

Proposed training seminars for the conference include:

- Restorative Justice (Marinetta Cannito Hjort, leader)
- Non-Violent Struggle (Daniel Hunter & Akum Longchari, leaders)
- Biblically-based Conflict Transformation (Dan Buttry, leader)
- Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid in Conflict (Daniela Rapisarda, leader)
- Building a Theology of Peace (Paul Fiddes, leader)
- Inter-Cultural Conflict and Peacebuilding (Barry Higgins, leader)

For more information, see the conference website:

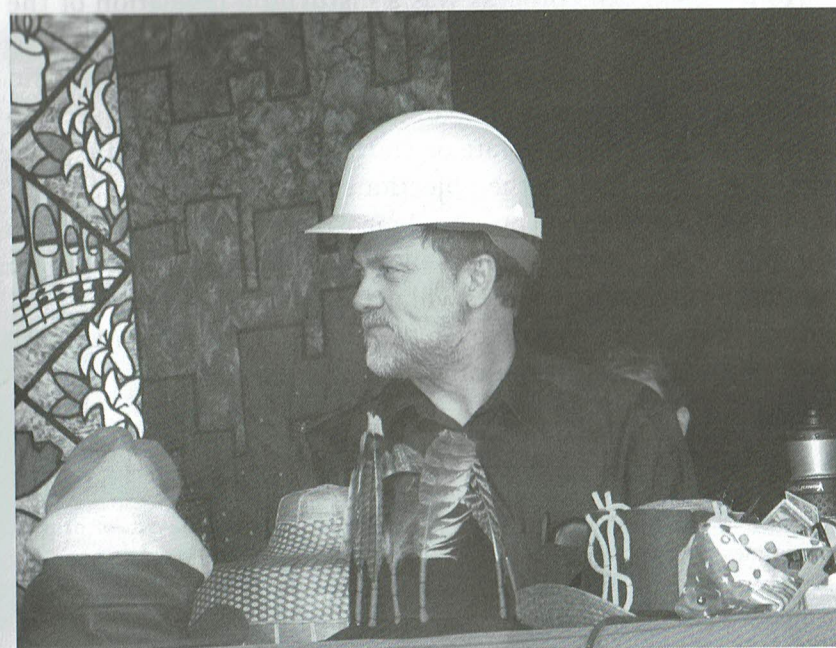
[www.globalbaptistpeace.org](http://www.globalbaptistpeace.org)



*Lively Exchange at the Rushton Luncheon: Allison Trites in a pre-marital discussion with Jeff White and Sharon Rafuse.*

# The Bulletin

An Atlantic Baptist Fellowship Publication



## Man of Many Hats

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*Autumn 2008*



## From the Editor

The postponement of the final vote on convention incorporation comes as a relief to those who saw major weaknesses in the proposal originally circulated. Perhaps the drafters will take seriously the proposals for improving the document that came from bodies like the Halifax Association.

Nonetheless, this process was a disturbing revelation of the way governance is viewed by many of our leaders. Contrary to the traditional Baptist position that the locus of authority within the Christian Church is a local congregation, these leaders seem to adopt a centralized corporate or church model foreign to Baptist tradition. I fear that, if the objections to this viewpoint are not truly heeded in the new proposed incorporation document, there will be a serious disruption of fellowship. From all points on the theological spectrum, Baptists will not allow a central ecclesiastical authority ultimate control over their beliefs, their ministers, or their property. — ED COLQUHOUN

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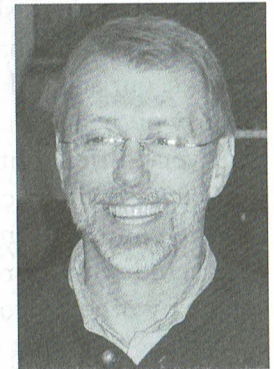
## A Word from the President

DAVE OGILVIE

As I sit to write this article, I've just completed my summer holidays. My children were home for a visit. We took time to be with family and to enjoy friends – precious pursuits that too often get pushed to the fringes of our busy lives. There were hours spent outdoors – on the water and at the beach, and forays of discovery into attractions and secluded coves on Prince Edward Island. There was time to tackle projects overdue for attention around our home. And of course there was time to read.

In reaching for books to take with me on holidays, I realized that much of my reading lately, and most of what I was looking forward to reading, falls under the umbrella of what some are calling “progressive” or “emerging” Christianity. Authors such as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and John Shelby Spong have long stimulated my thinking and ‘scratched’ me where I ‘itch.’ But in recent years a chorus of others has joined them in their pursuit of a more authentic expression of faith in our time – Karen Armstrong, Brian McLaren, Elaine Pagels, and Matthew Fox, to name only a few. That chorus of voices seems to be growing, and so too does the desire of pastors and lay folk to explore questions and concerns about their faith and their aspirations for the future shape of the church’s life and teaching. I see this as a very positive and hopeful development, the labour pains perhaps of a new reformation.

*With or Without God* by Gretta Vosper was first on my list of summer reading. It caused quite a media stir when it was released earlier this year so I thought perhaps I should see what all the fuss was about. It proved to be a thoughtful and challenging read. Vosper, a United Church minister in Toronto, believes that the church, as we have known it, has outlived its viability (along





with most of its doctrines and practices), and she imagines a new church that leads in ethics-fostering relationships, meaning and values that are solidly rooted in our own best selves rather than in any of our limited, outdated concepts of God. As the subtitle of her book makes clear, she is convinced that "the way we live is more important than what we believe," and she may be right. Heaven knows, our age-old preoccupation with right belief has produced plenty of 'heat' in the form of debates, schisms and heresy trials, but very little 'light.'

Vosper is an articulate and engaging author who writes with a warm, conversational style, yet her words often sting as they're delivered with a prophetic edge. She echoes many of the points made by other advocates of 'progressive' Christianity, sometimes accepting (e.g. that the notion of an interventionist God does not square with our experience), sometimes rejecting (e.g. Marcus Borg's process of redefining and reclaiming the language of faith), and sometimes extrapolating what others have already proposed. For example, she cites a passage in John A.T. Robinson's 1963 work, *Honest to God*, in which Robinson calls for a "radical recasting" of our theology of God, in support of her rejection of the word "god" altogether. I will leave the task of a proper review of this book to brighter minds than mine. Suffice it to say that while I often felt Vosper went too far in her rejection of longstanding Christian beliefs and practices, I appreciated very much her analysis and her warm invitation to think honestly and clearly about our faith.

What I found most challenging in her book, however, was the suggestion that for too long, clergy such as myself have served as "co-conspirators," along with their congregations, in a "silent pact" in which difficult issues are to be left unmentioned. "Those issues span everything from the origins of scripture to the nature of God. As long as the laity doesn't have to think about it, pastors don't have to talk about it. As long as pastors don't talk about it, the laity doesn't have to think about it. It's a tidy, mutually beneficial agreement" (p. 44). In spite of the fact that I know from personal experience this is not always the case, Vosper's words still smart,

because they are true. I have been a part of this "conspiracy," and many in each church I've served have been more than willing to play along, fearing that if we ask too many questions, our fragile faith might unravel and we would be lost. But as that chorus of voices I mentioned earlier grows louder, and more and more people who warm our pews are exposed to the theological and biblical scholarship of the last two hundred years, and as the tension between our religious and scientific worldviews also grows, it seems that fewer are willing to honour the "silent pact."

I sense a growing desire in my own congregation and elsewhere, to ask questions about our faith – what we believe (and don't believe) and why, and why we do what we do – and I believe it's time we offer more than bible studies that seek to appease and indoctrinate and instead give intelligent folk an opportunity for honest and informed inquiry. Church growth strategies and entertaining 'worship' have long been offered up to distract us from the questions that nag at our souls. It's time to face our fears and invite clergy and lay folk alike to join in a conversation in which we explore the beautiful and dangerous terrain of our faith with open eyes and minds, as well as open hearts.

To that end, our church in Port Williams will present *Living the Questions* this fall. It's a video-based series intended to offer participants "a safe environment where people have permission to ask the questions they've always wanted to ask but have been afraid to voice for fear of being thought a heretic." Perhaps in a later issue of *The Bulletin* I'll offer a report on our experience. I'm also hoping that ABF might serve as a catalyst to encourage and support pastors and churches in their pursuit of a "thinking" faith. After all, one of our declared aims has always been "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."

If ABF is to do this, however, we need your help and participation. We need to hear from you. We need to know what questions and topics you'd like us to explore together. And we need you to get involved. Promote the reading of *The Bulletin* in your church



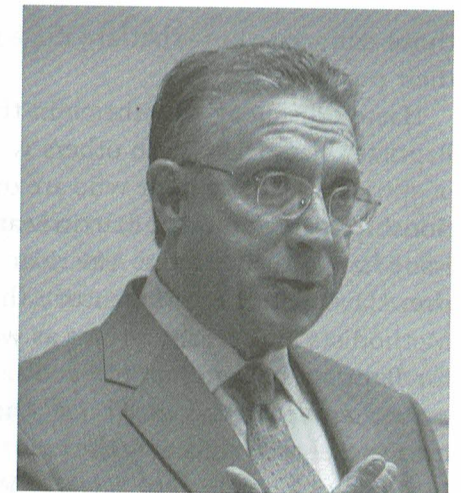
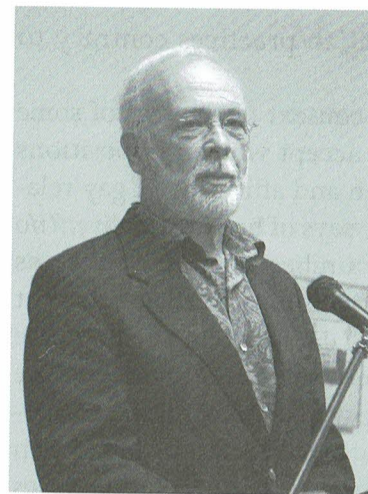
and invite others to come to our assemblies. Visit our website and participate in an online forum or send our Editor an article or book review. Tell us about the authors that are stimulating your thinking. Invite us to hold an event in your community, as Germain Street Church in St. John has done. The meetings of our Executive are open to all. Let us know you would like to attend and we'll tell you where and when we next meet. In other words, become an active member of this fellowship. We need your contribution. We need your voice at the table as we engage in the conversations that will keep our faith authentic and help shape an honest, open, intelligent church to nurture future generations. It's time.

## *A Baptist Dilemma:*

### *Autonomy vs. Associationalism*

#### VINCENT RUSHTON MEMORIAL LUNCHEON

Stan Hastey, Alliance of Baptists Minister for Ecumenical Relations and Missional Partnerships, spoke at this June's Vincent Rushton memorial luncheon about the dilemma faced by Baptists. The inevitable conflict between congregational autonomy and associationalism was outlined by Hastey in a careful discussion of leading Baptist thinkers like Bill Leonard, Charles Deweese, and Walter Shurden. Hastey quoted Bill Brackney of Acadia Divinity College, who, in an essay entitled "Volunteerism in the Baptist Tradition," says of Baptists that "From the earliest confessions of faith, the local church has been granted authority; all other connections are made in voluntary agreement and can be severed under adverse circumstances." Not only individual churches have the power of disassociation; Hastey acknowledged that "Conventions and associations of churches are free to discipline and even dismiss



(Left) Keith Churchill, Coordinator, welcoming the Friends of the ABF;  
(Right) Stan Hastey speaking at luncheon



Nelson Metcalfe, Pauline Allsop and Marilyn Peers of First Halifax



those congregations that are engaging in practices contrary to their purposes."

Hastey discussed the theme in the context of the fear of some Baptists to associate with others who accept women in positions of spiritual leadership or who are open and affirming of gay relationships. He noted that Martin Marty says of homosexuality, "no issue has so divided the American churches since the divisions over slavery in the 19th century that split not only Baptists, but Methodists and Presbyterians as well." Hastey put a strong case for Baptists being champions of a movement described in the 15th chapter of Acts in which "the party advocating inclusiveness succeeded in making the case that the church was to be open to Gentiles as well as to Jews." "Whenever the church chooses to include groups of people rather than exclude them, we are on the right side of history," said Hastey. Rather than seek further division, Hastey encouraged those present to find other Baptists who, like the apostle Paul, celebrate the differences to be found in the "body of Christ" and who "seek to be authentically Baptist in a time both profoundly unsettling yet strangely promising." (The complete address may be heard at <http://www.atlanticbaptistfellowship.org/stan>)

A number of other speakers addressed the luncheon audience. Before the lecture, Robert Rushton treated participants to a warm tribute to his father. After his thoughts about Vince (included in full following this report), Robert was pleased to hear from John Boyd about the regular work Vince did to keep in contact with Fellowship churches, and from John Churchill about Vin's assistance in helping churches find suitable leaders. ABF Friends Coordinator Keith Churchill welcomed more than 70 visitors to the chapel at Acadia University for the event, which provided a background for further reflection about the pending incorporation of Convention.

## "Memories of Vin"

ROBERT E. RUSHTON

Vincent Vernon Rushton was born the son of a coal miner in Springhill Nova Scotia in 1920. He eventually collected five degrees in history, divinity and education from his beloved Acadia University.

Dad was always a lover of history. Some of my earliest memories were the stories he told of our family. Later it was the history of the United Baptist Church in the Annapolis Valley and how it had grown and prospered over the past 150 years.

With great care and strength of feeling he would tell me how each Baptist Church was an independent institution that was part of a unified body called the Atlantic Baptist Convention. No President, Prelate or Bishop could dictate to them. These churches had the right to make their own decisions. He also explained how they recognized there was strength in numbers and so they met annually as part of a democratic convention process.

These were sacrosanct doctrinal values that formed the foundation of his thinking and religious teachings as a missionary, clergy, teacher and parent.

While we were in India in the 1960s, Vatican II and the expansion of *ecumenism* became an exciting time in his life. Many times he would share with me how he had met at a once forbidden seminary with clergy from all walks of the Christian faith. It was with great joy that he talked of how these men and women (for there were also nuns present) met and talked of their common God that they all worshipped through Christianity. This sharing of faith and the crumbling of theological walls built over centuries of conflict was a time for great rejoicing in his theological life.

Then in the 1970s when we had returned to Nova Scotia I began to hear his concern about a shift to the theological "right" within Convention. This was his wake up call! It was as if his whole life had been in preparation for this one moment in Baptist history.



What could he do about? He soon found out he was not alone. Not everyone was willing to “park their brains at the church door”. So they began to talk and gain strength from one another. They realized that if they were to succeed they must be part of the political process. After all, *this was a democracy!* Let the members of convention see that there existed a group of people who felt this new direction was inappropriate for the denomination. Make the Convention think! Challenge the motions put forward so that the “light” of open-minded reason could be allowed to shine. And so it was with great passion he would talk to me about each controversial motion that came on the floor of Convention. In great detail he would explain his arguments to be presented or the thoughts of those who would support him in this quest.

And so, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship was born.

Dad was actively involved in the formation of the group and became an enthusiastic participant whenever meetings were called. He eventually went on to serve in several official capacities within the organization.

He always had his camera ready to take pictures of those assembled. His study was littered with countless photographs of these important gatherings. They were not always organized but they were never thrown out! It was with great pride that he would show me how they had been used in a Bulletin or Newsletter. Speaking of Newsletters, I don't believe he ever threw one of those out either. He kept them by the hundreds, neatly bound in what eventually became known in their house as “The Fellowship Room”.

One day he came to me with a rather stunned expression on his face and said, “Some members of Convention think we're trying to cause a split”. He was upset that this had been raised for it was abhorrent to him. He was hurt by the accusation and returned to the Fellowship determined to somehow solve the problem without causing deeper wounds. Later, it was with a great sense of joy that he shared with me the formulated statement that I have seen countless times on bulletins and newsletters about how the Fellowship would work “within the Convention”.



*Family members of Vincent Rushton at the luncheon: (Front) Micheal Caines, Aaron Caines, Christianne Rushton, Ula Noiles, (Rear) Barbara Rushton & Robert Rushton*

In his later years as his health began to decline, the old spark that had always been such a vital part of my Dad's life began to diminish. His life became more sheltered and insular and as a family we witnessed a dramatic change in his personality. And then to our great joy we would hear the fateful words: “There will be a Fellowship meeting in Amherst” or “Springhill” or “Truro” or wherever.

And like the rejuvenated EverReady Bunny he would rise and gather the important things necessary to accommodate his attendance at these meetings. Then with mother dutifully at his side they would drive off with a great sense of urgency and happiness. They were going to be part of a wonderful group of like-minded people who shared a love for the Baptist faith and the independent institutions it stood for.

I salute you Dad, and all that you worked and stood for. I also salute the many wonderful people with whom you chose to share those dreams and passions.



## ABF Fall Assembly

OCTOBER 3 & 4

GERMAIN STREET UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH

SAINT JOHN NEW BRUNSWICK

"LIVING WITH RESPECT IN CREATION"

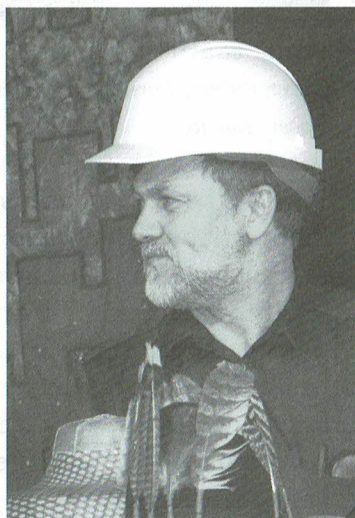
FRIDAY AT 7:00 P.M.

*Historical and theological overview of the theme.*

SATURDAY AT 9:00 A.M.

*The present situation: what are the problems  
And what needs to be done?*

Leader for the event is Eric Tusz-King, an ordained Diaconal Minister with the United Church of Canada. Mr. Tusz-King began his service in Moncton. In the 1980s, he moved to the national level where he worked on justice issues affecting countries like South Africa and Nicaragua. Since 1988, he has been in the Maritimes, involved with community development issues in fishing and farming communities and with First Nations. In the last two years, Eric has focussed on environmental concerns. He has formed and become the administrator of a builders' co-op committed to building affordable, energy efficient housing, thus combining his concerns of caring for the earth and of local economic development. Mr. Tusz-King has been a resource person to churches across Canada with regard to their energy conservation concerns and a member of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network.



## New Baptist Covenant

### Follow-up Meeting

About 70 Baptists, representing conventions, associations, universities, or other organizations, met at the Carter Center on March 12 to assess the hundreds of comments and suggestions that poured in following the New Baptist Covenant assembly in Atlanta. On March 19, Lance Wallace released a statement about the follow-up to the meetings.

According to Wallace, "An earlier decision was reconfirmed that we would not form a separate official organization, but would continue to build upon the excitement and inspiration that was shared by more than 15,000 of us who attended the Atlanta assembly, and work harmoniously with other Baptists. There was a consensus that we would reconvene the New Baptist Covenant in 2011, in the historic Baptist pattern of triennial meetings.... To allow for more diversity, including women and young people, our original



*Former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, participate in small group discussions on the issues addressed by the New Baptist Covenant.*

BILLY HOWARD PHOTO



steering committee will be expanded from five to about a dozen members.... Expert counseling will be sought concerning how we can assist actively in such major social issues as global warming, health care, poverty, criminal justice, human rights, religious liberty, elimination of nuclear weapons, and peace in the Middle East and elsewhere."

An extensive list of specific recommendations was included and listed on the Covenant Website, [www.NewBaptistCovenant.org](http://www.NewBaptistCovenant.org), for church congregations and individual Baptists who desire to expand their Christian ministry by reaching out in Jesus' name, to the "poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, and those who are bruised."

For example, the following actions were suggested to deal with poverty:

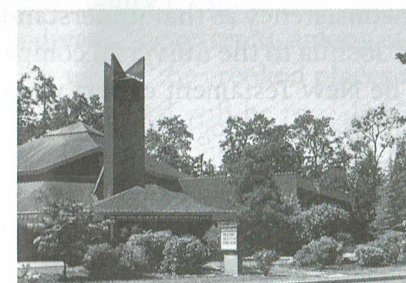
- Promote/support Baptist World Aid, CARE, and other groups that alleviate suffering from poverty.
- Promote tax policies that help the poor and working class, and support a minimum wage level so that the salary of one fulltime worker raises the family above the poverty level.
- Personally and as a congregation, visit neighborhood persons who are homeless, ill, or extremely poor. Every church should have a fund and an organized schedule for this purpose.
- Each person volunteer one week per year to Habitat for Humanity or other similar organization that serves the poor.
- Join together to clean up neighborhoods, work at shelters, repair homes, clear vacant lots for garden plots, etc.

## Church Notes

On April 26, the BAYER'S ROAD UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH hosted a workshop attended by more than 50 Baptists who belong to the Halifax Region Association of Baptist Churches. The purpose of the workshop was to inform those present of the urgent need to reconsider the incorporation proposal presently before Convention. Laymen David Gibson and David Dexter presented carefully reasoned and compelling presentations showing the inadequacies both of this proposal and of the process for adopting it. The concerns of the workshop were only partly addressed by news of a postponement of incorporation.



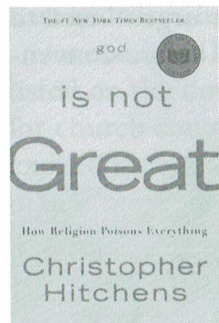
EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH in Victoria, BC, is not a bad place to worship on a Sunday in June. On June 29, the friendly congregation, with numerous connections to the Maritimes, began their summer services in a somewhat informal style featuring a puppet show. With the help of puppet Uncle Jake (aka Lead Pastor Rob Fetterer), Atlantic Baptist Fellowship webmaster Craig Hiebert, the church's Associate Pastor: Family Ministries, instructed younger, and not so young, members present about the value of memorizing passages from the Bible.





## Review

Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (McLelland & Stewart, 2007, 307 pages).



We have seen this before: Clever man exposes the abuses and absurdities of traditional, authoritarian religion, concluding that it is criminal to teach such to innocent children. Religion is therefore both foolish and dangerous – QED. For those who cut their theological teeth during the God is Dead debate, it must be interesting to hear the current opinion that, not only is God alive, He is responsible for most of the evil in the world.

Christopher Hitchens begins with murders committed in the name of religion in Serbia, Ireland, Beirut, Bombay, and Iraq and then moves on to describe how religion is an obstacle to disease control. He demolishes the argument for the existence of God from design, which few progressive Christians lean on these days. It takes Hitchens eleven pages to dispose of the Old Testament, fourteen for the New Testament. Hitchens seems blind to Israel's developing understanding of the nature of God, seeing only inconsistency as that understanding changed from the war leader of Joshua to the universal compassionate saviour of the prophets. The New Testament expert whom he chooses to refute is the traditionalist apologist C.S. Lewis. Hitchens hinges his criticism on Lewis' argument that Jesus was either the Son of God or a lunatic, based on sayings attributed to Jesus. The possibility that some of these statements originated from Jesus' followers as a way to state what they believed he was, although earlier assumed by Hitchens, is conveniently forgotten.

Richard Dawkins did most of this in 2006 in *The God Delusion*, albeit from more of a scientific rather than a cultural commentary viewpoint. Dawkins also crushed the arguments for the existence

of God. He explained the persistence of religion in human culture through a so-called memetic theory, in which religious ideas persist because they have a survival value in a way analogous to genetic inheritance. He was as efficient as Hitchens in debunking the Bible as a source of morality (twenty-five pages). Like Hitchens, he linked religion with the physical and mental abuse of children. His concluding argument was that the wonders of modern scientific discovery are quite enough to satisfy any "spiritual" longings of humankind.

Many of the basic points of Hitchens and of Dawkins are conceded. Of course there is bad religion and theology, just like there is bad medicine, or even bad commentary on religion. From the viewpoint of a free-thinking Baptist, one can cheer all the exposés along the way and still find Hitchen's conclusion a bit of a *non sequitor*. "Of course it happened, but religion isn't always this way, nor need it be."

In fact, Hitchens himself provides examples of the way religion can be the opposite of his title. He begins his book with the text from Philippians, "Whatsoever things are true ... honest ... just ... pure ... lovely ... of good report: if there be any virtue, and ... praise, think on these things." Hitchens calls this beautiful Pauline passage, which he chose for his father's funeral address, an "essentially secular injunction." His co-opting of Martin Luther King as an exemplar of atheistic spirituality is especially annoying. In fact, when King said, "I have a dream," he referred, among other things, to the great dream of Isaiah when "the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed." In a similar way, in his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, King placed himself in the company of Jesus, the prophet Amos, the apostle Paul, Martin Luther and John Bunyan. To say, as Hitchen does of the Baptist minister King, "In no real sense ... was he a Christian," is either uninformed or deliberately deceptive.

The main problem with Hitchens, and with Dawkins, is that they live mostly on the rationalistic surface of life – in the same neighbourhood as fundamentalism. Their analyses of humanity



and of God assume incorrectly that one can understand both through logic alone. On the one hand, we understand so little about the complexity of human beings. Carl Jung made the point forty-four years ago in his last work, "Approaching the Unconscious" in *Man and his Symbols*. So much energy is spent investigating nature, while so little research is done on the human psyche, this really complex and unfamiliar part of the mind that remains "virtually unexplored."

On the other hand, to speak of God as a being, a person, a super guy in the sky, does not take into account centuries of religious development. Fifteen years ago, Karen Armstrong in the immensely popular *History of God* did a much better critique of the idea of God. She pointed out the inadequacy of rationalistic thinking that leads both to modern atheism and to fundamentalism. She also gave a nuanced portrayal of the development of a kind of thinking about God that is so much more satisfying. Armstrong spoke of a move away from a personal God who behaves like a larger version of ourselves," and also described many past believers who insisted "that our human idea of God does not correspond to the ineffable reality of which it was a mere symbol."

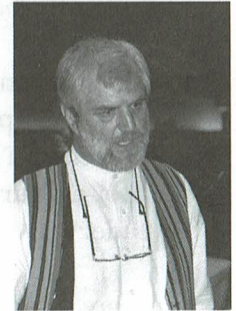
To quote Jung again, with adjustments for the current gender sensibilities, "[Human beings] positively need general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to ... life and enable [them] to find a place ... in the universe. [They] can stand the most incredible hardships when [they are] convinced they make sense; [they are] crushed when, on top of all [their] misfortunes, [they have] to admit that [they are] taking part in a 'tale told by an idiot.' It is the role of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of [humanity]." Surely, God is the most potent of these religious symbols.

## Baptist Peace Conference

ROME 9-14 FEBRUARY 2009

Mark your calendars now for the fourth international Baptist Peace Conference. This global event will inaugurate the 400th anniversary year of the Baptist heritage being recognized in various locations around the world. Like previous conferences in Sweden (1988), Nicaragua (1992), and Australia (2000), this gathering will bring together Baptists who are active in nonviolent struggles for justice and for strengthening the witness of Baptist peacemaking in various global contexts. The conference will consist of six days including intensive training in conflict transformation, nonviolent prophetic action, and other relevant topics, inspiring speakers, workshops, and worship. There also will be optional opportunities to tour Rome and the surrounding area on Friday culminating in a magnificent time of worship in the Waldensian church.

One of Four Plenary Speakers will be the Rev. Ken Sehested, co-pastor of Circle of Mercy Congregation in Asheville, NC (USA), who has been a speaker at an ABF gathering. Ken was the founding director, in 1984, of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, a position he held for 18 years. Throughout his tenure, he was viewed as one of the most significant voices for peace and justice in the Baptist world, including being a recipient of the Dahlberg Peace Award from the American Baptist Churches USA. He was the primary organizer of the first three international Baptist peace conferences. In 2006, during a conference of Baptist theologians in the Caribbean and Latin America, he was recognized with an award for persistent advocacy of justice, peace and human rights.



Ken Sehested