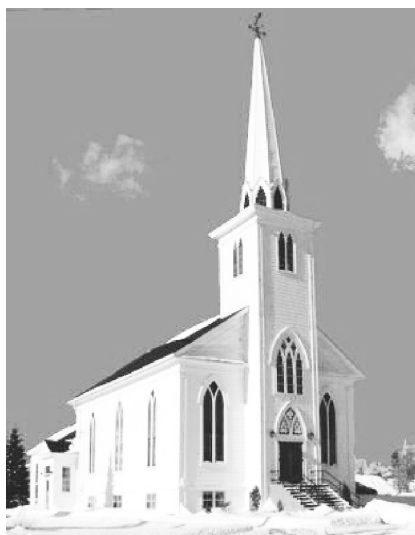


THE BULLETIN

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

Atlantic Baptist Fellowship

A U T U M N 2 0 0 4



*Port Williams Baptist Church
Location of the
Fall Assembly of the ABF*

22-23 OCTOBER 2004

Atlantic Baptist
Fellowship



within
Convention

THE ABF BULLETIN IS PUBLISHED
quarterly by the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship
and is mailed to interested churches and
individuals free of charge. To receive a copy,
or to change or correct a mailing address,
please notify the distribution organizer:

MRS. ISOBEL HORTON
6 Bay Street, Wolfville, NS, B4P 1L6

Opinions and views expressed
in this publication do not
necessarily reflect those of the
Atlantic Baptist Fellowship
or the Editor.

Donations towards the cost of production
are gratefully received and should be sent to:

DR. JOHN CHURCHILL
P.O. Box 56, Port Williams, NS, B0P 1T0

SUBMISSIONS

Articles should be between
400 and 800 words in length.

The Bulletin is edited by Rodger Forsman
and set in New Baskerville types at
Gaspereau Press, Kentville, NS.

MAILING ADDRESS

44 Kent Ave, Wolfville, NS, B4P 1V1
EMAIL: forsman@ns.sympatico.ca

In This Issue

RODGER FORSMAN, EDITOR

What do churches do? Well, among other things, they *plan*! Now planning can be short-term, or long-term. We are doing short-term planning when we already know what our goals are, and the question we are facing is how to accomplish them. For example, Who is going to lead the youth group? (We are already committed to having a youth group, even if we don't know why!) Long-term planning, on the other hand, always requires us to be clear about *why* we are doing what we plan to do. This often necessitates stepping back from the immediacy of a decision, taking stock of ourselves, and refreshing our grasp of our goals and objectives.

In this issue we have four contributions of the "taking stock" variety. The Rev. Bruce Matthews' report on the Anglican/Baptist Conversations is an account of two worldwide Christian communions orienting themselves to the situation of the Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Second, Ed Colquhoun returns to our pages with more thoughtful reflections on some thought-provoking new books, which themselves are attempts to take stock of the Scriptures, of Christian tradition and the life of faith in the light of current scholarship. Then the Rev. Roger Prentice's report on the selection of a new hymnbook for the Acadia University Chapel is another example of the way "taking stock" needs to be done in order to make as sure as possible that a decision with long-term consequences is based on the right sort of reasons. Finally, President Andy Crowell's remarks indicate that the Fall Assembly in Port Williams promises to be of particular interest to church folk, ministers and lay people alike, who see the importance of taking stock of ourselves as we struggle to shape our lives, individually and collectively, in the light of the Gospel.

President's Column

ANDY CROWELL



Editor's Note: The Reverend Andy Crowell obtained a B.A. in Philosophy from Mount Allison University in 1983 and the Master of Divinity degree from Acadia University in 1987. He was ordained to the Christian ministry at First Baptist Church, Truro, in 1988. He has served four pastorates: First Baptist Church, Truro (1987–1990) Mahone Bay/Northwest/New Cornwall UBC (1990–1994), Canning UBC (1994–2000), and Sydney UBC (2000–2002). Currently he is again minister of First Baptist Church,

Truro. Andy is passionate about endurance sports: Iron Man Triathlons, Marathons, and so on! He has coached school and community sports teams (mainly soccer) in all the pastorates he has served. Andy is married to Kathleen, and is father to their 4 children: Tiffany, Nicole, Leo, and William.

What is it “to be the church” in our day? This seems to be a question we can never stop asking if we are to judge from the attention given to it in recent years. It is also a question that arises in the day-to-day life of ministers and congregations who ask, “What are we to do, and become, situated as we are in our actual context?” What are the important questions to ask as we seek to direct our thought and action in ways that are faithful to the Gospel? Should our overriding aim be to become the biggest church in the neighbourhood? Should we be devoting our efforts to devising unalterable formulas for expressing faith? Should we be seeking to align ourselves with political forces which seem to favour our points of view? Or should we be trying to help people read the Bible with fresh understanding, and to grasp anew what the Christian tradition is saying to us, as a scholar like Marcus Borg suggests? (See, e.g., *The Heart of Christianity*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004)

At our upcoming Fall Assembly in Port Williams United Baptist Church on October 22nd and 23rd, we will be invited to look at what it means to be Christian in our day and in our contemporary church contexts. The Rev. Neal MacPherson, minister at Church of the Crossroads in Honolulu, Hawaii (a United Church of Christ congregation) will be leading us in examining this issue over the course of the weekend. Rev. MacPherson is the son of the Rev. Austin MacPherson, late of Wolfville. He has had the unique experience of pastoring a congregation that for sixteen years has chosen the simple but demanding path of honest struggle with the question of what it means to be the church in the specific context in which Church of the Crossroads finds itself. One result of this congregation's struggle to understand its mission is the conviction that the Church is not here to re-establish Christendom, but to live out the Gospel in a post-Christendom world. During the remainder of this year Rev. MacPherson will be studying in Montreal and writing about his experiences.

So let us come to our Fall Assembly, not so much with a hope to finding authoritative answers, as learning to ask the correct questions! Shalom!

FRIENDS OF THE ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

Friends are sympathetic to the aims of the ABF,
and support its work by an annual subscription fee of \$10.

To: REV. ROGER PRENTICE
5 GRANDVIEW DRIVE
WOLFVILLE, NS, B4P 1W5

Please enroll me as a
FRIEND of the ABF

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

DATE _____

TEL _____

SUBSCRIPTION _____

ABF Fall Assembly

PORT WILLIAMS UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH

Friday, 22 October, 2004

- 6:30 PM Registration
7:00 PM Welcome and introduction of
the Reverend Neal MacPherson
7:15 PM *Talk*: “The Church in Context: I,” followed by
a question-and-answer period. Communion
and Reception to follow the discussion

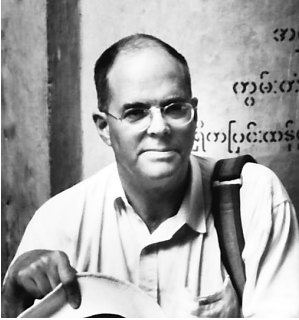
Saturday, 23 October, 2004

- 8:30 AM Gathering: coffee and conversation
9:00 AM Dr John Churchill, and Rev Sheila Smith:
“Reflections on Angola”
9:30 AM “The Church in Context: II”
10:30 AM Break
10:45 AM Discussion with Neal MacPherson
11:00 AM Business
12:30 AM Lunch

Our speaker, the Reverend Neal MacPherson, was born and brought up in the Maritimes but his ministry has taken him to the United States. He obtained a BA (Honours English) from Acadia (1964), the M.Div. from the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley (1967), and the MA in Religion and Literature from the University of Chicago Divinity School (1971). Ordained by the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the United Church of Christ in 1972 he has served churches in Chicago and Hawaii. He has been involved in several organizations working for justice, dignity and human rights. Currently minister of Church of the Crosswords in Honolulu, he is on a half-year sabbatical in Montreal, supported by the Lilly Foundation, working on the theme of the shape of the post-Christendom church.

The International Conversations between the Anglican Communion & the Baptist World Alliance

REV. BRUCE MATTHEWS, JUNE, 2004



Editor's Note: The Reverend Dr. Bruce Matthews is the C.B. Lumsden Professor of Religious Studies at Acadia University and Dean of Arts. He has published and lectured widely in the field of Comparative Religion. Reverend Matthews and Dr Paul Fiddes of Regent's Park College, Oxford University, are co-chairs of the Anglican-Baptist Conversations.

When two great Protestant denominations are charged with the opportunity and responsibility of seeking common ground through five years (a 'quinquennium') of communication and international meetings, an historic moment has been gained. Between 2000-2004, the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance have engaged in officially authorized 'Conversations'. The objective has primarily been to set down a Report on theological perspectives and points of contact at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Every effort has been made to ensure that the final Report of the Conversations (now very near completion) contain not mere description, a simple record of the talks, but represent as well a serious and critical reflection on points of sameness and divergence. By way of method, the Conversations were designed to reach out to Anglicans and Baptists in various parts of the world, including places where English is not an indigenous language, in order to gain a truly 'global' perspective. A small Continuation Committee of eight core members has, over a period of four years, travelled to locations in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin and North America, with a final meeting at Regents Park College,

Oxford, in March 2004. The two co-chairs were Rev. Bruce Matthews and Rev. Paul Fiddes. Each meeting has been a gathering place for regional representatives of both denominations. Each as well seemed spontaneously to encourage a unique fellowship between the denominational representatives that might not always have been anticipated. This truly heartening aspect was more than just social courtesousness. It indicates on its own a positive future for ways in which the two denominations might anticipate further labours together in the Lord's vineyard. The Conversations not unexpectedly encountered differences on crucial issues such as baptism and the episcopacy, to be sure. These have been seen not as hopeless barriers of division, but as signs of Christian devotion and understanding based on denominational experiences rooted in history and kept alive in the hearts of believers for generations. In general, the Conversations indicate how extraordinarily close the two denominations are in so many theological matters, and the potential they have to further cooperation in a number of specific initiatives (e.g., Bible translation and theological education).

The fruits of the Conversations set down in this Report do three important things. First, they indicate how Anglicans and Baptists respect each other's ecclesiastical institutions, and through this respect, work together in many parts of the world to achieve the common objective of bringing the saving message of Jesus Christ to those who seek association with these two respected denominations. One of the most vital sections of the report focuses on an unfolding process wherein the two denominations might seek an increasing sense of mutual recognition. Although in some instances this has not gone beyond a preliminary stage of shared worship and mission at the local level, elsewhere considerable advances in the matter have evolved short of actual full communion (in the case of the Church of North India, even this has been realized).

Second, although not meant to be a definitive doctrinal document for either denomination, the Conversations represent with considerable precision the theological positions of Anglicans and Baptists on many issues at the turn of the millennium – an important historic moment that represents a milestone of sorts in the ongoing story of Christianity in the modern world. The Conversations were never designed as talks leading to union, but ecumenism in the broadest sense still underlies their objectives.

The terms of reference provided by both the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance asked for eventual elucidation of key theological views. When both denominations committed to Conversations in 1998, it was assumed they would be the first of at least two subsequent rounds of talks, and that not much could be expected in terms of theological conclusions at the end of the first quinquennium. The fact that the 2000-2004 Conversations have produced a careful review of all the major theological issues confronting the two denominations represents progress way beyond initial expectations.

Third, the Conversations were conducted in a format that asked participants to respond to eight specific themes, beginning with ‘the story by which we live’, and embracing key issues of confessing the faith, ministry, initiation, membership, Eucharist, ‘episkope’, and denominational recognition. This provided the Continuation Committee with manageable and well-defined terms of reference whereby each regional conference was conducted, and is the basis upon which a final Report is structured. By way of summary, it is fair to indicate that in all places, in every meeting, there was a strong yearning for increased recognition of the historical and theological integrity that underlies both communions, and a desire to work out ways of recognizing that even without union or full communion, Anglicans and Baptists have far more in common than that which may hold them apart.

Editor’s Note: The Southern Baptist Convention had representation in the Conversations and many of its suggestions have found a place in the official record. Since the recent withdrawal of the SBC from the Baptist World Alliance, however, the co-chairs of the Conversations concur that the final document requires further editing. It is anticipated, therefore, that there will be one more round of Conversations to address this matter.

Three books by Marcus Borg

REVIEWED BY ED COLQUHOON



Editor's Note: Ed Colquhoun has held many roles in public education – English teacher, counsellor, principal, human resources co-ordinator, regional director for school construction and renovation et al. A member of First Baptist Church, Amherst, he retains a theological bent acquired at Acadia Divinity College. Ed works part-time assessing students with learning problems.

***The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2003, 234 pages)**

***Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002, 321 pages)**

***Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & The Heart of Contemporary Faith* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995, 150 pages)**

An old friend whom I see as a keen Christian minister recently told me that he was a lost soul. It seems that his long-held picture of God has been marred by his reflection on issues as diverse as the immense size and power of the universe and the most common theory of Jesus' death as a blood sacrifice. Such reflection left him in a state of profound doubt about the truth of the Christian faith as he had always understood it. Marcus Borg addresses his recent book, *The Heart of Christianity: Recovering a Life of Faith*, to those "for whom the earlier vision of Christianity no longer works." Borg is attempting to answer this question, "What is

most central to an authentic Christianity and Christian life today?”
Is it possible that Borg could be helpful to my friend?

Many people met Borg for the first time in his best-selling little book: *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. Here they discovered a warm, careful communicator with a vision of Jesus honed by serious scholarship and spiritual experience. Borg introduces himself in the first chapter through a brief spiritual autobiography. The origin of this book as a series of lectures to a general church audience about the significance of Jesus for the Christian life has resulted in an accessible introduction organised around themes like spirit, compassion, politics and wisdom. Borg carefully shows how the New Testament images of Jesus parallel root metaphors of the Hebrew Bible: the Exodus, Exile and Return, and the Priestly Story. This book made me aware of both Borg’s skill as a writer and his knowledge about Jesus.

Reading the Bible Again for the First Time demonstrates the breadth and depth of Borg’s scholarship. Although he was first known widely as a key member of the Jesus Seminar and has chaired the Historical Jesus Section of the Society of Biblical Literature, his interest and expertise extends far beyond study of the Historical Jesus. This volume is an excellent survey of biblical scholarship at the beginning of the 21st century. Borg begins with an overview which talks about the different ways to read scripture, then moves into a second part which introduces the Hebrew Bible through the creation stories, the Pentateuch, the prophets and the wisdom literature. Of course he concludes with the New Testament through the Gospels, Paul’s letters, and Revelation. In each chapter, Borg states the scholarly consensus as well as showing his own particular emphasis. Everywhere one is reminded, in a lucid style, of insights that have been forgotten, and is challenged with new information. For example, the section on wisdom literature is particularly good at showing the constant tension between conventional religious thinking and a first-hand experience of the Holy Land. After reading Borg’s chapter on Revelation as an indictment of empire, the relevance of this difficult book for our day becomes obvious.

Reading the Bible Again for the First Time would serve as a good introduction to serious study of the whole Bible.

In *The Heart of Christianity* Borg contrasts two ways of viewing Christianity: the “earlier paradigm” and the “emerging paradigm.” In the earlier paradigm, biblical interpretation is literal-factual and the Christian life emphasis is on salvation and an afterlife. In the emerging paradigm, by contrast, biblical interpretation is historical and metaphorical and the Christian life emphasis is “transformation in this life through relationship with God.” He surprises at times by championing such “evangelical” concepts like being “born again.” In fact, his opponents on the far right view him as especially dangerous because he knows how to talk their language, but gives it a new interpretation.

Marcus Borg writes for contemporary Christians as C. S. Lewis wrote for his generation with clear, persuasive prose that is easily accessible to a lay person. His continuing popularity was demonstrated to me when I saw, almost hidden by the new-age ephemera of the largest bookstore in Moncton, the three books cited above. I am sure that there are many people struggling with a Christian paradigm that would place God “out there” and see Jesus’ death only as a sacrifice for sin. Unfortunately, our metaphors have a way of either hardening into literal understandings or of being taken beyond the point where they are helpful. Borg points out another major way to view God that is, I find, much more helpful as well as five interpretations of the cross in the New Testament. For those of us who grew up in the earlier paradigm but now find it limiting, Borg can be a guide to a richer and more meaningful life of faith.

The Word In Song

REVEREND ROGER PRENTICE



Editor's Note: The Reverend Roger Prentice is the Chaplain of Acadia University. He is well-known on campus by students, staff and faculty alike. He is actively involved in the work of the Wolfville and Area Inter-Church Council, as well as in a national chaplaincy organization.

Few congregational decisions are more fraught with potential difficulties than the selection of a new hymnbook. As the hymnbooks published by

the Baptist Federation of Canada in 1973 continue to deteriorate with use, it will be a challenge for many of our congregations to find suitable replacements.

The Acadia University chapel has just gone through this process. Ideally, the first choice would have been a Canadian Baptist hymnal. Unfortunately, Canadian Baptists have not found it possible to accomplish this task, so it became necessary to look farther afield. This fact immediately raised the following question: What are the appropriate guidelines for the selection of a hymnbook? Several were identified.

The most basic guideline is a theological one: a hymnbook is to be used in our worship of God. Since worship is an offering, everything we offer in worship should be the best, including our music and poetry. The implication is that a hymnbook is not to be chosen simply because it contains songs that are popular or novel. What hymns assert, and the imagery they contain, need to be consistent with good theology.

Second, hymns have a teaching function. Poetry set to music is highly memorable. It is likely that the singing of hymns does more

to shape Christian experience and life than any other activity. So the hymns we sing need to be accessible, both in words and music, to people of different experience and age.

Third, Christian experience grows and develops as each generation faces new challenges to faith and finds new avenues in which express it. So we need to pay attention to newly written hymns as well as to those which have proven their worth over decades or centuries. Well-known and well-loved hymns need to be included, as well as those that give adequate expression to Christian understanding in terms of current thought and imagery.

A hymnbook also needs to be flexible enough to support the different uses to which hymns and songs are put. For example, different parts of a worship service call for different kinds of hymns, as do the different seasons in the Christian year. Again, different kinds of services require different kinds of hymns.

Finally, we have to face the fact that books are costly, so expense is a consideration. Thought was given to investing in projection equipment as an alternative to buying books which, in the long run, will need to be replaced again. It was decided however that the overhead projection of hymns on a screen was not an option. The main consideration here was architectural: in the Acadia Chapel a large screen would block the view of the chancel with its fine window depicting the story of God's grace. It was also felt that sight-lines did not favour use of a screen. Furthermore, it was thought that a book in hand conveys a feeling of permanence and participation in a community that cannot be achieved by the temporary appearance of words on a screen. As Lynne Truss notes in her bestseller:

Picking up [a] book in the first place entails an active pursuit of understanding. Holding the book, we are aware of posterity and continuity. Knowing that the printed word is always edited, typeset and proof-read before it reaches us, we appreciate its literary authority. (*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, Gotham Books: 2003, pp 180–1)

Practical requirements for a new hymnbook were then listed.

1. Its theology, music and poetry must be of high quality.
2. It should contain a reasonable number of well-known and loved hymns.
3. It should contain a varied selection of new hymns.
4. It should give reasonable recognition to inclusive language.
5. It should contain a good variety of hymns fitting the Christian year and adapted to the different parts of service.
6. If possible it might include some Canadian hymns.
7. It should be likely to remain in print for long enough to allow for replacements.

Several different hymnals were examined according to the above guidelines. We noted the abundance of American publications which are produced for profit by independent publishers. These appear to be designed for the market rather than with any comprehensive set of criteria in mind. As a result, some contained mainly 19th century “gospel” songs, popular in some quarters. Others seemed to cater to the demand for novelty, ignoring the way time and experience tend to cull out hymns and songs that gain popularity but lack the content that enables them to endure. Hymnbooks of this kind usually have a short life span.

Applying the above guidelines we shortlisted the following:

The BBC Songs of Praise The British Broadcast network hymnbook;

The Book of Praise The Presbyterian Church in Canada;

Common Praise The new Anglican Church of Canada hymnbook;

Common Praise An ecumenical British hymnbook published in 2000;

Hymnal A Worship Book; an American Mennonite (1992) publication;

Voices United The new United Church of Canada hymnbook.

In the end, we chose the ecumenical British hymnbook, *Common Praise*. It was a difficult decision, and the book is not perfect, but it best satisfied the above guidelines. Its positive features include:

1. It is ecumenical;
2. It is one of the most recently published and contains some new hymns;
3. Its poetry and musical arrangements are of high quality;
4. Within its 628 selections can be found many well-known hymns;
5. It has an excellent index system, contributing to ease of use;
6. It follows the Christian year;
7. It remains faithful to the original text of most hymns but is sensitive to concerns about inclusive language.

One negative aspect of the Melody edition (for use in the pews) is its layout. It follows the British (and former Canadian) pattern with music placed above the words.

There are three editions of the hymnbook: Music (full score), Melody, and Words. The music edition is too thick for our pew racks. We elected to purchase the Melody Edition for the pews, and a supply of Music copies for those who like to sing the harmonies.

No single hymnbook will satisfy all. Our selection fulfilled most of our requirements and maintained the principles of worship: quality of poetry and music, with theological integrity. We will not sing every hymn in the book, but it permits us to rejoice and sing praise to God with some of the greatest hymns in the English language.