

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship

(Its Aims and Purposes)

One thing needs to be made clear at the beginning of this article, "The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship — Its Aims and Purposes" and that is simply this: it is generally understood by the Fellowship that it has no intention of setting itself apart from the fellowship of Baptists in general; whatever its "aims and purposes" it is the hope of the Fellowship that these may be worked out by the Fellowship within the Atlantic Baptist Convention. It is the hope of the Fellowship that it may represent as faithfully as possible certain strands in the total Baptist witness — strands which the ABF deems to be of historic validity and of current importance. From time to time in our history some aspects of Baptist life and witness are strongly emphasized while others tend to be challenged or muted or neglected. Such muted or neglected aspects need a voice and a visible demonstration within the total body for the health of the whole body. Within the last few years such important Baptist principles as the primacy of local church autonomy, the right of individual interpretation of Scripture under the guidance of the Spirit, the inclusive nature of the Christian fellowship, have been neglected and in some cases officially rejected among us. It is the view of the ABF that these must be maintained and, where necessary, restored as ways of thinking and acting.

The ABF fully realizes the hazards of taking any stand which is not a major concern of the majority, and which might so easily be interpreted as being divisive or at least disruptive. Nevertheless the hazards must be accepted in the conviction that the purposes involved are valid and worthy of demonstration.

Some of these purposes are as follows; in reading what follows the reader needs to be reminded that this is not an official statement of the ABF, but rather, the personal reflections of the writer who hopes that they reflect with responsible accuracy the views of the ABF.

A major purpose of the ABF is to demonstrate in word and action the historic Baptist principle of the self-responsibility, under Christ, of each Baptist congregation. This means that no larger body has the right to make decisions binding on a local congregation without the prior consent of the local congregation. We hold this to be so for all congregations, not only those represented in the ABF. It is expected of course that individual congregations will act responsibly.

- with this purpose in mind, the ABF is organized on this model.
- with this purpose in mind, all proposed action of Association or Convention need to be examined carefully to prevent excessive authoritative action

which impinges on congregational self-responsibility — which has also been called “the autonomy of the local church”.

—with this purpose in mind the ABF considers itself responsible to give support to any congregation which justifiably feels its rights have been usurped or ignored.

Another major purpose: to maintain the primacy of the work of the Holy Spirit in the opening up of and the interpretation of Holy Scripture. No less than others, members of the ABF are people of the Bible.

Believing in the spirit of free inquiry, the ABF is a Fellowship of biblical studies, studies in theology and doctrine, and in the mission and work of the church. The focus of every ABF meeting is on such studies. This has created a fellowship of openness to the Spirit, willingness to listen to each other, the absence of authoritative presuppositions other than the Bible — all of which provides a fellowship climate which, we believe, makes it possible for God to speak, to be understood, and to provoke appropriate response.

—through the work of a recently appointed Theological Commission it is hoped that eventually study guides may be made available to local churches.

Another major purpose: in the name of Christ, to be identified with people through sharing in their needs as they actually are, without expectation of any rewards. Or, to put it in a more familiar phrase: encourage the development of social action. By and large, our Baptist witness in society requires much strengthening. One thinks particularly of the disadvantaged, the imprisoned, and their families, and those considered by many to be social outcasts.

—As a small start in this direction we, (1) have examined the work of the special ministries of the deaf, through the Atlantic Ecumenical Ministry of the Deaf; we participate financially, and are aiding in the spread of information about this special and much needed ministry; (2) are seeking some means of being involved more creatively in ministry within penal institutions, and (3) are striving to stimulate interest among churches so that they will become directly involved in their own localities in such projects as drug dependency, family life, housing for the economically disadvantaged, or whatever is of priority concern in the local scene.

A further purpose: the ABF believes that Baptists should seek fellowship not only among themselves but share faith and life with others as widely as possible. The ABF believes that Baptists have a witness to bear in all forms of ecumenical relationships, and that Baptists need the widening vision and awareness of common purposes, as well as differences, which involvement in such fellowships provides. The ABF realizes that this is not the point of view of our Convention at the present time, but believing that this is an appropriate

extension of our fellowship, and knowing that churches of other denominations look forward to Baptist participation, the ABF makes persons available wherever possible:

- through such persons, participating in the Atlantic Ecumenical Council.
- through such persons, participating in the "Heads of the Denominations" Conference.
- maintaining, in a very limited way, linkage with the Canadian Council of Churches.

A purpose inherent in the Fellowship is steadily demonstrated: that is the development of a sense of "Fellowship" itself as a way of life.

Reginald S. Dunn
President, ABF

Theological Commission

As reported in the last issue of the "Newsletter", the establishing of a Theological Commission was authorized at the Spring meeting of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship. The Commission has been appointed with the following persons as members: Rev. Dr. Morris R. B. Lovesey, Mrs. M. R. B. Lovesey, Rev. John Boyd, Rev. John Churchill, Rev. Dr. R. E. W. Forsman, Rev. Dr. Allen Gibson, Mr. Kendell Kenny, Rev. Austin MacPherson, Mr. Jack Matthews, Rev. J. Melville Scott, Lic. Gegory Whitehouse and Lic. Ida Whitehouse.

The Commission has begun its meetings and a report on its activities will appear in a later issue.

Impressions from Convention

By Vincent Rushton

Business Session

The overall impression which most people seemed to have of the past Convention was that it was a good one. The President, Executive Minister and Parliamentarian are to be commended for the manner in which the business of Convention was conducted. Mr. Robert Higgins deserves praise for the work of co-ordinating the various activities which went to make up Convention.

Motion to amend the Constitution

A motion was presented from the floor that any motion which sought to amend the constitution which was defeated by the house could not be brought up again until a three-year period had elapsed. I challenged the legality of the chair's decision that this could be dealt with the following day because it dealt with the constitution and therefore required a year's notice. The Parliamentarian ruled that it was a matter of policy and not constitution.

Rev. Danny Gibson challenged this ruling, stating that we had definite instructions about amending the constitution in the document itself. He said: "The constitution has its own amending formula, and to make any modification of that formula would itself be an amendment to the constitution, and therefore would require a year's notice of motion." The Parliamentarian and the President conferred. The President then declared that it would indeed require a year's notice of motion.

We will therefore be faced with making a decision concerning this amendment at the next year's Convention in Wolfville. It appears that this motion is an unnecessary rule further tying up the machinery of Convention.

The Doctrinal Statement — Basis of Union, 1905

The motion to include the Doctrinal statement for the Basis of Union in 1905 in the constitution of the A.B. Convention was not introduced at this session of Convention as was scheduled. (It had been given the notice of motion the previous year.) In order to make clear if it was actually being withdrawn, I asked for the President's ruling as to whether or not this motion could be brought up at a later date, and was assured by the President that it could not.

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship has taken the stand that passing of this motion would not be a wise move, and there was a great deal of support for our position, as was evident at Convention. Our founding fathers, in their great wisdom, kept the doctrinal statement separate from the original constitution of the United Baptists. To include the statement in the constitution would mean that it would be subject to change as is the rest of the constitution. To change an historical document of this type would be unthinkable. Placed in the constitution the doctrinal statement could soon become something which we could be asked to sign.

As Baptists we stand for the Scriptures as the all sufficient guide for faith and practice, and The Holy Spirit the only guide to the interpretation thereof. No man made document can replace the work of the Spirit to guide, and the power of God's Word to inspire each of us.

A.F.B. Fall Meeting

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship will hold its Fall meeting at the Atlantic Christian Training Centre, Tatamagouche, N.S., on November 5 and 6.

Registration will begin at 7:30 on Friday evening, to be followed by the evening session consisting of a panel discussion and question period on the theme: "Facing the Future". This session will conclude with the observance of The Lord's Supper.

The Saturday morning session will begin with a devotional period at 9:00, followed by an open discussion on "Direction Finding". This will be followed by a business period. The sessions will conclude with lunch on Saturday.

You are invited to attend and, with your ideas, help the ABF plan for its future role within the Atlantic Baptist Convention. Your ideas and suggestions are needed. SEE YOU AT TATAMAGOUCHE?