

A new committee, a fresh approach, please

As part of the debate on same sex marriage at the June '04 BCOQ Assembly we were assured that pastoral resources would be made available to assist pastors and churches in their ministry with gays, lesbian, transgendered and bisexual persons. It is an encouraging sign that apparently such a committee or task group is in the process of being set up.

Hopefully this committee will avoid the rush to judgment like that of the previous group born of such a flawed process that violated so many good people. After that debacle many of us are even more convinced that our leadership continues to be unable to be constructive in dealing with difficult issues. There seems to be a frustrating inability to have an open dialogue and to exercise the most rudimentary principles of conflict resolution.

Of course the same challenge can be directed back at critics like myself. What constructive proposals are you making to help improve relations and more importantly, solve problems in our Baptist family?

If the denominational leadership is serious about providing balanced resources to assist BCOQ churches of all points of view in their ministry with gays and lesbians I respectfully suggest that the following questions need to be answered affirmatively.

Will the committee:

- Include people who are affirmative toward gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people (we know the committee will have non-affirming members)?
- Have gay and lesbian members?
- Invite gay and lesbian Christians to come and tell their stories to the committee?
- Put forward a process that will assist churches to dialogue (talk to & listen to each other) about sexual orientation?
- Explore the scientific research that is now available regarding sexual orientation?

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- Invite constituents to suggest resources that could be included in the resource package to be provided to BCOQ churches?

In anticipation that the answer to these question will be yes, here are some resource that might be considered for inclusion in the BCOQ package:

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth; Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays; Marilyn Bennett Alexander & James Preston, Westminster John Knox Press.

Is The Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response; Letha Dawson Scanzoni & Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Harper-San Francisco, 1994.

A Separate Creation: The Search for the Biological Origins of Sexual Orientation; Burr, Chandler. New York: Hyperion, 1996.

Stranger At The Gate: To be gay and Christian in America; Mel White, a Plume book.

Homosexuality and the Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches; Edited by Walter Wink, Fortress Press, and Minneapolis, 1999.

Facing our Differences: The Churches and Their Gay and Lesbian Members; Alan Brash, Risk Book Series - WCC Publications, Geneva, 1995.

Others will have excellent recommendations as well. We can provide brief descriptions of these resources if this would be helpful.

Favourite Baptist Moments



◆ The favourite moment. There are those who have spoken their minds and have been tossed out. These are the folk I feel most at home with now. They do it because they care. They care because they love Jesus. They love Jesus because he first loved them. God loved all of us so much so he gave us Jesus. This, to me is community. Accuse me of spiritual gluttony, but I'll keep coming back for more of this.

- *Daphne L. Hunt*

◆ This is Gerry Hunt with some barefaced Baptist bragging, if you can stand it. Sometimes I have been so hung up on our lack of being known and seen, or consulted by the media on prominent issues....

I recall about 40 years ago being asked to speak at the Week of Prayer service in an RCC in both English and French to an audience of over 900 in Lachute QC.

I recall representing the Sudbury District Ministerial at the 75th Anniversary of the RC Diocese of the Soo. being seated on a dais in the Arena and getting a bear hug from Bishop Alexander Carter.

I recall a 2 year stint in the Toronto Board of Health as the clergy rep. I represented all clergy of any stripe across the city.

I recall saying Nov. 11th prayers at the Toronto City Hall, at which time I met Lech Walesa.

I recall, after my years of hospital and jail visitation, hearing someone say, "That lovely Baptist man came to visit." (My mirror tells me I'm not so lovely. How lovely are the feet of those who bring the Good News) Humbly?

- *Gerry Hunt*

◆ Since I began attending MacNeill, (and I must confess, this is my sole [soul?] Baptist experience), I have enjoyed the tremendous sense of community, inclusiveness, open discussion of religious and social issues, the acceptance and welcome use of what few talents I have, and the principle of soul liberty. The practical use of my belief in (having the whole church), praying for people and situations which actually matter to me. (Can you tell I'm an Anglican refugee).

- *Al Palin*

◆ A good many of my favourite moments aren't necessarily denomination-specific. Though baptismal memories (my own and others') are strong. Nancy and I baptized our oldest, on an Easter Sunday morning. The first one I performed was while I was still in seminary (not ordained). Our congregation had a policy that the person being baptized could select anyone they wanted in the congregation to perform their baptism. (Now that's a BAPTIST story.) When Nancy did her first, in a pool near a waterfall, she stepped back with one foot for leverage and stepped in a hole, nearly going under with the teenage girl being baptized.

Reflecting on who we are as baptists (I like James McClendon's "small-b" baptist notion) among the larger community of faith is crucial. I happen to believe that baptists' greatest contribution to the larger table of faith has been its radical democratizing of access to the Spirit.

- *Ken Sehested*

◆ Favourite moment as a Baptist?

Baptisms that I have performed - my own children and some other special people. Also baptizing 18 Chinese youth in Agincourt (in one service), my services being called upon because of the high view of ordination that the Chinese community has, their Pastor at the time not being ordained.

Also the big events were favourite moments at the time, and as I look back, e.g. the old BYPU Conventions (and spring rallies), also BCOQ Assemblies.

Why do I like being a Baptist?

Because of the many friends I still have in this particular family, and because (in spite of current directions) I sense that there still is at the core a freedom and diversity that does not exist in the same way in many other denominations.

- *John Furry*

◆ My favorite memories are around food, table fellowship. Meals and meetings and talking shop with friends/colleagues and laughter and learning together. I know all the jokes about Baptists and food, but I am grateful for the way community has developed, communities that included me, around us as we sat and looked each other in the face and dreamed and talked about what was really important. It may be a pub in Tillsonburg or a Greek Restaurant on Gerrard in Toronto or a Greasy Spoon in St. Thomas or a picnic table in Vieques or countless living rooms.

- *Cam Watts*

Do YOU have a favourite Baptist moment or a reason you like being a Baptist that you would like to share? Sent it to gnl@gatheringbaptists.ca, fax: 416-922-4359 or mail: Michael Steeves, 70 Linsmore Cr., Toronto ON M4J 4K1. Please include your contact information.

The Baptist World Alliance and the Apostle's Creed

This past June the Southern Baptist Convention voted to sever its ties with the Baptist World Alliance.

In explaining its decision several leaders of the SBC have claimed that the BWA harbours and encourages liberal theology, and that it also is guilty of "anti-Americanism". In response to this move and the published rationale, several Baptist Theologians (28 at last count) have recently suggested that at the 100th anniversary meetings of the BWA, to be held in England next year, the Apostles' Creed be recited by those present. This would demonstrate, it is argued, that the BWA would show itself to be in the mainstream of orthodox Christianity.

Some observations and comments:

First: the claims that the BWA harbours liberal theology is probably true. Given the diverse nature of Baptist life and faith, it is quite possible that members of national bodies who are affiliated with the BWA are in fact 'liberal' in whatever sense the word is intended or taken.

Second: the claim that the BWA has within it groups who encourage 'anti-Americanism' is also probably true. This has been true for some time. I can recall being present at the BWA Youth Assembly in Bern, Switzerland in 1968 and two things struck me. The first was the booing of a delegate from Vietnam by several US delegates present; the second was the hissing when certain jingoistic statements were made by an American delegate on the platform. If a country seeks to determine its foreign policy solely from the perspective of self-interest and the exercise of power unilaterally, it should expect to be disliked.

Third: the proposed reaction to the SBC move by the 28 Baptist theologians is extremely disappointing. Baptists have traditionally avoided creeds. Baptist confessions of faith, of which there are hundreds, if not thousands in existence, are not creeds. Creeds are tests of orthodoxy. Confessions are the results of intense self-examination and prayerful soul-searching by congregations, associations and even national denominations. They are a witness, not a doctrinal standard.

Further, obviously Baptists had no part in the forming of the Apostles' Creed, and, however "orthodox" it might

appear, it is and was intended throughout its history as a means of testing the beliefs of others, sometimes under the threat of penalty. In other words, it is in its written form, an instrument of power.

This power is to be exercised over the minds and consciences of others so that they become the objects of coercion. Its original targets were Marcionites and Gnostics, many of whom were persecuted and killed because of their divergence from the Creed (or, their 'heresy').

Fourth: rather than seeing the loss of the SBC from the BWA as a tragedy, why not look upon it as an intervention of the Holy Spirit? Why does the withdrawal of an organization, which demands conformity to its standards of belief and behaviour as a condition of fellowship, have to be considered a loss? Further, why does the withdrawal of a body which gave an infinitesimal amount of money relative to its own size, have to be mourned. It wielded a power far greater than its financial contribution would seem to permit.

As far as the recitation of the Apostles' creed at the BWA Anniversary meetings next year is concerned, it is an idea born of two motivations. The one is to present a rebuttal to the SBC for its criticisms of the BWA. The other is to offer a so-called "orthodox" face to the rest of the Christian world. On both counts, I ask, why bother? The SBC action needs no reaction to dignify it. That action is beyond rational discussion and debate. In my opinion it was a move motivated by spite. If the recital of the Apostles' Creed is used, as has been suggested, to show an "orthodox" face to the world, then Baptists have forsaken their heritage by so doing. As I read Baptist history, the true nature of the Christian community is to live the Gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to seek ways of nurturing this desire and the life which grows from it. To resort to Creeds to enforce this, especially those written by others, shows that the battle for that life together has already been lost. One must never forget that, in the words of Jack Goody, "the existence of an orthodoxy is always an invitation to seek an alternative."

- Ray Hobbs

Letters are welcome at gnl@gatheringbaptists.ca, fax: (local Toronto) 416-922-4359 or by post to Michael Steeves, at 70 Linsmore Cr., Toronto ON M4J 4K1. Letters may be edited for clarity and length. Please include full name, address, phone number and email if applicable. Editorial Board: Michael Steeves - Editor, Cam Watts, Barbara Bishop, Colleen Furry, bob paterson-watt, Daphne L. Hunt (production).

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From a deacon ...

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A few months ago, Easter to be exact, I was looking at the events around Jesus' death and thinking...who are we following? Not who was Jesus, but which character in this history are we actually following. which person's behaviour do we most closely emulate in our actions?

We profess to follow Jesus, of course, and it is his teaching that we use as our guide. You may see a different path if you look closely at the actions of Peter.

Matthew 26:69-75 NRSV "Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he went out to the porch, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you. Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly."

Peter was afraid of what others thought and what they would do to him so he denied who he was and what he believed. When we in the Church deny who we are because we are afraid of what others think we are following the example of Peter. As Baptists we are very clear that every individual is free to follow Jesus in their own way. We use terms such as "priesthood of all believers" and "soul liberty", but when it comes right down to it we sometimes refrain from saying what we believe because we are afraid of how others will react.

In June at Assembly there were 61 people who voted against the motion that upheld the BCOQ directive prohibiting pastors from performing same-sex marriages. Not all 61 spoke against the motion. One pastor publicly disagreed with her church's support of the motion. What seemed clear to me was that many churches have not had honest discussion around this topic. The BCOQ is afraid of losing churches and churches are afraid of losing members. We are afraid so we follow Peter, refuse to confess what we believe, and in doing so deny who we are.

- John Mackie

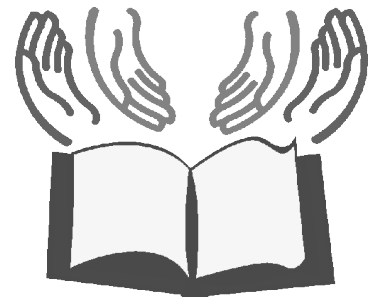
Fall 2004 Gathering of Baptists and The Lester Randall Preaching Fellowship

Saturday 30 October 2004

at

Yorkminster Park Baptist Church
1585 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario M4T 1Z9
Phone: 416-922-1167

Directions: www.yorkminsterpark.com/find_us.html



10:00 a.m.
The Lester Randall Preaching Fellowship.
Speaker: Dr. Joseph Jeter
Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, Texas.



LUNCH – 12:00



1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
The Gathering of Baptists
Speaker: David Gregg
The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB) will converse with us on ministry with our GLBT brothers and sisters.

Cost for the day is \$10.00. To preregister, contact bob paterson-watt, 1171 Woodbine Ave., Toronto ON M4C 4E1 Tel: 416-467-8987 email: registergb@gatheringbaptists.ca. Let us know if you will be attending lunch between the Morning and Afternoon sessions.

On the **Friday afternoon**, before the Saturday sessions, there will be an opportunity for a conversation with welcoming and affirming pastors. If you are interested in attending this, please send an email to camwatts@gatheringbaptists.ca.

