

The Bulletin

A PUBLICATION OF THE
CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR BAPTIST FREEDOMS



Fall 2020



The Bulletin is published three times a year by the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms, formerly the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship. It is meant to be an informative magazine about Baptist concerns and news of the Church in the world.

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SET IN BASKERVILLE TYPES & PRINTED FOR THE
ASSOCIATION IN KENTVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA,
BY GASPEREAU PRESS LIMITED

ON THE COVER

Profession of Faith by Matthew Cupido

Editorial

BY SCOTT KINDRED-BARNES

¶ The old Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, now the CABF, from its inception in 1971, has sought to be a witness to the freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion. To this end, *The Bulletin* seeks to publish, at regular intervals, the aims and activities of the fellowship. From 1985 to 1993 Dr. Morris Lovesey served as editor of *The Bulletin*. During this tenure, Lovesey used this publication as a Forum; that is, a medium where ideas and views on particular issues can be exchanged. I too see this as an important, even essential, component of Christian faithfulness. Church history is filled with examples of Christians ignoring the prophetic in favor of the *status quo*. It is often easier to ignore the tough questions that confront the Church and to carry on as ‘normal’ when very often Christ is calling us to something deeper and different. The free exchange of ideas, however, cannot expect to speak to the wider needs of our churches if we do not convey our perspectives with Christian charity, kindness and an openness to listen to alternative views. During what is now known as the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the 1920s, Harry Emerson Fosdick did not shy away from challenging many traditional doctrines such as the Virgin Birth. But while he made a challenge to young liberal theologians to foster “magnanimity and liberality and tolerance of spirit,” he also set an example by respecting those who did not share his views. Of his opponents who affirmed belief in the Virgin Birth, Fosdick writes, “Many are the gracious and beautiful souls who hold it.” I see this same kind of gracious spirit in the stories of transitions in faith shared in this edition.



The Rev. Dr Scott Kindred-Barnes is the Senior Minister at Wolfville Baptist Church in Nova Scotia.

Transitions in Faith: The Spirit Prepares Us

BY BERT RADFORD

¶ Life is a process of continual transition. For the evangelical Christians the most important transition is conversion to Faith, ‘being saved’, ‘coming to Christ’, or ‘being born again’. I was raised in this tradition and remember many anxious moments sitting through altar calls with the choir softly singing “Just as I Am.” I never went forward.



It was not love of my life of sin that glued me to my seat; it was fear of the unknown. I had no concept of the inner experience the evangelists were describing. When I was sixteen, a minister who understood me explained that, for some, just believing that Jesus lived, died, and rose again is enough. I could understand that and asked to be baptized soon after.

There are many paths into faith. The transition can be highly rational, deeply emotional, or simply part of maturing into adulthood. The story of Sara Miles, told in her book, *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*, provides an example of instantaneous, radical conversion to Christianity. She was raised an atheist by parents who were actively opposed to all religions. Her first job was cooking in up-scale restaurants in New York and she developed both a love of good food and skill in cooking. She was a journalist during the 1980s in the centre of revolutionary wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador and the Philippines. She joined the struggle of common people to gain freedom from repressive regimes and she shared their daily hunger, their endless quest for food.

She returned to the United States and was working in freelance writing in San Francisco when curiosity led her into St. Gregory's Episcopal Church during worship. She had never been inside a

church. She shared the modern, non-traditional liturgy thinking that dancing and singing around the altar were normal church. When the Priest put the bread into her hand saying, “the body of Christ,” she says, “Something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me.”

Her conversion from atheist to Christian was total and lasting. Sara became a Deacon, serving communion in St. Gregory’s, and founded food pantries that fed many hungry people. She dedicated her life to sharing both daily bread and the bread of communion with all in need. Her transition to the faith, though instantaneous, lasted because it was the culmination of a long, spiritual process.

Both Sara’s and my spirits were prepared for the moment of transition. Throughout my early life I was confronted by the Gospel and though I resisted, I was prepared to accept and appeal that spoke to my spirit.

Although she was not aware of it, Sara was also prepared to accept the faith. Her life-long involvement with food, her dedication to freedom and justice and her intense, commitment to the cause of the needy coalesced in that moment when the Bread of Life was placed in her hand. She felt that Jesus had come from beyond, but her story suggests that, unknown to her, Jesus was already with her.

So it is with the many transitions in life. The Spirit leads us even though, sometimes, we are unaware.

The Rev. Bert Radford represents the CABF on the Canadian Council of Churches. He is a member of Burlington Baptist Church in Ontario.

Reflections on Acting & Playing the Role of Jesus

BY NICK GUMMESON

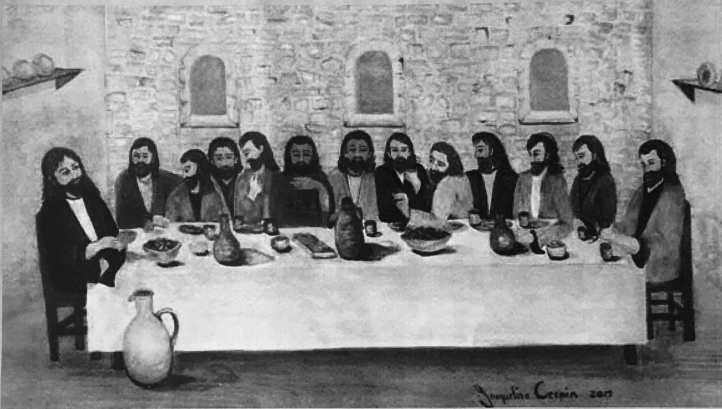
¶ In 2017, I was faced with a challenge: “Nick,” said a dear friend of mine, “would you play Jesus in a staging of *The Last Supper*?” Having performed a number of theatrical roles in the past, my inclination was to happily and quickly accept the role. However, after further contemplation, I was struck by some challenging questions: *How could I portray one who is without fault? And, how could I authentically portray a goodness and a godliness that no other human has ever embodied; at least to the same extent?* In addition to these questions, I was also wrestling with a fragile need for faith that was stirred by my transition from being an unmarried, mid-twenties young professional to a husband and father in his early thirties who is entering the middle of his career. I knew this role was a challenge that I wanted to accept; however, at a point in the rehearsal process, I didn’t believe that success was attainable. I didn’t believe that I possessed *that intangible other* who could overcome. I discovered that *this mystery* could be explored in a personal way as to nurture my soul. As the production evolved, this challenge began to feel more like a sentence. I was no longer in control, and I would simply have to let this obligation run its course, suffering the inevitable emotional and artistic consequences of delivering an individual performance that lacked personal investment. I remember standing alone in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church Ottawa, reading lines and attempting to find the sliver of empathy that would allow me to understand Jesus; for weeks, I remember pouring over the Gospels trying to find myself in his stories; I recall moments of prayer where I would be asking for his wisdom and his insight. No matter how I



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PROMOTIONAL POSTER FOR *THE LAST SUPPER* PLAY PERFORMED
AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OTTAWA IN 2017.

studied, and regardless of the intercessions for which I searched, I could not seem to find a foothold in the character of Jesus. Then, as is often the case, the answer presented itself in an unexpected way; I was confronted with a beautiful passage that made me view the situation from a new perspective and deliver the Jesus that was both personal and universal: “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13 KJV). In these words, I found comfort, strength and that intangible other who had always been present. With this experience, I realized that Jesus was not just an external being who was absent and mysteriously unknowable, and who had to be located, quantified and understood. Instead, I realized that, at the core of my experiences, whether they were moments of extreme joy, or extreme sadness (or somewhere in the middle), Jesus was present. Present as the consoler who compassionately grieves, the tired friend who willingly listens, or the captain who leads his team through hardships and, in the end, demonstrates modesty and humility in the face of victory. Through this role, I learned that Jesus longs to be present in all of us, and, during the moments where a challenge and choice begins to resemble a sentence and suffering, we may all look inward to Christ’s gift. With faith in Christ, we can trust that the challenges we accept can be faced with help by the mysterious one who comes alive in us. God has equipped us with our individual gifts. And, these gifts will be wielded by the Christ who makes his home with us and unconditionally loves us.

Nick Gummesson teaches Music and English at Rothesay Netherwood School in Rothesay, New Brunswick. Before moving to Maritimes in 2017, Nick played the role of Jesus in The Last Supper, a play written and directed by Vic Spassov at First Baptist Church, Ottawa. Nick was Baptised at Wolfville Baptist Church on June 9, 2019.

My Evolving Ecumenical Experience

BY ROBERT HANKINSON

¶ I arrived at my first United Church of Canada pastoral charge (Lac La Biche, Alberta) as a freshly minted (ordained and settled) minister on August 1st, 1973. I had driven 5,000 kilometers from Halifax, Nova Scotia, my home and the home of my alma mater(s)—Dalhousie University and the Atlantic School of Theology—during the month of July. Along the way I got married (to Mary Elizabeth Norton) in St. Lambert, Quebec. The cross-country trek, tenting no less, was exhilarating. The arrival in Lac La Biche was interesting, the last 25 miles driving on ‘soil cement’ added to the interest.



For the first few weeks (months?) in our new hometown I experienced a certain degree of culture shock. Lac La Biche was not Halifax, nor Montreal, nor Toronto where my partner had been a librarian for the previous year. It did hold, however, a peculiar charm, it exuded a pioneering spirit, and it was situated on a big lake—the second biggest lake in northern Alberta. And, on a windy day there were white caps on the waves, and a displaced Maritime lad could take a little comfort—and, almost, feel at home. The adventure had begun.

The adventure ramped up considerably before the end of my first month on the job. There came a knock (no doorbell) on the front door of the manse one morning. Upon opening the door I encountered a Middle Eastern gentleman, somewhat shorter and a little older than me, who, with a smiling face, introduced himself. “I am Ahmed al Sharkawi. I am the Imam of the Lac La Biche Mosque. I would like to join the ministerial.” My ecumenical experience was about to evolve.

I was a graduate of the Atlantic School of Theology, Canada's first ecumenical theological school (Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Churches being the founders), and I grew up in a multi-racial city with a small Jewish population. And I had a friend in Grade Two whose parents were from Lebanon and whom my parents named "Mohammedans." But all that was a long distance from and a long time before that August morning. And a lot less up front and personal.

I invited Imam Sharkawi into the manse's living room and the conversation began and my ecumenical education continued. Ahmed was from Egypt, an alumnus of the University of Cairo, and, up to a year before our propitious (providential?) meeting, had been the Headmaster at a Muslim Boys' School in Madras, India. The University of Cairo had transferred Ahmed and his young family from Madras to Lac La Biche, Alberta to serve as 'teacher' to the substantial ("highest Lebanese population per capita in North America") Muslim community in the second oldest (1958) mosque in Canada. Any notions I harbored of how great my culture shock was soon vanished.

I remember well our conversation. I told Ahmed: "I am the new kid on the block. I don't know if there is a ministerial. If there is one, I don't know how open [i.e. ecumenical, from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning the whole wide world] this ministerial is, or might be, in welcoming a 'non-Christian'." I promised I would find out and get back to him whatever the response. He told me he lived in the "little house" next to the mosque on Highway 36, and, to come and "visit me anytime. I am lonely". We had reached our first point of human contact—and solidarity.

To my delight I discovered there was a ministerial, "alive and well," and that: a) there was no impediment whatsoever to "widening the circle"; b) the United Church ministers had been active members for as long as there had been a United Church presence in Lac La Biche (the Methodists, under Henry Bird Steinhauer and Benjamin Sinclair from the 1850's onward); and, c) it was expected that I would attend the regular monthly meetings, and "would you kindly invite Imam Sharkawi to our next meeting." My ecumenical experience was advancing.

Over the course of the next four years (1973–1977) the Lac La Biche Ministerial ecumenical organization made a positive contribution to the town’s faith communities, and to the community at large. A global, multicultural, multifaith worldview replaced parochialism in ministerial conversations and activities, as Fr. Jules Laberge (the town’s much loved and highly respected Roman Catholic priest) and Rev. Malcolm Herman (the district’s faithful Anglican rector) and Imam Ahmed al Sharkawi (world citizen and diligent teacher) and I (the novitiate pastor) not only struck up a unique friendship but also engaged in an active fraternity of community service.

We (the ministerial) coordinated interfaith pastoral care at St. Catherine’s Hospital; held multi-faith “Ten Days for World Development” workshops and events; organized and conducted Marriage Preparation seminars for the community; lobbied (successfully) the Provincial Government to appoint a Marriage Commissioner for the town and district (in order that the citizenry might have a choice of wedding celebrants and ceremonies); and, became the local arrangements committee for the annual Lac La Biche Music Festival.

During those years our ministerial meetings were blessed with great camaraderie, exceptional fellowship, and international cuisine. My friendship with Ahmed, and our respective families’ friendship, grew. Relationships were nurtured with the Lebanese and the Muslim community. And my horizons expanded—and my ecumenical experience evolved!

I left Lac La Biche and moved to Edmonton (to be Associate Minister at Robertson-Wesley United Church) in 1977. Ahmed stayed on for another year as Lac La Biche Imam before moving to Princeton University for some sessional teaching. He had been challenged with some health issues for many seasons, and, upon his return to Alberta we would visit with one another when he stayed at the former outpatients’ residence at the University Hospital on his too frequent visits for treatment. Ahmed has since died. One of his children is an accomplished physician at the University Hospital.

I suggested earlier that my meeting Ahmed may well have been providential. I am bold now to state that it was. My encounter and

time with Ahmed, and through Ahmed his community in Lac La Biche, have enriched and shaped my life and my ongoing ecumenical experience. Thank you Ahmed for that knock on the manse door.

The Rev. Robert Hankinson is a retired United Church Minister. Rob served as secretary of the Lac La Biche Ministerial from 1973–1977 and as Chair of North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) from 2012–2016. He now resides in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

Transitions Large & Small

BY JOHN PERKIN

¶ After twenty-seven years in chaplaincy at Mount Allison University, I am returning to work in church ministry, specifically at First Baptist Church Ottawa. This represents a significant transition for me: from the academic world to the church community, from small Maritime town to busy urban setting, from a focus on counselling young adults to providing pastoral care to a largely older congregation, from working with paid professionals to sharing ministry with volunteers, from teaching New Testament and historical Jesus in an academic classroom to exploring text and history in the context of nurturing faith.



I have been reflecting back over my years of chaplaincy and its transitions through changing times, and also reflecting on the far more wide-reaching transition of the Christian church in Canada during my time in chaplaincy. Over the last generation, the church has been marked by transition, notably the decline in numbers of people actively involved, the decline of its social and public voice,

and the loss of its role as a principal community centre. Even as the church shrinks in its role and its numbers, we are also witness to the transition of Christianity itself from a predominately western religion to a more global religion. Philip Jenkins predicted almost twenty years ago in *The Next Christendom* that by 2030 only one-fifth of Christians would live in Europe or North America. In 2020, quantitatively, we are almost there already. Qualitatively, the western forms of Christianity still dominate, but probably not for much longer.

The Canadian church is transitioning even as it responds to growing secularism. In his massive work, *The Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor highlights three strands of secularism: the movement of people away from churches and the emptying of pews on Sunday mornings; the loss of the religious voice in the public sphere and removal of the presence of religion from public life; and, perhaps most troubling, the shift from a society where belief in God remained unchallenged and unproblematic to the contemporary situation in which belief is only one option among many others. In Canadian society, the default setting now seems to be secularism, even atheism, and those who choose to live on the basis of belief find themselves subtly mocked or challenged about that belief system and hard pressed to defend it. One wonders, if religion is devalued publicly, what will prompt people to find meaning in it? How can the church respond to such tectonic shifts in meaning and identity?

Perhaps the biggest transition in world Christianity over the last generation has been the shift in faith, largely away from people's rigid adherence to doctrine (belief) towards a search for meaning, a sense of the holy, an emphasis on spirituality and social justice (faith). As Harvey Cox notes in *The Age of Faith*, in general, religious people are becoming "less dogmatic and more practical ... more interested in ethical guidelines and spiritual disciplines than in doctrine." These may be seen, however, as positive signs that the future of faith is open, expansive, even hopeful.

Baptists hold to a New Testament view of the church, but need to ask which New Testament view. Recent scholarship is showing how diverse early Christianity was, with no unified theology,

scripture, or governance. What it did have, of course, was a resilient, committed and inclusive faith that resisted the patterns of the world around it. It focused on being an inclusive community that experienced the divine presence even as it sought to resist the pressures of the empire in which it lived. As Brian McLaren, of the contemporary emergent-church movement, writes, “before Christianity was a rich and powerful religion, before it was associated with buildings, budgets, crusades, colonialism, or televangelism, it began as a revolutionary nonviolent movement promoting a new kind of aliveness on the margins of society.” [Brian D. McLaren, *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation* (John Murray Press, 2014), p. xviii.]

The church is indeed in transition. As I transition from the academic world back to church ministry, I consider what the future holds and what I have learned. I return to the New Testament, the story of a resilient people of faith in the first century, and whose sense of mission, ministry and meaning gave life to nascent Christianity. I look forward to my own transition, and to sharing with the church in its own continuing transition to this secular world in which we live. Like the early Christians, we can truly open ourselves to the presence of the divine, nurture a vital sense of community, and seek to engage the world in which we live with good news.

The Rev. John Perkin served as Chaplain of Mount Allison University from 1993–2020. He is now the Minister of the Congregation at First Baptist Church Ottawa.

News & Notes

☛ The Gathering of Baptist in Ontario and Quebec invite all to join a virtual Zoom-based presentation by leading Baptist Ethicist, Professor David Gushee (PhD, Union Theological Seminary, New York) Saturday, September 26, 2020. 1:00 to 4:00 PM (EDT). The topic is “Changing Our Mind: A Call for Full Inclusion.” Details for online registration can be found at: <http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/events#>

☛ Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms will hold its 2020 Fall Assembly & AGM on October 2–3 at FBC Halifax. The speaker will be Dr. Spencer Boersma, Assistant Professor of Theology, Acadia Divinity College. The topic is “How to be a local congregation of theological diversity.” Details for registration of this zoom-based event will be posted on the CABF website in the fall at: <https://c-abf.ca/>

☛ The CABF sends condolences to Rick Manuel and family on the passing of Janet Manuel on August 12, 2020. Janet and Rick were blessed with 41 years of marriage. Janet’s funeral was held at All Nations Christian Reformed Church in Halifax on Wednesday, August 19, 2020.



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