

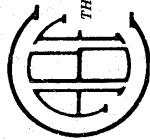
December 1989



15-16 June, 1990

Special Speaker: the Reverend Heather S. Gilmour, BA BPE BED MDiv,
Associate Minister, Highland Baptist Church, Kitchener, Ontario

Full Details in next Edition of the Bulletin



THE OFFICERS OF THE ABF ARE:

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THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP (approved by the Spring Session, Wolfville, June 14-15, 1985)

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship is 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 BULLETIN OF THE ABF is published by the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, Editor — The Rev. Dr. M. R. B. Lovesey, P.O. Box 68, Wolfville, N.S., B0P 1X0. Telephone 902-542-5264.

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While the Bulletin is mailed free of charge; donations to help pay the ever-increasing costs of publication and mailing are gratefully received and should be mailed to the treasurer, Mr. Don M. Myers. (address above). Receipts for income tax purposes will be mailed.

*"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, Lord Tennyson, 1809-1892

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Gentle reader, my prayer for you is that you may have a very happy Christmas and a New Year full of health, prosperity and the blessing of God.

This edition of the *Bulletin* contains a report of last September's Assembly of the Fellowship held in Moncton, together with abstracts of Dr. Timothy R. Ashley's two lectures given there on the topic of doubt in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. As Baptists tend on the whole, as far as my observations go, not to read the Old Testament, let alone *study* it, rarely preach from it, and more often than not omit Old Testament readings from their "orders of services" (incidentally a Psalm is *not* an Old Testament reading!), Dr. Ashley's comments on the Wisdom Literature in general, and on the Book of Job in particular, should do much to stimulate their interest in and greater use of the Old Testament.

One of my New Year resolutions is to promote more assiduously the use of a lectionary in the public worship of our churches. Where a lectionary is not used, and where sermons are not based on lectionary readings, the congregations are starved of the whole counsels of God. They are given a diet of scripture that cannot be called balanced and as a result lop-sided Christians are produced.

Another of my New Year resolutions is to promote, to the best of my ability, the daily devotional reading of the Bible with the help of a good guide to understanding, such as the Notes published by the International Bible Reading Association. The IBRA is British-based and is a world-wide service of the National Christian Education Council of the United Kingdom at work in over 90 countries of the globe. Some years ago, at the invitation of the IBRA, William Barclay wrote a book entitled *Introducing the Bible*, which is still valuable. His writing is non-technical and suitable for lay people, students, church school teachers and all believers who seek to have a good, intelligent understanding of the ancient scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation. How delighted your editor would be if there is only one person who, after reading this column should make a New Year resolution: 1) to read William Barclay's *Introducing the Bible*, and 2) to read the Bible devotionally every day of 1990 with the help of the IBRA's *Notes on Bible Reading 1990!*

We are truly living in exciting times! Who would have thought a scant few weeks ago that there should be a sudden warning of the cold war between East and West and that the Berlin Wall would be passed through peacefully by the inhabitants of East to West Berlin and vice versa! Books are now being written on the rise and fall of communism in Europe. How remarkable it is to see on our television screens pictures of crowds in communist eastern Europe demonstrating for democracy and reform and not being met with police and military ferocity of the Tiananmen Square variety! We think of Christ who has "broken down the dividing wall of hostility" between both Jew and Gentile, and between God and humanity; and we rejoice that "walls of hostility" are being broken down in many parts of the world. However, our times are full of menace, full of danger, for returns to hard-line doctrinaire positions using brutal methods for crushing reform movements are always possible, as recent experience in China has shown. Our prayers must always be for God's help and protection in this wicked world. Thy kingdom come, O God!

It seems appropriate, in the context of the material of this edition, to close this column with a quotation from Dr. Barclay, who, in his *New Testament Words*, wrote: "It is the simple fact that more people have been brought into the Church by the kindness of real Christian love than by all the theological arguments in the world; and more people have been driven from the Church by the hardness and ugliness of so-called Christianity than by all the doubts in the world."

ABF FALL ASSEMBLY 1989

The West Lane United Baptist Church, Moncton, New Brunswick, was the host church for the Fellowship's Fall Assembly, 29-30 September. In the interim between making the initial arrangements and the Assembly itself, the pastorate of the church changed, the Reverend William A. Bresnahan resigning and the Reverend Robert E. Baker succeeding him in the pastoral office. The Fellowship is grateful to the church and the ministers involved that no impediment whatever was experienced in the arrangements for the Assembly. The new minister conducted the opening devotions on the Friday night and welcomed the Fellowship to the church. The attendance was 55.

The Reverend Timothy R. Ashley, BA (Sioux Falls College), MA (American Baptist Seminary of the West), PhD (St. Andrews), Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Acadia Divinity College, accompanied by his wife, the Reverend Maxine Ashley, whom we congratulate on her recent ordination to the professional Christian ministry, was present as theme speaker.

Dr. Ashley gave two erudite and carefully thought-out lectures on the subject, "Doubt in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament." Abstracts of these will be found below, pages 6-9. A valuable bibliography of over 2½ pages on the Wisdom Literature, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job and Doubt in the Old Testament, was prepared by him for the Assembly and is available on request to him.

Dr. Ashley's first lecture was given on the Friday night. It was followed by the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, conducted by the minister and deacons of the host church. A pleasant time of fellowship rounded off the day.

The Reverend Andrew S. Crowell, BA (Mount Allison), MDiv (Acadia), conducted opening devotions on the Saturday morning. Keenly interested in sport and possessing a passion and care for people, Andy served as Associate Minister of the First Baptist Church, Truro, N.S., in which church he was ordained in 1988. He spoke appropriately on the text in Mark 9: "I believe; help my unbelief." An abstract of his address is given on page 16 below.

The necessary business of the Fellowship was conducted on the Saturday afternoon, with president Roger Prentice in the chair. It was preceded by a delicious lunch prepared by the ladies of the church, to whom praise and thanks were duly and loudly given. The treasurer, Don Myers, presented a financial report, covering the period August 1 to September 30, 1989. This showed a balance in hand at 30 September, 1989 of \$1,154.21. With respect to the Marion Grant legacy it was agreed that the sum should be invested and that the interest earned should be used to increase the editions of the *Bulletin* from three to four per year. It was further agreed that this action should not be implemented before the first annual payment of interest from the monies invested from the Grant estate is received by the treasurer.

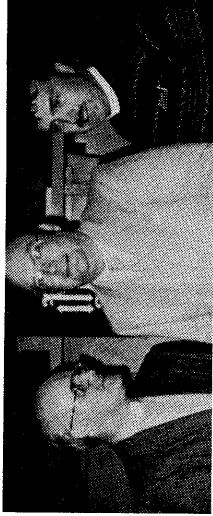
The Editor of the *Bulletin* said that the deadline for material for the May 1990 issue is 16 March 1990. He pointed out that he is not responsible for distribution or change of address; such matters are the responsibility of the Public Relations Officer and the Distribution Organizer.

It was intimated that the Spring 1990 Assembly will meet June 15-16 (for more details see the front cover of this issue of the *Bulletin*). The Fall 1990 Assembly will be held 28-29 September; venue, possibly Truro, Nova Scotia; theme, possibly, Why Foreign Missions?

Concerns expressed included: unlicensed men seeking to infiltrate our pastorates; the loss of the "License to Preach" designation; the fact that some members of the Ordination Committee oppose the ordination of women.

SCENES FROM THE FALL ASSEMBLY 1989

Photographs by Gwen Atherton and Philip Griffin-Allwood



Bill, Timothy and Philip



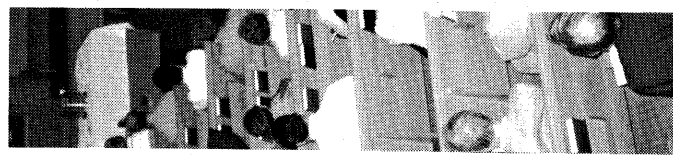
The President



Table Fellowship



The Assembly at Worship



DOUBT IN THE WISDOM LITERATURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by Timothy R. Ashley
LECTURE I

1. LITERATURE

A three-page bibliography of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament has been specially prepared for the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship and is available on application to the Lecturer.

2. THE WISDOM LITERATURE

By "wisdom," is meant a way of thinking and looking at the world, a way held in common by the peoples of the ancient Near East. The Hebrew word for "wisdom" (hokmah), variously defined by scholars, is said by J. Crenshaw to mean: "the ability to cope, the art of steering, practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, parents' legacy to their children, the quest for self-understanding and for mastery of the world." For the lecturer's part, he would say simply: "Wisdom is the ability to deal creatively and appropriately with the situations of real life." However one defines the word, the aim and thrust of "wisdom" in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament is practical and concrete rather than abstract and arcane.

The ancient sages used a variety of literary forms in expressing their thoughts in writing: proverbs, debate, instruction, essay and the like. The primary Hebrew wisdom literature is found in the books of *Job*, *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*; such books as the *Songs of Solomon*, *Esther* and *Ruth* and the Wisdom Psalms, are secondary, and will, along with the Apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon* and *Sirach*, not be dealt with in these lectures due to limitations of time. The three canonical books we shall deal with are broken down into sentence wisdom (or, gnomic wisdom) and discursive wisdom (or, contemplative/speculative wisdom). *Proverbs* is an example of the former, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* of the latter.

3. THE BOOK OF JOB

In between the prose prologue and epilogue (1.1-2.13; 42.7-17, an old story about a "patient" Job) there is a long dramatic poem consisting of a series of cycles of speeches between a very "impatient" Job and his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, 3.1-31.40), a young man Elihu (32.1-37.24) and God (38.1-42.6). The poetry is not, of course, reports of historic speeches, but are dramatic compositions dealing with the problem of innocent suffering in particular, and in the meaning of life in general. A wide variety of opinion is held by scholars on the matters of the date and authorship of the book. Many think that the prose prologue and epilogue is old, centuries older than the poet who cleverly uses the story as a vehicle for his profound meditation on the meaning of suffering and the meaning of life. In view of the fact that the poet appears to have experienced suffering himself and the release gained from it, and that he was at odds with the conventional wisdom about suffering, and still further that he was probably not a native-born Israelite, many scholars think he should be placed in the sixth century before Christ.

4. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

The Book of *Proverbs* is an anthology of different kinds of wisdom literature (short pithy sayings as well as longer discourses) that claims to have originated in Solomon's court, and was added to until it reached its final shape in the fifth century before Christ.

The meaning of the word "proverb" (mashal) is debated. It is used both of gnomic sayings and longer discussions. Probably it means something like "model."

5. THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Although the books says the author of *Ecclesiastes* is "Son of David, King of Jerusalem," i.e. Solomon, most modern scholars place the work much later than Solomon because of the patently late character of the Hebrew and of the thought. Even Keil and Delitzsch's Commentary on the Old Testament, noted conservative German scholars, admits that, "the book of Qoheleth bears the stamp of the post-exilic form of language." The book was probably written in the time of Ezra and before the work of Jesus ben Sirach who cites it about 180 B.C. Perhaps we might date it between 350 and 300 B.C.

It is debated whether *Ecclesiastes* is a single treatise or a collection. With J.A. Loader, the lecturer tends to see the book as by one author but not necessarily written at one time and not on one theme.

6. PROVERBS, JOB, ECCLESIASTES AND THE WISDOM OUTLOOK

The Wisdom Outlook entails a basic confidence in the human ability to find out about life and the world by searching and observation. *Proverbs* gives us rules for the good life, drawn from observations of the world. This is the theological orthodoxy of the Wisdom Literature. But both *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* react against this view of Wisdom as a rather rigid set of propositions by which one can get the good life. Job is sure he is suffering innocently and therefore calls in question the traditional orthodoxy held by his comforters, that sin is always punished with suffering. Qoheleth is not sure that humans can know as much about living the good life as is claimed by the orthodox. Both *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* doubt the Wisdom Outlook of *Proverbs*.

7. DOUBT

By "doubt," one means not being sure (intellectually and emotionally) about a belief, opinion or even a so-called fact. Doubt is caused by a clash between a cherished belief or tradition and our experience in the real world.

It is often the case that "doubt" is thought of as the enemy of Christian faith. This is more true in Christian traditions that are strongly creedal. That this is not necessarily true has been seen more clearly by poets than theologians, e.g., Tennyson, who wrote: "There lives more faith in honest doubt, / Believe me, than in half the creeds."

It is important to distinguish doubt from unbelief or even pessimism. Doubt is rather, as J. Crenshaw states, "grounded in profound faith." "Doubt," wrote P.J. Bailey, is the "shadow" of truth. Doubt is often found in the Hebrew Bible, the best example being that of *Job*. There is such a thing, Rousseau said, as "reverent doubt." Though Arthur Hallam believed doubt was "Devil-born," his friend Tennyson wrote of him: "He fought his doubts and gathered strength . . . thus he came at length to find a stronger faith his own." The questionings of Job were in the interests of a better theology (a better way of thinking about and living in the world) than that in which he and his friends had been brought up. He knew he was suffering innocently and so he refused to accept his friends' orthodox opinions that he was suffering for his sins. Qoheleth's questionings led to pessimism perhaps largely because he was not given an appearance of God of the kind Job had had. Doubt, in *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* is not antithetical to faith, but a component of it; it is a station on the way to faith, not a final destination.

LECTURE II

It was said in the last lecture that doubt, as exemplified in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, is not necessarily antithetical to faith, but rather is, or can be, a way-station on the road to faith, to a stronger faith. This kind of doubt must be distinguished from unbelief, pessimism and cynicism.

1. SOME MODERN DISCUSSIONS OF DOUBT

Modern academics and intellectuals write helpfully about doubt in a variety of ways; we mention some. Philip Phenex writes about constructive and destructive doubt. Constructive doubt is the attitude of the father, as recorded in Mark 9, who cries, "I believe, help my unbelief."

Destructive doubt is the view of the cynics who abandon the search for ultimate certainties. R.T. Habermas differentiates sincere doubt from unbelief, the unwillingness to hear an answer. G.W. Allport identifies five causes of doubt: 1) a history of personal traumas; 2) an unconscious attitude towards parent figures; 3) an egocentric self-worshipping personality; 4) public hypocrisy and the failure of institutional religion; 5) the conflict between faith and science. One feels that these modern discussions of doubt are not all that different from the discussions about it found in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.

John Westerhoff III (a teacher of religious education), in his book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, speaks of four kinds of faith — really stages of faith along the way to maturation. The third stage is called **SEARCHING FAITH**, which is characterized by: 1) doubt (critical judgement); 2) experimentation; 3) the need for commitment to persons and causes. On the matter of "doubt" Westerhoff points out that if we are to have a faith of our own it is necessary to doubt and question the faith taken over from parents and our community. He says: "The despair and doubts of the searching soul need to be affirmed and persons need to join others in the intellectual quest for understanding." The way to handle our personal doubts, then, can be summed up in one word — **COMMUNITY**. The last stage in Westerhoff's schema is **OWNED FAITH**, which comes as a result of maturation through the process of searching faith, never by denying that process, and, importantly, the dynamics of the previous stage are never wholly outgrown. In other words, doubts come back through life.

2. DOUBT IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The poetic sections of the Book of Job tell of the righteous sufferer disputing with his three friends and questioning their traditional theology that all suffering is brought on by sin. His experience makes him doubt that theology. In the end Job is enabled to "see" God, and that encounter, that mystic experience, gives him a practical answer, though not an intellectual one, to the mystery of innocent suffering.

In 42.5 Job says: "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see thee." All his days Job had heard the conventional wisdom that all suffering is brought on by personal sin and that humankind's best response is simply to believe and go on with life understanding that that they would never understand. This is, I believe, the point of the poem on wisdom in Job chapter 28, a chapter that most scholars assume to be a later addition to the text.

However, I think it is best read where it is, for I take it to be crucial to the theological argument as it develops. All his life Job was told humans could never get wisdom which was in the sole possession of Yahweh. The only "wisdom" humanity can attain to is involved in the life of piety (the practice of religion) and ethical living. The ultimate wisdom, the meaning of life, the knowledge of the principles upon which the universe is run, the understanding of providence, humanity cannot know and never will know. "Behold the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom: and to depart from evil is understanding (28:28)." Taken as a generality this is not bad Old Testament theology, and Yahweh himself implies it in his own speeches.

Difficulty arises, however, when this theological generality is moved into the specifics of an individual case. Chapter 28 summarizes the whole argument of the three friends before Job sums up his own case in chapters 29-31. The friends' claim is that Job's sufferings prove he has sinned. Job's case is: "I do fear God, I have turned from evil; yet my suffering continues unabated." Job sees the traditional theology was overly simplistic. Theology, even moderately good theology, has and can continue to play this stifling role if we confuse a relationship with God with affirmations of certain propositions about him (even orthodox ones). Face-to-face relationship is what God brings to Job in chapters 38-42. And it is in relationship that an "answer" to the problem of doubt emerges. Job learns no new doctrine in his encounter with God — he very simply meets God. Meaningful faith through doubt comes not simply (and not always) by proclamation of certain facts about God, true though they may be. Chapter 28 is a collection of such facts — but more than that is needed. Faith finds its basic ground, rather, in a personal encounter with God. And that is what enabled Job to carry on with life.

3. LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF JOB ON HANDLING DOUBT

How can we handle ourselves and others when doubt afflicts us? The example of the three friends shows us how *not* to do it. They started out alright; they sympathized with Job by sitting with him for a week in silence. But after that they tried to argue Job out of his doubt, thinking he needed *answers* more than he needed *community*. They failed to see that Job had a "searching faith," to use Westerhoff's terminology.

No doubt there is a role for intellectual arguments in helping people with their doubts, but the fundamental attitude of the community should be a *willingness to be with* the doubter throughout the period of his doubt, rather than to try to argue him out of it. In other words the basic stance should be that of *friend*.

Job chapter 6 includes a discussion of what is required of a radical friend. When Job needed a friend, he was met instead by theologians; when he called for sympathy, he was given doctrine; when he wanted sympathy, he was met with an argument. Better to die than have no friend help him face life! In verse 14 there is a startling definition of "friendship," which is necessary in the face of doubt. The verse, a most difficult one to translate, is rendered by the N.E.B.: "Devotion is due from his friends to one who despairs and loses faith in the Almighty." Norman Habel translates: "A despairing man needs the loyalty of a friend when he loses his faith in the Almighty." A true friend is one who shows love and loyalty (Hebrew, *hesed*) to one who is despairing to the point of giving up his faith in God. Job's friends proved themselves unable to give him the quality of friendship he needed . . . but God came to him, the true friend, who gave him not arguments but his encouraging and empowering presence to face life with all its troubles, sufferings and mysteries.

ATLANTIC UNITED BAPTIST CONVENTION 1989

A PERSONAL REPORT

by G. Bruce Gammon

The 1989 Convention was attended by less than 600 delegates (as reported from the platform Thursday afternoon), a disappointing attendance. In fact attendance at business sessions appeared to fall far below the numbers indicated by registration. The most pressing item of business on the agenda, circulated with the registration packages, was the changes in Licensing and Ordination procedures as prepared by a committee set aside several years ago to study this matter. A detailed comment on the changes in the procedures is beyond the scope of this commentary; however, some of the more significant changes were: 1) the use of thorough-going inclusive language in keeping with the intention of convention to recognize, accept and recommend the ordination of women to full-time ministry; 2) the addition of several repetitious, introductory paragraphs in each of the various sections of the report; 3) the tacit inclusion of all full-time ministries (i.e. Christian Education, etc.) as vocations fit for recognition by ordination (some of these were formerly included in a section regarding "young women," in the section "Lay Licenses"); 4) the addition of a brief section on "Discipline," making all Pastors accountable to the Board of Ministerial Standards and the Examining Council for their conduct "in every aspect of the minister's life." The report states inappropriate conduct "may lead to examination of fitness to continue in office" by the Board and that Council. The recommended changes were carried by the Convention delegates with one amendment, viz., that the actual vote of the Council not be reported in the official letter to the sponsoring church. This amendment was made due to the embarrassment such a report sometimes causes when read in the ordination service.

On Thursday morning delegates were made aware of the fact they would be requested to vote on a series of three resolutions put forward by the Social Action Committee of the Saint John/Kings Association. These resolutions concerned our public stands on abortion, pornography and alcoholism. It was clear that this commission had put a great deal of work into preparing these resolutions. Why they were "sprung" upon the delegates of Convention on such short notice, and without prior notice being given to the churches that such action was forthcoming, is a question that went unanswered. It was noted that these are pressing issues and that each delegate has the right on Twenty-four hours' notice to present any resolution they wish for immediate action (with the exception of constitutional amendments, etc., as usual). Also asked but not satisfactorily answered was the question of why these resolutions had to have so much, and such sweeping, social and theological commentary in the form of "Whereas . . ." statements. With less than forty-eight hours' study the delegates were being asked to approve several resolutions containing such confusing and even apparently contradictory information on major moral crises!

At any rate, the three resolutions were dealt with in various ways: the first, expressing "our desire to respect and protect life from conception, and to implore government leaders and legislators to establish laws which will protect life, and to restrain those who would destroy life through abortion

or euthanasia," was amended by the deletion of reference to euthanasia and then carried.

The second resolution regarding pornography which, as was pointed out, contained no reference to pornography as such in its resolution, was referred to the Social Action Commission for consideration and a redrafting to be presented to the 1990 Convention.

The third resolution, concerned with alcohol, that we "express our concern and our formal opposition to the present policies of our Provincial Governments who are: 1) promoting the sale of alcoholic beverages by allowing media advertisements, and 2) making it more readily available by increasing the number of sales outlets," was drafted because of concerns that the Province of New Brunswick is in the process of voting on legislation which may allow the sale of liquor in Convenience Stores. This motion was carried in its drafted form.

Along with the regular reports and devotional addresses (this year on the very worthy theme of "Reaching out to the Family" and ably conducted by the Reverend Byron Fenwick and Dr. Roy Bell) there came one more subtle but notable change. This year the proposal put forward by the Budget Committee was not based on a "fair share" basis. Instead it was calculated and will be promoted in the churches by determining the actual amount given last year by a church and then adding 10%. This is a welcome move especially in less well-to-do communities where "fair share" figures are not always attainable and the attendant feelings of failure to meet a commitment are dispiriting.

It must be said that a very good and relatively friendly atmosphere was maintained throughout the Convention proceedings and great patience was shown by all involved when the badly overloaded agenda got backlogged, altered and realtered. Such was Convention 1989.

Editor's Note — The Reverend G. Bruce Gammon, BA MDiv (Acadia) was ordained in 1986 and is currently pastor of the Annapolis Royal and Area United Baptist Churches. He is president of the Annapolis Royal Council of Churches, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Nova Scotia District of the Canadian Bible Society. In his "spare time" he is a Volunteer Firefighter and a devoted fisherman and fly-tyer. He is a good "Friend" of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship.

* * * * *

A VICTORIAN BISHOP'S PRAYER

"In times of doubt and questionings, when our belief is perplexed by new learning, new teaching, new thought, when our faith is strained by creeds, by doctrines, by mysteries beyond our understanding, give us the faithfulness of learners and the courage of believers in Thee; give us boldness to examine, and faith to trust all truth; patience and insight to master difficulties; stability to hold fast our traditions with enlightened interpretations, to admit all fresh truth made known to us, and in times of trouble to grasp new knowledge and to combine it loyally and honestly with the old. Save us and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord. Amen."

— George Ridding, Bishop of Southwell, 1828-1905.

* * * * *

"We must therefore, I think, bid a definitive good-bye to dogmatic theology. In all sincerity our faith must do without that warrant. Modern idealism, I repeat, has said good-bye to this theology forever."

— William James, 1842-1910.

NEWS OF THE CHURCH FROM FAR AND NEAR

CHINESE BIBLE PRODUCTION

Despite continued news of repression and persecution of dissidents in China, the one-millionth Chinese Bible came off the Amity Printing Press, Nanjing, last September. There is need for at least ten million Bibles in China for Christians alone; still more are wanted for non-Christians.

FESTIVAL UPDATE

Plans are progressing well for the Third Canadian Christian Festival to be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 16-19 August 1990. The theme will be: "A Time to Love — God, Self, Neighbour, the Creation." Speakers will include Dr. Emilio Castro, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and the Reverend Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa.

THE PREACHING DENTONS

The pathway taken by the preaching Denton family has now come full circle, from Presbyterian to Baptist and back again. The story begins in the early 1600's with a Yorkshire Presbyterian, ten years after the *Mayflower*, emigrating to the New World. In the late eighteenth century, as United Empire Loyalists, the family moved to Nova Scotia, where Joseph Denton became a Baptist. A descendant, Dr. Harvey Denton, was president of the Maritime Baptist Convention in 1948. In the late 1950's Thomas R. Denton moved to the West and became a Presbyterian because he found the Western Baptists were more fundamentalist than the Maritime Baptists. His son, Peter, intends entering the Presbyterian ministry. Peter's wife, Mona, is already serving as a Presbyterian minister in Ontario.

FLIGHT TO THE WEST

Christian Youth Leaders in East Germany are worried by what they call "the flight to the West." Many young people there are attracted by the freedom, life-style and affluence of the West and tend not to care about the country in which they live.

RUNCIE ON RELIGIOUS FANATICS

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, blames religious fanaticism for much of the world's violence. "I want faith without fanatics," he said in an interview. In a sermon he is reported to have said, "Where there is strife in our world, you do not have to look hard to see the hand of . . . Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, Christian fundamentalism in Northern Ireland or Jewish fundamentalism in Israel."

THREATS TO FREEDOM

The presidents of three Southern Baptist Convention seminaries issued warnings of threats to religious and academic freedom as the new school year began recently on the six SBC seminary campuses. The president of the Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, urged students, while knowing that harassment and intimidation will come from legalists in the SBC, to "choose to be free in Christ."

FRAUD PUNISHED

TV Evangelist, Jimmy Bakker, aged 49, has been found guilty of conspiring with aides to divert to himself \$3.7 million to pay for homes, cars, vacations, furs, jewelry and an air-conditioned dog-kennel, and has been sentenced to 45 years in jail and fined \$500,000.00. He will be eligible for parole in 10 years.

THE CANADIAN BIBLE SOCIETY: TRULY ECUMENICAL AND WITH INTERNA- TIONAL AFFILIATION

by Allan V. Jorgensen

We were in small town Nova Scotia for a meeting of local supporters of the Bible Society. It was a good opportunity to meet the clergy so we invited them to have lunch with us. When we called the Baptist pastor, whom we knew, to call together some of the other church leaders, the response was rather startling. He indicated that he really did not know the other pastors even though he had been there three years, but he consented to call as many as he could find at home. At noon we met at a local restaurant. Only the Roman Catholic priest had been at home when the calls were made. So the Bible Society was instrumental in having the Baptist pastor invite the Roman Catholic priest to lunch. This little story is really an important illustration of the strong ecumenical nature of the Bible Society.

The Christian Church has always done its missionary work with the Bible in hand. The Bible is the record of God's redeeming deeds in Christ, the story of God's loving action on behalf of all people. The Bible Societies have always considered themselves to be the handmaidens of the Church to provide Bibles in the required format and translation so that the work of evangelization and Christian growth can be most effectively accomplished. Many churches have preference for certain translations, but the Bible Society supports all translations of the Bible. The Bible Societies' own translation, the *Good News Bible* (or the T.E.V., the *Today's English Version*), is a modern translation designed to appeal to the ordinary person who is not familiar with the Christian Faith.

The interpretation of the Scriptures is the responsibility of the various churches and individuals. To maintain its neutrality in this area, the Bible Societies maintain a strict policy of publishing the Scriptures without doctrinal notes or comments.

As a Canadian organization, the Canadian Bible Society is comprised of sixteen districts which are directed by District Secretaries who come from eleven different denominational backgrounds. In Canada we have put a greater emphasis during the last number of years to have more representation from the Roman Catholic Church. As a result there is good Roman Catholic representation on our National General Board and a number of district presidents are Roman Catholic, including the Nova Scotia president, Mr. John Mullally.

The Canadian Bible Society provides Scriptures not only to most Christian churches but also distributes Scriptures in over one hundred different languages throughout Canada. Cooperating together with 110 Bible Societies in more than 180 countries, the Bible Society in Canada distributes about ten million Scriptures annually. Bible Societies around the world distributed last year nearly thirteen million Bibles and over six hundred million Testaments, portions and selections.

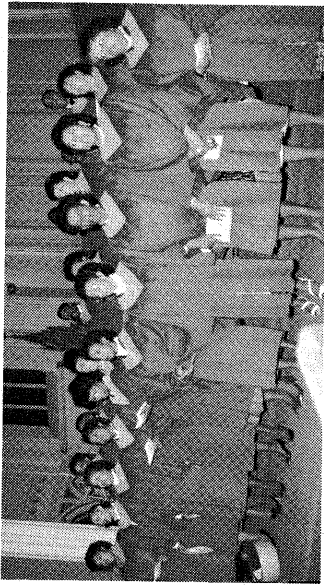
The Bible Society is a strong ecumenical catalyst world wide. The Soviet Union President, Mr. Gorbachev's era of openness and change is currently making possible new opportunities for Scripture distribution never thought possible. Both leaders of the Baptist Church and the Russian Orthodox



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Church in the Soviet Union have been instrumental in obtaining Scripture importation permits for over one million Bibles and Testaments during the coming year. Similar stories of Church cooperation have been repeated in China, Cuba, Papua, New Guinea and South America.

Another interesting cooperation venture is taking place right here at home. Discussions have been taking place with members of the Micmac native people to produce the New Testament in Micmac. Although Micmac peoples speak one language through-



"The Gospel Heirs," from East Preston, in concert at the 175th Anniversary Celebration Service of the Nova Scotia District of the Bible Society held in Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Basilica, May, 1988.

out the Maritimes, they use three different writing systems. The high cost of producing three different New Testaments in relatively small quantities makes the Bible a unique player to encourage the different Micmac native groups to talk together about a possible

compromise translation for all their people. The translation was done by a Baptist translation team, Marilyn and Watson Williams, for a largely Roman Catholic audience.

The truly ecumenical side of the Bible Society is totally exposed when you attend a Festival of Praise. The Bible Society is again the neutral partner which initiates and encourages the coming together of all the clergy and people in any town or city to celebrate together the things we hold in common in our faith. It is a great experience to be a part of a Festival where clergy, lay people, musicians and choirs come together for an evening of celebration in music and the spoken Word. The planning process makes it necessary for people to come together to talk, share, suggest, negotiate and listen to one another. Truly this is ecumenism at work. The Bible Society is happy to have an unofficial but very special role to play, both in Canada and throughout the world, in the process of ecumenism and the encouragement of inter-church dialogue and cooperation.

Editor's Note — The Reverend Allan V. Jorgensen was born in Denmark and came to Canada in 1951. He holds the degrees of BA MDiv granted by Acadia University and was ordained in 1971 in the Brunswick Baptist Church, Fredericton, New Brunswick. Since then he has served Convention Baptist churches in Fredericton, N.B., and in Brookfield and Stewiacke, N.S. Prior to his appointment with the Canadian Bible Society he served as minister of the McPhail Memorial Baptist Church in Ottawa. He was appointed the Nova Scotia District secretary of the Canadian Bible Society in August, 1986. Along with his wife, Dianne and two children, he is delighted to be back in Nova Scotia and most happy to be able to serve churches, individuals and organizations that support the Canadian Bible Society. He can be reached at the N.S. District office, 1521 Grafton Street, P.O. Box 183, Halifax, N.S. B3J 2M4. His telephone number is 902.423.3545.

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"The Bible is a book, not only to be read, but also to be studied."

— William Barclay, 1907-1978

COMMENT

If you had to accept a label to express your Christian theological position, what would you say? The writer has in mind such labels as fundamentalist, conservative, conservative-evangelical, neo-evangelical, Barthian, liberal, neo-orthodox, modernist, radical and the like. An elderly man when asked to state his religion on a hospital entry form wrote "Agnostic Baptist." This points up the difficulty of using labels, of course, but their use is regrettably perhaps inevitable. We recall Vera Brittain's claim that she was "Anglican, with a tendency to Quakerism," a claim she qualified by saying that she was too interested in frivolous things like clothes and make-up to be a good Quaker!

Whether you like it or not you do have a position, whether you see it as a final position or only a temporary one along the path of your Christian pilgrimage. It is a constant source of amazement to this commentator to note that, as far as he can see, most Christian believers seem to accept the former position rather than the latter. Surely it should be obvious, after two thousand years of Christian reflection, that no human articulation of the Faith can, in the very nature of the case, be a final one. We see in a glass darkly! Of course, some folk are immensely proud of their positions. The present writer was astounded on one occasion, at a meeting that drew together a company of erudite University faculty and folk, when the chair of the meeting, a full university professor, proudly asserted that he was a fundamentalist! One would think that it would have been embarrassing to make such a confession of sheer fideism in a company of scholars committed to the value of reason!

Some, of course, in a lordly fashion, refuse to accept a label, thinking themselves above such things. However, in practice, the acceptance of a label is inevitable; for people award us their labels, and it might be better for us if we accept a label of our own choice, subject to the understanding that the theology we accept is always liable to change, it is only a *theologia vias*.

The writer, if he had to, would accept the label, "liberal evangelical," an appellation not used much anywhere today. It is, as many will know, used for a movement among British Anglicans that flourished between the world wars of the first half of this century. Originally called the "Anglican Evangelical Group Movement," it arose in 1906 from the desire of some of the younger evangelicals to free evangelicalism from what they regarded as an unduly conservative interpretation of Christianity, to welcome the help of science and criticism in the search for truth, and to infuse more dignity and beauty into public worship. In 1923 the movement was organised at the annual conference of the group. Its members were pledged to study the social and economic implications of the Gospel and to work for effective unity among all Christian people. Its activities included group study and the holding of retreats and conventions, especially the holding of an annual conference. Cromer, on the south coast of England, was the venue of these annual conferences from 1928 until the outbreak of World War Two. The leader and chair of these conferences was the Reverend Vernon F. Storr, Canon of Westminster, who died in 1940. The heyday of the movement's influence was 1923-1939. After World War Two, attempts to revive the movement failed (perhaps due in large part to the loss of Vernon Storr's leadership), and in 1967 it was formally terminated.

It is clear from the above that there are striking similarities between the British liberal-evangelical movement of the between-the-wars period of this century and the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship. The A.B.F. might well study the rise and fall of British liberal-evangelicalism, noting carefully the patent fact that even good movements fade away when the charismatic leadership dies off.

SERMON

by Andrew S. Crowell

DOUBT — THE CRUCIBLE OF FAITH

In the story, related in Mark 9.14-24, the unnamed father of an epileptic boy cries out in agony of mind to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief." The father had taken his son to the disciples and when he discovered they were unable to heal him, he took him to the Master himself. Jesus told him that all things are possible to him who has faith; a statement that evoked his cry (as the Good News Version has it): "I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!"

The cry reflects the fact that the life of faith is not without its difficulty; it is not without turmoil, doubt and questioning. Yet, ironically, doubt is not only a nuisance to faith; it is also the "crucible" of faith, in which faith is tested and refined and made viable in the "real world."

The Presbyterian and one time Pulitzer Prize nominee, Frederick Beuchner, writes: "Whether your faith is that there is a God or there is no God . . . if you don't have any doubts you are either kidding yourself . . . or you are asleep . . . for doubts are the ants in the pants of faith, they keep you awake and moving." If the Preacher of *Ecclesiastes*, as a sceptic, overstates the case of the world not being a pretty place in order to confront the face of false piety, then Beuchner's humour only serves to confront a similar false piety, that of separating "honest doubt" from pessimism.

Honest doubt is not a curse; it is rather a capacity, a capacity in our humanity to help us see we are neither God nor an accident in the universe. It is the capacity in our human condition enabling us to journey into the unknown, "to boldly go where none has gone before."

Doubt keeps folk honest, unashamed, for there is a rewarding relationship between faith and doubt. Such people become humble in the face of God's sovereignty, not arrogant. They tolerate other people's views and serve them gladly without embarrassment. Thirsty for knowledge, they explore the mysteries of life and refuse to dodge difficulties posed to faith by life's experience.

In an academy award-winning film, "Chariots of Fire," there is a scene showing Eric Liddle, the famous Scottish runner and "muscular Christian," sitting in the stand of the Olympic Stadium in Paris with his friend Lord Lindsay. As the final of the 100 metres is about to begin, Lindsay says: "Any regrets, Eric, any regrets for not being down here now?" Liddle had scratched from the event since the final was being run on the Sabbath. "Yes," replied Liddle, "I have regrets . . . but no doubts though." I have always thought from the time I saw the film as a boy, that Liddle must have had doubts, since his decision not to run on a Sunday was based on his faith, and faith is generally surrounded by doubt. It always seems a shame to me that the popular understanding of faith means that doubt is necessarily precluded.

Honest doubting, one feels, has a real part to play in our Christian development. Let us not cast away doubts until we have identified what kind of doubts they are. May we confess, with the father of the epileptic boy, "I believe; help my unbelief."



Andy Crowell