

ABF Fall Assembly

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2003

- 6:30 PM Registration
7:00 PM Welcome and Introductions
7:10 PM Rev. Roger Prentice "History of
Separation of Church and State"
7:20 PM Dr. Mark Parent: Religion and Politics:
How can/How should the Church
Influence Government Policy?" (I)
8:00 PM Break
8:10 PM Discussion
8:45 PM Holy Communion
Refreshments and Conversation

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

- 9:00 AM Opening Devotions
9:15 AM Business
10:45 AM Refreshment Break
11:00 AM Dr. Mark Parent: Religion
and Politics: How can/How should the Church
Influence Government Policy?" (II)
12:30 PM Lunch and closure

If you arrive in Sydney before supper on Friday, why not plan in joining with other members of ABF for supper? Reservations have been made at Peking Restaurant, 355 Charlotte Street for 5 p.m. If you are interested, please contact Sheila Redden-Smith either by calling 564-4140 or by e-mail at sheila.redden@ns.sympatico.ca

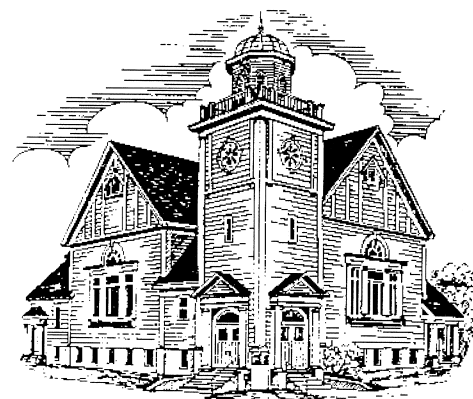
HOTEL INFORMATION: Reservations can be made at Cambridge Suites Hotel, 380 Esplanade, Sydney by calling 562-6500. This is a lovely hotel. You'll have a full suite with small kitchen. Cost: \$89 plus tax (includes breakfast). Your reservation must be made by Sept. 30 in order to secure the special price. When making your reservation, be certain to say you are with Atlantic Baptist Fellowship. If you must cancel, you may do so up until 4:00 PM on day of arrival.

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 3



SYDNEY UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH

CHARLOTTE & TOWNSEND STREETS

*Location of the Fall Assembly of
the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship
October 17-18, 2003*

Theme

*Religion and Politics: How can/How should
the Church Influence Government Policy?*

with guest speaker

DR. MARK PARENT, MLA

From the President

SHEILA REDDEN-SMITH

“TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN’” sings Bob Dylan. One only has to take a quick look around to notice all the change that is occurring in the world. Change within the family, workplace, community, church. No one and nothing is immune to change. Consequently, many folks find themselves confused and wondering where they belong. “Is there still a place for me?” they ask.

Times of transition can be both challenging and exciting but far too often we meet transition (change) with fear. We fear the unknown ... the unexpected. If we're honest, most of us would have to confess that we like things to remain the same. When things remain the same, there are no surprises. Life becomes predictable, even boring. We grow comfortable. It is during times such as these that a family, place of work, community group, faith community must take an inward look, re-group, re-focus and re-vision, in order to re-capture its mission.

This fall the ABF will be marking its 32nd Anniversary. Some of what I've just described above has been happening within the ABF. We've been together for a long time. We've formed a fellowship and we've become comfortable within it. That's a good thing! But it is also necessary for us to keep on with our mission. Because some of our life-long members, who were once at the helm, are no longer able to be with us due to death, health concerns, new employment opportunities, we need to recall and retell our story in order to remind ourselves from whence we have come. It is imperative that we know our history in order to know where we are going.

The ABF's leadership is also changing. Our newly elected executive includes:

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| PRESIDENT | Rev. Sheila Redden-Smith |
| VICE-PRESIDENT | Rev. Andy Crowell |
| TREASURER | John Churchill |
| PROGRAM | Paul Burden |

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| PROMOTIONS | Rev. Jeff White |
| BULLETIN EDITOR | Rodger Forsman |
| PAST PRESIDENT | Rev. John Boyd. |

With our new executive comes the need to do some re-visioning. The executive has met a couple of times since spring and has begun the task of asking questions such as: Who are we? Where are we going? How are we going to get there? What is our mission? This conversation will continue at our October gathering as well as throughout the year. We want to hear from all our members, and provide opportunity for more voices to be heard.

Like our past president, Rev. John Boyd, I believe that the ABF has an important role to play within our denomination. I want us to continue to dialogue on such topics as: Baptist heritage and identity, social and ethical issues, the role of the church within contemporary society, as well as to foster ecumenical relationships. Should any of you have a concern you want to be discussed or a topic idea for a future gathering, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing you and welcoming you to Sydney United Baptist Church for the Fall Assembly on Friday-Saturday, October 17-18. ☛

Atlantic Baptist
Fellowship



within
Convention

THE ABF BULLETIN is published quarterly by the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship. Submissions: Articles must be less than 500 words in length. Opinions and views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship or the Editor.

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The Frustrations of God

REVEREND ROBERT MATTHEWS
WINDSOR, NOVA SCOTIA

OVER TWENTY-SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO, the prophet Isaiah tried to shock his hearers into thinking. In a parable he portrayed God as the owner of a vineyard on which he lavished great care. Yet God was frustrated because the land had not yielded acceptable fruit:

God looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!

If Isaiah could describe God as frustrated in his day, surely we may describe God as frustrated when the Son He had sent into the world was rejected by the people He came to save. Certainly Jesus showed frustration when He wept over Jerusalem:

How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not.

He was also frustrated by his disciples when He could not communicate with them and when they were unable to support Him in His final hours. Surely we can describe God as frustrated today! It is more than two thousand years since the Prince of Peace came, but wars still rage, still there is unrighteousness. Many live in comfort while millions live in poverty and face starvation, and we do not know what to do about it. Yet all is not gloom. Although Isaiah portrayed God as frustrated (ch. 5), he goes on to speak of God as the Almighty, before whom angels veil their faces and humans fall prostrate, the One who must triumph.

The prologue to John's Gospel also has two facets of truth. John, who laments: "He came unto His own and His own did not receive Him", nevertheless exults: "Light is come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it." Perhaps Mammy Yokum

in Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* was saying the same thing when she said: "Goodness is better than badness because it's nicer."

Jesus did say that His kingdom would act as leaven in the world, leavening the whole lump. The progress of the kingdom seems to have been distressingly slow. It took about eighteen hundred years for slavery to be outlawed. But it can be argued that it is speeding up, for the past century had seen some amazing developments. Women have been liberated and racism, if it has not been totally destroyed, has been rendered politically incorrect. The final issue is not in doubt.

For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

Turning to the Apocalypse, we dare to believe what is symbolized there. We read that the Lamb that has been slain is the ultimate power that can control human destiny, and the climax of the human story is pictured in lyrical language:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... Behold, the dwelling of God is with men and they shall be His people and God shall be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. (Rev. 21:1-4)

Our final hope is expressed by hymnwriter William De Witt Hyde:

Beyond the present sin and shame,
Wrong's bitter, cruel, scorching blight,
We see the beckoning vision flame,
The blessed Kingdom of the Right.

What though the Kingdom long delay,
And still with haughty foes must cope?
It gives us that for which to pray,
A field for toil and faith and hope.



Editorial remarks about ...

ABF Business Meetings

IS IT OUTRAGEOUS TO PROPOSE THAT our business meetings should be the centrepiece of ABF assemblies?

I don't think so, but I can hear the groans already! "Oh No! Who wants to sit through a long, boring business meeting! Nothing really important ever happens anyway! The same people come, the reports never change, the same issues are rehashed, routine decisions are made, and eventually we go home. And the organization carries on anyway. As for me, I'm leaving early!"

This is a common reaction of busy people, and it is understandable in some ways. Complex organizations often include activities which do not interest all members. They often require attention to details which many find dull or boring. Even the most dedicated are sometimes moved to ask, Is it really worth it? In the long run, what is the point of it all?

A good answer to this question is suggested by a curious biblical text. Deuteronomy 26:5-10 is probably a part of an ancient Hebrew thanksgiving liturgy, that is, a form of religious service which focused the peoples' attention on certain facts about the past.

My father was a homeless Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small company and lived there until they became a great, powerful, and numerous nation. But the Egyptians ill-treated us, humiliated us and imposed cruel slavery upon us. Then we cried to the Lord the God of

our fathers for help, and he listened to us and saw our humiliation, our hardship and our distress; and so the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying deeds, and with signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I have brought the firstfruits of the soil which thou, O Lord, hast given me.

What is most notable about this text is that it consists of a stylized recitation of significant events in a history by which the Hebrew people achieved unity and identity as a nation, along with words expressing thanksgiving and obviously to be accompanied by an offering.

In the Christian church, too, there are similar recitations, such as occur at Advent and Easter. The Church does not observe Advent merely to anticipate a year-end holiday, nor Easter to celebrate burgeoning life. On the contrary, these festivals are occasions on which we tell a story which reminds us of the key events which constitute the unity and identity of the Christian people. Advent and Easter are times at which we deliberately organize ourselves to remember what has happened to make us what we are. These festivals call to mind shared traditions, shared loyalties, and shared aims.

The ABF is no different. It is an organization with traditions, loyalties, and aims—the very things that give us unity and identity. An organization which fails to remind itself of its past will also fail to maintain a clear picture of itself in the present, and flounder hopelessly when it comes to planning for the future. Conversely, if we are aware of the reasons why the organization was founded in the first place, and of current areas of concern related to those reasons, we will not find it difficult to frame intelligent policies for future action.

The business meeting is a superb tool by which to achieve these goals. When we listen to reports, discuss issues and help make decisions we are reminding ourselves of who we are, what we have done and where we are going. In other words, the business meeting not only records past achievements and illuminates current events; it also provides an agenda for future action. It says, in effect, "This

is what we have been, this is what our situation is, and this is what we must do.”

Dull and boring? Perhaps to some! But when I see our business meetings being whittled down to a few minutes per year I ask myself: “Is this organization still doing anything worthwhile?” And there just *might* be a connection between this question and the fact that attendance at ABF assemblies has been declining. ✎

“A People Out Standing In Their World”

DR. TIMOTHY ASHLEY



Editor's Note: In May, 2003, after twenty-one years of faithful and creative service at Acadia Divinity College in the cause of top quality theological education, Dr Timothy Ashley and the Reverend Maxine Ashley moved to La Crosse, Wisconsin, where he is the minister at First Baptist Church of La Crosse, WI. Maxine is Staff Associate Minister of Christian Education, American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, and also Chaplain of Onalaska Care Centre, Onalaska, WI.

Dr Ashley preached the following sermon on 24 August 2003. It is a carefully thought out and biblically based reflection on the nature of the Church. This is a timely topic. The Scripture readings for the day were: 1 Kg. 8:22-24, 27-30, 40-43; Ps. 84; Eph. 6:10-20; Jn. 6:66-69.

THIS MORNING'S SERMON TITLE is a play on the old joke which defines a farmer as a man out standing in his field. And I thought that one definition of a Christian Church is “a people out standing in their world.” Each word in this definition is important.

The church is PEOPLE not a building. The church is A PEOPLE who have a common commitment to Jesus Christ as the centrepiece of their meaning structure. Then the church is a people who are not content simply to be safe INSIDE the four walls of a building, but who know that the mission is OUT THERE in the world. The church must be standing in the world rather than falling, and must claim a solidarity with folks they meet out there in the world as co-creatures in God's WORLD. They have much in common with those with whom they are called to minister. The biblical readings this morning unpack all that.

The Old Testament Lesson is from King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple that he built in Jerusalem. He begins by praising God as incomparable, and by thanking him for divine faithfulness to Israel through the promise to David, kept with regards to Solomon. He adds a confession of the people's sin and a request for God's continued blessing of the temple and the people who pray there, whether they be native born Israelites or “come from away”, as they say in Nova Scotia. This is not a bad model for public prayer.

In the story Solomon recognizes that, beautiful and important as the temple building was, it was only a thing and, as such, not to be worshipped. He says:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built.

That Almighty God should choose to meet people in this world at all is a bit of a miracle. Indeed, it is a miracle that some people have a hard time believing and don't often experience. The writer of this story knew that it would be tempting to imprison God, so to speak, in the temple. But this will never happen, for God cannot be imprisoned in any of the little places we make for him. Even the whole earth and the highest heaven are too confining for God. God is greater than all our thinking of him.

Many devout people have thought that we could put God in a little box called a church building. Church life, for them, is really all about what happens in the building. Sometimes people think of the church AS a building. “Where's your church? It's down on

the corner of West Avenue and Main.” This might be called the “edifice complex.” But remember our definition of a church: A church is people. Buildings exist only to be used not to be saved and venerated. It is much better for a building to be used to death, than to remain pristine and end up as a mausoleum. I can remember my blessed mother admonishing us all the time: “You’re sitting on the furniture.” I thought then, as a child, and now as an adult: “That’s what it’s for!”

Solomon also prays that the temple (the church building of the day) may be a meeting place where people lift up their concerns to God, and where God can answer those concerns. The church is people. The building is a contact point where people may worship, pray, and commune with God concerning their lives in the world. The building exists only as a tool for empowering people to do God’s work out in the world.

The Epistle to the Ephesians assumes that the church is found in the world, and describes the equipment Christian people will need for their work out there. We read the famous “Whole Armour of God” passage. Now if your experience has been like mine you have sat through at least one very long sermon on this passage, and that’s enough! The passage really isn’t about how neat Roman armour was, anyway.

If the church is a people out in the world, what ought they to be doing? This passage answers this way:

...Take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore...

The reason for putting on God’s armour is standing. We have to be careful to understand this correctly. I do NOT think that Christians are called to beat up on people out there all the time. Nor do I think that we ought to be out there standing, in the sense of standing STILL, going nowhere. Remember that Christians were a tiny minority in the population, and that their Master stood for radical love in action for those who don’t deserve it at all. (That’s a long description of grace.) THEY were liable to be the ones beaten up because the standards by which THEY lived were different from the dominant ones of the culture. Note that all but one piece of

God’s armour is protective or defensive. The only offensive tool this passage discusses is the word of God. This armour enabled Christians to stand up under the persecution that was bound to come when they tried to put Jesus’ way of living into practice in their world. The armour is the qualities we need to protect us and help us stand up (or to be out standing): truth, righteousness, readiness to do whatever makes for peace, faith and salvation. These values are STILL deeply countercultural. What is valued is relativity and duplicity, doing what it takes to get people on our side, overpowering anyone to give oneself an advantage, inability to keep our word even for a little while...need I say more?

So, the first grace is TRUTH. In the Bible, truth has nothing to do with facts and faultless adherence to them; it has to do with trustworthiness. A true friend is one upon which you can depend, a true bridge is one upon which you can walk, a true map is one you can trust to get you there. To be true, one must say what one means and mean what one says. One must be dependable, trustworthy.

Righteousness, in the Bible, simply means being and doing what is right. And, because the Bible is really God’s story, being right means conforming to God’s story and God’s standard. Christians believe that this means following Jesus and what he taught. Next:

As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace (6:15).

Shoes are designed for the journey. They make it possible to be active without damage to the feet. To equip you for your journey, use whatever you need to enhance the proclamation of the good news of shalom (by your life and by your lips). Shalom would have been the word that Paul had in his mind when he used the Greek word we translate as PEACE. Shalom is not just peace as absence of conflict. Shalom is the opposite of disease and hunger and unrest. Shalom is wellness, wholeness, and being centred in life. If there’s a word that sums up what Christian life is all about it’s shalom. Jesus said, literally, “Blessed are the shalom doers.” Many of you have noticed that I usually sign off letters and e-mails with the word shalom. Doing what makes for wholeness—for SHALOM—I guess if I had a PERSONAL mission statement that would be it.

Next comes faith. Faith is not simply assenting to this, that or the

other so-called truth. Rather, faith is betting your life. Faith is not saying: "I believe that bridge will hold me up." Faith is walking out on it and across it. Trust is much closer to what faith is than mere belief. As the writer of 2 Timothy said: "I know the one in whom I have put my trust." We know who God is in Jesus and know that God can be trusted because God has come through time and again. Read the story of Israel, read the story of the church, read the story of countless saints. We are personally acquainted with the one in whom we're putting our trust, our faith.

Last, the helmet of salvation. This is the only grace so far that Christians do not "put on themselves," so to speak. The verb here is to "take," and this word means "to take" (from someone), "to receive." Sometimes, in the Old Testament, the word "salvation" means "victory." If we understand "the helmet of victory" in this way it may refer to the ceremonial helmet given to the victor. The gift of victory at the last is the reason why Christians can do everything they do in the world—because we believe the victory has already been granted in Christ.

Christians out standing in their world also receive the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In spit of of constant, widespread teaching and preaching to the contrary, almost never IN the Bible, does the phrase WORD OF GOD refer TO the Bible. What it DOES mean varies a good deal, but very often it is used as a metaphor for the understandable presence of God with his people in the world. The implication would be that the way in which we are active in the world is by making God's presence understandable in the world by what we say and how we live. By looking at us people understand what God is like. Wow! What a task! This presence of God in the world is a sword, which sometimes cuts to the heart of matters. It is not a club that beats people to death.

Long ago when what we call the Epistle to the Ephesians circulated around churches in Asia Minor Christians were a tiny minority that had no real power except the power of love as they tried to be a people out standing in their world, explaining God to their world by who they were and what they said. In our day the church is rapidly losing political clout and I, for one, am glad. We were never intended to be able to legislate people into the faith. Baptists have often been martyred for bearing that testimony. So,

if we lack the power to coerce people to look like Christians, how do we continue to be out standing in our world?

The last words of the Epistle for today tell us that:

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

The Gospel is, as always, the bottom line. Jesus found that his words caused many people to drop out, and he came to his core followers and said, "Will you, also, go away? And bless Peter's heart, he said, "Where else can we go? You have the words of life." It is tough to be a people out standing in our world. But we believe that Jesus still has the words of life.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
AMEN. ☛

Atlantic Baptist Fellowship Spring Assembly

WINDSOR UNITED CHURCH ☛ MAY 14-15, 2004

Guest Participants:

Rev. Dr. Harry G. Gardner
*Executive Minister,
Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches*

Rev. Ronald Baxter
Regional Minister, Region 2

Rev. Dr. Frank Guinta
Regional Minister, Region 4

DETAILS OF PROGRAM AND IMPORTANT ITEMS OF BUSINESS
WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN A FUTURE EDITION OF THE BULLETIN.

As I See It

TERRY TINGLEY

PERHAPS IT IS TIME FOR THE Atlantic Baptist Fellowship to get into the real estate business. Well, sort of! Pine Hill Divinity Hall in Halifax leases property to help fund the Atlantic School of Theology. And, just recently, the Cathedral Church of All Saints in the same city seeks to develop a plot of land which will provide a building including office space and 42 apartments and underground parking. All Saints will use monies raised by this project for necessary church renovations.

Roger Prentice, Chaplain of Acadia University, suggested almost ten years ago that the ABF consider establishing a Hall of Residence in Wolfville where some Acadia theology students could live in community. His idea was for ABF to purchase a suitable house close to the University campus. Funds for purchase of the property and construction and maintenance of the residence would come from residence fees and an endowment. During summers the residence could be used for ABF retreats and study programs. The chaplain and this writer discussed such a residence again in August, 2003.

It would be useful to place this item on a forthcoming ABF Council agenda with a view to determining the degree to which the ABF and its members might be interested in such an undertaking. As I see it, such an ABF Hall of Residence would not only help ABF maintain its identity but also provide all kinds of possibilities for enrichment of students, clergy and lay people.

ABF is committed to the preservation of historical Baptist principles. May the Spirit of God continue to lead us. ✠

Friends of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship

Friends are sympathetic to the aims of the ABF, which are:

- (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 United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces 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; and
- (5) TO PUBLISH, at regular intervals, a Bulletin which seeks to further these aims and which describes the activities of the fellowship and announces the agenda for its general meetings which will be held in the spring and in the autumn of each year.

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To: REV. DR. ROGER CANN,
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Please enroll me as a
FRIEND of the ABF

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