

[A paper given at “Christian Mission in the Public Square”, a conference of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) and the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre of Charles Sturt University, held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) in Canberra from 2 to 5 October 2008.]

Anabaptism: The Beginning of a New Monasticism

by **Mark S. Hurst**

Introduction

Wolfgang Capito, a Reformer in Strasbourg, wrote a letter to the Burgermeister and Council at Horb in May 1527 warning about the Anabaptist leader Michael Sattler. He was worried that Sattler was bringing about “the beginning of a new monasticism.” (Yoder, 87)

Both Anabaptism and “new monasticism” are being explored today as relevant expressions of the Christian faith in our post-Christendom environment. The connections between these two movements will be examined in a conference sponsored by the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand in January 2009 as they were in a recent conference in Great Britain called “New Habits for a New Era? Exploring New Monasticism,” co-sponsored by the British Anabaptist Network and the Northumbria Community.

(See <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/19> for papers from the conference.) The British gathering raised a number of questions for these movements:

“We hear many stories of ‘emerging churches’ and ‘fresh expressions of church’, but Christians in many places are also rediscovering older forms of spirituality and discipleship. Some are drawing on the monastic traditions to find resources for a post-Christendom culture. ‘New monasticism’ is the term many are using to describe these attempts to re-work old rhythms, rules of life and liturgical resources in a new era. Is this a hopeful sign? Or is this ‘monastic-lite’, a fad that is unlikely to last? What does ‘new monasticism’ mean and what does it offer the church?”

New Monasticism

New monastic writers start with an exploration of our 21st century Western setting: *“Today... faithfulness to the gospel is in danger. As our culture’s project desperately works to maintain control despite its looming death, the ‘living arrangement’ worked out by the church and the culture is collapsing. Many parts of the church are sinking with the culture and doing so without any resistance. The call for a new monasticism is the work of God’s Spirit calling us to renewed understanding of the gospel and faithful witness to it through new forms of monastic community.”* (Rutba House, 9)

Alasdair MacIntyre’s conclusion in *After Virtue* is quoted often by these writers: *“What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the dark ages which are already upon us...This time, however, the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been among us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for Godot, but for another-doubtless very different-St. Benedict.”* (Rutba House, 2)

This idea *“that our increasingly fragmented and barbarous Western Civilization can only be saved by a new Benedict...is the somewhat grandiose idea behind the call for a new monasticism that can produce disciplined communities sustaining the virtues of civilized life...The new monasticism...will have little of value to offer the world if it tries to meet the needs of the world as defined by the world. What the world needs is Jesus, and a people who allow their lives to be radically reshaped in communities demonstrating love and non-violence of the One who sent Jesus.”* (Rutba House, 95)

These new intentional communities are appearing in all the major western Christian traditions—Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal-Charismatic—and although they vary in purpose, outlook, and theology, they share a common centre: a commitment to follow

Christ without compromise. Most of these communities are small, and when viewed individually appear to be insignificant and ineffective. But when they are viewed as part of a global movement it becomes apparent that an equivalent to the Benedictine monastic movement of the first millennium is taking place in our time. This new movement has much in common with the one that preceded it:

- *Its communities are being formed by lay Christians.*
- *They are self-governing.*
- *They are focused on prayer and personal conversion.*
- *They are devoted to radical hospitality, especially for the poor.*
- *Their members engage in productive work in the wider community.*

What is new about this movement of Christian intentionality is however as significant as its continuity with the past:

- *Its members are both married and celibate.*
- *Its communities vary greatly in organizational structure.*
- *They provide for large degrees of individual freedom.*
- *They are located in both urban and rural places.*
- *Their membership is ecumenical, and their outlook is global.”* (Kauffman, 2)

Some see this development as “suggesting unease with megachurch religion” and are surprised at the movement among Protestants who generally demonstrate “distaste with all things monkish.”

“Martin Luther called monks and wandering friars ‘lice placed by the devil on God Almighty’s fur coat.’ Of all Protestants, American evangelicals in particular - activist, family-oriented, and far more concerned with evangelism than solitary study or meditative prayer - have historically viewed monks as an alien species, and a vaguely demonic one at that.” (Worthen, 1)

Over 100 new monastic groups have sprung up in North America “*suggesting that mainstream worship is leaving some people cold.*” These new monastic communities “*share a common frustration with what they see as the overcommercialised and socially apathetic culture of mainstream evangelicalism.*” “*They perceive a ‘spiritual flabbiness in the broader church and a tendency to assimilate into a corrupt, power-hungry world,’* writes author Scott Bessenecker in *The New Friars.*”

Bessenecker writes: “*When I read about the intense Christian communities cropping up in corners of our twenty-first-century world, something inside me cries out to be a part of them. For much of my Christian life I have sought an expression of Christian community that defies the often-hollow suburban life held up to us as the ‘American Dream.’ We’re trained for an individualistic existence with self at the centre, especially for those of us in white American culture who grew up in suburban, single-family dwellings, separate from our extended family, encountering neighbours only at a superficial level. The new monasticism, as it is being called, is partly a reaction to the self-absorbed life of material accumulation, career obsession and amusement fixation that is promoted in the West and that is now being exported around the world as a picture of ‘the good life.’*” (Bessenecker, 187)

These new monastics “*are post-Protestants, breaking old liturgical and theological taboos by borrowing liberally from Catholic traditions of monastic prayer, looking to St. Francis instead of Jerry Falwell for their social values, and stocking their bookshelves with the writings of medieval mystics rather than the latest from televangelist Joel Osteen.*” While their numbers are still small in the overall American Evangelical scene, “*their criticisms may resonate with more mainstream believers. A recent study by Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois... discovered that many churchgoers felt stalled in their faith, alienated by slick, program-driven pastors who focus more on niche marketing than cultivating contemplation. The study suggested that megachurch members know how to belt out jazzy pop hymns from their stadium seats, but they don’t always know how to talk to God alone.*”

While New Monastics often live and worship together and “*tend to favour simple living, left-leaning politics, and social activism*” they are different from the Jesus People of the 1970’s in “*their intellectual seriousness and monastic forms of prayer and study that set them apart...The real radicals aren’t quoting Che Guevara or listening to Rage Against the*

*Machine on their iPods," writes Wilson-Hartgrove in **New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church**. 'The true revolutionaries are learning to pray.'*"

Molly Worthen discovered that "Most New Monastics are trying to create an alternative to conservative mainstream evangelicalism. They embrace ecumenism over doctrinal debate, encourage female leadership, and care far more about social justice and the environment than about the culture wars. Shane Claiborne, founder of one of the best-known New Monastic communities, the Simple Way of Philadelphia, asks that churches that invite him to speak offset the carbon emissions produced by his visit by "fasting" from fuel."

She concludes: "New Monastics consider themselves 'monks in the world.' They are not interested in extreme isolation or asceticism... Nearly all have regular jobs and social lives. From the traditionalist perspective, many break the most essential monastic rule: they are married. Most groups support those who choose a celibate lifestyle, and a few have a member or two who do so, but it happens rarely." They seek "to better integrate core Christian values into their lives as average citizens. This is the fundamental difference between old monks and the new. New Monastics often quote one of their heroes, Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who captured the ambitions - and the ecumenical limits - of the movement when he wrote in 1935, 'the restoration of the church will surely come only from a new kind of monasticism which will have nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ.'"

Some Evangelical critics of the movement fear New Monastics are getting too Catholic, too New-Age, or too near Eastern religions. Some Catholics are also wary, fearing these new monastics are watering down age-old traditions while other Catholics ask "What took you so long?" The monastic tradition is a spiritually rich one waiting to be discovered.

There are Anabaptist connections in this new movement, particularly in the area of peacemaking. A number of early leaders of new monastic communities joined Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq at the beginning of the present war. One was Shane Claiborne, one of the movement's most popular authors, popular speakers and social activists. His book ***The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*** is a very readable description of the movement and has won praise from U.S. Evangelical luminaries like Brian McLaren, Ron Sider, Tony Campolo, Leonard Sweet, Tom Sine, and Rob Bell.

Claiborne includes in his book the "Twelve Marks of New Monasticism", a list developed at a gathering of new monastics in Durham, North Carolina.

"This contemporary school for conversion which we have called a "new monasticism," is producing a grassroots ecumenism and a prophetic witness within the North American church which is diverse in form, but characterized by the following marks:

- 1) Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire.
- 2) Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.
- 3) Hospitality to the stranger
- 4) Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation.
- 5) Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.
- 6) Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.
- 7) Nurturing common life among members of intentional community.
- 8) Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.
- 9) Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.
- 10) Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies.
- 11) Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.
- 12) Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.

May God give us grace by the power of the Holy Spirit to discern rules for living that will help us embody these marks in our local contexts as signs of Christ's kingdom for the sake of God's world."

Anabaptist themes like *community* and *reconciliation* are reminiscent of this recent Anabaptist statement: "Jesus is the centre of our faith! Community is the centre of our life! Reconciliation is the centre of our work!" (Becker)

New Monasticism in Australia

Darren Cronshaw in *Credible Witness*, his helpful book on Australian mission models, writes about "the postmodern desire for a fresh experience of mystery and everyday spirituality." He contrasts this with a "marketing and management approach" used by many churches today. "Rather than alleviating spiritual poverty, marketing approaches can foster it further...promoting a consumerist approach to Christianity and reliance on techniques rather than God's leadership." (28) Like new monastics in North America, many Down Under are looking for a more genuine Christian experience.

Tom Sine in *The New Conspirators* explains what is happening among young activists and innovators in the church by categorising them into at least four streams: **emerging, missional, mosaic and monastic**. These categories are fluid; communities in Australia seem to merge aspects from the different streams.

The Celtic tradition is attracting attention from a number of groups. Brad Bessell from Adelaide wrote:

"I believe that the role of Celtic Spirituality in this nation is to bring healing and reconciliation between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal. In fact, I believe that had Celtic monks come to Australia instead of convicts etc. then the Aboriginal people would have had a spiritual experience similar to that of the ancient Celtic Christian...the role of the Celtic renewal in this nation is to encourage the Church to embrace a faith that is more gentle and incarnational than the colonial one that we have inherited from our English forebears and less 'salesman' like than the recent American models that we seem to have embraced." (Simpson 3, 4)

Scott Bessenecker helps in classifying some of these communities in his writing about the distinction between historic orders of monks: *"The cloistered (or inward) and the missional (or outward) forces in these various monastic communities were often held in tension, some emphasizing one over the other. Likewise today we find both cloistered and missional communities cropping up. The New Monasticism often consists of households of Christian men and women planted in dying inner-city communities within their home country, attempting to live the Christian ideal among their neighbours, drawing the lost, poor and broken to themselves. They resemble more the cloistered order. The new friars, on the other hand, have something of the spirit of mission-driven monks and nuns in them, leaving their mother country and moving to those parts of the world where little is known about Jesus."* (21, 22)

One Australian group he includes among the 'new friars' is **Urban Neighbours of Hope** (UNOH). They identify themselves as "a missional order" and have a list of values very similar to the Twelve Marks of New Monasticism:

Gospel Justice: *We value living out God's priority for those facing poverty.*

Incarnational: *We value the Kingdom coming among poor communities with whom we live and identify.*

Compassion: *We value personally relating with those facing poverty, coming alongside them and responding to needs.*

Holistic in Mission: *We value serving the whole life of our neighbourhood the way Jesus would using Word, Deed and Sign.*

Discipleship: *We value loving and obeying Jesus as Lord ourselves and helping our neighbours to do this together.*

Spiritual Formation: *We value the life-long journey of growing closer to and more like Jesus through the use of spiritual disciplines and increasing simplicity in lifestyle.*

Team Building: *We value working in teams so that we can mutually affirm and challenge each other in seeing our vision become a reality.*

Organic Growth: *We value reproducible models of nurturing, training and raising up of new team and leaders as the means of growing UNOHers and Jesus-centred movements.*

UNOH also has a “Common Rule of Life” that guides its community with spiritual practices that include Solitude, Scripture, Spiritual guides, Hospitality, Just Stewardship, Servanthood, Worship, Living Among the Poor, and Discipleship.

The **Peace Tree Community** in Perth, Western Australia is cited by Tom Sine as an example of new monasticism in Australia. They describe themselves as:

A support group of “sinners anonymous” for “recovering consumers” who pray to embody God’s grace by transforming vacant blocks into permaculture gardens, dumpster bins into delicious feasts for anyone hungry, empty homes into welcoming places for the homeless and refugees, individual lives of “successfulness” into shared lives of faithfulness, enemies into friends, our charity “to the marginalised” into solidarity “with the marginalised”, the unskilled over-schooled into workers on the land, swords into ploughshares and other humble beautiful signs of God’s dream for creation (or “kingdom of God”).

The Peace Tree community has been inspired by an older Baptist monastic community known as **The Community of the Transfiguration** in Geelong, Victoria. Paul R. Dekar has written about the community calling it “*a compelling adaptation of historic Christian monastic traditions to contemporary life, the community is unique in that it continues the life and witness of a 135-year old Baptist congregation while drawing on classic sources of Christian monasticism.*”

The Community of the Transfiguration began in the early 1970’s. Graeme Littleton and Steven Shipman met during a monastic formation program at The Community of the Glorious Ascension, an Anglican monastery in England. Littleton and Shipman studied the Rule of St. Benedict, Orthodox sources, and a number of models of communal life, including the Ephrata Cloisters, an Anabaptist experiment that began in the eighteenth century in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

As the community grew, members developed a **Resolve**, the practices by which they live:

- *Being perfectly assured of your salvation, with your whole life proclaim your gratitude.*
- *Reject nothing, consecrate everything.*
- *Be the good of love, for God, for neighbour, for all creation.*
- *Judge no one, not even yourself.*
- *Love beauty.*
- *Maintain inner silence in all things.*
- *Show hospitality; err only on the side of generosity.*
- *Speak truth to power, especially power without love.*
- *Let your only experience of evil be in suffering, not its creation.*
- *For us there is only the trying, the rest is none of our business.*

Dekar says the community “*exhibits many generic traits of its monastic forebears and of the new monastic communities. These include the centrality of Jesus Christ, communal life under a rule of life, vital worship, use of the visual arts, care for youth, care for the natural world; and ministries among marginalized persons..*” (57) The community members “*live their prayers and pray their lives.*” (92)

Anabaptism’s Monastic Roots

What is Anabaptist spirituality? C. J. Dyck describes spiritual life as being “nourished through an intimate commitment to Jesus Christ, individually and in community.” (26) He sees several characteristics of sixteenth-century Anabaptist spirituality:

- *Community is important. Anabaptist spirituality is not merely medieval monastic spirituality extended to the laity, but is a redefinition of spirituality. In monasticism, the focus of community was on the interior life of the soul. In Anabaptism, community is faith active in love as a life of obedience to God.*
- *Restoration of ethics into personal and communal spiritual life.*
- *Suffering was central.*

- *Holiness-sanctification as a living out of the new covenant alone and in community.*
(23)

I began with a quote warning about Michael Sattler causing “the beginning of a new monasticism.” Wolfgang Capito was not alone in this opinion about Anabaptists. Martin Luther accused them of having a “monkish” life and doctrine and Zwingli saw Anabaptists as “restoring a full monkish system.” The Reformers had several concerns about these Anabaptists:

- *Their discipleship sounded like a return to salvation by works.*
- *They were influenced by medieval monasticism and asceticism.*
- *They held a typically monastic emphasis on integration between the inner and outer*

life. (Murray Williams)

Gerald W. Schlabach says, “*In explaining who Mennonites are I have sometimes quoted the historians who call them, the Amish, Hutterites, and the Anabaptist forebears who preceded them all, “married monastics...Anabaptist-Mennonites are the old “new monastics.” Growing out of late medieval movements for lay renewal, the Anabaptists sought to form communities of intentionality that would make the kind of serious Christian life of discipleship and communion long assumed only to be possible in celibate religious orders and live it out in families. They did so not because they couldn’t control their desires and just had to get married, but because Jesus calls us to follow him as disciples in all of life.*” (Schlabach, “Benedictine Values”)

While Sattler’s early influence among the Swiss Anabaptists is often noted, his Benedictine past and how that influenced him and the emerging Anabaptist movement is often overlooked. Weldon D. Nisly explores the connections between Saint Benedict and the Rule he developed and Michael Sattler and the Schleithem Confession he helped write in an article entitled “Hidden in Plain Sight: Mennonite Benedictine Spirituality”.

“Benedict of Nursia was born around 480 or 490 and died in 547. He wrote “a little rule for beginners” in the late 520’s, conceivably in 529. Not much is known about Benedict’s life. Yet the Rule of St. Benedict has guided a great monastic tradition in the Church ever since the sixth century. At a young age, Benedict abandoned a proper education in Rome with a deep sense that student life was morally corrupting, and went off into the hills east of Rome to live a monastic life. “All the rest of Benedict’s life was to be subordinated to the search for God and lived out...in separation from this dangerous world.”

A thousand years later Michael Sattler was born about 1490 and died in 1527. We also know little about his life. But we know that he was a monk who left his Benedictine monastery with a deep sense of monastic corruption. He soon joined the emerging Radical Reformation movement and in 1527, Sattler shaped a document that guided the emerging Swiss Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. Sattler was the primary writer for these seven Schleithem Articles in which “We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil...which the devil has planted in the world”.

Nisly places Sattler back in his St. Peter’s monastery in the Black Forest at a time when reform was happening among the Benedictines as well in the rest of the church scene in Europe. Sattler held the position of Prior of the monastery before he left and joined the Anabaptists.

“St. Peter’s monastery was caught in the middle of the peasant revolt and reformation impulses, to say nothing of political and economic struggles and a reforming Abbot who fled. Under these conditions presumably the Prior, Michael Sattler, was left in charge of the Abbey in the spring of 1525. No documentation tells us exactly when he left the monastery. But the best judgment is that it was in May 1525, during the peasant invasion of the monastery. (Snyder, 64)

As a monk and Prior of St. Peter’s of the Black Forest, Michael Sattler was caught in the crossfire of reform in the monastery and the peasant’s oppressive plight. These concerns, not the pull of the Protestant and Anabaptist Reformation, are what seemed to drive Michael Sattler to take the dramatic step of leaving his Benedictine vows and monastic community. (Snyder, 65)

One additional element that we know – but know little about – is that sometime after Sattler left the monastery he married Margaretha. Her last name is unknown but she is believed to be a Beguine who with other Beguines was feeding poor people burdened by the oppressive taxes collected by St. Peter’s monastery. That may well have further influenced Sattler’s decision to leave the monastery.

The document that Sattler is most known for is the Schleithem Articles. They show Sattler’s Anabaptist vision and influence. The articles are about the practice of the church more than doctrine. They come with the title: “Brotherly union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles:”

- 1. Baptism...only believers and no infant baptism;*
- 2. Ban...discipline to follow Matthew 18 model;*
- 3. Breaking Bread...believers all united in baptism and confession/reconciliation;*
- 4. Separation from evil and the devil...allegiance to God in Christ alone;*
- 5. Shepherds...chosen and supported by the congregation according to rule of Paul;*
- 6. Sword...ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ not permitted for Christians;*
- 7. Oath...forbidden by Christ so must do all in the name of God in truthfulness.*

Nisly sees some parallels between the Schleithem Articles and the Rule of St. Benedict summarizing them this way:

- Voluntary entry into the community and a public act of profession;*
- Through that profession a person is subject to a common way of life;*
- Discipline takes the form of exclusion from community activities;*
- The community is separated from the world;*
- The spiritual leader is to be [s]elected by the community, and is responsible for the spiritual growth and discipline of the community (Snyder, 185).*

The Schleithem Article on baptism, the Rule of St. Benedict and the Benedictine vow of profession call for repentance and new life which is a dying to self and the world and living in the imitation of Christ (Snyder, 186). Obedience and discipline are very prominent in both documents and in the monastic community. The monastic profession is a vow of stability, conversion of life, and obedience, with the knowledge of discipline for disobedience. One very important biblical common ground in both Benedict’s Rule and Sattler’s Articles is the explicit reference to Matthew 18. The Gospel formula set out by Jesus for going to the sister or brother to listen, admonish, and discipline in specific stages is a frequent appeal of the Anabaptists. Likewise, chapter 23, of the Rule – “Excommunication for faults” – is equally clear and biblically rooted.

Nisly says: *“Michael Sattler was shaped in life and faith as a Benedictine steeped in obedience and discipline in the community. As an Anabaptist leader formulating the first “rule” for communal life, Sattler can be seen to draw heavily on his monastic life and the Rule to establish the centrality of obedience and discipline of the community. Nevertheless, we may see a difference in the direction of the obedience for Sattler as a Benedictine and Sattler as an Anabaptist. In the Benedictine community the direction of obedience was explicitly to the Abbot, as the representative of Christ, and to the Rule rooted in Scripture. In the Anabaptist community the direction of obedience is to what is sometimes called the “Rule of Christ” set out in Scripture and lived out in the community. In the Benedictine monastery the Abbot commands ultimate authority while in the Anabaptist community that authority resides in the community where the shepherd has special responsibilities but remains a member of the congregation (Snyder, 189).”*

Sattler lived less than two years as an Anabaptist before he and his wife were brutally martyred. Nisly says:

“We can see that Michael Sattler brought a Benedictine sensibility – more than an obvious spirituality --with him into the Anabaptist movement. We can even see in Michael Sattler a Benedictine in Anabaptist clothing. It is probably less accurate at this point yet, to see in the Anabaptists shaped by Sattler’s Schleithem Articles, a Benedictine in Anabaptist clothing. There are strong roots and parallels. It surely was an attempt to live a devout and holy life wholly rooted in scripture in a separated community of faith.”

Nisly ends his article with some dreams about where this connection might take Anabaptists today:

- *Become immersed in 15 centuries between the first & sixteenth centuries,*
- *Identify interpretive and operative principles for the church (ascetic life),*
- *Live with head and heart (listen and look with the heart),*
- *Renew a rhythm of prayer and work (ora et labora),*
- *Seek new ways for living stability and change (stabilitas & conversatio),*
- *Unite hospitality and service (receive/greet all as Christ),*
- *Become a Eucharistic Peace Community (sacrament, symbol, story, song),*
- *Establish new paradigms of authority and obedience (responsibility & "the least of these").*

In this list, the Schleithem Articles, and the Rule of St. Benedict one can find the roots of "rules" of many of the new monastic communities emerging today. The early Anabaptists and St. Benedict provide rich spiritual resources for modern-day monks of all stripes.

Inhabiting The Church, a 2007 title which is part of the New Monastic Library book series, explores elements of the Rule of St. Benedict. Three new monastic writers "*decided to use [Benedict's] central vow as a springboard for a biblical-theological reflection that was true to our own free-church Biblicist roots.*" (Stock, 5) Their chapters explore the Benedictine themes of Vows, Conversion, Obedience, and Stability.

Schlabach in article entitled "The Vow of Stability: A Premodern Way through a Hypermodern World" picks up on this one part of the Rule of St. Benedict:

"Benedict's rule requires a "vow of stability" -- the uniquely Benedictine commitment to live in a particular monastic community for life. At first, this may seem to apply least of all amid other ways of life. Yet precisely because it contrasts so sharply with the fragility of most commitments in our hypermodern society, the Benedictine vow of stability may speak more directly to our age and churches than anything else in the Rule... And one cannot understand the vow of stability apart from the Benedictines' two other vows -- conversion of life and obedience, which in turn requires us to face questions of authority. Still, what I wish to argue is this:

It is no use rediscovering any of our church's roots, nor discerning innovative ways to be faithful to our church's calling, if we won't slow down, stay longer even if we can't stay put indefinitely, and take something like a vow of stability. Slow down -- because postmodernism may really be hypermodernism. Stay longer -- because there is no way to discern God's will together without commitment to sit long together in the first place. A vow of stability -- because it is no use discerning appropriate ways to be Christian disciples in our age if we do not embody them through time, testing, and the patience with one another that our good ideas and great ideals need, in order to prove their worth as communal practices. As one Mennonite church leader remarked to me concerning the impact of constant mobility on our congregations: "It's getting so the Abrahamic thing to do is to stay put."

Implications For Mission

In describing new monastics and other young radicals today, Tom Sine says "*One can hear a distinctly Anabaptist accent as these young conspirators in all four streams invite all of us to embrace a more radical, whole-life faith and to create churches that are more outwardly focused in mission.*" Stuart Murray Williams asks "*What encouragements or resources can the Anabaptist tradition offer to those who are exploring new monasticism today? What might re-monking the church after Christendom mean?*" He lists six responses:

- *Hundreds of stories – Anabaptism is a story-rich tradition – of Christians who have attempted to follow Jesus as serious disciples, despite the cost of this, and whose lives impressed their persecutors.*
- *An in-depth critique of the Christendom mindset that continues to pervade the churches and insights on various issues that we will need to renegotiate in post-Christendom.*

- An insistent **focus on Jesus** as the one we follow and whose life and teaching is our example and guide. The monastic tradition is not always focused on Jesus in this way – sometimes Jesus is marginalised or the object of pietistic devotion.

- **Integration of spirituality and discipleship.** Arnold Snyder, Anabaptist historian, writes: “It is because Anabaptism echoed many elements of the monastic understanding of the ‘holy life’ that was supposed to follow true faith that they related social, economic and ethical issues directly to the ‘spiritual life’ ... The living of a life of discipleship became paramount, just as it had been in the monastic traditions.”

- **Ethical non-conformity.** In a violent, image-driven and consumerist culture, the Anabaptist practices of non-violence, truth-telling and generous simplicity are distinctive, winsome and powerful. *Re-monking the church after Christendom* is about counter-cultural living.

- A commitment to **accountability in community**, which is counter-cultural in our individualistic culture. If new monasticism only imports liturgical practices from monasticism and ignores accountability, this will not amount to re-monking. In fact, within emerging churches there are real dangers of irresponsible pillaging of ancient practices without appreciating their significance and dangers.

Both Anabaptism and new monasticism are about faithfully following Jesus – privately and publicly. Discipleship is a political act calling Christians to be engaged with public issues like poverty, climate change, economic disparities, and warfare.

Both of these movements realise **community** is needed for Christians to be faithful disciples. Lone Rangers need not apply. Hospitality is a major mark of these communities.

Both movements call for **disciplined discipleship** – seen in documents like the Schleithem Confession and the Twelve Marks of New Monasticism. Accountability is important.

Both movements are **counter-cultural**. Following Jesus calls Christians to be alternative, attractive, and articulate. This stance takes them to the margins of society and often the margins of the church.

Both movements take seriously the **Sermon on the Mount** with particular emphasis on being peacemakers.

Jesus told his followers “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matthew 5:14) He went on to warn about hiding this light and then said “Let your light shine before all in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven.” (5:16) Anabaptists have been guilty at times of hiding the light and just remaining the “quiet in the land”. But living the light before a watching world speaks powerfully. Living in community, following a disciplined spirituality, and caring for others allows the light to shine brightly.

The Challenge

Ash Barker from UNOH says he loves being around radicals. “*There’s a passion and feistiness that is indomitable*” but the down side is “*the constant loss of community experiments by Protestant radicals after short periods of time. We’ve been great at prophetic announcements, critiquing what is wrong with our church and society, but we have had real trouble building communities long enough to see transformation occur.*” He says “*these kinds of communities are almost second nature to Catholic structures with their various orders...however it is almost always the cause of argument and schism within Protestant ones.*” (123)

Maybe Anabaptist and new monastic radicals can learn something from the Celtic and Benedictine traditions that will allow us to create more stable communities – “*specialist communities able to live out the gospel in radical, sustainable and innovative ways without trying to be everything for everyone.*” (Barker, 123)

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The traditional account of Christian monasticism begins with St Paul of Thebes retreating to a cave in the Egyptian desert in AD 250 to avoid the persecution initiated by Decius. St Paul himself is probably a mythical figure, but there may well have been Egyptian hermits at this time. Early in the 4th century, perhaps in response to the new favour shown to Christianity by Constantine, Anthony organizes other hermits, living nearby in the desert, into a partly shared existence. In this there is the beginning of a monastic community. One of the world's oldest monasteries, named after St Anthony and established soon after his death, still survives in the desert near the Red Sea - below the mountain cave in which the saint spent his last years. The coenobitic life: 4th century AD.