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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.

⑤ 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.

# THE BULLETIN

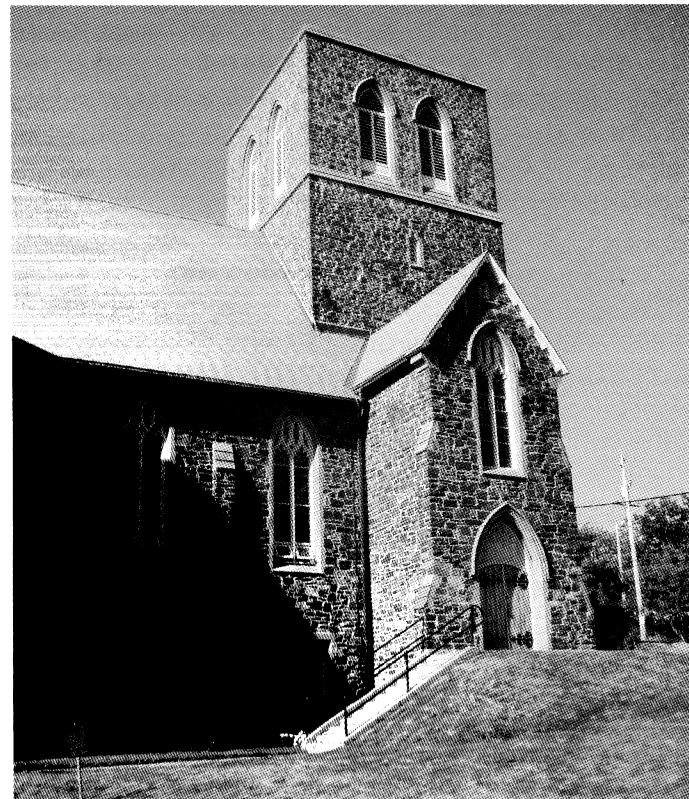
A P U B L I C A T I O N O F

## *Atlantic Baptist Fellowship*

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### *First Baptist Church, Halifax*

LOCATION OF THE AUTUMN ASSEMBLY  
OF THE ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

*September 30—October 1*



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## *In This Issue*

RODGER FORSMAN, EDITOR

**M**alaise in the Lord's Vineyard is a positive sign. When we feel content with the way things are it is often because we are enjoying selective observation, noticing only what comforts us. By contrast, the articles in this issue point to some discomforts, some stresses and strains. The first and the last, respectively by the Reverend Andy Crowell, President of the ABF, and by Himself, the Editor, reflect on matters of polity, that is, with the way local congregations and wider associations govern themselves. Lurking in the background of both pieces is the conviction that these are essentially theological matters, and the hope that recognition of this fact will lead to broader and more informed discussion of the way we do business both as local congregations and as a Convention.

A new contributor, the Reverend Dr. Barry Morrison, Senior Minister of Wolfville Baptist Church, offers a paper which points to some stresses and strains between homileticists and liturgists. Homileticists are those who specialize in the science of sermon-crafting. Liturgists, on the other hand, focus on the principles which determine the proper order and content of a service of worship. Dr. Morrison likens these two kinds of scholarship to Mary and Martha in the Gospel story (Luke 10:42), but without determining which has chosen the better part. Instead he argues that they are complementary when seen in the light of the proper purpose of the service of worship, namely the nurturing of worshippers into lives marked by thankfulness. As he puts it, "both participate in a greater movement and lead to a higher goal: the thankful response of heart, mind, soul, and strength to the gift and calling of God—the sacrifice of thanksgiving we name Eucharist."

I trust that these reflections will stimulate thought and have practical value.

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## President's Reflections

THE REVEREND ANDY CROWELL  
PRESIDENT, ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP



The annual assembly of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches is over and the Convention has begun celebrating its centennial. Celebration of Baptist life in Atlantic Canada makes me feel a little sentimental, and a little sad. Sentimental, because for me being a Christian of the Baptist persuasion is almost as much a natural quality as being human. My father, the Reverend Seth Crowell, was a Baptist minister. He served our Convention for over forty years. He regularly took our family to Convention Assemblies; this was treated as part of our vacation. His open spirit and demonstrative personality was for me a bridge to many people within our Atlantic Baptist life whose friendship I prize and with whom I still maintain contact. For me, as a boy, a Convention Assembly was like a family reunion. Now, as a minister myself, I have many additional reasons for attending Assemblies; yet I wax a little sentimental when I encounter people who were special to my father.

But the 2005 Assemble also has me feeling a little sad because the basic Baptist principles and practices of soul liberty and autonomous but inter-independent congregational life are being challenged to an unprecedented degree. The challenge is not just the fact of the "Provisional Statement" issued by Convention Council to all Atlantic Baptist Churches in December 2004, but in the reasons behind it. I have attended several meetings with people in leadership positions in the Convention. It is clear that the "Provisional Statement" was a response to the decision by Nova Scotia to legalize same-sex marriage. Convention Council, along with the Board of Ministerial Standards, appears to believe that ministers in the Convention need to be protected against possible

reprisals should they refuse to participate in a same-sex marriage. This appears to be the primary reason given for issuing the "Provisional Statement". However there is also an interest in maintaining consistency with resolutions on homosexuality adopted by previous Convention Assemblies.

However it is unclear to me why local churches were not given the responsibility of dealing with these issues themselves. This would have been much more in keeping with Baptist polity. Nothing would have stopped Convention officers from issuing some kind of pastoral letter apprising local congregations of the need to address current social realities. Indeed, doing so would have acknowledged and supported the principle of local autonomy. It would have stimulated local churches to engage in serious and informed study of all of the issues involved: social and political as well as moral and pastoral. Churches would have been empowered to make their own responses in ways that would both protect and reflect their own integrity as local congregations. Individual churches do not exist in a vacuum; each sees itself as part of a larger body that exists to work together for the common good. Each also exists to protect this principle of local church autonomy as a distinct expression of who we are as Baptists, given our understanding of New Testament living.

The die has been cast and a certain direction appears to have been set, perhaps with consequences extending beyond the specific intentions underlying the "Provisional Statement". It is almost certain that we will face debate about regulations governing the conduct of ministers and churches on matters that previously were properly left to the discretion of local congregations. The flash point, of course, has been the broad question of sexual orientation, not to mention same-sex marriage. What saddens me about the action of Convention Council is that it appears to reduce what is essentially a ministry concern, in need of pastoral understanding, to decision-making by formula without respect for people involved. What saddens me further is the apparent presumption that our common ground as Baptists must be determined by our stance on narrowly focused concerns, rather than by our traditional practice of working and worshipping together while tolerating differing opinions on many matters. The latter is by far the preferable position. Our common ground should be found in the faith we profess,

not in the requirement that the practical outcomes of faith must in all cases be the same.

As a child I could not articulate these principles. But they were exhibited to me in the way my father respected the freedom that each individual had before God. As a minister myself, I have learned and experienced on my own, through the churches that I have pastored over the years, just how meaningful these principles are. I am grateful for the centuries of Baptist life that have helped to shape my own faith, and the faith of many others. But I would be dishonest if I were to say that the current climate represents the best that our heritage can offer.

What life will look like for some of our churches in coming years remains to be seen. The ABF plans to “debrief” about this at our Fall Assembly, at First Baptist Church, Halifax on 30 September to 1 October. It is the conviction of our executive committee that we needed to come together to discuss the implications of Convention’s decisions with a view to achieving clarity about how to live as congregations in the days to come.

As the Convention moves forward with its centennial celebrations I am reminded of my great grandfather, the Rev Edwin Crowell, who in 1905 was instrumental in helping unite the congregations of Habitant (Free Baptist) and Canning (Regular Baptist), to form the new Canning United Baptist Church. At the same time and on a larger scale the United Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces began to be established under the Basis of Union. Such movements, large or small, were expressions of hope in what it means to be one in Christ, and they also illustrated the risks we take when we put genuine Baptist principles of freedom and unity into practice. My great-grandfather’s days are long gone, but I believe that the Spirit which fostered his vision of life in freedom and unity will never forsake us.

*Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.*

ALFRED TENNYSON (1809–92)

## *Someone’s in the Kitchen with Martha: Outlines for a Eucharistic Homiletic*

THE REVEREND DR. BARRY D. MORRISON



*Editor’s Note: Dr. Morrison received the Th.D. degree from Regis College (Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto). His dissertation is entitled: “The Theology and Spirituality of the Lord’s Supper in the Worship of the Baptist Tradition.” He served Baptist churches in Saskatoon, Montreal and Hamilton before being appointed as Professor of Worship and Homiletics at Acadia Divinity College. Since 2004 he has been Senior Minister of Wolfville Baptist Church. A member of the Worship and Spirituality Committee of the Baptist World Alliance, he has recently been involved in Baptist/Roman Catholic discussions in Washington, DC. He is married to Jean, who is a marriage and family therapist currently working with Addiction Services. They are parents of Gillian and Thomas. The family enjoys hiking and camping. Dr. Morrison is currently finishing a kayak for Jean. His essay is based on a paper read at the Preaching and Worship Working Group of the Academy of Homiletics, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, in August, 2003.*

I want to sketch the outlines of what I call “a Eucharistic homiletic.” The field of homiletics has gained a great deal from many disciplines including rhetoric, drama, linguistics, literary and narrative theory. Not to be left off the list is the field of liturgical theology. Like neighbours who have lived next door for years but have rarely been into each other’s homes, homiletics and liturgy may still have much to learn about one other and, in the encounter, strengthen the community in which both reside.

In some traditions the sermon has been treated as a kind of *hors-d’œuvre*—a morsel on which to nibble while awaiting the main course—real food, but not enough to count as a meal; rather, some-

thing to whet the appetite in anticipation of the Eucharistic feast. In other traditions the sermon has taken the place of the feast and has become the main course in its own right. Other elements of the worship service are then downgraded to being mere preliminaries to the main event: the preaching (or teaching) of the word.

In contrast to the minimalism of a morsel of bread and a sip of wine, the full course sermon occupies easily a third, if not half the time of the gathering—about the same proportion of the preacher’s work week, if we follow the homiletical recipe that calls for an hour of preparation for every minute in the pulpit. That’s a lot of time in the kitchen for a little time at the table, particularly in those traditions where the Eucharist is celebrated infrequently—monthly, or even quarterly. Disconnected from communion, the sermon has developed its own *raison d’être* and has tended to become self-sufficient in its design. As a result, the cord binding Word and Sacrament has been frayed, if not broken.

Yet we still speak easily of The Service of Word and Sacrament, the Service of the Word and the Service of the Table. In practice, however, (particularly in the so-called Free Churches) ‘Word *and* Sacrament’ has often been replaced by ‘Word *or* Sacrament,’ as if the one could stand without the other. For example, some observe an early morning communion quite separate from the later preaching service. Others dismiss the congregation with a benediction before regrouping for communion, sometimes in a place other than that used for the main service of worship. In these settings it would be uncommon for there to be any obvious continuity between pulpit and table.

Preachers are usually quite deliberate with regard to the overall liturgical context in which preaching takes place. The lectionary texts, the rhythms of the liturgical calendar, and national and local pastoral concerns are never far from the homiletical workbench, nor should they be. Less attention seems to be given, however, to the immediate liturgical context in which the sermon is situated—the service of worship.

Specialists in worship, while applying themselves to the construction of a fitting liturgical environment for a gathered community, often have been content to let the sermon be the sole concern of the preacher. Thus, while homileticians and liturgists are obviously in the same pond, it is less clear that they are always in the same

boat. They are the Mary and Martha of the theological curriculum: one complains about the other: “Lord, tell my sister to help me!”

The way forward, it seems to me, is to recognize that neither sermon nor liturgy has the last word on a Sunday morning. Rather, both participate in a greater movement and lead to a higher goal: the thankful response of heart, mind, soul, and strength to the gift and calling of God—the sacrifice of thanksgiving we name Eucharist. All of our acts of worship, including the sermon, share in and contribute to this one action. Essentially, the entire service of worship preaches. The various movements of the liturgy enable the people of God to proclaim, confess, console, teach, heal, challenge, repent, promise, understand, and celebrate.

To speak of worship as spiritual formation is to acknowledge the power of liturgy as well as the impact of the sermon. As Mary Catherine Hilkert says, “The desire to hear the good news and prayerful listening to the proclamation of the word as well as participation in proclaiming the Christian story through singing or speaking the words of the psalmist—regardless of the quality of the preaching—are never in vain.”<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that preachers in the more liturgical traditions are like Garrison Keillor’s violists, who suddenly realize that they cannot be heard past the second row. Speaking of the place of the sermon in the liturgy, Charles Rice affirms “the crucial office of the preacher.”<sup>2</sup> A liturgy is incomplete without the proclamation of the word in the local and global context of the day. We preachers might take comfort in the awareness that we do not come as virtuoso soloists. Rather, we are part players who sometimes carry the melody but who are more often carried by it.

When set clearly in the context of the whole, the sermon serves to speak the biblical texts into the present situation. As William Skudlarek puts it, the sermon interprets “our concrete human situation by the word of God in such a way that people are led to turn to God in acts of praise and thanksgiving.”<sup>3</sup> The sermon is intended to engage the congregation in the dynamism of the

1. Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 68, 69.
2. *The Embodied Word*, 88.
3. William Skudlarek, *The Word in Worship: Preaching in a Liturgical Context* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) 70.

liturgy, focusing the whole momentum of worship—from gathering to giving thanks to sending forth—on the needs and opportunities of *these* people in *this* place on *this* day, set in the larger context of the identity and mission of the Church in the world. The goal of the sermon is Eucharistic: “We need to know why we should lift up our hearts. We need some reason to be able to answer the celebrant’s ‘Let us give thanks to God’ with ‘It is right to give [God] thanks and praise.’”<sup>4</sup> This is true whether or not the response to the word involves coming to the Table, for every sermon requires a response. The truncated liturgy that moves immediately from sermon to closing hymn surely does the congregation a disservice. People at least need opportunity to offer thanks, to intercede for others, to celebrate and commit themselves to the sermon’s glimpse of God’s vision for life.

A Eucharistic homiletic, then, is a way of thinking theologically about the sermon as integral to the impulse of the entire liturgy toward the giving of thanks, with all that that implies about the Church’s response of heart and mind and strength. What the sermon does for the text of Scripture—that is, to interpret the ways in which our story is woven into the biblical story—it can do for the Eucharistic prayer, namely, help us to understand our present situation as somehow caught up in the flow of God’s redeeming grace and give us a reason to offer thanks.

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## Book Notice!

MACPHERSON, D. NEAL, & TIMOTHY R. ASHLEY.

*Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life: Two Studies on the Contemporary Church* (Wolfville: Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, 2005).

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship is pleased to announce the publication of the above volume. One of our aims is to help our readers keep abreast of current thought in fields of study relevant to church life. *Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life: Two Studies on the*

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4. *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

*Contemporary Church* advances us towards achieving this aim. The book consists of two sets of lectures delivered by the authors to two ABF Assemblies, one in October 2004, the other in May 2005. The lectures shed much light on our understanding of the Church and the nature of the Christian life. Notably, both sets of lectures strongly challenge some currently popular views of the Church. Both reject the assumption that the purpose of the Church is to attain secular power or influence. Both argue that the Church, to fulfill its proper mission, must identify itself with the suffering and powerless in order to channel to the world God’s redeeming love and grace. Both maintain that our understanding of the Church must be based on sound theological and biblical study.

For the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship’s first venture into publishing, these two sets of lectures establish a high standard. We thank both authors for placing their work at our disposal to help us pursue our educational goals.

Every person on our mailing list will receive a copy of the book. While there is no charge, we do remember that the ABF is not a wealthy organization, and contributions from our readers to help defray the costs of publication and distribution will be very welcome. A few extra copies have been printed and will be available from the Editor for \$15.99, including postage.

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## Why Polity Matters

RODGER FORSMAN, EDITOR

When Baptists address a controversial issue concerning faith and order the discussion often takes the following shape. One party seeks to gain perspective on the issue by invoking Baptist polity, whereas the other attempts to proceed on the basis of appeal to some kind of authority: perhaps Scripture, or democratic process, or organizational hierarchy. Appeals to authority are often attractive because they seem to be so clear-cut: some belief or practice either is or isn’t in accord with Scripture, or with a resolution that can be voted on, or with institutional power. Appeals to Baptist

polity, by contrast, are often thought to introduce matters that are irrelevant to the case under discussion, even to the degree that people will exclaim in frustration, "What's all this Baptist polity stuff about, anyway? I just don't get it!" This is a fair response, and it behooves people who believe that discussions of church polity are relevant to almost every issue to explain their position.

The word 'polity' comes to us via Old French and Latin from the Greek 'politeia', which is connected with ideas of citizenship and the body of which one is a citizen, as well as with the ideas of conduct or one's way of life. These connotations persist in current English usage: *polity* is the structure or method by which an organized body governs itself.

Now it is vain to speak of "Baptist polity" if by that term one intends a set of governing principles and practices accepted by all Baptists. In light of the fact that there are at least twenty thousand different kinds of Baptists in North America this kind of uniformity is not to be sought, and we ought not to use the term 'Baptist polity' in this sense.

We make more progress towards understanding what Baptist polity is if we recall the first line of a fairly standard form of covenant for a Baptist congregation: "Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour ... we do now ... enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ."<sup>1</sup> What is notable about this statement is its indication of where Baptists begin their thinking about the church: believers, guided by the Holy Spirit, are moved to unite in a congregation. Understanding of what it is to be "one body in Christ" depends on collective discernment of the will of the Holy Spirit. From this comes unity of purpose and action in the fellowship. Now to speak of "purpose" and "action" is to speak about how the members of a congregation interact with each other as they foster the fellowship, the "one body in Christ." But this is precisely to speak of church governance. In short, *polity* is about how we conduct our lives as members of the body of Christ.

Clearly the key feature of this way of thinking about the church is the notion of "discerning the will of the Holy Spirit." We cannot talk

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1. *Canadian Baptist Ministers' Handbook* (Baptist Federation of Canada, 1955), p. 5.

sense about this unless we know what *counts* as discernment of the Spirit's will. If we don't have *some* convictions about the signs of the Spirit's presence in congregational life our talk about discerning the Spirit's will is just so much empty twaddle. And we do have such convictions. For example, some church covenants refer to walking together in Christian love, striving to advance the congregation in godly living, working against sin and injustice, being just in our dealings, exemplary in deportment, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

Such descriptions have three crucially important features. First, they refer to observable behavioural characteristics. For example, we generally *do* know how to tell when someone is being just in her or his dealings. Second, they signify ways in which people interact. For example, walking together in Christian love is clearly a collaborative enterprise. Third, they are all concerned—to put it in the language of the New Testament—with "the building up of the body of Christ",<sup>3</sup> i.e., with living in such a way as to help each other grow in God's grace. Such patterns of behaviour are evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We can easily extend the foregoing analysis to the specific area of decision making in local congregations, or in larger associations of autonomous congregations. Consider, for example, what happens when one group enforces its will against another, even by democratic vote. Almost inevitably this creates winners and losers. People with strongly-held opinions can remain opposed and even rancorous, seeds of future discord are sown, and the fellowship is disrupted. Such are the consequences which flow from the application of coercive power.

What happens if we allow our polity to be shaped according to the historical Baptist theological analysis sketched above? For one thing, decision-making, especially on controversial issues, will not begin and end as an exercise of political power. Instead it will feature partnership and participation. For example, boards and committees will not see themselves as decision makers whose main problem is to get the membership to "buy into" the policies and plans preferred by current board/committee members. On the contrary, boards and committees will see themselves as fact

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2. *Ibid*, loc. cit.

3. *Eph.* 4:9-16

finders, analysts, educators and facilitators. Their tasks will be to apprise the membership of all the issues at stake, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be heard and understood. This kind of process encourages people to seek objective grounds for decision making. It enhances appreciation for one another even when opinions differ markedly on important matters. It fosters mutual respect. It provides the context in which people can grow in their understanding of what unity in the body of Christ can be.

Polity is important. How we govern ourselves in our local congregations and in our wider associations directly reflects our convictions about the reality of the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. "Baptist polity" is not an empty concept. It is a theological concept rich with practical implications to help us understand and participate in the saving work of God in the world.

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**FRIENDS OF THE ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP**

Friends are sympathetic to the aims of the ABF,  
and support its work by an annual subscription fee of \$10.

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# *Atlantic Baptist Fellowship*

## *Fall 2005 Assembly*

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HALIFAX

**FRIDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER**

6:30 PM Gathering and Registration  
7:00 PM Welcome and introduction of the Reverend  
Gordon Delaney  
7:15 PM Talk: "How shall we then live? Reflections and  
Reorientation"; Time for questions and discus-  
sion; Communion & Reception to follow the  
discussion

**SATURDAY, 1 OCTOBER**

8:30 AM Gathering: coffee and conversation  
9:00 AM Devotions  
9:30 AM "Life after the Provisional Statement":  
panel presentations and discussion with  
representatives of four Baptist churches:  
*First Baptist Church, Halifax*  
*Port Williams Baptist Church*  
*First Baptist Church, Truro*  
*Kempt Baptist Church*  
10:45 AM Break  
11:00 AM Business  
12:30 PM Lunch