church, Free State* (2005). Wright offered recommendations for how the Church (especially in the "free church" tradition) might engage with the state. For Wright, Christendom was "often used in an undifferentiated way which overlooks the complexity of the phenomenon." Wright identified three approaches: "theocracy" or "Caesaro-papism," in which any significant distinction between Church and state disappears; "Constantinian Christendom," associated with the close relationship in the West between the emperor, or national rulers, and established Churches; and "non-Constantinian Christendom." With this third option, as Murray notes, Wright argued that "the free church tradition has laid the foundation for this approach in its advocacy of freedom of conscience and religious liberty."[55] Earlier historians, such as Ernest Payne, explored both the Free Church tradition and Anabaptism, including in relation to mission, but that wider awareness was less common among those writing more recently on post-Christendom.[56]

The "After Christendom" series continued, with *Reading the Bible* (2011), by Lloyd Pietersen, an Honorary Research Fellow of Bristol Baptist College. This book offered an historical overview of biblical interpretation; an examination of the Bible book by book, pointing out what can be seen when reading from the margins; and suggestions for enabling readers to explore the contents of scripture communally. In the same year, an incisive article by Stefan Paas from the Vrije Universiteit (VU), Amsterdam, appeared in *Mission Studies*. To an extent, this was a reply to Murray's 2009 article that considered terms such as "post-Christendom." Paas noted that this term label was "often employed with a positive spin in missiological discourse," the argument being that the death of Christendom "allows the church to operate in its own social space as the radical counter movement it was meant to be in the first place." Paas accepted that post-Christendom discourse "is an important perspective on mission in Europe today, even if it applies less for large areas of Europe, especially

55. Wright, *Free Church*, 272–74.

56. For a discussion of the background, Randall, "Mission in Post-Christendom," 227–40.

in the South and the East." However, he argued that when the term is used to cover the whole story of religious change in Europe it loses much of its explanatory power. For Paas, Murray's seven "transitions," although part of a valuable contribution by Murray, intermingle "descriptive and prescriptive features" to such an extent "that it can hardly be established what is fact and what is programmatic."[57]

Counter-Cultural Churches?

The *Plough* was published in a limited way in the early years of the twenty-first century, but it was re-launched in 2014 in a striking new format, featuring articles by writers from a range of Christian traditions, and containing superb artwork. As an example of the intentional breadth, an accompanying blog in 2014 quoted Pope Francis, in his first apostolic exhortation: "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus," and his invitation to "all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ."[58] In the same period, Andrew Francis, a United Reformed Church (URC) minister and author of the "After Christendom" book *Hospitality and Community* (2012) reflected on "Food in the contemporary UK Anabaptist movement," and gave attention to the Bruderhof. He traced the story of the sixteenth-century Hutterites, with their commitment to communal life, and highlighted in the Hutterite-inspired Bruderhof communities the daily sharing of meals as a distinctive feature. He described the experience of Bruderhof hospitality, which together with the "upgrading of the style of their international *Plough* publication books"—now an impressive publishing list—had resulted in non-Anabaptists asking to experience residential visits with the Bruderhof communities. More broadly, Andrew Francis considered that food and the generous

57. Paas, "Post-Christian," 3–25. Paas is Professor of Missiology, Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, and Theologische Universiteit Kampen, the Netherlands.

58. Domer, "Have It All?"

sharing of it had been central to the development of Anabaptist witness, theology, and influence.[59]

The second decade of the century saw important academic developments. The International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTSC) was established in Amsterdam, having previously been in Prague (as a Seminary, IBTS). Over the course of fifteen years, Keith Jones as Rector of the Seminary, had expanded its role as a highly significant center for Baptist and Anabaptist studies and research. In the year he became Rector, Jones wrote *A Believing Church* (1998), which drew from Anabaptist and Baptist history.[60] There was shared teaching in the Baptist and Anabaptist areas between IBTS and Spurgeon's College, London, where a Master's degree in Baptist and Anabaptist Studies had been introduced by Stuart Murray and myself. A journal entitled *The Journal of European Baptist Studies* was part of the new enterprises at IBTS. The Amsterdam move meant a relationship with the VU. IBTSC had a stream of PhD students (something begun in Prague), and a library of 40,000 books as a resource, alongside the vast holdings of the VU. IBTSC has as Rector, Mike Pears, and as Dean of Research, Toivo Pilli, from Estonia, both of whom are deeply committed to the Radical tradition. A new Centre for Anabaptist Studies also opened at the Bristol Baptist College, with a focused library, from the former London Mennonite Centre, and with special lectures, MA modules and research.

Over the years 2015 to 2018, a remarkable five titles in the "After Christendom" series were published: *Atheism After Christendom* (2015) by Simon Perry, Chaplain at Robinson College, Cambridge; *Women and Men* (2015) by Fran Porter, a researcher, writer and teacher; *God After Christendom?* (2015) by Brian Haymes, formerly Principal of Northern Baptist College and then Bristol Baptist College, and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, Director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre; *Missional Discipleship* (2018) by Dan Yarnell, National Coordinator for the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Britain and Ireland, and Andrew Hardy, academic program director at ForMission College; and

59. Francis, "Food," 11–32.
60. Jones, *A Believing Church*.

Theology After Christendom (2018), by Joshua Searle, Tutor in Theology and Public Thought at Spurgeon's College, and later Director of Postgraduate Studies. He had strong connections across Europe, especially with Ukraine, and spoke in 2022 at two Anabaptist-themed conferences, in Amsterdam and Berlin, commending the contemporary Anabaptist movement as not restricted to a particular denomination. By that time, three more "After Christendom" volumes had been published, all in 2021: *Interpreting the Old Testament*, by Jeremy Thomson, who was Principal Lecturer in Theology and Vice Principal of Oasis College of Higher Education, London; *Sacraments After Christendom*, by Andrew Francis and Janet Sutton-Webb, also a URC minister and an evangelism coach; and *Singleness and Marriage*, by Lina Toth Androviene, Assistant Principal and Lecturer in Practical Theology, the Scottish Baptist College, and a former student and lecturer at IBTS, Prague.

The Autumn 2017 issue of the *Plough* was devoted to the theme of "Re-Formation" and the editor, Peter Mommsen, addressed the theme of "The Church we need now: Why the Anabaptist vision matters." This was in the context of the celebrations across Europe of 500 years since the challenge by Martin Luther in Wittenberg to the authority of the Pope. Mommsen described Christendom as being "in its death throes" and urged a new way of being the church. He recalled the way Karl Barth saw the church as always needing to be reformed. Luther took up the humanist battle cry of *ad fontes*—back to the sources—but in the Anabaptist communities, Mommsen argued, the spirit of early Christianity came alive because they were more thorough in seeking the sources and also went back—*ad fontem*—to the Source.[61] This article was followed up in January 2018 by Bernard Hibbs, a member of the Bruderhof community in Darvell, Sussex, who wrote about "Changing the Church in a Changing world." For all those who follow Jesus, he wrote, there was the challenge of responding to the people in the West who "appear to be dissatisfied with their current lifestyles, and want something better than our culture's cult of individualism." This presented great opportun-

61. Mommsen, "The Church we need now," 3–6.

ities but responding would not be easy or popular. Hibbs wrote: "We'll need to stop hankering after Christendom and start living our faith like the first Christians: on the margins of society." He commended Alan Kreider's *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* (2016), which had shown how seriously the first Christians took discipleship. For Hibbs, a Christian community rediscovering discipleship calls sin what it is, shows people where forgiveness is to be found, shares possessions in accordance with the commands of Jesus, and engages in radical mission.[62]

The post-Christendom discourse in relation to ecclesiology and mission, prompted an analysis by Stefan Paas of what he termed the "counter-cultural" model of the church. In this view the church's crucial mission was "to form a holy people, a congregation that truthfully represents what the gospel is about in the face of an unbelieving world." Paas offered a missiological evaluation of this model, "with an emphasis on its neo-Anabaptist contributors." He argued that the counter-cultural approach to the church offered important perspectives on Christianity's minority mission in the contemporary West, but that this required "a very strong, intense community," in which there was little diversity and in which members were willing to submit to the authority of church leaders or the congregational meeting. By way of critical evaluation, Paas suggested that research indicated communities "that excel in strong internal bonding and idealistic missional rhetoric may not be all that successful at establishing meaningful relationships with people outside the church." His proposal was that "Anabaptistically inspired churches" should not present themselves as a "counter-culture" but as an "intensive" culture. In a summary that fitted well with the Bruderhof vision, he encouraged such churches not to "play the sectarian card, but the monastic card," and in mission to find stepping stones that would help those outside to find "ways of belonging without yet really believing or behaving."[63] The experience of the Bruderhof in recent years is

62. Hibbs, "Changing the Church in a Changing world."

63. Paas, "The Counter-Cultural Church," 283–301. Paas is prone to generalization about the contemporary neo-Anabaptist movement. For a longer view

that many visitors come because they are drawn to the way of living as something that seems good or right, without any initial understanding of the Christian life.[64]

Conclusion

Since the 1950s, there has been a significant increase in the interest in the Anabaptist movement, and in Europe this interest goes across denominational boundaries. In the development of the Bruderhof there is what can be termed a neo-monastic expression of Anabaptism, and more broadly, to follow Paas, there is wide recognition of "neo-Anabaptist" thinking, especially in relation to mission and the emergence of "Anabaptistically inspired churches." Stuart Murray, whose thinking and initiatives have been particularly influential, has made important links between Anabaptism and the challenge of post-Christendom for church life and mission. It is important, however, to note the critique of those such as Wright and Paas. The rejection of any Christian vision for society can mean that society is left to its militant secularism. Also, it is possible to create Christian communities that have a strong internal life but fail to create bridges for mission. Arguably, and ironically, Anabaptist mission in the sixteenth century gained benefit from precisely the Christendom context that many of the neo-Anabaptist proponents have found so unpalatable. The society in which Anabaptists witnessed was one that affirmed the Christian story and there was, in consequence, the possibility of discourse about how to express Christian faith. Discourse which assumes Christian knowledge is, by contrast, generally not possible in many parts of contemporary Europe. However, this has been recognized by a number of the writers of the "after Christendom" books and the signs are that a call to inner spirituality in communities is being combined with a call to vibrant witness.

of the Bruderhof as an Anabaptist community, see Stober, ed., *Another Life Is Possible*. Foreword by Rowan Williams.

64. I am indebted to Ian Barth for this reflection.

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