

A Dream

“I had a dream”, to paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr’s famous sermon preached just before he was assassinated. My dream was that the BCOQ would be a Faith Group that could tolerate differences of theological opinion and continue in charitable dialogue with mutual respect. A Denomination where we could “agree to disagree” and still work together at home and abroad for the good of all. My understanding of the Baptist vision of the “free church” is that we relish our autonomy and the grass roots democratic nature of our fellowship. The dimming vision of this dream is what keeps me in the Baptist fold (Though I, and others have been invited to leave the BCOQ in the name of so-called unity, which means don’t dissent with the “party line” because it is disturbing us. It makes us deal with issues we would rather avoid).

It is a travesty that the current BCOQ leadership seems unable to celebrate and foster this “vision” that our forbears fought and died for. Their insecurity (I suggest lack of faith in the body of Christ) is such that they now have so centralized and consolidated their grip on the Denomination that “for cause” (this means that if your local autonomous Baptist church does anything the current leadership disapproves of) your congregation can be dismissed from the BCOQ. There is no definition of what would require such action nor is there any apparent way to appeal a decision by the Board. Even the Southern Baptists in their “rush to the right” get it. They leave the disciplining of churches to local associations where it belongs. The BCOQ leadership just doesn’t “get it” or is so fearful of the wisdom of the body that they must seize control of the levers of correction so that local congregations will be dealt with by the Board of the Corporation rather than by the association which received them into membership and presumably should act to remove them “for cause”. At least the associations will be willing to hear the local churches side of the story before dismissing them (at least this is my vision).

Another part of my dream for the BCOQ is that we would be genuinely inclusive. For me this includes

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people of all races, genders and sexual orientations. The Denomination did allow a group of us to present a seminar at assembly (with a disclaimer which unfortunately gave permission for people who might have a problem to shun this event-sad) that addressed this issue in a positive and pastoral way. We simply heard the stories of our gay and lesbian sisters and brothers and invited participants to share their stories and ask questions. Despite the organizers best efforts to marginalize the event, 75-80 people crowded the room-some standing. We heard the agony of parents of lesbian and gay children and of pastors who have these parents in their churches. How do we love and support gay and lesbian persons and their loved ones whatever our position on orientation. Many stayed after the allotted time to continue the dialogue. Sadly only one member of the BCOQ task group developing resources to minister with gay and lesbian people was present. He was the moderator of the workshop.

So, I had a dream. It is fading quickly. I pray it can be re-kindled because dreaming and bringing our dreams to reality is what following Jesus is about.

*Michael Steeves
 Editor*

Peace from inside out

by Daphne L. Hunt

Surrounded by government buildings and situated just a few hundred metres from Parliament Hill, about 50 Gathering Baptists joined together to discover how change in their lives can help bring peace into the world on 30 April 2005 at First Baptist Church, Ottawa.

Lee McKenna duCharme and Gary Purdy led us in a series of exercises, games and small group activities that informed, entertained and challenged us beginning with a time of getting to know our neighbours. As each one introduced another to the group, our ideas about what peace means to us were shared and a diversity of thought emerged that included inner peace, peace in our relationships, peace with nature and environment, political peace, peaceful outreach to meet the world's needs and peace with God.

In a group exercise we named change that could bring peace to the world and gathered with others who were like minded. As the groups grew, some found that their cause did not fit in with the rest of the group and they moved on to another group

We sifted and sorted ourselves and examined the change we sought and how it would look, the costs, the risks, what we need to know, with whom we need to engage.

As each group responded to these questions, common

threads emerged. We would begin by listening more, learning more about ourselves, how we act, feel and think, taking time to be quiet so we can renew ourselves and hear what Christ has to say to us. The costs could involve financial sacrifice, giving up comfort, control, and the familiarity of home. Risks of seeking change invite us to accept responsibility, the possibility that others will see us as crazy or we will alienate friends and family, the possibility that we will discover things about ourselves that we do not like. We need to know more about the change we seek, the causes we champion, the context of those causes and what will help us be effective in our work for those causes while keeping our focus on just a few since there are many that call for our attention.

For our quest to bring peace to the world, we need to surround ourselves with others who are supportive of our causes and we need to support theirs. Engaging those who oppose our cause by getting to know them on a personal level, and finding common ground with them, is key to producing dialogue that can reduce conflict. This can bring us closer to finding peace with our enemies and bringing peace to those who have lost hope in the process of trying to find a place of peace in their lives.

This article first appeared in the Spring 2005 issue of *PeaceWork*.

Rainbow Theology or the Bible in six colours



RED: Red is at the beginning and it is the passionate love God felt for the creation that came from womb, hands, heart and head. Human Beings are part of that creation and long for that love. It is a gift from God and a gift we give to one another.

ORANGE: Messengers were the forebears of LIGHT sent to Human Beings, created by God, to tell them of the love that awaited them. This was told to them in many ways. Some Human Beings got the message and sadly, many did not and a long time passed.

YELLOW: God sent the LIGHT, a self in the form of a Human Being who could talk about the red, passionate love God had for what was created and show human beings

what love means. There are many human beings who call this LIGHT "Jesus."

GREEN: The LIGHT shone afresh upon creation and caused it to grow visibly. Wonderful signs of growth were seen by many Human Beings. Love grew inside creation. Love grew in Human Beings for other Human Beings who did not know about the LIGHT.

BLUE: Creation needed more from LIGHT now that it understood that it needed to grow. LIGHT gave itself up and called WATER. WATER came in torrents to help continue the growth of creation and its understanding of God.

PURPLE: Creation needs reminders about love. Love is wonderful, astounding, affirming and passionate. So purple is ROYALTY who put itself at the bottom, giving away everything it had so that creation could be on top and know the red, passionate love that came to it from the beginning.

- Daphne L. Hunt

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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Think globally, act locally

by bob paterson-watt

Peace Camp, the annual Summer Conference of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, met for the second time in 21 years at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, from August 1-6. Linfield provided food and housing and a few other facilities, but the main meeting space was at First Baptist Church, McMinnville. Their kind hospitality was only outdone by their attention to detail and generous openness to nearly 350 strangers from across North America.

Marcus Borg, renowned Jesus Scholar and pastoral author of many insightful books, opened the conference on Monday evening with a look at the problem of Empire through Biblical history. He made links to our challenge as peacemakers, who seek to dismantle the destructive and oppressive nature of Empire today. His text will soon be available on line at <http://www.bpfna.org/>.

Cam Watts led bible study for four mornings around the theme, "By the Rivers of Babylon: how the people of God come to terms with their oppressors." Cam's multi-media presentation challenged and provoked us to consider difficult questions around our relationships with our

'enemies'. The only problem with Cam's study was a lack of scheduled time for intentional response and interaction. You can access Cam's texts at <http://www.bpfna.org/>.

One of the greatest benefits of alternating locations for Peace Camp each summer is connecting with new folks in the host town or city. This was truly important in McMinnville. Since March 2002, before the invasion of Iraq, a small group of local peacemakers (anywhere from 4-12) have been gathering every Friday afternoon for one hour at one of the busiest intersections in McMinnville, holding up signs indicating their opposition to US Military intervention in Iraq. On Friday, August 5 their numbers swelled to over 170, and nearly that many signs. There was certainly a smattering of negative and rude gestures from passing motorists, but the majority were honking and waving and giving 'thumbs up' for the message of peace and non-violence presented by a great crowd of witnesses.

The local peace activists are heroes, in my books: small in number, but constant in their commitment to and witness for peace. Their overwhelming delight with our presence made the trip to Oregon most worthwhile. Their example of faithful discipleship is an inspiration and a challenge to gather with local, like-minded peacemakers to bear and share the gospel of peace.

Peace in the church: a backward look

by Gerald Hunt

As a child I was part of Ontario Baptist churches where peace reigned. As a teenager I discovered they both developed splits. It seemed to be a time for separating. I heard of the chasms between Roman and Orthodox Catholic and Protestants. The United Church and the Fellowship Baptists had gone through birth pangs. Pentecostals picked up a good number of dissatisfied members of other churches. Every division of the church looked upon itself as the only true one. My father used to say that it was like breaking a piece of cake in two and then putting the crumbs together. Everybody seemed to forget it had been the same cake.

Leaders would proclaim their correctness; deviation from the party line often led to unchristian behaviour. In more than one incident a faction had padlocked the church or thrown the furniture out on the lawn. Perhaps incidents such as this helped to blow off steam giving a strange sense of satisfaction and freedom. Reconciliation, however, would be impossible — any peace was ugly and feathers remained ruffled.

I had no reason to change churches but steering through the twists and turns on the theological map was frustrating.

Unmistakable signs of peacemaking appeared through

some in the churches throwing themselves into writing, radio preaching, missionary service, and community welfare; in them I did see the Spirit of Christ shining forth through both staunch liberals and fundamentalists evangelizing and educating third world peoples, attending to medical and agricultural needs, constructing alphabets and printing scriptures. Some produced Christian music, while others applied money and materials in ways to foster peace. On mission fields groups recognized comity agreements and theological differences faded into hard work. Some actually lived with native peoples and ate their food.

Conferences and camps helped to humanize and relax people whose rigid and narrow positions had been dressed in Sunday suits. In community public services — Armistice, Memorial, hospital, nursing home, civic, chaplaincy — it became increasingly important to take the high ground. I recall being requested by a large city hospital to replace an aggressive Baptist group of visitors with our own.

Peacemaking was a real need in some groups affected by both family and church feuds and divisions. Some refused to speak to one another ever again. Some churches practised shunning or excommunication — a sad legacy.

Turning swords into plowshares falls to many a preacher. Sometimes our message of peace and love may seem insipid to those accustomed to warfare, but that's what we are called to proclaim.

Elijah's Coattails and the Temptation to Retire

This is an excerpt from an address by Cam Watts to the Vince Rushton Lecture of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship in April 2005.

We live in a day of transitions.

Those of us who span a Baptist past and future have taken on a mantle of responsibility from those who have gone before.

We are like Elisha, who faced a huge and difficult transition when his mentor Elijah left. When Elijah asked Elisha what he wanted he said, "if you are going to leave me to continue this work I want a double share of your spirit." "Possible, but not his to give," came the response. They had to wait and see. Elijah was swept up in a chariot of fire and Elisha tore his clothes in grief and despair. He crossed the Jordan after striking the waters with Elijah's mantle to part the waters all the while asking, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" With reluctance he released the coattails and accepted the mantle.

One would expect "the Baptist Mantel" to be challenging and fulfilling. I started out with a sense of belonging to something bigger with a commitment to nurturing all members of the family even those with whom we disagree. But changes in Baptist life are making it more difficult to work with folks with whom we don't see eye-to-eye. There seems to be more acceptance of diversity with other denominations than there is within our own Baptist family where one would expect a fair degree of tolerance and openness because of the nature of our family.

Acceptance of diversity in Baptist life is diminishing because of dwindling numbers, money pressures and the disregard of society.

We have succumbed to the embrace of a survival mentality. The struggle to survive eliminates the luxury of tolerance & diversity. In a crisis (or perceived crisis) organizations become authoritarian. While paying lip service to diversity Baptist leaders continue to insist that we can't afford dissent: we must be able to "agree" and "get along."

We moderate thought we could continue to agree to disagree on certain matters. The contortions that conservative Baptists have gone through to establish their bottom lines for orthodoxy would be laughable if there weren't so many brothers and sisters wounded by them.

Same sex marriage is an example. The BCOQ is

unable to allow any diversity of practice; legislating that the standard is one man to one woman for life, which leaves divorced persons with questions about God's grace. There is, however an apologetic to permit a divorced person to remarry.

My perception of the future of institutional Baptist has me wanting to hand over the mantle. Also, things are changing so fast it's difficult to keep up with the paradigm shifts. Like the "virtual church." A recent study indicates that there approximately 300,000 young people who constitute an online church in North America. They do not gather to worship but do special projects in community like Habitat for Humanity.

There are still a few reasons to resist the temptation to retire:

- The enjoyment of ministry.
- To be part of what's coming next like the "virtual church."
- Being a Baptist pastor.
- Fulfillment in creating an environment where people grow.

Our belief in soul liberty balanced by the mutual accountability of the priesthood of all believers has us in a good place to promote growth and to be open to new expressions of faith.

We need to be able to listen to dissenting voices so as to discern what to hold onto and when it's appropriate for us to release the coat tails, when it's time to wear the mantle differently or even let someone else carry it.

The question for us is how do we bear and how long do we bear the burden set upon us by our brothers and sisters? While we don't know the answer to it in the Gathering there is enough acknowledgement of how difficult it is and that we support each other while figuring it out.

Barbara Wheeler articulated a possible approach in the February 2004 issue of Sojourner's:

"How's this for a model of the church that we are called to become: 'They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth?' What if instead of denying our estrangement, or bemoaning it, we embraced it as a gift from God? A church that contains members we think strange, even barbaric, is a healthier setting for us, for our formation as Christians. We like to think of a church of our kind, one that excludes those who believe incorrectly and behave badly by our lights, would be a better school for goodness than the mixed church we've got. It is not necessarily so. Familiarity and affinity breed bad habits as well as virtues. The last and most critical reason for all of us Presbyterian strangers to struggle through our disagreements is to how the world that there are alternatives to killing each other over our differences."

Movie Review:

The Kingdom of Heaven

Produced and Directed by Ridley Scott; Written by William Monahan.

by Ray Hobbs.

The plot of this film is simple and straightforward. It tells the story of a young blacksmith, Balian (played by Orlando Bloom), bastard son of Godfrey of Ibelin (Liam Neeson), who travels to the Holy Land to join the Crusades and to find redemption and forgiveness after the death of his wife. In the film Balian becomes friend of powerful figures at the court of Jerusalem, including King Baldwin IV (Edward Norton), and enemy of others like Templars Guy Lusignan (Martin Csokas) and Reynald of Kerak (Brendon Gleeson). He encounters the Muslim ruler and battle leader Salah ed-Din (Ghassan Massoud), and helps defend Jerusalem against his massive armies, finally surrendering and negotiating a peaceful passage back to France with his new wife, Sybilla (Eva Green), Guy's widow. Does he find redemption and peace? Only in the arms of a beautiful woman and a verdant countryside surrounding his original village homestead.

To create such a character and a plot the Writer, William Monahan, and Director, Ridley Scott, have distorted history almost out of recognition. In reality Balian (or, Barisan) was the legitimate son of Balian the Elder, Master of Ibelin and a lord in his own right. He was married to Maria of Comnena for almost twenty years. He eventually became Lord of Nablus and Caymont. His sojourn in the Holy Land was far longer than one year, and during his life he developed remarkable sympathy for the Muslim cause, and helped negotiate a peace between Salah ed-Din and Richard I of England to end the Third crusade. He did not return to France, much less as a blacksmith, and died in the Middle East, probably in Tripoli in 1193, passing on his estates to his son John, who became Lord of Beirut and Constable of Jerusalem.

I like the work of Ridley Scott. Many of his stories contain common themes. Violence is no answer to conflict; violence is often caused by pride, and by people being invading the space of others. One of his earliest films, the *Duelists* (1977) is a brilliant study of military honour and the stupidity that it can generate even among allies. One of his later works, *Gladiator* (2000), is of the corruption of power. Two of his most famous films "Alien" and the classic and brilliant "Blade Runner" deal with alienation of species, and the inability to understand the Other. These are grand themes, and often Scott has something to say in his work. The ending to "Duelists" is

a remarkable piece of near extemporary film-making with a powerful visual and symbolic message.

Sadly, although he had the chance to continue his exploration into these themes, in "Kingdom of Heaven" Scott constantly misses the mark. Orlando Bloom, one of filmworld's 'hottest stars simply cannot act. His emotional range is paper-thin, and he never reacts to the horror of his circumstances. His voice is monotonous, and his facial expressions frozen. Jeremy Irons is wasted and seems to drift through the film in a fitful sleep. Scott seems to have asked for the minimum from his cast, and instead opts for stylish battle-scenes using all the tricks of the modern special-effects intoxicated film maker.

The moral tone of the movie is stressed repeatedly. Balian is to be a "good knight" in the tradition of his father. Godfrey's dream is for "A kingdom of conscience, of war instead of peace..." But the search for this kingdom reveals a self-obsessed, postmodern male whose only solution is to throw every ounce of conventional wisdom to the winds and to retreat to a rural simplicity in isolation. In response to Sybilla's question, "What will become of us?" Balian replies, "The world will decide. The world always decides." This demonstrates an amoral surrender to nihilism, and the confession that humans are in fact not moral beings at all, but tossed around by natural forces beyond their control. It is the confession of the coward. The original Balian was a wonderfully complex character, a man of power, to be sure, but also a man of vision and diplomatic skill. His secret in negotiating peace between Christian and Muslim needs to be discovered, and expounded. Had Scott pursued this, as he had done in several previous films, he would have made a far better movie.

Incidentally, the modern parallel of a western army invading and colonizing the Middle East, is inescapable. But even this dramatic possibility is squandered. All Muslims in the movie are noble and honourable. All the scoundrels are white and European, and who simply don't belong. This is a sad caricature, and falls into Edward Said's definition of "Orientalism". Peace between enemies is to be negotiated over the minefield of human action and character - little of which is predictable. Nothing is gained by stereotyping the Other.

I saw the film in its first full week of release, and on "cheap Tuesday." I sat with four other filmgoers. The movie is a box-office bomb, suggesting perhaps that a surfeit of special effects can become boring. Morality, and "the living of these days" are, in fact, far more engaging subjects. Unfortunately, and surprisingly, in "The Kingdom of Heaven" they are abandoned.

Fall 2005 Gathering

A day to reflect on our history together,
and discern our path forward.
With Ross Lawford, we will explore the topic

Shaping our Future

Saturday 29 October 2005

[First Baptist Church](#)
4264 Mountain St.
Beamsville ON L0R 1B0
Minister, Rev Clarence Braun
905-563-9175



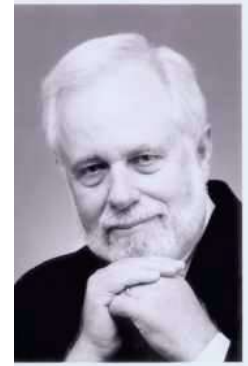
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Registration starts at 8:30 a.m. followed by
worship, morning session, lunch
and afternoon session.

Cost is \$25 for the day and includes lunch.

The day will last to approximately 3:30 p.m.



ROSS LAWFORD

Award-winning author, speaker, popular workshop leader, and experienced life coach. Ross helps people in their quest for richer, more fulfilling professional and personal lives. He teaches ways to reduce stress, to live according to your true nature, and to create the kind of life you most deeply desire.

Ross has been a researcher and professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University, the chief technical officer for a large Canadian corporation, the president of a technology company, and most recently has founded his own company.

In addition to his leadership skills, Ross has been trained in mediation, community building, as well as a variety of alternative health techniques and spiritual practices.