

Joining the Anabaptist Conspirators

By Tom Sine

God is doing something new through a new generation that has a distinctly Anabaptist accent in these uncertain times. These young initiators are creating new ways to make a difference in both the world and the church. In *The New Conspirators*, I explained these activists and innovators as being found in at least four streams: emerging, missional, mosaic and monastic.

The **emerging** church stream seems to have its beginnings in Britain in the late eighties. Essentially those in this stream are seeking to plant new expressions of church that are contextualized to engage the postmodern young. For example, Ian Mobsby has started a new Anglican Church plant in London called Moot. They use ancient symbols, arts and liturgy as well as visual material from popular culture to engage the urban young that wouldn't typically attend a traditional church. There are hundreds of emerging church planters who are planting churches like Solomon's Porch in The Twin Cities or Church of the Beloved in Seattle. Emergent Village, The Ooze and Youth Specialties provide events where these young initiators gather.

The **missional** stream didn't begin with young practitioners but with academics that are a part of The Gospel and Culture Network. They are committed—out of the influence of the writings of Lesslie Newbigin—to call the church in North America to put mission much more at the center of congregational life. Their book, *The Missional Church*, published in 1991, really got the ball rolling. However more popular books, like Alan Hirsch's *Forgotten Ways*, have really increased the buzz. Unfortunately much that flies under the missional banner is little more than buzz. But there are a growing number of young church planters who are a part of traditional denominations, like the Covenant Church in America, who are planting missional churches that focus on addressing the needs of those outside the building instead of creating programs to meet the needs of those inside the building.

For example, Tim Morey planted New Life Covenant church in Torrance, Calif., three years ago. What makes this church different from most established churches is that it has no programs for people inside the church. The 300 members meet for worship once a week in a rented hall. The only other time they meet is in small groups to create ways to meet the needs of those in their community, and virtually every member is regularly involved in mission to people in their community instead of those

in the building, and 30 percent of their income is invested in local and global mission.

Without question the **mosaic** stream is the least visible of the four streams. It is comprised of those starting multicultural churches like Efrem Smith's Sanctuary Covenant Church located in a tough urban neighborhood in Minneapolis. Like the missional churches, these new congregations also tend to focus more outwardly in mission. In fact 50 percent of the budget of this church is also invested in addressing the urgent needs in their neighborhood as well as the needs of those at the margins in poorer countries. This four-year-old church plant has about 800 members. The congregation is about 40 percent African-American, 40 percent European and 20 percent Latino and Asian. They are discovering not only how to focus more outwardly in mission but how to celebrate God's multicultural kingdom together.

The **monastics** comprise the fourth stream. Few in this stream have any interest in church planting. These activists are moving into cities all over the world, living in community and working with the poor. They are a new kind of Franciscans. They include groups like Word Made Flesh, InnerCHANGE and Servants With the Poor. The New Monasticism Movement was born in 2005. It includes groups like the Rutba Community in Raleigh Durham, N.C., and the Simple Way in Philadelphia. But this movement also includes older communities like Reba Place in Illinois and Sojourners Community in San Francisco. This stream is concerned about not only reaching out to those in need but seeking to embody something of God's new community in their life together. In fact Shane Claiborne, a member of The Simple Way Community, is becoming a new young prophetic voice from this stream calling the entire church to work for justice and peace.

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. As Jim Wallis has observed many of these young activists have turned away from the influences of the religious right to embrace a more biblically progressive agenda for social transformation. They are consistently much more committed to working for social justice, racial reconciliation and caring for God's good creation than many of the churches from which they come.

While those in all four streams share many common concerns with those of Anabaptist faith, the clearest

Anabaptist voice is coming from those in the monastic stream. Let me take you on a quick tour of young Anabaptist activists that God is raising up all over the world—many of whom are a part of this stream.

Let's start in Britain. The Mennonite Center in the UK has had a remarkable influence in traditional churches in Britain through the writings of authors like Stuart Murray, who is calling the young to create new counter-cultural, post-Christendom expressions of church. One group of young people inspired by this influence is called SPEAK. SPEAK is composed of college and post-college young adults to raise awareness in the UK regarding global warming, social justice and fair traded products. They are inviting their collaborators to become a part of monastic networks and embrace a rule of life that includes vows of simplicity, prayer and action. One of their campaigns, for example, is to lobby universities in the UK to sever their ties to the arms trade, and they also lobby against weapons made in the UK being used against civilians in Palestine (www.speak.org.uk).

In Australia, the Peace Tree Community and EPYC (Empowering Peacemakers in Your Community) call young and old alike to consider embracing the biblical call to work for nonviolence and justice. They are a part of the Anabaptist Network in Australia coordinated by Mary and Mark Hurst. Jarrod McKenna is a young “peace evangelist” for EYPC who trains both young people and adults in nonviolence and just and sustainable lifestyles in Australia, and he is also a member of the Peace Tree Community.

Jarrod writes, “This generation does not need more slick entertainment or clever answers to numb us to what is really happening in our world. Instead they long for a space where the deepest questions can be explored with people who are authentically living an alternative.” Seven people live in the Peace Tree Community in a poorer community in Perth. These young activists rise for morning prayers at 6:30. They coordinate a community garden, and they also share food they glean from dumpster-diving with their aboriginal neighbors. They also conduct nonviolent demonstrations at Australian military bases and at the

Baxter Detention Center for asylum seekers and refugees (www.suwa.org.au/parts/epyc/).

In North America there is a growing chorus of young voices for peace, justice and creation care—many of whom are not Mennonite. These groups include Jesus Radicals, Convergent Friends and Submergent. Submergent is an emerging global network of those with Anabaptist inclinations that includes many Mennonites, but is not a part of the Mennonite church. It is seeking to connect not only in the UK and Australia but to those with Anabaptist interests in the two-thirds world (www.submergent.org).

One of those involved in creating this network is Mark Van Steenwyck, who has started a new Mennonite church with a monastic flavor, called Missio Dei, in a poorer community in Minneapolis. This small group offers hospitality, sponsors an urban garden and reaches out to those in need.

One of the most creative contributions from young Anabaptists in North America was the launching of *Geez* magazine in Winnipeg Manitoba. The byline on the cover of *Geez* reads, “holy mischief in an age of fast faith.”

In their issue on consumerism, they promoted “The de-motion campaign.” In the Spring 2006 issue of *Geez* the editor wrote, “It’s time to start preparing for the practical and spiritual transition to a post-oil era. So let’s de-motorize our souls, localize our lifestyles and de-normalize fossil fuels. We want to hear about your de-motion experiments. Send your ideas of how we can joyfully, collectively and effectively move beyond oil.”

These new Anabaptist conspirators have the possibility to be agents of renewal in historic peace churches. But they also have the possibility of calling growing numbers of other young people from outside the Anabaptist tradition to join a more biblically radical approach to life, faith and witness for peace, justice and creation care.

Shouldn’t we all encourage these new conspirators? Shouldn’t we also join them by seeking to put God’s kingdom purposes much more at the center of our lives and congregations in these uncertain times?

*Tom Sine is a convinced Anabaptist, an author and a futurist. His latest book is **The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time** upon which this article is based (www.thenewconspirators.com). He and his wife Christine are a part of the Mustard Seed House Community. Tom and Christine will be speaking at “A People’s Summit For Faithful Living” to be held July 8-19 in Winnipeg.*

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