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# THE BULLETIN

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

## *Atlantic Baptist Fellowship*

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## *Wolfville United Baptist Church*

LOCATION OF ABF FALL ASSEMBLY  
20 & 21 OCTOBER 2006

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## *In this issue ...*

RODGER FORSMAN, EDITOR

Three regular contributors are back. Ed Colquhoun sends a review of a new book, one which raises the issue of how one reads the Bible. It is simply a matter of fact that different people can and do read the Bible in different ways: with different interests, purposes or initial presuppositions. Ed does well to show why this fact is both a challenge to the religious reader, and a stimulus to new insights.

These days when it is popular to devise "mission statements", make "plans", and formulate "goals and objectives" it is often not clear what these activities comprise as applied to the life of a church. Roger Cann's brief essay addresses this issue by suggesting three criteria against which to test our understanding of "mission" in the church. This is a timely paper, and any congregation engaging in long-range planning, or searching for a proper theological understanding of itself, can benefit from reading it.

Tim Ashley's essay, originally a sermon delivered to his congregation in La Crosse, Wisconsin, is an example of good biblical preaching and a fine model of exegesis. It is also a very thoughtful and well-reasoned contribution to discussion about one of the current hot button items in many congregations and larger associations of churches, namely, how to think about same-gender marriage. His distinction between *guarding Christian identity* in a secular world, and *inviting everyone without restriction to experience the good gifts of God* is precisely the kind of tool needed to assist us to move past internecine controversy and focus instead upon living out the mission of the People of God.

This is the last issue of *The Bulletin* that I shall edit. In my judgment it is time for *The Bulletin* to take some new directions. For one thing, I have fed our subscribers a pretty regular diet of issue-oriented articles, some of which have undoubtedly required concentrated effort to read. I make no apology for this, of course, as one of our editorial policies has been to try to keep our readers

abreast of what well-informed people are saying about issues confronting churches today. In this regard, it would be a great error to assume that we can think, speak and act intelligently about such matters without being well informed. Indeed, given the issues that confront churches today—concerns about social and economic justice, gender and sexuality, war, the nature and use of power, stewardship of the earth's resources, not to mention such matters as next year's budget or what constitutes proper church music—it is obvious that we need more clear and well-informed thinking in the churches rather than less.

At the same time, however, *The Bulletin* might appeal to a broader spectrum of readers if it contained a bit more news: more information about what is going on in the churches, or what is happening in churches across Canada, or North America, or around the world, as they attempt to live out the Gospel. We are encouraged when we hear of the successes of others; and we are moved to prayer and practical support when we learn of others' needs. Material of this sort has not been absent from the pages of *The Bulletin* over the last three years, but we likely need a bit more of it, especially in light of the demise of the *Atlantic Baptist*.

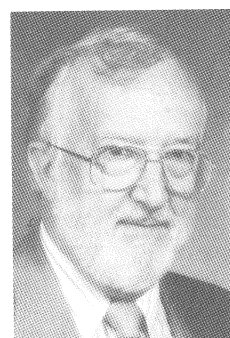
I want to thank all who have been my colleagues and associates in producing *The Bulletin*. Gary, Andrew and Kevin, and the rest of the staff at Gaspereau Press have been most helpful and accommodating to me. It has been a pleasure to work with them. I also owe hearty thanks to all who have contributed articles. I have had the most extraordinary cooperation from them. No one from whom I have requested an article has refused! And all have submitted their work on time! I am also grateful to those who have managed circulation, both the late Isobel Horton, and our current manager, Dr Keith Churchill. Accurate record keeping is an important matter in this business, and our circulation managers past and present have always made efforts to keep our mailing lists up to date and to think creatively about ways and means to extend our circulation. Then there are those here and there among the churches who have taken on the task of assisting with our circulation by personally delivering copies of *The Bulletin* to friends and acquaintances. Not only has this saved us money in postage, but it has also ensured that *The Bulletin* has reached folk who otherwise would not have received

it. Also deserving of thanks are those who have contributed to the cost of publishing and distributing *The Bulletin*. Finally I thank our readers for their loyalty to our little publication, and I trust that my successor will receive the same support!

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## *Right Here, Right Now: The Mission of the Local Church*

A ROGER CANN



*Editor's Note: Dr Roger Cann is a graduate of Acadia University and the University of Toronto. He and wife Sadie were Baptist missionaries in India for 15 years. Roger served on the executive of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, CBM, and the Canadian Council of Churches. They settled in the Annapolis Valley in 1993. (The following article was previously posted on the ABF website.)*

**H**ow do we start in mission? I doubt if there is a perfect starting time, with all prerequisites met, and a perfect starting line for mission. But how about Right Here and Right Now? For instance you are probably already involved in God's mission locally. So at best you might wish to sharpen your focus.

Three characteristics of the mission of the Local Church outlined by Leslie Newbigin in his article in the World Council of Churches booklet, *In Each Place*, supply guidelines for achieving a sharper focus on this question:

1. Identification with your community;
2. Solidarity with the disadvantaged and oppressed; and,
3. Living the life you profess.

God is at work in your local community. Day by day, He is inspiring and encouraging the committed. As you and I participate in the corporate life of our community, enjoying its festivals, celebrating its heroes and identifying with its nobler aspirations, we will meet the People of God. You are not required to travel to far off lands to work at God's tasks. Just as Jeremiah pointed out to those in exile in Babylon, there is no point in whining! Settle down, build your homes, raise families, and "... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare". (Jeremiah 29.8) The Gospel is one, universal and eternal. But it needs to be articulated through the medium of the local culture, with a homegrown flavour all its own.

Second, our fellowship of believers should be so organized that it responds to those needing help. Our response should not be merely to offer a band-aid, but to put forth strenuous effort to right wrongs and advocate changes in structures and programs. Having identified with the good points of the place where you live, you will have oceans of credibility to spend on behalf of those being treated unfairly. Jeffery Sachs in his book *End of Poverty* points out that soul-destroying extreme poverty breeds on lack of education, underemployment, poor health, poor self-esteem, and inadequate housing. The challenge is to work on all of these negativities at the same time. That is what God is doing. We should seek to be His co-workers. This is what "being in solidarity" means: to stand alongside neighbours, identifying with their needs and advocating their welfare. When we have said all that must be said about justice, we have not fulfilled the mandate of the Church to proclaim the Gospel. We must also demonstrate compassion, good will, forgiveness, reconciliation, and love, which act as a social lubricant where injustice remains.

This leads us to the third guideline for achieving a sharper focus for mission: becoming the Shalom fellowship, which is the promise of the Gospel. This fellowship is characterized by a mutuality of love as in the Household of God, a unity in functioning as in the Body of Christ, and participation as an agent in the divine plan as the People of God. Primarily our fellowship should be the example of how God wants people to live: forgiven and forgiving, loved and

loving, building a Culture of Peace, being the Healing Fellowship where wounds are bound up and the sorrowful are comforted. This fellowship is a foretaste of the Kingdom, Right Here and Right Now.

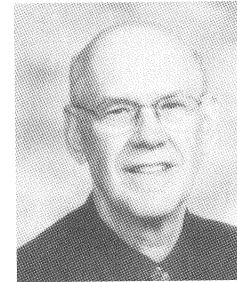
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## *Revelations: Personal Responses to the Books of the Bible*

*Introduced by Richard Holloway*

*Viking Canada, 2005, 403 pages*

REVIEWED BY ED COLQUHOUN



*Editor's Note: Ed Colquhoun has held many roles in public education—English teacher, counsellor, principal, human resources co-coordinator, 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.*

To those of us enamoured by new translations of the Bible, it is a curious fact that to many persons within the literary community the King James Version remains the translation of choice. There could be no more vivid example of the truth of the previous statement than Richard Holloway's compilation of the Introductions to the best-selling Pocket Canons—individual books of the Bible in the King James Version. Why the King James Version? According to Holloway there are two reasons. Firstly, this version emphatically conveys the sense that the Bible is an archaic text, not a contemporary document that can be doctored to mirror contemporary realities. Secondly, Holloway admires the extraordinary achievement of the Translators (as they were known). He quotes Adam Nicholson's

book, God's Secretaries—The Making of the King James Bible,<sup>†</sup> to the effect that their words remain a valuable vehicle of meaning precisely because of their gorgeousness and ambiguity.

Written by thirty-three popular authors, *Revelations* introduces fifteen books of the Hebrew Scriptures and ten books of the New Testament. This is not a typical study of scriptures because the writers are not typical biblical exegetes. No doubt, curiosity about how Mordecai Richler responded to Job or P. D. James to the Acts of the Apostles or the Dalai Lama to the Epistle of James helps sell the *Canons*. Holloway describes the tumultuous launch of the *Canons* provoked by the essay of novelist Louis de Bernières, who obviously identifies with Job, whom he sees as a "classic existential hero." Extending Job's argument, de Bernières calls God "an unpleasantly sarcastic megalomaniac." A group Holloway describes as evangelicals asserting "the primacy of their own views and the wrongness of everyone else's" arrived at the launch to protest. With some justice, Holloway states that *Revelations* is "a complete demolition of this blinkered and partisan view of the Bible."

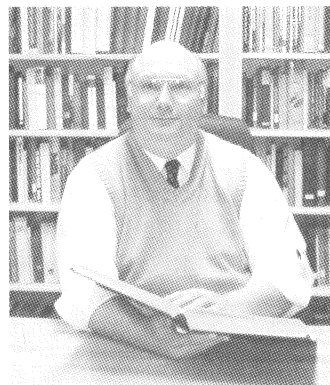
In truth, the essays about the Book of Job are challenging to the faithful (as is the Book itself!). Author Charles Frazier's comparison of Job's complaint to that of a blues singer; Spanish writer Benjamin Prado's focus on Job's moral courage in the face of God's inscrutability; de Bernières blistering critique of conventional religion; and Richler's irreverent plea for God to please, please choose another people to discipline: these essays show why the *Canons* are both bestselling and controversial. This reviewer found the Jewish authors, including David Grossman who introduced the Book of Exodus, particularly helpful. Grossman concludes that Exodus, rather than being merely a religious document, describes the fate of the Jewish people throughout history. While all the responses are interesting, some emphasize scholarly research, others personal reflection. *Revelations* is a powerful prompt to read the Bible for yourself, whatever your preferred version.

<sup>†</sup> Reviewed by Ed Colquhoun in the Spring 2006 issue of *The Bulletin*

## Majoring On Minors

(Ps. 15; James 1:17–27; Mk. 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23)

TIMOTHY R. ASHLEY



*Editor's Note: Timothy R. Ashley (BA, MA [Honours], PhD) was born and raised in the USA. For twenty-one years he taught Old Testament and Hebrew at Acadia Divinity College. Prior to that he was the minister of two American Baptist congregations. Since leaving Acadia in 2003, he has been minister of First Baptist Church of La Crosse, Wisconsin. He also is Director of Central Baptist Seminary—Milwaukee, WI Centre and Visiting Professor of Hebrew Bible at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, headquartered in Shawnee, Kansas. In connection with the Milwaukee Centre, Dr. Ashley is also Staff Associate Minister for Theological Education for the American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin. He is married to Reverend Maxine Ashley who was Dean of Students and taught Christian Education at Acadia for many years, and is now both a chaplain at a senior care facility and a Staff Associate in Christian Education for American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin. Dr Ashley's sermons are available at [www.firstbaptistlacrosse.org](http://www.firstbaptistlacrosse.org).*

Have you ever watched a debate where the opponents were arguing vigorously, but were actually not talking about the same thing at all? This happens in political debates fairly regularly, and is a staple of much so-called academic "conversation" (to use the current term) as well. It even happens in the Church!

In our Gospel Lesson today, we have the record of what appears to be such an occasion of talking past one another. Most of us have learned to think that the Pharisees were the bad guys of the whole New Testament. All they cared about was majoring on minors.

The commonly rehearsed “knock” on the Pharisees is that they just loaded rules and regulations on people that made their lives intolerable. I am grateful that our knowledge of the diversity within Judaism around the time of Jesus has grown greatly over the past years. In reality, the Pharisees were NOT the bad guys at all, but were people who had decided that it was important in their own diverse culture, not to mention the pluralistic environment of the Mediterranean world of their day, to give common people concrete and clear ways to be people of Jewish faith, and not become white spots on white walls. They did this by taking certain practices that the Torah applied only to priests (such as ritual washing before eating) and applying them to all people. They also attempted to work out what the Torah meant in their day in concrete terms so that people could have strategies to hang onto their identity in an increasingly secular world. Some called this oral collection of material the Tradition of the Elders. Historically speaking, the Pharisees, in their variety, made it possible for the Jewish people, as a tiny minority of people in the world, to survive.

On the other hand, here’s this young rebellious carpenter from Galilee (which was certainly not the centre of power, influence, or sophistication) who simply defied such “identity markers” by healing people on the Sabbath day, by touching lepers and women with issues of blood, and by eating with all kinds of riff-raff without first undergoing ritual cleansing. In the light of their concern to maintain their witness in their culture, it is not surprising that the Pharisees who came out from Jerusalem (which was the centre of power, influence, and sophistication) had some honest questions of one who was, in their view, threatening to make Jewish identity disappear. I believe their question to Jesus was heart-felt. “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” In short, “Don’t you care about defining your identity as over against this godless world in which we live?”

Jesus responds in a number of ways in Mark 7. In order to keep a tight focus on the question of purity, our Gospel Lesson cuts out some of what he said. Jesus first responded with a citation from Isaiah 29:13 (interestingly enough from the Greek Old Testament not the Hebrew) to the effect that the Pharisees are putting human tradition ahead of God’s own will and, yet, were

sounding pious about it. When we next dip into the text he says that impurity doesn’t come from outside in, but from inside out. What actually defiles people does not come from associating with the wrong sort of folk or by contravening human regulations, but from harmful human intentions which lead to: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and folly. Any true Pharisee in Jesus’ day would have agreed with him both about evil intentions being a product of the human heart, and about the harmfulness of the list of vices Jesus’ mentioned. And here’s where talking past one another seems to come in. The Pharisees weren’t talking about ethics at all; they were talking about guarding Jewish identity in a secular world. Jesus either missed their point completely or responded to it by saying that guarding one’s identity in a secular society is not the major issue—it is majoring on a minor. Of major importance is how one cares for others in one’s society, no matter how secular it is.

James’ little letter takes up Jesus’ point of view and tries to answer the difficult question of how one DOES care for others in one’s society. When we come in at 1:17, James is finishing up one point before beginning another. The point he makes first is that God is the source of good things not bad things. He has already said before we started reading that bad things are the result of harmful human intentions (much as Jesus said to the Pharisees). James, then, goes on to say that being a Christian in our world (no matter how secular, evil, twisted, pick your word) should reflect God’s good gifts. He names three specific ways in which Christians can reflect God’s good gifts: by being quick to listen, slow to speak, and even slower to get angry: God’s gift was TWO ears and ONE mouth in order to suggest a useful ratio for their implementation. Anger and harmful speech to and about others do not reflect God’s good gifts, but rather are the product of our own harmful inner desire to control people.

James also gives one general principle for living in the light of God’s good gifts: being doers not just hearers. He’s going to come back to this principle in chapter 2, but here he introduces the subject by saying that we are not to be like those who continually look at themselves in a mirror and, then, forget what they look like, and have to look again. This is another way of saying that

those who “reflect” God’s good gifts are not so concerned with their “image” as they are with actually living out the good things that God has given. He sums it up by saying: “religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” We will be known by our deeds, not by our creeds. Don’t major on minors.

I think this is also a helpful way to look at that Old Testament Lesson in Psalm 15. If we read this passage as a legal document, expressing rules for getting into God’s fellowship, we make it an impossible task, or, worse, begin to think of it as getting close to God by, first, seeing how good we can be. This would be against almost everything Jesus said and did. On the other hand, if we remember that this text is a liturgy not a law, we can see that it provides a model for the kind of lifestyle that issues from God’s goodness toward us—living out the good gifts of God. Psalm 15 gives a thumbnail sketch of some of the ways in which such living works. Such folk speak the truth as they know it, rather than slander. Such folk intend no harm to those around them. They actually do not make common cause with harmful folk. When the people who reflect God’s goodness give their word, they do all they can to make it good, even when it is a costly thing. They do not do things simply for gain or to gain power, but for the good of others. Such are the marks of a firm and stable life that reflects the fact that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

To get back to Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisees: we need to see it for what it is. Jesus is NOT saying that such things as purity of life, the Sabbath, and living in distinct ways in the world are bad things. He is saying that, when these are compared to living in other-centred ways that reflect the love and care of God in the world, the “identity issues” major on minors.

It seems that we have two distinctly different approaches to life set before us. I would say that this difference is not only something that concerned the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. If we change the context to the USA, the religion under discussion to Christianity, and the time frame to today, there are many Christians who are busily doing exactly the same thing to maintain what they consider Christian identity embattled in our godless world. The question with which

Jesus leaves us is this: is what is crucial in our increasingly secular world finding ways to maintain “Christian standards,” in building a wall around the Christian faith, much as the Pharisees wanted to build a hedge around the Torah? Or is what is crucial going out into the highways and hedges and finding the halt and the lame, finding those who are marginal and poor, finding those who are maltreated and inviting them, together with us, to experience the good gifts of God, and live according to them? From our story in Mark, it would seem that the answer is obvious, and it may seem a bit odd that sometimes we applaud the contemporary standard keepers while at the same time we condemn their exact counterparts in the Pharisees of the New Testament.

In our contemporary world most of the identity issues have been transformed into various matters surrounding human sexuality. These now replace the issues of clean and unclean foods and with whom one eats that were the hot button issues in Jesus’ day. And I, for one, would not want to say that it is an unimportant matter to think about what it means to be a Christian in sexual matters. Nonetheless, I do think that to do so, as if the primary, burning issue facing us is distinguishing ourselves from others, is still majoring on minors as Jesus said it was in his day. The major issue is still caring for others in a world that is not only unfriendly to Christians, but to justice and righteousness in all but its weakest or most watered-down forms.

Dr. Cynthia Campbell, the President of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago recently wrote this: “When we respond (to the question of what makes us Christian), we can do no better than Jesus did when asked what was the greatest of all of God’s commands—love God and neighbour. It is as simple and as complex as that.” (*Christian Century* [August 22, 2006]: 17)

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

AMEN

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# ABF Fall 2006 Assembly

Wolfville United Baptist Church

WITH SPEAKER  
Dr Charles DeWeese

ON THE THEME  
Freedom: The Key To The Baptist Genius

FRIDAY, 20 OCTOBER

6:30 PM Gathering & registration  
7:00 PM Welcome and Introductions  
7:15 PM "Freedom's Place in Baptist Origins & History"  
Questions & Discussion (*A Communion  
Service and reception will follow the discussion.*)

SATURDAY, 21 OCTOBER

8:30 AM Gathering: coffee & conversation  
9:00 AM Devotions  
9:30 AM "Freedom's Implications for Baptists Today"  
10:45 AM Break  
11:00 AM Business  
12:30 AM Lunch and closing

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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 with out 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.