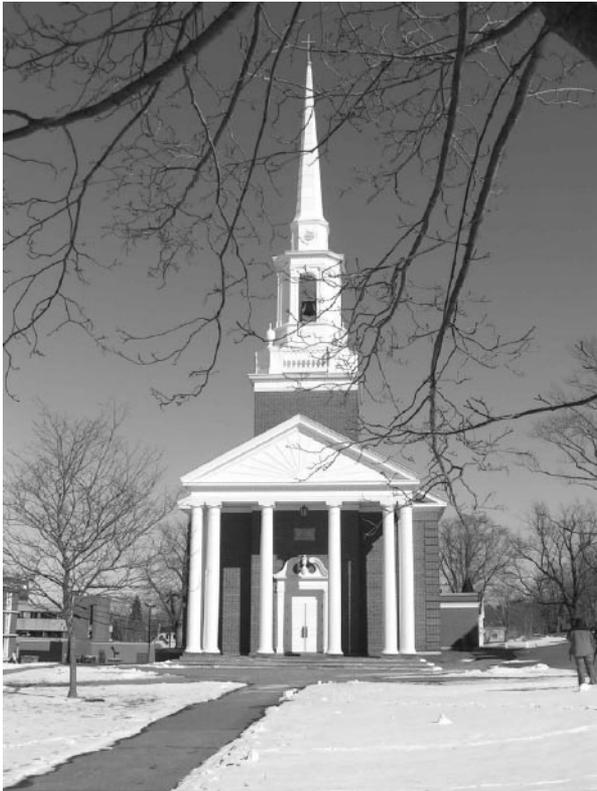


THE BULLETIN

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F

Atlantic Baptist Fellowship

S P R I N G 2 0 0 8



Acadia Chapel

SITE OF THE RUSHTON MEMORIAL LECTURE
ON JUNE 7, 2008



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In This Issue

ED COLQUHOUN, EDITOR

This issue of *The Bulletin* devotes considerable space to developments in the USA and the New Baptist Covenant Celebration. Whether, as co-chair Jimmy Allen asked, this will turn out to be a “moment” or a “movement,” it is a very promising attempt to bring together the many disparate members of the Baptist family. Baptists in Canada need to know what has happened in Atlanta.

The elephant in the room of the Celebration was the cautiously mentioned Southern Baptist Convention. The New Baptist Covenant is the unwanted child of that once-great convention which, in its obsession for a particularly narrow brand of orthodoxy, has driven from its fold so many moderate and progressive Baptists. In the process, the fundamentalist leadership doctrinally cleansed its seminaries and severed its relationships with other, more inclusive, Baptist groups like the Baptist World Alliance, from which Southern Baptists voted to separate in 2004 after the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship joined that body. The recent (?) movement to keep women in their place – women are to submit to men’s leadership, pastoral leadership is a male prerogative – may have been the last straw, suggestive of Southern Baptist’s affinity with the regressive wing of the Roman Catholic Church. It is difficult for the laity to engage the so-called theological experts about their theories of biblical interpretation; however, their take on the male-female relationship clearly conflicts with what most laymen feel to be the mind of Jesus.

Just to demonstrate that I believe that there have been good Christian folk in the Southern Baptist Convention, let me quote them with approval. Recently, a former official of our Convention asked me rhetorically where I would draw the line to designate the authority of Convention over members of local congregations. My belated answer is to quote the first suggested by-law from *How to Develop a Church Constitution and Bylaws*, a 1970 booklet of the Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board, as cited in Foshee’s *Broadman Church Manual* (1973):

This is a sovereign and democratic Baptist church under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The membership retains unto itself the exclusive right of self-government in all phases of the spiritual and temporal life of this church. The membership reserves the exclusive right to determine who shall be members of this church and the conditions of such membership.

Anything less is not a Baptist church.

To add to your confusion about where to find allies within the church, check out *Surprise!* in this Bulletin.

A Word from the President

DAVE OGILVIE



It has been a year since a copy of the *ABF Bulletin* graced your mailbox. I know you've been waiting expectantly for it to arrive and I thank you for your patience. I apologize that it has taken us so long to get this issue to print. However, you need to know that while you were waiting patiently, a great deal has been happening behind the scenes, and on behalf of your ABF Executive, I am delighted to have this opportunity to share several pieces of important news with you.

First, I wish to thank the congregation of First Baptist, Halifax for hosting us last September and co-sponsoring *Testimony '07*, a two-day event led by Dr. Anna Carter Florence, Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary. It was a superb weekend of learning and fellowship, and a great opportunity to share in First Baptist's 180th Anniversary celebrations.

Second, last October we welcomed Dr. Stan Hastey, Minister for

Mission and Ecumenism with *The Alliance of Baptists*, into our midst for some informal discussions about the relationship between our sister organizations. There has long been a strong sense of kinship between ABF and *The Alliance*, and we continue to explore ways in which we can further strengthen and encourage one another. Toward that end we have invited Stan to address us in June at the upcoming *Vince Rushton Memorial Luncheon and Lecture*. You will find further details about this event elsewhere in this issue. The theme Stan has chosen for his lecture is "Congregational Autonomy and the Associational Principle: A Baptist Dilemma." How we live with the creative tension between 'autonomy' and 'association' is an especially timely topic for Atlantic Baptists, and we look forward to Stan's wisdom, insights, and counsel. Please mark June 7 on your calendar, and plan to attend.

Third, in January of this year, ABF was well represented in Atlanta, Georgia at the historic *New Baptist Covenant Celebration* initiated by former President, Jimmy Carter. John Boyd and Ed Colquhoun share some of their experiences and observations in this issue of *The Bulletin*.

Fourth, also in January, we received word that the CABC Council plans to incorporate the Convention. A 105-page legal document was distributed to clergy and posted on the Convention's website. Regional "consultations" have already been held, and this process is on a fast track headed for approval at Assembly this August. The complexity and legal language of this document, the sense of fear it promotes, and the hasty process to have it passed, have raised numerous concerns in the minds of our Executive. Of particular concern, however, is that it threatens to impose dramatic changes on our historic Baptist polity. If passed as it now reads, this document will give Convention Council and Assembly, among other things, the power to establish "statements of doctrine and polity" and to compel clergy and local churches to "respect and uphold" these statements. Failure to do so will result in the "termination" of a church's membership in Convention and/or the suspension of a minister's credentials.

In response to this action on the part of Convention, John Churchill has written an excellent paper that outlines some of our shared concerns. It is available on our ABF website. I encourage you to read it, and to make it available to others. Gary Nelson, a lawyer

who is a member of Falmouth Baptist Church, Dan Gibson, pastor of Perea Baptist Church, and I assisted John in his efforts. We invite you to join in conversation with us on this, or on any other topic of interest, on our website, or to submit a letter to the editor of *The Bulletin*.

This leads nicely to my final piece of news. With the publication of this issue, we are delighted to welcome Ed Colquhoun as our new *Bulletin* Editor. Ed is no stranger to the ABF. He was there at its inception, and has twice served as President. He has also held many roles in public education – English teacher, counsellor, principal, human resources co-ordinator, regional director for school construction and renovation *et al.* Ed is a member of First Baptist Church, Amherst, where he gives leadership, particularly in areas of adult learning. While he describes himself as somewhat of a “reluctant Baptist,” he has enthusiastically taken on the challenge of editing *The Bulletin*, and we look forward to the fresh look and expertise he brings to the task. Welcome, Ed!

I thank you for your continuing interest in and support of ABF. The rich diversity of people we are, the important values we share, and the time we spend in worship, conversation and learning, make this a vibrant and meaningful community. I am grateful for your involvement and for the honour of serving with and among you.



The ABF Executive

Celebration of A New Baptist Covenant – Basics

WHO? Sponsors included more than 30 organizations like the Baptist World Alliance, North American Baptist Fellowship, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Canadian Baptist Ministries, and Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. The steering committee for the Celebration was Jimmy Allen; Jimmy Carter; David Goatley, President, National Baptist Convention; William Shaw, President, National Baptist Convention, USA Inc.; and William Underwood, President, Mercer University.

WHAT? *A New Baptist Covenant*. We Baptists of North America covenant together to:

- Create an authentic and prophetic Baptist voice for these complex times,
- Emphasize traditional Baptist values, including sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications for public and private morality, and
- Promote peace with justice, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and marginalized, welcome the strangers among us, and promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.

The Celebration of this covenant, based on Luke 4:18–19, had 5 plenary sessions – Seeking Peace with Justice, Bringing Good News to the Poor, Respecting Diversity, Welcoming the Stranger, and Setting the Captive Free. Thirty-two related special interest sessions allowed for in-depth consideration of these themes.

WHERE? Atlanta at the Georgia World Congress Center.

WHEN? Sponsors prepared the Covenant and did preliminary planning for its Celebration from April, 2006, to January, 2007, at which time it was announced that the meetings would be from January 30

to February 1, 2008. This allowed the planners to join the second historic gathering of African-American Baptist denominations that were already attempting a united witness in the days immediately prior to the Celebration.

WHY? The Covenant is an attempt to find ways of cooperating that will allow Baptists to achieve more by working together than they can achieve independently.

WHITHER? On March 12, at the Carter Center, 70 Baptists considered the feedback from the attendees and suggested future direction. More information will follow in our next edition.

Thoughts on Celebrating the New Baptist Covenant

BY REV. JOHN E. BOYD



I had been looking forward to the *Celebration of the New Baptist Covenant* ever since early 2007 when I had heard about Jimmy Carter's extraordinary effort to bring Baptists together around an agenda of compassion based on Jesus' own "mission statement" in Luke 4:18-19 – "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*"

This news had first come to me via the *Baptist Studies Bulletin*, a monthly "e-zine" from the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University that ABF friend Dr. Walter Shurden had started to keep "moderate" Baptists informed about important events.



PHOTO: Bob Reilly

Jimmy Allan & Jimmy Carter; Dialogue at a plenary session

I was particularly excited that our then CABC Executive Minister, Dr. Harry Gardner, along with other Canadian Baptist leaders, had been at the Carter Center for the launch of this initiative, *and had signed on!* It seemed to me that here was a productive path for Baptists to take, one that would allow for freedom of diversity while creating unity around the mission of Jesus.

Diversity was certainly visible in Atlanta – racial diversity, geographical diversity, liturgical diversity, musical diversity, theological diversity, political diversity and probably many others. Unity was also visible as we sang together, prayed together, laughed and cried together, studied together and dreamed together.

Plenary speakers like Marian Wright Edelman, Tony Campolo, and William Shaw, political leaders like Jimmy Carter, Charles Grassley and Bill Clinton, and workshop presenters like Stan Hastey, Bill Leonard and Welton Gaddy inspired, informed and excited us about the future for Baptists who are determined to work together for Jesus' sake.

Two of the highlights for me were the powerfully persuasive presentation by Al Gore on climate change, and the simple, humble declaration by Jimmy Carter that "this Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant is the most momentous event in my religious life."

It was indeed moving to witness the emotional coming together of black and white Baptists in one of the major centers of the American South, to experience the passion for justice for children in the call to action by civil rights activist, Marian Edelman, and to see a rainbow-coloured chain around the neck of Tony Campolo declaring his solidarity with gay and lesbian Baptists whose official presence at this gathering was still too much of a problem for some.



Al Gore; Delegates at the Gore luncheon

I came away from Atlanta uplifted by the vision that Baptists could find unity in the mission of Jesus Christ, and by the reality of that unity experienced in those few days.

But my joy was tempered by conversations with several of our Canadian Baptist leaders who claimed that they saw little relevance in the New Baptist Covenant for Canadians. Apparently we aren't "divided like the Americans" and our Conventions don't try to enforce conformity "like the Southern Baptists."

Ever since the ABF was founded in 1971 we have been consistent and insistent that our calling as Baptists requires a freedom of diversity wed to a passion for mission. We have resisted efforts by our Convention to impose a unity based on conforming to the "majority view" on membership, ecumenism, social issues, doctrine, or any of the other aspects of faithful discipleship on which Baptists often differ.

The New Baptist Covenant is consistent with our vision, and if the "sign-on" of our leaders is taken seriously in our Atlantic context, we could move forward together in exciting new ways.

Unfortunately, however, the recently proposed documents on incorporation show that the siren call of enforced conformity is still shaping the vision of our leaders. Pity.

Reflections on Atlanta

DR. WILLIAM H. BRACKNEY



Dr. William H. Brackney is the Millard R. Cherry Distinguished Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at Acadia. Formerly Chair of the Department of Religion at Baylor University and Principal of McMaster Divinity College, he is known throughout North America as a Baptist historian. Dr. Brackney was moderator of a special interest session at Atlanta – 'Can We All Get Along? Finding Common Ground with Other Faiths'.

What occurred in Atlanta at the New Covenant Baptist meetings was of singular import to the entire family of Baptists in North America. Firstly, there was a new sense of being Baptists in *North America*. Over the years the regional subgroup of the Baptist World Alliance, the North American Baptist Fellowship, has held useful sessions and done commendable things, but never as energetically as the parallel European or Asian regional bodies. Nor has there recently been a convocation of the numbers involved, unless one recalls the World Congress in Toronto in 1980. So, the sheer magnitude of involvement was historic. The music, preaching and inclusiveness were empowering.

I found the interaction and mutual recognition of Black and Caucasian Baptist groups is a sign of hope for the Baptists of the United States. The Black tradition has long been ignored by the SBC but embraced in a limited degree by the American Baptists, many of whom are dually aligned congregations. If Barak Obama's presidential candidacy is any barometer of racial progress in the United States, the exposure to Black Baptist worship and preaching in Atlanta is part of a new era. That's a very good thing.

Being a "Canadian Baptist" participant at the sessions gives me some pause. I could certainly affirm the biblical, social, and theological foundations of much of what transpired. Much of this was in my focus when I wrote my history of Baptists in North America in 2004. But, in this instance I need to understand if and how

Canadians will be integrated into a dialogue that has a particularly American – and Southern – accent. Baptists in Canada need to plumb deeply the history of the groups that brought about the New Covenant and evaluate where Canadian ideals fit and where we can have an impact. That’s an important assignment ahead for us.

Former President Clinton’s remarks about reconciliation, presumably with Southern Baptist brothers and sisters, presents a hefty challenge. His understanding of reconciliation is on the right track, and there are doubtless significant numbers of Southern Baptists who would like to have been included. There are growing signs of rapprochement among leaders of several of these groups and those in the SBC. We all need to be sensitive to the recent brokenness of our denominational witness across this continent. Where is the Spirit at work among us?

Finally, as a student of Baptist polity and the extensive vocabulary we have developed over the years to describe our organizational structure, I’m looking for some clarification on what “covenant” means: who has one in mind, and why do we need to institute another structure, however flexible. I think this is what former President Carter meant when he said the next step was to ascertain whether Atlanta is a “moment” or a “movement.” This should happen in open forums, not rooms of select “representatives.” Let us hope that theologians will have a role to play. Above all, let us see what comes forth and respond creatively as *North Americans*.

The View from the Bus

ED COLQUHOUN

At least once daily, large tour buses loaded with Celebration participants shuttled us from hotels to meetings. The conversation moved from the weather (below freezing at night in the peachtree city) to the number of participants (ten to fifteen thousand) to the many connections Baptists have (the former seminarian from Kansas who helped get Tom McDormand, his teacher, breakfast in college – Dr. McDormand, our former Minister Emeritus in



Barbara and Damon – Friends on the Bus

Amherst). New connections were being made. People who were prominent in denominational activities exchanged business cards, often white and African-American officials.

The deep racial divide that was the shame of the American church – scripture justifying and upholding slavery – was being tentatively bridged before our very eyes. In fact, it was obvious that the historic coming together of white and African-American Baptists was the keynote of this Celebration. We saw the iconic images of Martin Luther King at the first plenary meeting and we heard the message from Marian Edelman about the dim prospects of African-American boys in that wealthy society, the inspiring testimony of former Surgeon General David Satcher, and the preaching of Charles Adams of Detroit that had us all standing and clapping. If Canadian Baptists seemed to be on the periphery of the celebration, so be it. So were all other reconciliation projects – with some Republicans who suspected partisan leanings, and even with the Southern Baptist Convention, whose official absence was regrettable. Finally, in the Deep South, white and African-American Baptists celebrated unity in setting the captive free.

Surprise!



PHOTO: Halifax Herald Limited

John Gahan was born in the Ottawa Valley town of Renfrew and grew up in Arnprior Ontario. He has attended York University in Toronto, Gonzaga University in Spokane Washington and Regis College, University of Toronto. His interest and training in theology, spirituality and pastoral care has been influenced by his interest in Carl Jung. In recent years he has served as Chaplain of Saint Mary's University, Halifax, and Pastor of Canadian Martyrs Church, Halifax, and has also served the Roman Catholic communities of Wolfville and Canning. He has offered retreats, workshops, and courses in spirituality to people of all denominations and backgrounds.

One of the things that I reflect on more often these days is the element of “surprise” in life. It seems to me that it doesn’t happen nearly as often as it did when I was a child or adolescent or a young adult. Back then there were so many new things to learn and discover. There was a surprise around every corner, or so it seemed. With the advantage of age and the life experience that it brings, surprises become fewer and fewer. Sometimes I have wondered if I would experience any more surprises at all.

Oh yes, there are indeed surprises in life. About four years ago the surprises began to flow like water on a previously dry desert riverbed. Out of nowhere my life became filled with surprises – unexpected events and situations that I could not have predicted. Life is funny that way.

I had been a member of the Jesuit Order for over 20 years and a Roman Catholic priest for close to 10 years – and a good one if I do say so myself. I’d been a university chaplain and a pastor. I’d been privileged to see people at their best and worst, by being a

spiritual director and retreat director. Many times, I had journeyed with people and helped them realize their dreams, make significant changes in their lives, recognize the blessings in their midst, move beyond grief in their lives and eventually feel contentment. I had helped congregations discern their hopes for community and future endeavors. People often told me I was a good priest, that I was approachable and humble and flexible.

Change for me was a long time coming. The first murmurs of discontent echoed in my mind when I had to take vows of obedience to the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. These vows would obligate me to submit in my heart and mind to accept even the most simple matters of faith emerging from this body. And I would be obligated to announce this to others, confirming the validity of these matters.

Over the years what had begun as a murmur of discontent became louder and louder. I found that I could no longer accept or even pretend to believe the things I was obligated to believe as a Roman Catholic priest. There was a deep yearning to be authentic and to live the faith I possessed as a thoughtful, intelligent believer.

And so the first surprise for me occurred when I made the choice to leave the Jesuit Order. This was difficult on many levels. The security which comes with belonging to a religious order is immense. Why would anyone leave such an exclusive men’s club? For me it was to live a life of authenticity.

The second surprise was when I decided about 14 months later to leave the priesthood. I loved my parish community but I could no longer be a voice for the archbishop and Rome. Many parishioners understood and supported my decision, some did not. The archbishop told me it was scandalous and I should move from the area.

These decisions and changes to my life left me feeling ecstatic. I hadn’t known such happiness and liberty in years. And maybe beyond that I respected myself and my faith more than I had in a long time.

In Wolfville, it was the Baptist and United church communities that extended an invitation for me to worship with them. However I was content on Sunday mornings to drink coffee and watch the political shows on television. It was after a few months that I realized I wanted and needed to belong to a faith community and so I

joined St. Andrew's United Church. As kind as the Baptists were to invite me to worship with them, I could not see myself doing that – not in a million years.

I was due for another surprise! I received a phone call one evening from one of the deacons at First Baptist Church, Halifax, asking me if I would consider applying for the position of Interim Director of Christian Education. Now that was a surprise.

Today I am the Interim Director of Christian Education at First Baptist Church, Halifax. I love the position and I love the community I serve there. That is a surprise. But the greater surprise is that I love the fundamental principles of Baptist faith. They resonate with me to the core of who I am. It is almost as if this is what I have been waiting for.

What does it mean to be a Baptist? It means accepting, respecting and rejoicing in one's faith and the experience that has led and nurtured that faith. It also means Freedom. It means Freedom from the constraints of ritual and dogma. It means respecting and relying on one's personal relationship with the Divine.

What a surprise! I am a Baptist! And what a joy and delight to belong to a church where the culture of each community is respected, tolerated and celebrated. Baptist churches may not agree with each other, but I am quite sure that on a fundamental level, they do support the right of each community to be different.

First Baptist Church, Halifax, is an inclusive, ecumenical and open community. What could be more important than that? The community supports same-sex marriage. Rather than create barriers to people coming to the church, it is opening the doors and announcing, "we accept you and respect you, you are welcome here". I think Jesus might just have done the same thing.

In my humble opinion, I believe that a Baptist Church at its best, if true to its fundamental principles, offers a great deal to a world which is cynical of organized religions. People have had enough of judgmental and hypocritical churches, where love is preached but seldom offered. Offering love, acceptance and respect is fundamental in touching the lives of those who have been estranged from religion.

The last surprise is that as a Baptist, I am going to announce this good news through my words and actions and story. This is the exciting new chapter in my life.

Church Notes

A (mherst) to Z(ion)

A generous legacy donated by Janet Christie has enabled FIRST BAPTIST, AMHERST, to extend its service worldwide. The church has helped fund travel by third world pastors to the ADC *International Conference on Baptist Studies*; working trips to El Salvador CBM/*Habitat for Humanity* projects; the studies of pastors working with the Baptist Church in Katowice, Poland; and travel to Kenya by a *Leader Today* program participant.

Mark your calendars! The ABF Fall Assembly is coming to GERMAIN STREET UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH on October 3 and 4, 2008. That means the meeting is in Saint John, New Brunswick, a self-declared energy hub, with oil refineries, gas pipelines and nuclear power. What better place to tackle, along with concerned citizens of that city, the issue of global warming and its relationship to the stewardship of God's earth?

So What's a Baptist Anyway? is the title of a recently-concluded five-session series at FIRST BAPTIST, TRURO. The series dealt with themes like origins, champions of freedom, the Christian mosaic and where we Baptists fit. The *Four Fragile Freedoms* – Biblical, Soul, Church, and Religious – named by Walter B. Shurden formed the backbone of this study.

Beyond the Food Bank, which it also supports, the ZION BAPTIST CHURCH Congregation cooperates with other town churches to feed about 200 people three times a year in the *Yarmouth Community Lunch Program*, hosted by the Knights of Columbus. The church also took part in the *Ecumenical Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* Service held at the Salvation Army Community Church.

Help to expand this section of the Bulletin. Write to abfeditor@gmail.com.

Proposed Incorporation of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches

Just asking ...

How many lawsuits has Convention had to face to cause this change in the way we are governed?

Why is membership in an Association no longer enough to determine Convention membership for a church?

What local Baptist Church would recognize any external agency, other than the Holy Spirit, having authority over its scripturally-determined doctrine?

Is the 100-year-old Basis of Union an historical confession of faith or a creed binding today's churches?

Is it not acceptable for a Baptist Church to decide to exempt someone from baptism by immersion, because of either physical handicap or prior Christian experience?

Are Baptist ministers to be ordained by their churches or by Convention, accountable to their churches or to Convention?

Do we want to become a more top-down, legalistic, centralized denomination?

For information, visit the ABF website: www.atlanticbaptistfellowship.org.

The Annual ABF Friends Luncheon & The Vincent Rushton Memorial Lecture

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 2008, 12 NOON

Manning Memorial Chapel,
Acadia University, Wolfville, NS

Lecture:

*Congregational Autonomy and the Associational Principle:
A Baptist Dilemma* by The Rev. Dr. Stan Hasteley,
Minister for Ecumenical Relations and
Missional Partnerships, The Alliance of Baptists

To make your reservation contact Keith Churchill at:
kjchurchill@gmail.com



Reviews

Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*
(Metropolitan Books, 2006, 354 pages).

Chalmers Johnson is a prominent social scientist and professor emeritus at the University of California, from which he recently retired. In one word, his latest book is frightening.

Johnson believes that, for all intents and purposes, the United States, particularly since the Second World War, has become an empire. As evidence he notes the more than seven hundred American military bases worldwide, replete with appallingly lopsided agreements with the “host” nations.

The thesis of the book is that the United States is in a position similar to that of the Roman Republic before it collapsed under the weight of trying to maintain an empire.

Johnson believes that the resources needed to maintain the American Empire will “inevitably undercut ...domestic democracy” just as the Roman Republic found itself transformed into an imperial/military government. Much as Rome had to devote ever increasing resources to its military, and just as it saw the executive branch claim ever more powers, so also for the United States. Johnson believes that the combination of almost continuous wars since 1945, the increasing dependency of the American economy on military expenditure, an ever increasing military budget and, particularly under the second Bush administration, a largely successful grab of additional powers for the Presidency – unchallenged to this point either by Congress or the Supreme Court – has put the United States on the edge of the abyss.

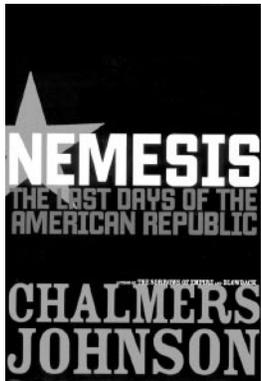
While at times he overplays his argument, Johnson makes a worrisome case. In the course of the volume he details repeated examples of interventions to overthrow democratic governments which did not happen to fall in line with U.S. foreign

policy, the support of repressive regimes which did, and the growth of the CIA as a virtual “private army” answerable to the President and generally unsupervised by Congress. Perhaps most disturbing of all are the outrageous claims to power made by the members or friends of the Bush administration, essentially that the President, in his role as Commander-in-Chief, is not, in time of war, subject to domestic or international law or treaties, and moreover, may define when the nation is at war. This is a recipe for human rights abuses, at home and abroad, abuses which have ranged from Guantanamo Bay and “extraordinary renditions” (the kidnapping of non-American citizens and their transportation to nations which practice torture) to illegal domestic wiretapping.

Perhaps in this election year, this book should be required reading for American voters, particularly those evangelicals who have unquestioningly supported the Bush administration and who apparently see little difference between the “American Way” and the teachings of Jesus Christ. In fact, one would be hard pressed to see much of his concern for the poor and the oppressed here, or any sign of release being announced to captives, let alone any hint of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. — *Dr. Mark G. McKim is the senior minister of First Baptist Church, Regina, Saskatchewan. A review of his latest book follows.*

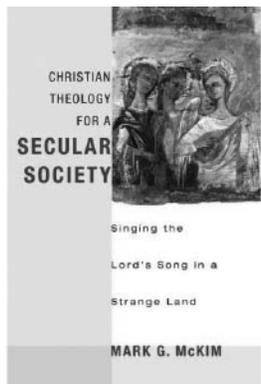
Mark G. McKim, *Christian Theology for a Secular Society: Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land*
(Wipf & Stock, 2008, 512 pages).

This roadmap through the very large territory of Christian theology is an ambitious undertaking. Mark McKim’s method is to show carefully the possible routes, as Christian thinkers from the early church fathers to 21st century scholars like Walter Brueggemann have envisioned them, then to suggest which one makes the most sense to him. He often seeks the mediating position between old rivals like Arminians and Augustinians. In the process of this consideration, he finds meaning in practices that he can not commend, like the Roman mass. As Paul Tillich did, McKim attempts to find the present-day world-view and the contemporary problem for which the Christian gospel is the answer, hoping through the



establishment of common ground to speak with effect to secular society. As readers are shown the pathways in this stroll through systematic theology, they have the sense of being with a broadminded, orthodox guide who sees the landscape through the eyes of the believers' church.

This reviewer did not always take direction well from his guide. Occasionally, McKim's arguments are puzzling. For example, he states that Christ's return will be like his ascension – "physical and visible." In fact, he cites Acts to state that this "would seem to conclude the matter decisively." After spending time with Dawkins and Hitchens, those aggressive advocates of secular society, it seems



that a careful exploration of spiritual or Bultmannesque interpretations is in order. One can imagine what the two atheists would do with the belief that Jesus physically shot through the clouds – to where? – and will someday physically return. On the other hand, McKim is often content to suspend judgement, particularly of matters related to the person of Jesus. He acknowledges that Jesus' finite knowledge as a man and infinite knowledge as God is a deep mystery and must remain so for now, in the same manner as Jesus' genuine humanity and

sinlessness. In the same vein, the New Testament teaching of both limited (God freely chooses who will be saved) and unlimited (Jesus died for us all) atonement remains an "unresolved paradox."

Occasionally, one feels that effort is expended on matters that are not important. McKim's concern with pre-, post-, and a-millennialism is probably not a top-of-mind- issue for most of today's audience, secular or Christian. Perhaps there is not enough attention to the diversity and development of thought within the Bible. Reading Paul, one feels the different spirit between Galatians and Timothy; in the Hebrew scriptures, one experiences the great gulf between Job and Proverbs. Sometimes this book seems to convey the belief that "the scriptures" are a totally unified revelation.

Nonetheless, there is much study and thought revealed herein. McKim is that rare person who stands firmly in his tradition and,

at the same time, is able to appreciate what Christians from other traditions bring to the table. This stance results in a combination of decisive thinking and due consideration of positions that differ from his. It is definitely not necessary to agree with everything that McKim says to realise the richness of the roadmap that he puts before us. – *Ed Colquhoun*



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What is the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship?

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship was formed about thirty years ago by a group of Baptist lay people and ministers who conceived it as a way of pursuing certain converging interests. First, they wanted to witness to historical Baptist principles. They also wanted to be involved with non-Baptist communions in joint worship, social action and ecumenical discussions of the nature of the Church. Finally, they wished to create a safe and welcoming environment where Baptists can share concerns and points of view without fear of being marginalized. The ABF is not an executive body, carrying out programs, and advocating positions. It is a consultative body with the following aims:

1. To witness to the freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion which is the essence of the traditional Baptist position;
2. To affirm and celebrate Baptist participation in, and witness to the whole, visible, catholic and evangelical church of Jesus Christ;
3. To strengthen the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches and to encourage it to strive for the above;
4. To provide a forum for the discussion of doctrinal and ethical questions and social problems and policies in that spirit of tolerance and mutual respect which issues from Christian love.

In pursuit of these aims the ABF publishes the *Bulletin*, and meets semiannually for worship, fellowship, and study of an issue of contemporary interest. Everyone is welcome to attend.