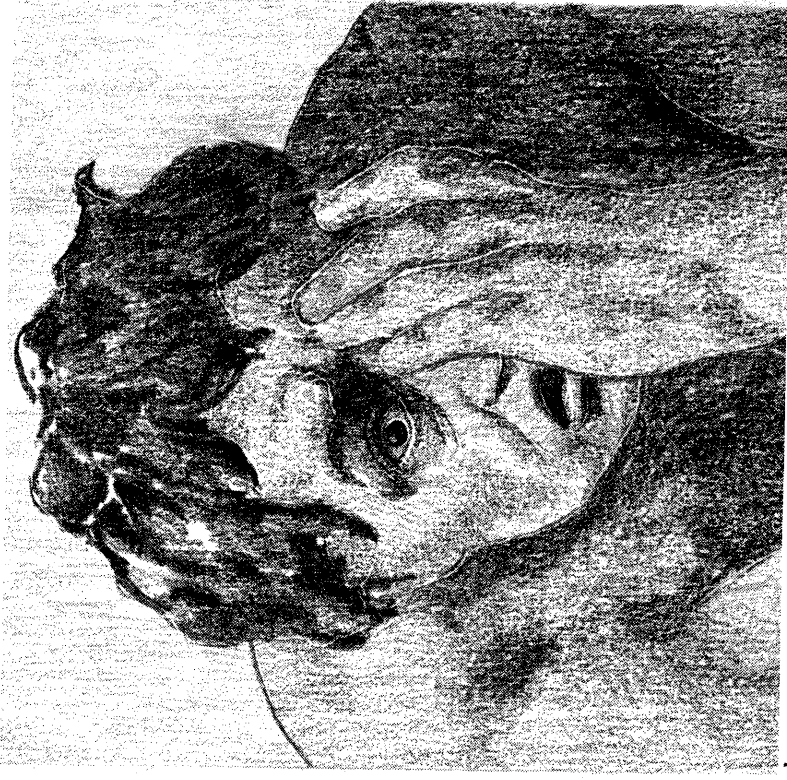


BULLETIN

of the
Atlantic Baptist Fellowship
December, 1985



APOCALYPSE

THE ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP
SPRING ASSEMBLY
CHESTER, NOVA SCOTIA, BAPTIST CHURCH
13-14 JUNE 1986

Theme: THE USE AND THE ABUSE OF THE BIBLE
Special Speaker: Sister Eileen Schuller,
Professor of Old Testament Studies,
Atlantic School of Theology

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

(approved by the Spring Session, Wolfville, June 14-15, 1985)
a community of Baptist churches, laypersons and ordained ministers. It is supported by voluntary contributions made by persons and churches sympathetic to its aims, 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.

THE OFFICERS OF THE ABF ARE:

President: Rev. Robert Matthews, P.O. Box, 261, Annapolis Royal, N.S., B0S 1A0
Vice-president: The Rev. Dr. G. Gerald Harrop, Blandford, R.R. #1, Hubbards, N.S., B0J 1T0
Secretary: Mrs. Gwen Atherton, Camp 4, Site 19, Sandy Point Road, R.R. #1, Saint John, N.B., E2L 3W2
Treasurer: Mrs. Evelyn Smith, 13-A Marilyn Drive, Dartmouth, N.S. B2Y 3X8

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Ama et fac quod vis.

Love and do what you will.

— Augustine, 354-430

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Thanks are due to the Nova Scotia artist Leonard Paul for his drawing of a vignette from Michelangelo's **The Last Judgment**, which illustrates Gerry Harrop's valuable article on "apocalyptic" printed below.

Dr. Harrop points out that the eschatological dimension is sadly neglected and must be recovered.

A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to one and all.

ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP REPORT OF THE FALL CONFERENCE, 27-28 SEPTEMBER 1985 FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, HALIFAX THEME: "THE BROKEN FAMILY AND THE HEALING CHURCH"

FRIDAY EVENING

The conference began at 7:15 p.m. with a brief devotional period conducted by the President, who spoke usefully and appropriately on the **pericope adultera**, John 7:53-8:11.

The theme of the conference was introduced by the two special speakers: the Reverend Earl Ward, now living in active retirement at New Minas, N.S.; and the Reverend David Shaw, minister of the Perea Baptist Church, N.S. Each speaker gave two presentations; these are given in abstract form below.

The session concluded with a communion service conducted by the minister of the host church, the Reverend Dr. Carey Harvey, assisted by the Reverends Hubert Bartlett and Mel Scott and the deacons of the church.

SATURDAY MORNING

The session opened with a devotional conducted by the Reverend Dr. Gerry Harrop, who, using the material of Mark 5:31-43; 3:31-35, spoke about the two apparently different views of the family attributed to the historical Jesus. These are: (1) the normal Jewish view of the importance of the family, and (2) that God rather than the family is the ultimate concern. Jesus' last words on the Cross seem to bring the two views together (To John the dying Christ said "Behold your mother," to Mary his mother he said, "Behold your son": John 19:26,27). The two views are reconciled in the new community, the life of the age to come.

The remainder of the morning was devoted to a panel discussion on the theme of the conference, chaired by the President: the panelists were the two special speakers plus the Reverend Elizabeth Legassie and Ms. Janet L. Swansburg. Janet is a social worker with the Annapolis Royal Office of the Family and Children's Services and is the author of a most useful and helpful book of practical advice for those experiencing the emotional trauma and confusion that frequently accompanies marriage breakdown and divorce. The book, of 51 pp., is printed by Parsons Printing, St. Stephen, N.B., dated 1985; and has valuable appendices on where help can be obtained on all aspects of marriage breakdown in Nova Scotia. Elizabeth, who works in the same office with Janet writes in the foreword to the book:

"... the reader will find a very practical guide for understanding and working through the many aspects of divorce and separation. The author gives a clear understanding of many of the emotions experienced. She

offers helpful insights, practical suggestions, and perhaps most importantly, she offers realistic hope that the wounds can heal . . . I highly recommend this work."

The contributions by the panelists and the ensuing discussion revolved around the following main points:

- the magnitude of marriage breakdown on our society today.
- the reasons for these marriage failures.
- the difficulty of interpreting the Biblical material dealing with sexuality in general and marriage and divorce in particular, and making it relevant for use among modern Christians. Several said that in addition to the Bible modern Christians must listen to what contemporary Christian theologians and moral philosophers are saying on these important topics.
- the failure of modern conservative churches to provide help and healing ministries to those experiencing marriage breakdown and divorce.
- the sad lack of educational facilities in many of our churches for dealing with human sexuality and the problems of marriage collapse and divorce.
- the problem of motivating our churches to reach out to the broken family and hurting people with loving compassion: rigorism is not enough!

Perhaps the most moving address was given by Janet who was fortunate in living near a church that was able to help her survive a divorce that left her feeling abandoned, exhausted and lost. It is encouraging for us to know that some ministers and some churches exist in our midst now, able to render such a service.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

After an excellent lunch provided by the ladies of the host church, the necessary business of the ABF was dealt with.

- ABF Council Meeting, 10:00 a.m. Saturday, 8 March 1986, Port Williams, N.S. Baptist Church. Bring a packed lunch, drinks provided.
- ABF Spring Assembly, 13-14 June, 1986, Chester, N.S., Baptist Church. Theme: "The Use and Abuse of the Bible." Theme speaker: Sister Eileen Schuler, Ph.D., Professor of Old Testament Studies, Atlantic School of Theology.
- Programme Committee to recommend a theme for the Fall 1986 Assembly: Gwen Atherton, John Boyd and Gerry Harrop. It was suggested that the theme might be based on Harvey Cox's book **Religion in the Secular City**.
- the Editor of the Bulletin needs the services of a good cartoonist. Any offers and suggestions, please.
- Acadia University Archives keeps a file of ABF Bulletins. This is complete except for the October 1982 edition. If you have a copy and can spare it please send it to the Archives Librarian, Acadia Library, Acadia University, Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0.
- an encouraging letter from an Ontario Baptist pastor who is pleased to receive the ABF Bulletin was read and received with satisfaction.

Convention concerns dealt with included the following:

- the necessity of keeping ecumenical concerns alive in the ABF and in the Convention.
- the importance of promoting open membership Baptist churches.

— some expressed the fear that Convention is becoming too dictatorial.
— the lack of the Baptist voice on secular boards dealing with social matters.

- the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Services appear to be the only place in our society where ecumenicity is at work.
- some felt the Convention's Pastors-at-Large system is not working.
- the ABF needs to explore the possibility of sponsoring workshops and supply resource persons dealing with social problems, especially those related to marriage breakdown and divorce.

It was agreed that the ABF Executive meet annually with the Executive Minister of the Convention.

This excellent conference concluded with a vote of thanks to the minister and friends of the host church, to the panelists and the two special speakers, superbly presented by Mrs. Alder (Athena) Colpitts. This was passed by acclamation, **nem.con.**, with a loud and sustained burst of applause.

Editor's Note:

The above report is based in part on the excellent minutes prepared and circulated by the Secretary of the ABF, Gwen Atherton.

ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS GIVEN AT ABF FALL CONFERENCE, 1985, HALIFAX, ON THE THEME "THE BROKEN FAMILY AND THE HEALING CHURCH"

PAPER I — THE REALITY AND SCOPE OF THE BROKEN FAMILY — EARL WARD

The family is our oldest social structure. Christianity has long regarded the indissolubility of the marriage bond as God's will for his human creatures. For over a century now, the extended family has been in process of change to the nuclear family. Many now feel the increasing number of "broken" families signals the demise of the family as designed by God.

Some Canadian statistics: 1,232,705 children now live in one-parent homes (1981); in 1983, divorces totalled 68,213 involving 32,213 children; 80% of one-parent homes are headed by women. Until fairly recently "broken" families were the result of death. Today's "broken" families have multiple causes: marriage breakdown; infidelity; alcoholism; homosexuality of one partner; physical, mental and sexual abuse (often suffered as a child). More teen-age girls today are opting to keep their babies than formerly; and more professional single women in their thirties are deciding for motherhood.

An increasing number of church couples are seeking divorce, and others are saddened at the collapse of their children's marriages. U.S. statistics show that clergy divorce ranks third among professionals. When church marriages break up there is often a deeper sense of guilt, shame and loss of self-esteem than is found among secular families. This is in addition to the common blame of self, of the partner, a sense of loss, failure, anger and resentment. For the children there are many related, conflicting emotions.

PAPER II — CONTRIBUTING FACTORS — DAVID SHAW

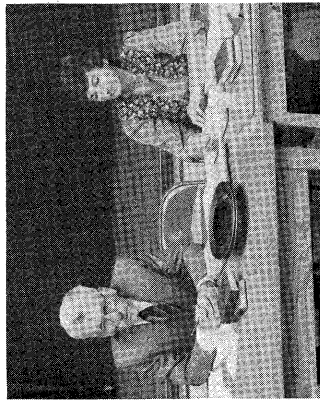
Consider what the family used to be like. Two families came together in marriage. Family history, traditions and values were central. It was

Scenes From Fall Assembly 1985

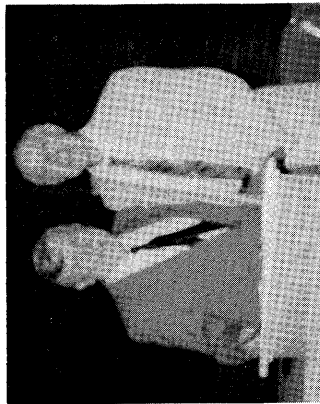
Photographs by Vincent Rushton



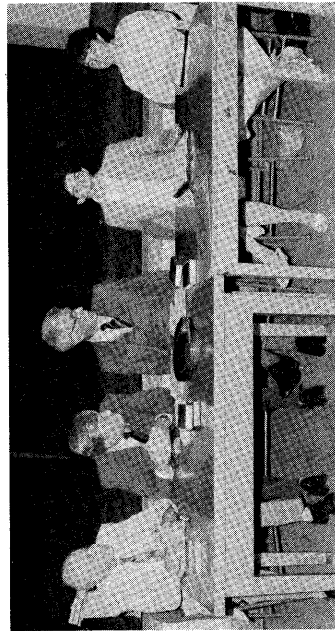
Rapt Attention to Business



The President and the Secretary



David Shaw and Earl Ward



Panel Discussion

From left to right — Earl Ward, David Shaw, the President, Elizabeth Legassie and Janet Swansburg

sustained in the extended family of the community and church. The children of the marriage fed the familiar structure. The personal relationship between the married couple tended to be removed to the outer edge of the relationship. Personal fulfillment, communication, sexual satisfaction and just plain getting-along together were left to the couple to work out in the larger context of the whole.

Imagine a triangle. Along the base are written the words **EXTENDED FAMILY/COMMUNITY/CHURCH**. That represents the traditional view of marriage and family, stable, because the triangle rests on a broad, solid base. Now imagine the triangle inverted, so that it rests on its point (this point is marked **COUPLE**). This represents our contemporary view of marriage, resting almost entirely on the relationship between two people. Such a triangle resting on its apex is anything but stable. Around that triangle blow the winds of our contemporary society, namely, the greater mobility of the population, social and economic crises, conflicting value systems and the like. No wonder the triangle standing on its apex is blown over (four out of ten of marriages today fail).

PAPER III — ISSUES TO BE FACED FOR THE CHURCH TO BE A CHANNEL OF HEALING — EARL WARD

1. The Church's perception of itself.
Traditionally, the family has stood on Christ's teaching of the permanency and indissolubility of the marriage bond. Divorce was seen as a transgression of Christ's command and while it might be the only alternative to an increasingly mutual destructive relationship, it was felt to be a spiritual failure for the couple, the church and society.
2. How broken families perceive the Church.
Some adopt the traditional Church attitudes, which tend to magnify the individual's feelings of guilt, shame and spiritual failure, causing them to hesitate to turn to the Church and its pastors for help, support and a place in the fellowship.
3. Jesus' words on divorce.
More biblical scholars, theologians and Christians in the Helping Professions, are agreeing that Jesus' emphasis on the sacredness and permanency of marriage (Mark 10.2-12; Luke 16.18) were directed against the Rabbi Hillel (20 B.C. to A.D. 20) and his followers who allowed divorce for the flimsiest reasons. To Jesus, this was to make a mockery of a divinely ordained institution.

Noting the parallel passage, Matthew 10.2-12, with the addition of the words "except for unchastity," and considering the Pauline tradition (1 Corinthians 7.1-16), it seems that Christian communities outside Palestine were facing the reality of broken marriages. This caused them to be faithful to Jesus' high view of marriage and his condemnation of easy divorce on the one hand, and also to attempt to minister to troubled believers on the other. They were able to hold in tension and balance (a) the permanency of the marriage bond, and (b) God's grace and love revealed in Christ. Such a blending of grace and truth faces the Church today as it seeks to minister to broken families.

PAPER IV — OPPORTUNITIES OPEN TO THE HEALING CHURCH TODAY — DAVID SHAW

These are many, but unfortunately, time will only allow the mention of one, namely the opportunity given in the preaching ministry of the Church.

In preaching stress should be laid on the truth that the Gospel is primarily a matter of love and grace; not one of judgment and condemnation.

One example must suffice. Consider Matthew 9:35-38, KJV.

1. Jesus was "moved with compassion" when he saw the crowds. We need to catch hold of the intensity of Jesus' caring for broken people.
2. He saw them "fainting," KJV. A stronger word than "fainting" is needed to bring out the meaning of the Greek word used. Note that the RSV has "harassed." We minister to people who are genuinely and deeply hurting.
3. He saw them "scattered abroad," KJV. The Greek verb used here can mean "violently hurled to the ground, broken up and scattered on impact." Note the RSV has "helpless."
4. He saw them as "sheep without a shepherd." We know he cared, served and gave his life for suffering, hurting humanity. We, his under-shepherds, are called to the same task.

SOME UNCERTAIN SIGNS: CONVENTION 1985

by

the Rev'd. Roger H. Prentice,
Chaplain, Acadia University

There were some uncertain signs which may have left some Convention delegates hopefully wondering if the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, meeting at Acadia University last August, may have found ground for consensus. The Convention itself seemed to amble along, swaying from side to side, as it made its way along the path of business. At times, it was far behind schedule, but in the end sprinted to catch up on Saturday, which it did, and the agenda was completed in time.

Wednesday evening's Presidential Address helped to set the tenor of proceedings when the Rev'd. Carl Price recounted his positive experience as President of our Convention. He said early in his address, "The marriage of 80 years between the Regular and Free-Will Baptists is still strong." This was a sign, perhaps, that the traditional (and Christian) unity still does survive and remains an important facet of Atlantic Baptist church life. One recalls a number of former Presidents, after their year in office, reiterating their confidence in the Union as well. As Mr. Price said, "In Convention, there is more that unites us than divides us," a cliché often heard but which somehow retains its meaning when heard from his lips.

This is not to say that there are few unresolved problems. In business sessions, factionalism would raise its ugly head a number of times. Still, there were some small signs of growth and maturity. The amendment proposed by the Rev'd. Headley Hopkins, after a tortuous journey through the minefield of parliamentary procedure, survived, to be enthusiastically added to the original 'Introduction' of Atlantic Baptists Reaching Out. This is a document suggesting a Five Year Plan for Convention goals.

The Hopkins Amendment was an important addition, which change, to a degree, the reasoning for a concerted drive to increase 'discipleship'. Mr. Hopkins questioned how this would be understood by other denominations in the same communities. He also wondered publically whether it inferred

that the Convention wished to make more 'Baptists', rather than 'more Christians.' His amendment called for more sensitivity in our relationship with other denominations when seeking to evangelize.

A long and confusing debate took place, which probably revealed some of the 'growth pains' of decision-making within the delegate body assembled. People began to make 'amendments to the amendment', and other procedural suggestions. The Committee presenting the report, chaired by the Rev'd. Robert Steeves of Saint John, made a strong statement supporting the Hopkins Amendment, although one could have felt that the Rev'd. Jeff Brooks, Director of Evangelism, slightly equivocated when he endorsed Mr. Steeve's remarks. A number spoke from the floor, often repeating arguments already made, asking redundant questions, and making substantially irrelevant remarks. It seemed that the delegates needed this time in which to make up their minds. In the end, and to their credit, the Convention delegates overwhelmingly voted to add the Hopkins Amendment to the text of the document.

As the devotional and business parts of Convention dragged on, another less obvious presence could not be over-looked. It has been some time since the Official Visitor of the United Church of Canada has personally remained throughout the Convention (they have sometimes appointed pastoral representatives to stay, as last year). To her everlasting perseverance, the Rev'd. Diane MacVicar, President of the Maritime Conference, came to listen to and observe her sister denomination for the whole of Convention. This was no mean investment of her time. She mentioned privately to some of her surprise and delight that so many of the delegates approached her to say how pleased they were to have her there.

Outwardly, Miss MacVicar's interest may seem a small but gracious act of fellowship between Christians. Yet, it is out of this sort of thing one sees healing and reconciliation growing, and for which we can only rejoice. The strain known 10 years ago seems to be on the point of ebbing. It is not insignificant that Dr. John Keith's last morning devotional address quietly nudged delegates into opening their hearts to the whole Church of Christ.

One must not forget that with these small signs of encouragement, there was a gross display of denominationalism. It could be expected at a Baptist Convention, perhaps, but there was still an undercurrent of bravado and cheerleading. To sensitive ears, it may suggest a sense of denominational insecurity in identity, or a result of a real sense of direction. At times, one thought that the Convention felt that it had to live up to a 'reputation' for unabashed 'enthusiasm'. Little time for reflective debate was allowed. Rarely were questions placed within the context of the whole Church of Christ.

We should not fool ourselves into believing that issues which cut deep into the fellowship of the Convention are disappearing. We cannot ignore grave problems of attitude and dissension. Unfortunately, many of our Atlantic Baptist Fellowship churches decide to 'opt out' and send few, if any, delegates. This voice is missing now, and Convention is the poorer because of it. However, some of the defensiveness of former years is dissolving, and Convention 1985 offered a few, and still uncertain, signs of maturity in discussion, and growth in fellowship and trust.

MODERN APOCALYPTICISM

by Gerry Harrop

The noun **apocalypse** comes from the Greek verb **apo-kalupto**, which means to uncover, reveal. The title of the last book in the Bible is **Apocalypse of John** and its first words are: "The revelation (**apokalupsis**) of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place . . ." **Revelation** and **Daniel** are the two books in our Bible which are entirely apocalyptic. Other books have apocalyptic passages, the most extensive being: Isaiah 24-27, Ezekiel 38-39, Zechariah 9-14, Mark 13 (= Matthew 24: 4-6 and Luke 21: 8-36).

The apocalyptic vision rises from the ashes of despair. In the prophetic tradition (if not in every prophet) there is conditional hope for the future. If Israel will "turn" from her faithfulness unto the Lord, she will be delivered. The wisdom tradition is also, on the whole, optimistic about the state of society. With the outstanding exceptions of **Ecclesiastes** and **Job**, the wisemen taught that reverence ("fear of the Lord"), prudence and industry will reap rich rewards for the individual and his community. Apocalyptic roots are in both prophecy and wisdom. But the apocalyptic seer makes a radical departure from these traditions and sees nothing ahead for the world but doom and gloom. The point of no return has been reached. Deliverance will come for the saints, and only for the saints, on the clouds of heaven. At the extremity, the faithful are exhorted not to address themselves to solutions, for there are none but, in the face of cataclysm and catastrophe, to "look up and raise (his) head . . . because (his) redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28)

Apocalypticism flourished among the Jews when the Syrian heirs of Alexander the Great sought to destroy Judaism and incorporate Israel into the "modern" Hellenistic world. It continued in the Christian community in the face of the Augustan Roman Empire's attempt to put down all local loyalties, cultures and cults and concentrate the "ultimate concern" of all humankind in the person of the Emperor-God.

The apocalyptic period was, roughly, from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 100. Among the Jews apocalyptic declined during the Talmudic period (the first six centuries of our era) as Israel perceived herself no longer as a nation but as a separated community in the diaspora whose survival depended upon faith-observance of the Torah as expounded by the rabbis. And as Christianity moved from being an obscure and persecuted sect to the place of power and privilege culminating in the conversion of the emperor



Dr. Gerald Harrop

Constantine (about A.D. 312) there was not much interest in radical visions of the end. In both communities there were sporadic resurgences of apocalyptic, but on the whole, both communities centred their energies on the institutional and earthly existence of church and synagogue. With the closing of the Christian canon in the fourth century of our era, the apocalyptic thrust had to be centred on the interpretation of existing scriptures. Apocalyptic writing, whose initial reference was for the Hellenistic or Imperial Roman eras, had to be re-interpreted to refer directly to contemporary history. So the apocalypticist is no longer an inspired person but the **interpreter** of a revelation given long before. This re-interpretation of the apocalyptic scriptures occurred most prominently in times of historical calamities or natural disasters.

Biblical apocalyptic has at least eight distinguishing marks:

- (1) Apocalyptic is **written prose**. There is no preceding period of oral transmission, as is the case with prophecy and wisdom. The books are tracts for hard times to be circulated among the saints.
- (2) Apocalypses are usually **pseudonymous** (an exception is **Revelation**). This was partly to conceal the identity of the subversive writer from the authorities and partly to claim the authority of some ancient honoured and inspired person such as Ezra, Enoch, Baruch, Daniel etc.
- (3) Apocalyptic arises from **deep pessimism**. Hope for better times as an outcome of the historical process is abandoned.
- (4) Apocalyptic is characterized by **cataclysm**. There will be catastrophic signs and wonders in both history and nature just before the new day dawns.
- (5) Apocalyptic writing is replete with **symbolism** and **enigma**. Sometimes **cryptograms** are used (e.g. "666" and "Gog of the land of Magog"). The reader, belonging to the writer's faith community, it is assumed, will have the key to interpretation.
- (6) **Determinism** is essential to apocalyptic. Every line of the drama of humankind has been written by God who determines what shall be done and what shall be said.
- (7) The apocalyptic vision is **futuristic**. The seer who has abandoned all hope for the status quo concentrates on what soon must come to pass.
- (8) **Dispensationalism** is the division of history into periods characterized each by a distinct way in which God deals with humanity. The two essential periods are "the present evil age" and the "age to come." But often more elaborate schemes are devised, usually involving seven dispensations.

In times of historical crisis, apocalyptic re-appears. In Reformation Britain we have the "fifth monarchy men" and in mid-eighteenth century America the Millerites. Both of these movements were based on an interpretation of **Daniel**.

The form of the apocalyptic vision that we encounter today is Darbyite dispensationalism. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was an Anglican cleric who came to the conclusion that the visible church of his day was "in ruins." He was one of the principal founders of the Plymouth Brethren movement. The key to his Biblical hermeneutics is the literal, rigid, distinction he makes between "Israel" and "the church." The Old Testament promises to Israel are to be fulfilled to that people who are to return to the land of Israel and to the temple site to await their Messiah whom they had rejected. When Israel rejected her Messiah, God stopped the prophetic clock and calendar and turned to the Gentiles to call out for himself a

people with a heavenly destiny. This community, with no visible boundaries, is the true church. It has no connection with visible ecclesiastical institutions. It will be secretly "raptured", called to heaven before the full fury of the final Messianic woes falls upon the earth. After seven years of this great tribulation, the time of "Jacob's trouble," Messiah will return on the clouds of heaven. He will identify himself with Israel who will face the full fury of the legions of Antichrist mustered at Armageddon. Then he will reign for a thousand years from Jerusalem as the true Messiah. Darby's ideas were popularized throughout Anglophone Christendom by the Scofield Reference Bible (1909, Revised 1967) and, in our day by "Bible teachers" the most popular of whom is Hal Lindsey whose **Late Great Planet Earth** and several spin-off books have sold tens of millions of copies in several translations. In Canada, the most influential Darbyite teachers have been William Aberhart and Ernest Manning whose broadcasts across Canada have spawned many Bible schools and sent hundreds of missionaries around the world with the dispensational message. This is not some "cranky" religious notion of a few obscure sects. The President of the United States confesses his fascination with these ideas.

Christians belonging to "mainline" denominations cannot ignore the current upsurge of apocalyptic enthusiasm in the form of Darbyism. Several points should be made, among them:

- (1) Despite some fundamentalist claims, Darbyite dispensationalism is not orthodox Christianity. The "secret rapture" of the church was unheard of before the nineteenth century.
- (2) Both Judaism and Christianity are "historical" religions in the sense that the God of the Bible reveals himself by his identity with and participation in the human story. History is moving toward a goal. The human adventure on this planet is not interminable. The study of Christian hope, for the person and for the world, is known as eschatology and has been a neglected theme in the church. The Christian hope is that, at the end of the human adventure as at the end of your life and mine, the risen, living Lord Jesus Christ will reign and God will be all in all. To reject Darby, Scofield, Lindsey and their kind is not to turn away from this hope.
- (3) The main problem with the modern apocalypticism is its determinism which robs the political process among and in the nations, and the moral choices of individuals, of any meaning. To believe that we have some part to play in the outcome is not to reject the faith, based for Christians on the Easter event, that come what may, God's kingdom will not be aborted but will be born.

Whatever trials we may face, and we must pray not to have to meet them (Matthew 6:13; 26:39), we can take from the apocalyptic faith the courage to say, if the test should come:

Our God, whom we serve is able to deliver us . . .
and he will deliver us But if not . . . we
will not serve your gods or worship the golden
image which you have set up (Daniel 3.17, 18)

Editor's Note:

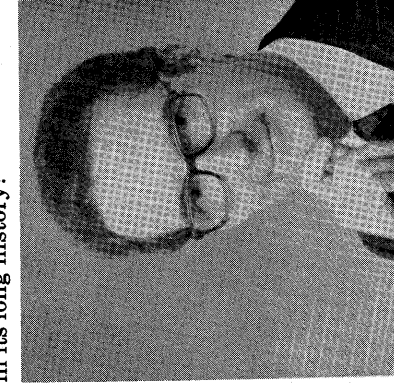
The Reverend Dr. Gerald Harrop, emeritus professor of Old Testament studies, McMaster University, now lives in active retirement at Blandford,

Nova Scotia. In 1985 his important book **Armageddon** was published by the Lancelot Press, Hantsport, Nova Scotia. All royalties from the sale of this book are devoted to the victims of famine now devastating the people of SubSaharan Africa.

MANDATE FOR MISSION

A Sermon preached by Harold L. Mitton

An Induction Service is a highly significant event. Members of the congregation feast their eyes upon the new minister. Expectations run high. Questions throng the mind. Will he be understanding and compassionate? Will he lead in worship creatively and reverently? Will he prove credible, trustworthy, sincere, human? These questions are bound to occur. Is there not a danger, however, in our focusing too much attention upon the minister at a time like this? Ought we not to be asking some questions of ourselves? Perhaps the all-important question, right now, is this: what particular Word does God wish to speak to this congregation at this particular juncture in its long history?



DR. H. L. MITTON

I believe that Word is found in Scripture in Deutero-Isaiah, chapter 54, verse 2: "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." The divine command to Israel through the prophet was to bring more and more of the world's life under God's righteous dominion. The divine intention has not changed. This is ever God's will for His people. This is the task of the church: to bring more and more of this world's life under God's loving sovereignty.

What kind of church is required to accomplish this mandate? I am convinced that if the church is to extend its influence in the world, it cannot be a case of "business as usual" for our world is in great torment and turmoil. Four conditions must be met. It must be a church centered in Christ, a church concentrated on mission, a church committed to ecumenism, and a church controlled and energized by the Holy Spirit.

IF THE CHURCH IS TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD, IT MUST BE CENTERED IN JESUS CHRIST. Dr. Robert MacCracken once said, "Across the centuries, discipleship has meant one thing, and one thing only, namely, the unreserved acceptance of the Lordship of Christ." We are to offer Christ first place in our list of priorities. A character in one of Walker Percy's novels is made to say: "I believe in God and the whole business, but I love women best, music and science next, whiskey next, God fourth, and my fellow-man hardly at all." Needless to say, that man could scarcely qualify as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

What are the conditions of discipleship, stringent though they may seem? There are three. We are to renounce all rights to ourselves (Luke 14:33), we are to lose ourselves in the service of God and of others (Luke 9:23), and we are to conform not to the world but to the likeness of Christ. In other words, discipleship means the dethronement of self and the enthronement of Christ. It means placing our lives at risk in His service. James Michener says that Southern Florida is filled with people 68 years old who were going to do something big in their lives but waited until it was safe. Now it's safe, and they are 68 years old! I am convinced that the church will never extend its influence in the world until we place our lives at risk in the service of Jesus Christ. Only then can we obey the divine summons, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out."

II

IF THE CHURCH IS TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD, IT MUST CONCENTRATE ON MISSION. The mission of the church has been variously defined. Richard Niebuhr says, "the purpose of the church is the increase among human beings of the love of God and neighbor; the church must be concerned about the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity." Dr. Carl Henry says that the church exists not simply to proclaim the justification that God offers but the justice God demands. Dr. James D. Anderson says that the primary task of the church is faith development. Education is not enough. Science is not enough. Technology is not enough. Man cannot live by these alone. Dr. Jacques Ellul says that the task of the church is to expose man's idolatry and summon him to radical repentance.

I believe that the work of the church is the most important work going on in history: that of participating in God's mission of reconciling the world unto Himself. "From first to last," Paul writes, "this has been the work of God; He has reconciled us unto Himself through Christ, and has enlisted us in the service of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18, NEB). If the church is to extend its influence in the world, it must be faithful to its mission. Only then can it conform to the divine injunction, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out."

III

IF THE CHURCH IS TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD, IT MUST BE COMMITTED TO ECUMENISM IN THE BEST SENSE OF THAT WORD. The task of the church is simply too monumental to be achieved, or even begun, by any one communion. Yet there seems to be among us a new wave of isolationism, divisiveness and discord. For many Baptists, it seems that the very word "ecumenism" has sinister connotations. Apparently, many believe that it calls for some great monolithic organic structure. Of that we might have serious misgivings. But is it not obvious that the household of faith, the body of Christ upon earth, is one, and that we are members one of another? Is it not obvious that a divided church can never be taken seriously by a divided world?

It seems to me that we are prone to ask the wrong questions. We should be asking, "What is God's dream for His world?" Is it merely denominational growth? Is it merely to build up the church's institutional

strength? WHAT IS GOD'S DREAM FOR HIS WORLD? Is it not that the power of the demonic may be overcome, and everything that would be destructive to the human spirit? Is it not that all men should live with dignity and in peace, beating their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks? Is it not that all may own His Fatherhood and be conformed to the image of His Son? In short, is not God's dream for His world the redemption of humankind? If so, the task is simply too colossal to be addressed by any one communion. It becomes clearer to me, day by day, that if the church is to bring more and more of this world's life under God's loving sovereignty, it must be committed to ecumenical co-operation and action. How else can we obey the divine summons, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out."

IV

IF THE CHURCH IS TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD, IT MUST BE CONTROLLED AND ENERGIZED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. It would be sheer folly to attempt great things for God without the enabling power of His Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers us for service in the world. The Holy Spirit is not bestowed upon us primarily to give us goosebumps, warm feelings, mysterious speech, and cloud-nine ecstasy. Rather, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to be and to do. A preschool child on the west coast recently asked his mother, "Mummy, are we live or on tape?" It is a good question. Where there is lassitude, the Holy Spirit brings life! A woman, long active in her local church, said to her pastor somewhat wearily, "What I want in my life now is not meetings but MEETING — meeting in the sense of being aware of the Spirit's presence in my life."

Our mandate for mission is clear: "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out; hold not back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." Ours must be a church centered in Jesus Christ, concentrated on mission, committed to ecumenism, and controlled and energized by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Editor's Note:

The Reverend Harold Logan Mitton, BA, BD, DD, recently retired from the office of Principal and Dean of the Acadia Divinity College, at which time he was honoured by being styled Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology. The sermon above was delivered at the Wolfville Baptist Church, 22 September 1985, on the occasion of the induction of the Reverent Ralph D. Wilton to the pastorate of the Church.

SUCCESS?

We must make sure that we do not decide that we shall succeed. If we decide to succeed then we may succeed without succeeding in God's way. But if we go on from day to day seeking to do His will, then we shall be prepared to receive success from Him if He wills it; and if He does not then humbly to say — It is God's decision that David shall not build the temple, but He will raise up Solomon. — W. A. Visser't Hooft

NEWS OF THE CHURCH FROM FAR AND NEAR

THE CHURCHES IN CHINA

After the moratorium imposed by the Cultural Revolution, religious activities in China have increased tremendously since 1980. There are more than 2,000 Protestant churches re-opened throughout the country and some 11,000 meeting points. The number of Catholic churches has topped 600; there were only 300 three years ago. To meet the need for ministers, the Nanjing Theological Seminary (Protestant) re-opened in 1981, with students attending from all over China. Since then many other seminaries and short-term Bible Schools have come into being. Catholic seminaries have increased from two in 1982 to seven at present.

CONGRATULATIONS

To Roger Cann on completing six years of much-appreciated service as Associate Secretary for Communications of the Canadian Council of Churches. Roger's D.Min. studies in the area of local ecumenism continue. He resumes full-time work with CBOMB (the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board).

To Roger Prentice on being formally inducted to the office of Chaplain of Acadia University at a service in the Manning Memorial Chapel on November 13, 1985.

To the Rev. Dr. Lois M. Wilson on being awarded the Pearson Peace Prize. Mrs. Wilson is the seventh recipient of the medal and the first woman to receive it. She has been a United Church minister since 1965, a moderator of the United Church of Canada and is currently one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches.

To the Rev. Dr. G. Russell Hutton, principal of the Atlantic School of Theology, recently elected Suffragan Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

To the Rev. Dr. Andrew MacRae who is about to public a booklet entitled *Building a Bible Teaching Ministry*. The booklet is based on addresses recently given in Los Angeles at the 15th Baptist World Congress, 2-7 July 1985.

EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD

Called by Pope John Paul II to gather in Room from November 23, 1985 for two weeks, the issue seems to be the place of power in the Roman Catholic Church; in the papacy or in the collegiality of bishops. Will the work of Vatican II be undone in some measure, or will the advice given by many bishops in England, Europe, Canada and the United States for a greater degree of loosening be taken to heart? We shall see! Archbishop James Hayes of Halifax is there in Rome at the moment, an official representative of the CCCB (the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops).

THE SEARCH FOR THE ARK CONTINUES

A recent Fifth Estate TV programme reported on this. Those engaging in it, among them Jim Irwin the ex-astronaut and walker on the moon, believe the ark is there on Mount Ararat or near it ready to be found and that its discovery will prove beyond doubt and for all time that the Bible is inerrant in every respect.