

A CAPSULE OF INFORMATION

ABOUT THE BAPTISTS

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The Baptist people of Canada form one of the four largest Protestant bodies in the nation. The first Baptist Church in Canada was organized in 1763 at Saekville, N.B., by Massachusetts settlers who came from a Baptist background reaching back to the first Baptist Church founded on this continent at Providence, Rhode Island, by the great religious and political leader, Roger Williams, more than a century before.

But we must go back to England to locate the beginnings of the Baptist story. In London a small group of non-conformists worshipped together secretly at a time when the law of the land forbade bodies other than the Church of England to hold public services of worship. The threat of persecution prompted John Smythe and Thomas Helwys, leaders of the infant Baptist cause, to move with their fellow believers to Holland, where religious liberty was known to prevail. There, in 1609 the first Baptist Church was formed, and in 1959 the Baptists of the world dedicated a fine new church building in Amsterdam to mark the 350th. anniversary of the establishment of the first Baptist church. Returning to England, when a larger measure of religious toleration seemed assured, the Baptists formed a congregation in 1612, about the time when the King James Version of the Bible appeared. This seems appropriate since Baptists have always and everywhere based their faith and teaching upon the authoritative Word of God. Indeed, the distribution of the scriptures, following the invention of the printing press in Germany, led to the formation of numerous evangelical groups, including the influential Anabaptists, long before the Baptist denomination appeared.

Through the generations the Baptist body has grown steadily, so that today Baptists are found in 63 nations, organized into 80 Conventions, and reporting a total membership of over 28,000,000. Close to 20,000,000 of these are in the United States, where the Baptists are the largest of all Protestant bodies.

Canadian Baptists, stemming from the historic fellowship mentioned above, have some 1200 churches from coast to coast, with a total membership of some 140,000. These are found in three geographic areas: the Atlantic Provinces; Ontario and Quebec; Western Canada. These three Conventions are banded together in the Baptist Federation of Canada, organized as recently as 1948 for fellowship, consultation, and cooperation in several major areas of common concern (such as Overseas Missions, Sunday School publications — and many other areas of common interest). Located largely in Ontario and Quebec there is a Baptist membership of probably 30,000 in another group known as The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists. While having basically similar doctrinal views, these two Canadian Baptist bodies operate quite separately.

IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

The Atlantic United Baptist Convention consists of 602 cooperating churches. The word “united” in the Convention’s name, refers to the merger of two historic Conventions in 1905. The “diamond jubilee” of this union was marked in 1965-1968 by a program called, “Jubilee Journey.” Study booklets were prepared in the areas of Baptist history, Baptist beliefs, and Baptist involvements in the issues of our time. These are available at 25c for some and 50c for others, from the Baptist Bookroom, Box 1053, Saint John, N.B., and are valuable for those who seek an informed understanding of what Baptists believe and practise.

Atlantic Baptist churches range in membership from over 1200 to as few as a half dozen. There are eleven Churches in Saint John; fifteen in Halifax-Dartmouth; more than a dozen in the Moncton area; four in Fredericton; three in Truro. In 1968 there were fifteen major building projects (including four major Christian Education additions) in the Atlantic United Baptist Convention, costing a total of about \$1,500,000. Home and Foreign Missions interest are strong in these provinces by the sea, with about 60% of our “Missionary and Extension” funds going to these areas of our responsibility.

Canadian Baptists have many interdenominational interests. They hold membership, with other major

bodies, in the Canadian Council of Churches. Our pastors are active in local inter-church Ministerial Associations. Our churches and people lend support to such interdenominational bodies as the Canadian Bible Society; provincial temperance organizations; the Student Christian Movement and the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship; and others. With friendly relations with other church bodies, Baptists believe in the continuing value of their ministry and message. They are for the spirit of Christian unity but not for uniformity or unification; they respect the views of other church bodies, while believing strongly in the worth of their particular contributions to the total Protestant cause in our day.

BASIC BELIEFS

The historic, consistent convictions of Baptists of all nations can be summarized quite briefly, though they have broad implications:

1. The Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is Lord of the Church, and Lord of the individual believer. His Word is of supreme authority; His redeeming grace and atoning sacrifice are all-sufficient for those who, with repentance and trust, confess their faith in Him, and follow Him in obedience and love.

2. The authority of the Scriptures. This is related to the Lordship of Christ, for He is Lord of the Scripture, saying, “They are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). To build one's life upon His word is to build on solid rock (Matthew 7:24.) For Baptists the Bible is inspired of God and is of supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice for His people.

3. The priesthood of the believer. Because Christ is Lord of the individual believer's conscience, the believer must follow the leading of His Spirit even when doing so may involve refusal to submit to any human authority. The words of Jesus to Peter in John 21 illustrate this principle dramatically, “What is that to thee, follow thou me” (verse 22), Baptists have phrased this principle also as “freedom of conscience”, and “the right of private interpretation”.

4. Regenerate church membership. This is an important emphasis of Baptists. They regard the church

as “a gathered community”. They find the principle in Acts 2:47, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” The principle implies that people are not saved because they are in the church, but that they are in the church because they are saved. Added to this is the fact that people are saved through **personal** faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism in the New Testament followed repentance, and only responsible persons can repent and believe (see Matthew 3:6; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38, 8:12, 16:31-34.) One is not saved by proxy, by being citizens of a particular country, or by being members of a given church or family. Salvation by faith alone was the watchword of the Protestant Reformation, and Baptists have steadfastly adhered to this.

5. The independence of the local church.

Baptists regard each local church as competent, under the Holy Spirit, to carry on all aspects of its work. In this sense Baptists have refused to accept domination from either ecclesiastical or political authorities. Christ alone is Lord of the individual and of the individual church. However, Baptists from the beginning of their history, have consistently recognized the necessity of fellowship with other churches “of like faith and order.” This principle is termed “connectionalism.” It expresses itself in Associations and Conventions of Baptist Churches, **voluntarily** banded together for mutual aid, inspiration and cooperative endeavour for the Master. The local church, in the spirit of its independence, can accept or reject a policy or program of the Association or Convention, but such rejection of a part of a larger program, does not make necessary the severance of relations with or the withdrawal of fellowship from the larger body. Such selectivity has always marked Baptists, though it can be said that Baptist churches, in general, support the decisions of their “connectional” bodies, once such decisions are democratically reached.

6. The separation of Church and State. Baptists have championed consistently the independence of Christian churches from secular control in any form. This, too, as in the case of all of our principles, derives from the Lordship of Christ. The principle was especially pertinent in the early years of Baptist history when “State Churches”, supported by government endorsement, denied the “non-conforming” bodies the right to worship without

interference from the authorities, and treated their people as unregenerate and “unwashed.” While the principle operates in a changed context here in Canada, it continues to be an area of spiritual significance to be safeguarded. Methods, places and objects of individual or congregational worship are not subject to the decision of secular or ecclesiastical authorities, except, of course, in situations where public requirements of law and order are involved (for example, no church group could claim the right to hold an outdoor service in the middle of a busy street!). Baptists could accept public financial aid for programs which they operate in the public interest only when the acceptance of such aid did not involve government restrictions upon any spiritual ministries relating to such endeavours.

BAPTIST INSTITUTIONS

Recognizing that the “whole gospel is for the whole man”, Baptists have established and supported various institutions of educational and charitable intent both in Canada and in overseas mission enterprises maintained in India, Africa and Bolivia. Acadia University at Wolfville, Nova Scotia, was founded by Baptists, as was McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and Brandon College in Manitoba. The Atlantic United Baptist Convention names fourteen of the Governors of Acadia University, and has full control, through a Convention named Board of Trustees, of the Acadia Divinity College. Ontario - Quebec Baptists operate the McMaster Divinity College, and provide an apartment building for retired people. The Baptist Union of Western Canada has a large bungalow colony for retired people in Vancouver. There is a Baptist dormitory on the campus of the University of British Columbia, named Carey Hall (after William Carey, the Baptist founder of the modern foreign missions movement). A home for senior citizens is being considered by the Atlantic United Baptist Convention. A home near Halifax for orphaned or homeless negro children has been closely associated for many years with the African Baptist Association of the Convention. These are illustrative of the strong social interests of Baptists down through the generations. Baptist schools, colleges, and hospitals have been in the vanguard of educational and medical progress in many countries served by Baptist missionary endeavour.

THE CONVENTION ORGANIZATION

The Atlantic United Baptist Convention has a headquarters building at 112 Princess St., Saint John, N.B. Here the various Boards and Committees of the Convention have such staff as they require. The General Secretary is the senior officer. Full-time secretaries are appointed by the Boards of Home Missions, Christian Education, Evangelism. There is also a full-time editor of the denominational journal, "The Atlantic Baptist", and a full-time Treasurer of the Convention. The Baptist Building in Saint John also houses the operation of the All-Canada Publications Committee, which distributes Sunday School materials across Canada. The Eastern Section of the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board has an office in the Baptist Building. A Baptist Bookroom at the Baptist Building serves our churches generally, and the United Baptist Woman's Missionary Societies as well.

Twenty-one Associations hold semi-annual meetings and carry on significant programs in coordination with Convention objectives. The annual Convention assembly meets for four days beginning with the Thursday before the first Wednesday in September. It is the senior body of the denomination, to which all Boards report, and where major matters of program and policy, involving member churches, are dealt with. The Convention usually meets at Acadia University, Wolfville, N.S., because of the adequate billeting facilities there

IN CONCLUSION

So we introduce you to the Baptists! Many Baptists will read this "introduction", and gain a summary of our story since 1609. Many people, with little previous knowledge of the Baptists, will, we trust, gain a reasonably clear understanding of the traditions, convictions, and spirit of the historic, and very contemporary Baptist people.

Baptists are known as friendly, democratic people, so that strangers are always welcomed, and the ministries of our churches made warmly available to them. Their communion services are "open", in that "those who love the Lord and profess themselves to be His followers" are

welcomed to His table. Membership in Baptist Churches is by baptism by immersion for new believers. For others it is by letters of transfer from other Baptist churches, or by "Christian experience." Evangelical in spirit, deeply concerned for Christian Education and Missions, eager to see the Church more effective in these troubled days, Baptists seek to fulfil their calling with humble reliance upon their Lord, and with an unfaltering faith in the ongoings of the Kingdom of God.