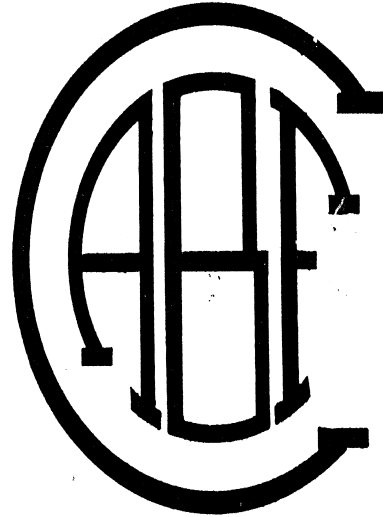


Atlantic Baptist Fellowship



within

Convention

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, From 1971;
A Pilgrimage for Identity: To be Free and Ecumenical

by

Philip G. A. Griffin-Allwood

Originally published in the *Bulletin*, February 1982. Revised October 1986, June 1987,
June 1988, June 1989, June 1990, April 1994.

For many the history of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship (ABF) is the story of the organization of a fellowship that predates the 1971 Convention assembly. For others, who in 1971 were entering denominational life, the ABF is an agent of formation.

THE PILGRIMAGE IN GENESIS

At the 1979 ABF Fall Conference, Athena Colpitts traced the events that led to the formation of the ABF. At the 1971 annual Convention Assembly held at Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., two motions were passed which changed the nature of the United Baptists denomination's life.

By a majority of 61 (242/181; 57.2%), the decision was made that no appointments were to be made by the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces (UBCAP) to the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) and that no funding, direct or indirect, would be made to the CCC. The second motion, adopted by a majority of 244 (359/115; 75.7%), changed the constitution of the Convention to read that churches could only appoint delegates who had been baptized by immersion.

Reaction against the motions by those who would form the ABF was immediate. Winston Miles moved that the UBCAP withdraw fellowship from the Sydney United Baptist Church, which practiced both openness of membership and participated in ecumenical councils. This motion was defeated by an overwhelming majority.

Response to the above events continued after the Convention had dispersed. An *ad hoc* meeting was held in the Anglican Diocesan Centre in Halifax, on September 15, 1971 at which plans were made for the organizational meeting. It was held in First Baptist Church, Truro, the following October 14. Churches and individuals were invited to join the ABF on the basis of the following resolution:

Being led as we believe by the Holy Spirit, who in our day is moving with renewing power among Christians of all denominational traditions;

And, as Baptists subjected to increasing pressure to control and limit our Christian liberty;

We therefore would associate ourselves in an Atlantic Baptist Fellowship which would seek to experience and express, both personally

and in the corporate life of our churches, that freedom with which Christ makes us free.

It is our intention to remain within the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces; and, maintaining our distinctively historic tradition, the Fellowship would promote co-operation with other Christian bodies at all levels.

Initially the organizational structure consisted of a small council with several action committees (Christian Education, Ecumenical Relations, Convention Attendance, Public Relations, Social Service, and Convention Affairs). Eventually the Council size was expanded and committees were appointed as needed.

THE PILGRIMAGE IN PURPOSE

The original five purposes adopted by the ABF illustrate how resolve was carried into action.

* To proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through the full ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing for the whole man;

The Spring and Fall Conferences of the ABF are vehicles for the execution of this purpose. Devotional addresses and the Lord's Supper hold a prominent place at them. The *Newsletter*, and its successor, the *Bulletin*, under the editorship of Roger Prentice, I. Judson Levy, M. R. B. Lovesey, and Terry Tingley have served as mouthpiece for the ABF and as disseminator of information on the "full ministry." Other publications have aided in the carrying out of this purpose; *Discovery from Discussion*, a collection of papers, *Scriptures Then and Now* by J. R. C. Perkin, and the Theological Commission study paper "The Nature of Theology."

* To preserve religious and soul liberty;

* To preserve the autonomy of the local churches;

These two purposes can be summarized in the word "freedom." This was a topic for several conferences under the leadership of people such as Dale Moody, Emlyn Davies, M. R. Cherry, and Russell Aldwinckle. The early years were marked by repeated attempts to have the 1971 decisions overturned (except the one about the Sydney Church). These attempts made the ABF position known even in defeat. The ABF provides a place for churches such as the Sydney Church against which the Cape Breton Association passed a resolution

disapproving of its faith and practice. The ABF seeks to promote individual freedom by refusing to grant special status to ministers.

- * To promote co-operation among Baptist Churches, and maintaining our historic traditions, to co-operate with other Christian bodies at all levels;
- * To promote the well-being and unity of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces

The ABF maintains cordial relations with the Convention leadership; in recent years, meeting regularly with the Executive Minister and President. Convention projects, such as the work in East Wolfville, are promoted. In the early years of conflict, face to face meetings were held with the Evangelical Baptist Fellowship, the organization of those who sponsored the 1971 resolutions, to try and reach an understanding. When Convention nominating committees reports seemed to be unjust, action was taken from the floor. The ABF joined the Atlantic Ecumenical Council and maintains correspondence with the CCC. We have financially supported the Canadian Girls in Training and the Ecumenical Ministry for the Deaf. Ecumenism has been a repeated Conference topic.

THE PILGRIMAGE IN THE IMPERFECT

The pilgrimage of the ABF can be summarized in the two words freedom and ecumenical obedience; the freedom to seek what it means to be part of a Baptized Church of Jesus Christ and obedience to Christ's ecumenical directive. The early years of the ABF were ones of lobbying for the authority of the local church. Although the 1971 decisions were not reversed, recognition was achieved that the Convention does not have the authority to enforce the regulation concerning delegate selection.

In the mid-1970's the major emphasis of the ABF has focused on ecumenism, particularly during the discussions concerning the creation of a Wider Ecumenical Fellowship. During his period as President, Vin Rushton identified the ABF as an instrument for discussion. In the late 1970's and through the 1980's this discussion has focussed increasingly on areas of social justice. In the 1990's association with like minded Baptist groups has occurred as communication was established with the Southern Baptist Alliance.

The lack of denominational turmoil in recent years (although recent debates at Convention assemblies concerning participation in the Evangelical Fellowship

of Canada and ordination of women may have signaled an end to the calm) caused the ABF to reexamine its *raison d'être*. It has always been a movement, but in the turmoil of its first decade, institutional expression of dissent was the primary means of expression. The objectives adopted at the 1985 Spring Conference (on the back cover) reaffirm the purposes of genesis of the ABF and its nature as a movement and as a special interest group within the UBCAP; that it is a religious community seeking to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

LECTURES AND DISCUSSION THEMES

The scope of the interests and activities of the ABF is indicated by the topics discussed at the semi-annual conferences. (Lecturers names are in brackets.)

- "Baptist Practice Regarding Baptism" (Rev. H. S. Hartlin)
- "Baptism" (Rev. Austin MacPherson)
- "Open Membership--Open Communion: A Personal Position Paper" (Dr. M. R. B. Lovesey)
- "A Re-examination of the Church's Ministry" and "Is the Church Geared to Radical Change?" (Dr. Emlyn Davies)
- "The Meaning of Baptism" and "The Mode of Baptism" (Dr. Dale Moody)
- "Freedom" (Dr. M. R. Cherry)
- "Scripture Then and Now" (Dr. J. R. C. Perkin)
- "Freedom and Authority in Religion" (Dr. Russell Aldwinckle)
- "Facing the Future--Direction Finding" (Open Discussion)
- "Education at Acadia Divinity College: Toward a Philosophy of Theological Education" (Dr. M. R. B. Cherry)
- "Baptist Contributions to Christian Unity" (Dr. I. Judson Levy)
- "Atlantic Baptist Roots and Trends" (Dr. M. Allen Gibson and Dr. Frank Sinnott)
- "Ministering with Prisoners" (Dr. Charles Taylor)
- "Our Christian Witness and Cultural Identity" (Dr. Max DeWolfe)
- "The Shape of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship for the 1980's" (Open Discussion)
- "The Church Visible and Catholic" (Dr. Gerald Harrop)
- "The Canadian Council of Churches" (Dr. Lois Wilson)
- "The Gospel and Social Concerns" (Dr. Andrew MacRae and Dr. Maurice Tugwell)
- "The Church and the Disabled: A Time to Listen" (Dr. Gerald Harrop, Mr. Manley Bennett and others)
- "The View from the Pew--The Layman's Perspective" (Ms. Patricia Gow and Mr. James Stanley)

- "My View of Evangelism" (Rev. Hedley Hopkins)
- "Contemporary Medical Ethics" (Dr. John Thomas)
- "New Testament Witnessing--The Bible's Call to Witness" (Dr. Allison Trites)
- "What It Means to be a Baptist, Here and Now" and "Baptist Ordination and the Nature of the Ministry" (Dr. Gerald Harrop)
- "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (Rev. Roger Prentice and Dr. M. R. B. Lovesey)
- "The Role of Women in the Church" (Rev. Diane MacVicar)
- "The Broken Family and the Healing of the Church" (Rev. Earl Ward, Rev. David Shaw, and others)
- "The Use and Abuse of the Bible" (Sister Eileen Schuller)
- "Grief--Guilt--Shame" (Dr. Charles Taylor)
- "The Concept of the Historical Jesus and its Theological Significance" (Dr. Dan O. Via, Jr.)
- "Human Sexuality and Christian Ethics" (Dr. Douglas W. Archibald, Dr. M. R. Cherry, and others)
- "The Theory and Practice of Worship" (Dr. J. R. C. Perkin)
- "The Southern Baptist Alliance: Why? What? Where To?" (Dr. Walter B. Shurden)
- "The Challenge of Feminism for Faith and Worship" (Dr. Kathy Schwartzentruber)
- "Doubt in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament" (Dr. Timothy Ashley)
- "The Stone has been Rolled Away: A Woman Who is a Minister Looks at Mark 16:1-8" (Rev. Heather S. Gilmour)
- "The Question of Missions" (Rev. Hedley H. Hopkins and Dr. Miriam H. Ross)
- "Music and Hymnody" (David MacDonald, Dr. David Carle, Nancy Carle)
- "Lessons from Recent S.B.C. Experience" (Dr. Stan Hastey)
- "Baptist Theological Education: Is There A Crisis in Canada?" (Dr. Raymond Hobbs)
- "Modern Youth and the Church" (Jack Wendt)
- "The Resurgence of the Radical Right in Our Time" (Dr. Martin Rumscheidt)
- "The Face of Violence in our Society" (Dr. Gerry Harrop, Lic. Kirby Smart, Rev. Terry Tingley, Ed Colquhoun, and others)
- "Family Values" (Dr. Stan Hastey and others)

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 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 autumn of each year.