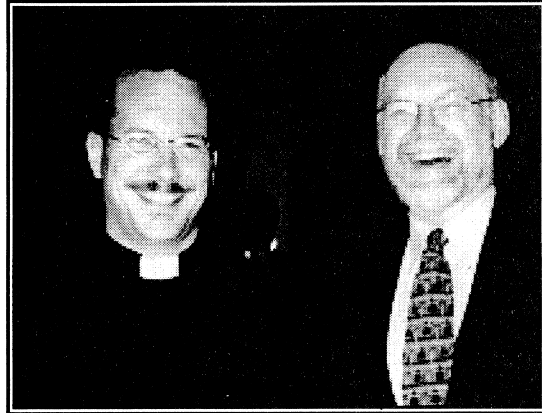
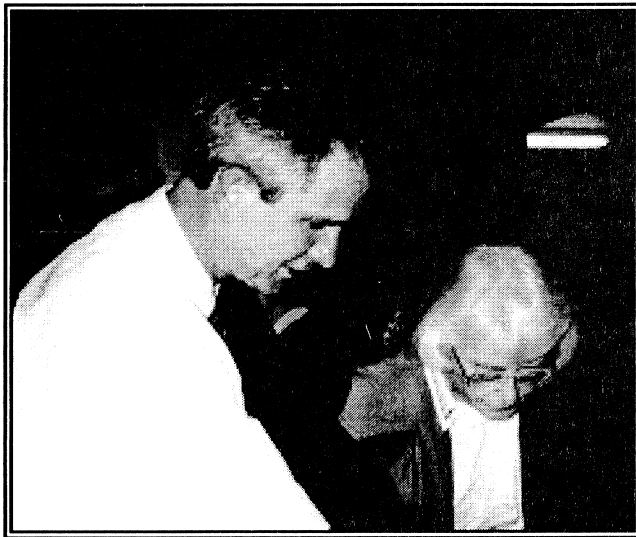


Photo Highlights

Spring Assembly ~ Chester UBC



Jeff White and Ed Colquhoun

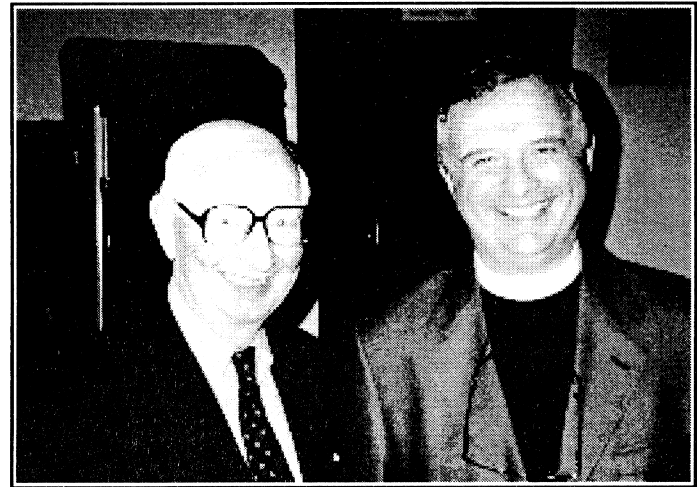


Dan Green and Miriam Ross

A Quarterly Publication of the

Atlantic Baptist Fellowship

the Bulletin



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Atlantic Baptist Fellowship



within
Convention

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Deadline for Article Submission for Fall Issue August 1, 2002

Editorial Comment . . . To Sign or Not to Sign

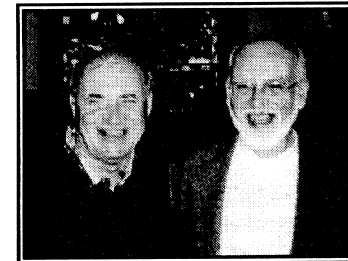
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Roger Cann

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What a comment on our human condition. The very issues which could mean the most to us are the issues which could destroy our human community. So we forbid even the discussion.

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There is nothing evil about conflict, or disputes, or differences, whatever you wish to call it. John Bartol says the only place there is absolutely no conflict is in the cemetery. In our church programs, whenever there is a sharing of space or time or resources there is a potentiality for conflict. There is nothing wrong in finding yourself in conflict. The test for the Christian is what you do about it.

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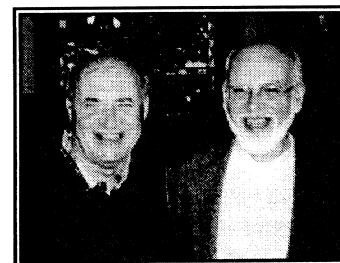
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Tomorrow in Britain

The ABF Friends Address - abridged- March '02

Robert A. Ellis

Tomorrow in Britain, if the statisticians are to be believed, about 8 people in every hundred will attend church. 8% I have to say, often seems to me to be an optimistic estimate. In my leafy middle class suburban road, the sort of place often spoken of as the stronghold of churchianity, I'm not convinced that enough go to make up for the lower than average figures elsewhere. But these statistics are interesting. If you ask the general public whether they go to church, just over 20% apparently say they do. If you ask the churches how many are actually there on any given week, the figure is well under half that. The statisticians say that this 'overreporting' of church attendance has been a constant feature of surveys of religious observance in the UK. Do people like to think of themselves as churchgoers even when they are not? Do they record themselves as churchgoers by virtue of an annual carol service? Is the variety of church going practise now reflecting in these figures? By this last question I point to such phenomena as: 1) the move away from attending twice each week on the part of many of our 'core' members, and 2) the move from weekly attendance to

fortnightly or less regular by others, even including those who consider themselves to be strongly committed to their local church. It's a puzzle.

But also a puzzle are the figures for general religious belief. Our impression of North America is of a more religious culture, and of stronger attendance figures. But even in secular Britain almost 70% will claim to believe in some sort of 'God'. Now admittedly we do need to admit its only 'some sort'. The famous exchange from such a survey runs:

- Do you believe in God?
- Yes.
- Do you believe in a God who is interested in you and active in world affairs?
- No, just the ordinary one.

As you go up from the 20% or so who at least claim to go to Church, towards the fuzzy 70%, you move towards a vague and rather wishy-washy higher power. It's God very much in your heart, a God of self-actualisation. But it's some sort of 'God'. Should we be encouraged by this? Does this mean that there is a fertile territory for mission in the barren Christian wasteland of Britain?

I wish I could be encouraging. In fact there is a debate raging (well, murmuring at any rate) between leading sociological authorities in the field in the UK. They split into two main camps. One group, epitomised by Grace Davie, is optimistic for the church and the faith. They see in this excess of belief over observance an opportunity for mission and, by implication, recovery. Studies into folk religion, and what is increasingly called 'folk religion', are called in to bear this out. The overwhelming incidence of funerals (though not christenings) is reckoned to bear out this argument that the British has become disaffected with the church rather than with Christianity as such. And the rise of interest in new spiritualities, and in new age movements, is cited as further evidence to encourage us. Britons 'believe' even when they do not belong.

But others are less positive. Steve Bruce is an exponent of another view of these statistical peculiarities. Bruce sees the 50% gap between 'some sort of God' and church attendance as being a sort of echo of the retreating tide. People still have some vague, inherited belief but it means nothing to them now. This gap is a

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residue, almost like a fossil record. He uses the illustration of a 'football fan' who never watches even on the TV, never follows the scores and can't tell you anything about his sport...

And as for the new spiritualities, the new age movements - these groups offer no comfort for at least two reasons. First because the numbers involved (so far as we can guess them) are tiny compared to the number leaving mainline churches each year; and second, because many of these people are barmy anyway!

Whereas Davie suggests that young people in every generation have been less into organised religion, Bruce finds this current crop of younger people to be much less likely to return to church later on in their lives, and predicts a continuation of the exponential curve of decline until only a hard core of religiously committed are left.

My job is to direct students on programmes whereby they prepare for ministry in our Baptist churches. Fresh from ministry myself I am finding it a bracing and stimulating challenge. Tomorrow in Britain, what sort of ministers will we need?

I am traditional enough to believe that they will need to be grounded in the scriptures and tradition of our faith community: they will need to know what it is to have been Christian through 2000 years, and 'Baptist' through several hundred. But that will not be enough. You know that too, and it never has been enough. In every age we have to try to second guess where our culture is headed, have to prepare people to bring the horizon of the biblical story to converge with the horizon of contemporary life.

I am ecumenical enough to think that none of this can be done in Baptist ghetto.

I am evangelical enough to believe that ministers tomorrow need not only to be biblical but also to have a sense of the urgency, importance, uniqueness and delight of the good news in Jesus Christ. They will be ministers who challenge people to re-orient their lives to the God and Father of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These ministers who serve in churches attended by 8% of the population on a regular basis (if Bruce is right, 8% and falling) but where 70% believe in 'some sort of God', will need to be able to connect with people who have little or no grounding in what we sometimes think of as Christian basics. Evangelists have always needed to do this. But these ministers will need to know who they are and what they believe, and not be too quick to draw lines about who is 'in' and 'out'. Wesley Carr speaks of the way in which parish realities mean that the definition of 'church' is continuously and locally renegotiated. We need to be willing to negotiate what it means to be church with our communities as well as simply state it, take it or leave it. One of the images used on contemporary pastoral theology as a model for ministry is that of 'bridgebuilder'. Ministers tomorrow will need to build bridges to the fuzzy half of the population who think they believe and want to believe.

These ministers, in an age of image and symbol, will need to be expert communicators. There is nothing new in that, but these ministers will have to be adept with visual communication as they are with verbal; they will learn to use the arts and the media as previous generations have used homiletics - or rather they will learn a new homiletics which goes beyond words. They will learn basic aesthetics and value the sacraments in a way that not all Baptists have done so. Its another story, but I believe also that increasingly, taking a leaf out of Moltmann's book, that the sacrament of communion will not be a sacred mystery for the initiated but a converting ordinance, an evangelical act in which Jesus'

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open table is a sign of the marvel of the gospel itself.

These ministers will need to be much more aware of other faiths than many previous generations have been. William Carey setting out to India taught himself religion and culture as an essential part of the beginning of the modern missionary movement. In the 21st century we once more need Carey's willingness to learn, though we may take different positions when we *have* learnt. Ministers tomorrow will, I think, need a more generous and coherent approach to other faiths - whether encountered around the block or across the (shrinking) world.

8% is not a great number, we ought to be depressed. And yet how could we be, really? How can we be other than excited and enthralled when we are called to follow Jesus Christ and be his people? Believing in our possibilities we yet believe all the more in the grace of God. Tomorrow in Britain the gospel will be proclaimed - and God will be at work. There as here, he goes with us into his future.

Editor's Note: On March 23, 2002, the ABF Friends gathered for the annual Vincent Rushton Luncheon and Lecture at the Manning Memorial Chapel, Acadia University. The speaker was Rev. Dr. Robert A. Ellis, presently Tutor in Pastoral Studies at Regent's Park College, Oxford University. The ABF BULLETIN is pleased to print this abridged copy of his lecture dealing with the church and the challenge of contemporary culture.

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Dr. Allison Trites retired after 37 years of teaching at the Acadia Divinity College. A retirement celebration was held in his honour on May 6th. Pictured with Dr. Trites (right) is Dr. M. R. B. Lovesey also a professor of Biblical Studies who retired in 1982 after 26 years of teaching.

Rev. Sheila Redden-Smith has been called to Sydney United Baptist Church. Sheila and her husband, Doug will be leaving Milton, Charleston and Port Medway UBC and moving to Sydney August 1, 2002. They have three children: Kari of Centreville, NS, Troy and Adam both of Milton, NS.



Rev. Andy Crowell has accepted a call to minister at First Baptist Church Truro.

Camp Wegesegum celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2003.

The Board of Trustees of the Atlantic Divinity College has established a Chair in Systematic Theology named for **Dr. M. R. Cherry**. A native of Kentucky, Dr. Cherry's teaching career began at Acadia University in 1957. He became dean of the faculty of theology in 1963 and ADC's first principal in 1968.

Towards a New Paradigm in Theology

M.R.B.Lovesey

John Shelby Spong, the recently retired Anglican Bishop of Newark, New York, is quite sure that the future of Christianity in the modern world is in jeopardy and that this faith is in urgent need of reformulation. Old paradigms, in which many groups of conservative Christians seek refuge, have proved themselves to be in urgent need of updating, as is shown by the decline in church membership and in worship attendance, particularly in the part of Christendom that Bishop Spong knows best, namely the Protestant mainline churches of North America. The best-selling author of Why Christianity Must Change or Die (1998), published in 2001 his A New Christianity for a New World, in which he gives what must be his final understanding as to why the traditional faith (of recent paradigms) is dying and what the new faith that is being born (in this post-modernist, trans-paradigm period) might look like.

Bishop Spong has written over a score of books in which he gives his reasons for rejecting large parts of the credo in which he was nurtured. He came from a conservative, evangelical background but when he discovered that that kind of articulation of the faith did not correspond with reality, as it is understood today, he tried his best to discover the truth of the matter for himself. He sat at the feet of the teachers of the great divinity schools, Oxford and Cambridge, Harvard and Yale; he read widely; and, basing his thought on such authorities as Don Cupitt, J.A.T. Robinson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich and Robert Funk, he gave us his *apologia pro vita sua* in a memorable series of books. His theological explorations convinced him that the situation confronting the modern church is extremely serious and demands a drastic reexamination of the Christian creed. His 2001 book, based on his William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University for the year 2000, gives his vision for the Church of Tomorrow, what it might believe and how it might behave.

The Bishop makes it quite clear that he is reacting vigorously against fundamentalism, which he sums up in the classic five points. There are several listings of these. He accepts the one given by Laurence Meredith in his book Life Before Death (2000). To abbreviate, the five fundamentals for him are:

1. Scripture, inspired by God, to be taken literally.
2. The Virgin Birth, which guarantees the divine nature of Christ.
3. The Substitutionary theory of the atonement, achieved by the death of Christ.
4. The physical, bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead.
5. The Second Coming of Christ, followed by the Day of Judgment, leading to heaven and hell.

In a public statement, given at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, in 2001, he states: "Surely the essence of Christianity is not found in any or all of these propositions." Spong is quite sure that "God does not inhabit creeds or theological doctrines shaped with human words."

The Bishop is also sure that "theism is dying." By "theism" he understands it as belief in "a being, supernatural in power, dwelling outside this world and invading the world periodically to accomplish the divine will." Since we live in the post-modern world we cannot any longer be "children dependant on the theistic parent-God." The God Spong wants is not the God of theism, but the God that is the "Ground and Source of All Being," as Tillich has it.

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The present writer finds it impossible to pray to a "ground and source of all being. "Such an entity he finds rocky and hard, and untrue to the experience of Christian believers about prayer. He believes the authority of experience must be taken seriously at this point. He recalls a sentence of Karen Armstrong's in which she said, "We must think that in some sense, God is personal - he cannot be less than personal - he might well be more than personal - but he must be in some sense personal." That happy phrase, in some sense, is the refuge of theologians facing mystery, paradox, and the sheer impossibility of accurate theological definition! So God must be, it seems, in some sense, personal and therefore there must be a dimension in "theism" which cannot be thrown out. Possibly the Bishop has gone a little too far with his almost total rejection of theism.

However, this is a splendid book. It addresses many who are wavering in their Christian commitment and should help many. It is not addressed to fundamentalists, for the Bishop feels dialogue is impossible with those who "know it all" and refuse to accept mystery. Fundamentalism will ultimately fail through its own inner weaknesses. The book is written by an honest, deeply

believing Christian. He affirms: "I am a Christian. For forty-five years I have served the Christian church as a deacon, priest and bishop. . . . I call Jesus my Lord . . . Part of my life's vocation has been spent seeking a way to articulate this impact [of Jesus's life upon his own]. . . . In this Christ I discover a basis for meaning, for ethics, for prayer, for worship and even for the hope of life beyond the boundaries of my mortality."

This book may well alarm many, but there can be little doubt that it should be read and pondered, and not only read but reread and studied many times until one is clear why one has doubts about it! A book of this importance cannot be sidelined and forgotten.



Prayer

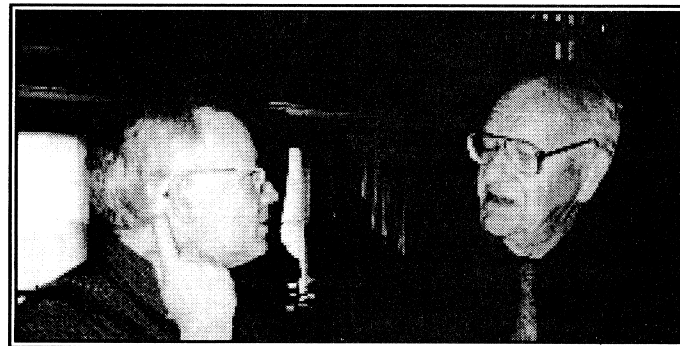
(World Prayer for Peace
from the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches)

For peace in your country
For the victims of violence everywhere
For those struggling for peace and justice
For churches in conflict situations
For a world without war and violence
Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth,
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace,
Let peace fill our beings, our world and our universe.

Amen

Photo Highlights

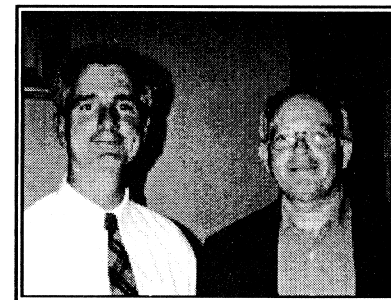
Spring Assembly ~ Chester UBC



John Churchill and Howard Taylor



Mel Scott and Philip Griffin-Allwood



Dan Green and John Churchill



More photos on Back Cover

Recommendation of Convention Council to Assembly 2002

Applying for Membership in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

... the Council of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches is recommending to the Convention Assembly 2002 that the CABCC apply for membership in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada ...

The above recommendation, received by all Convention churches, was an agenda item for the Spring Assembly of the ABF.

The ensuing discussion touched on the following points.

- The same proposal was turned down approximately a decade ago.
- Convention would be required to subscribe to a statement of faith.
- Because it speaks nationally on behalf of its members the EFC would be empowered to speak on behalf of the Convention without direct input from the Convention or from Associations.
- By fast-tracking the decision-making on this issue, Convention is severely limiting the ability of affected parties to participate in meaningful deliberation.
- For historical and theological reasons the proposal is contrary both to Baptist ecclesiology and evangelical principles, as the term "Evangelical" has been traditionally understood.
- The proposal is potentially divisive.

Resulting from this discussion the following resolution was moved by Ed Colquhoun and seconded by Howard Taylor:

That the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship petition the Council of Convention to place the proposal that the Convention join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada into a participatory process, thus affording Convention and Associations opportunity for informed discussion in light of historical evangelical and Baptist principles and enabling full input into the decision, and to encourage the same by postponing a decision on the proposal for at least one year.

The motion carried.

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To:
 Rev. Dr. Roger Cann
 1032 Club Crescent
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 B4N 4Z5

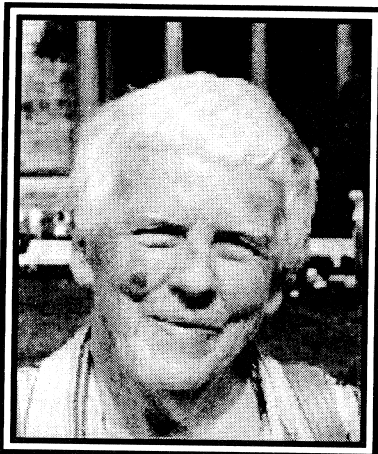
Please enroll me as a Friend of ABF

Name _____

Address _____

Date _____ Phone # _____ Subscription _____

Friends of the ABF



In Memoriam

Athena Belle Colpitts

Indian Harbour
Nova Scotia
1908 - 2002

"a consecrated Christian life"

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;
- (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.

FRIENDS undertake:

- (1) To pray for the life and work of the Convention and the Fellowship;
- (2) To seek other committed Christians to join the Fellowship;
- (3) To become better informed about current ethical and theological issues;
- (4) To pay an annual subscription, minimum \$10.00;
- (5) To respond, as circumstances permit, to requests for financial support.