

There is a lot of talk in Ottawa right now about so called “whistle blowers” and the need to protect them from the retribution of their bosses and superiors when they draw attention to mistakes and misdeeds.

While it may not be exactly the same, a whistle of sorts has been blown on the BCOQ leadership and it has brought the steam engine of by law changes and affiliation agreements to a squealing metal on metal stop. Well at least it has slowed the distasteful and probably illegal process somewhat. Many of us in the Gathering and beyond have been voicing grave concerns about the process and the content of these draconian actions. Red flags like centralizing power and control, an anti democratic plan that destroys the grass roots genius of Baptist life and a structure that abrogates the autonomy of the local church and voids the role of the associations were largely ignored, that is until FBC Brantford came forward with their withering report that has finally got the BCOQ’s attention. My opinion is that most of the rest of us have been “tuned out” because sadly we have been successfully “demonized” blackballed and marginalized by those in power. To bad because we continue to be staunchly Baptist (in the best sense, I hope) and would like to make a positive contribution to our life together, see our statement of purpose [www.gatheringbaptists.ca/Activities/](http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/Activities/)  
But I digress.

The good folks at FBC Brantford also became concerned and struck a committee of 15 members that included such Baptist luminaries as: Dr. Dan Gibson, Dr. Fred Bullen, and Rev. Thomas Caldwell, Dr. Theo Gibson, David Partridge (lawyer) and others. All the members of the committee read and studied the entire 89 page BCOQ document. Their report, unanimously endorsed by the FBC congregation,

and now reverberating like a well aimed bowling ball down the corridors of the new BCOQ office has got the attention of the leaders. The detailed document focuses on two main areas: 1) the direction that the new by-law and Constatng Documents take the denomination i.e. toward a centralized corporate model of governance and away from a democratic grass roots, bottom up movement and 2) the flawed and probably illegal process that was used to secure passage of the package.

The result is a serious review of the process via a select committee that now includes Dan Gibson and Dale Soble. The encouraging development is that the BCOQ Board have publicly acknowledged that their preparation of the documents and process used were questionable, and “genuinely regret” the result. Perhaps it is possible for institutions to repent? As well the content of the Constatng documents will be reviewed to determine if they are consistent with historic Baptist polity and practice. This give a whole new meaning to the phrase “Daniel in the lion’s den”, but my prayer is that further progress can be made. Who knows this may even save the BCOQ from oblivion. We live in hope.

It should also be noted that at least 50 churches and association have expressed concerns about the by-laws and Constatng Documents so even our optically challenged leadership has been forced to listen. Perhaps more constructive change will follow. You can read the full FBC Brantford documents on our website at [www.gatheringbaptists.ca/News/](http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/News/)

Thank you and good night.

Michael Steeves  
3/10/2006

## "Christian Peacemaker Team Released"

Our hearts filled with joy today as we heard that Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember have been safely released in Baghdad. Christian Peacemaker Teams rejoices with their families and friends at the expectation of their return to their loved ones and community. Together we have endured uncertainty, hope, fear, grief and now joy during the four months since they were abducted in Baghdad.

We rejoice in the return of Harmeet Sooden. He has been willing to put his life on the line to promote justice in Iraq and Palestine as a young man newly committed to active peacemaking.

We rejoice in the return of Jim Loney. He has cared for the marginalized and oppressed since childhood, and his gentle, passionate spirit has been an inspiration to people near and far.

We rejoice in the return of Norman Kember. He is a faithful man, an elder and mentor to many in his 50 years of peacemaking, a man prepared to pay the cost.

We remember with tears Tom Fox, whose body was found in Baghdad on March 9, 2006, after three months of captivity with his fellow peacemakers. We had longed for the day when all four men would be released together. Our gladness today is made bittersweet by the fact that Tom is not alive to join in the celebration. However, we are confident that his spirit is very much present in each reunion.

Harmeet, Jim and Norman and Tom were in Iraq to learn of the struggles facing the people in that country. They went, motivated by a passion for justice and peace to live out a nonviolent alternative in a nation wracked by armed conflict. They knew that their only protection was in the power of the love of God and of their Iraqi and international co-workers. We believe that the illegal occupation of Iraq by Multinational Forces is the root cause of the insecurity which led to this kidnapping and so

much pain and suffering in Iraq. The occupation must end.

Today, in the face of this joyful news, our faith compels us to love our enemies even when they have committed acts which caused great hardship to our friends and sorrow to their families. In the spirit of the prophetic nonviolence that motivated Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom to go to Iraq, we refuse to yield to a spirit of vengeance. We give thanks for the compassionate God who granted our friends courage and who sustained their spirits over the past months. We pray for strength and courage for ourselves so that, together, we can continue the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace.

Throughout these difficult months, we have been heartened by messages of concern for our four colleagues from all over the world. We have been especially moved by the gracious outpouring of support from Muslim brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. That support continues to come to us day after day. We pray that Christians throughout the world will, in the same spirit, call for justice and for respect for the human rights of the thousands of Iraqis who are being detained illegally by the U.S. and British forces occupying Iraq.

During these past months, we have tasted of the pain that has been the daily bread of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Why have our loved ones been taken? Where are they being held? Under what conditions? How are they? Will they be released? When?

With Tom's death, we felt the grief of losing a beloved friend. Today, we rejoice in the release of our friends Harmeet, Jim and Norman. We continue to pray for a swift and joyful homecoming for the many Iraqis and internationals who long to be reunited with their families. We renew our commitment to work for an end to the war and the occupation of Iraq as a way to continue the witness of Tom Fox. We trust in God's compassionate love to show us the way.

Living through the many emotions of this day, we remain committed to the words of Jim Loney, who wrote:

"With God's abiding kindness, we will love even our enemies.

With the love of Christ, we will resist all evil.

With God's unending faithfulness, we will work to build the beloved community."

Rev. Carol Rose  
Dr. Doug Pritchard

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### **Gathering of Baptists website updates:**

#### **Spring 2006 Gathering page details.**

<http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/Spring/>

There is a poster there for download.

#### **EVENTS:**

BPFNA Summer Conference

<http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/Events/>

#### **FBC Brantford's response to BCOQ regarding the constating documents.**

<http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/News/>

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Letters are welcome at [gnl@gatheringbaptists.ca](mailto: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, Colleen furry, bob paterson-watt, Daphne L. Hunt Production: RoseMary Cummings

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## **"Reflections on God & Myth"**

I have been thinking about what God is like. And what it means for us. Please forgive the superficial treatment of a theme, but if this was too

long would you read it (especially if it's about theology)?

Let me start with Noah, one of the subjects of last week's Lectionary reading. We think this story was recorded during the Exile, when the Children of Israel were at a nadir. Maybe *the* nadir. Their lives were disrupted and this story was told to say that somehow there is hope in the midst of total disruption. The Creator hangs up his (sic) bow, pledging safety to creation from any jeopardy. And God says that it is a reminder: "Everytime I see the bow I will remember my covenant."

Wait a minute. God needs a reminder? God forgets? Wouldn't that represent a nadir for us, to be forgotten?

Walter Brueggemann speaks about God's interior life, a life not unlike ours where we are free to change our minds, repent, consider another possibility.

Wait a minute. God has an interior life? The mind of the immutable is mutable? I suppose that's comforting from the "this is how I know God understands me" point of view.

But it is not comforting to someone, me, who is increasingly uneasy with our anthropomorphic picture of God, our mythological vision. I am not repudiating myth. With Karen Armstrong and Northrop Frye I want to affirm the importance of affirming our myths. But in my heart and head is an ongoing conversation/argument about what God is. Not anthropomorphic. Yet somehow personal. But not. Not personal. Not impersonal either. More like Tillich's description of the Ground of Being. But how do I relate to that Ground of Being? The scriptural confessions of God as "I am" may be at the heart our understanding of God. God is. Whether I relate or not or no matter how I relate.

I find myself looking for evidence of God in worship. Will I get a fleeting glimpse in the music or words? How do I know that God is present in prayer (I know God is, but how do I know that?)? And whatever I do for others for justice and peace and the offering of grace is an

expression of my wrestling and gripping, like Jacob, for myself and others, until we are blessed.

Big words with little eloquence. So I escape to simple eloquent humour. One day Andy Capp asked the Vicar if he thought that this earth was just another world's hell. The vicar replied "Don't ask me, mate, I'm already confused enough." Andy offers "Let me buy you a pint."

For me this Gathering of ours is a good place for us to ask questions, a safe place to entertain confusion, and a fine place to have a round together.

Cam Watts

Myth is a way of putting in language and pictures that which we cannot express any other way. Myths are only good if we know they are myths. The danger lies in taking them as truth. The danger is also in the interpretation of myths.

My cynical, skeptical side wonders if the whole Noah series was but a need for the Jewish faith to explain the floods because they didn't like the other cultural stories 'floating' around. Perhaps we are mining them for a deeper meaning when there isn't one.

However; not that Cam has interpreted them incorrectly, his sermon on Sunday was excellent, but as I understand the Noah narratives the 'myth' of the (rain)bow is the understanding that God was not a Warrior God nor a Punisher God but a Creator God. He set aside His weapons (bow) yet they needed to remain in view as a sign of what He is not. The bow is not for God. It is for us.

(As an aside - could some share with me if there is any connection between this OT myth and the gay/lesbian community choosing a 'rainbow' flag?)

To sense God's presence means we do not start at the myths, nor try to form new ones, but at the inner experience where our spiritual nature rests within the God Spirit. I suppose that sounds somewhat mystic or Buddhist, yet that is where my meditations are now taking me. I no longer

struggle to 'understand' God nor experience Spirit. I allow the distractions of my thoughts to get out of the way so that I can be part of Spirit.

Communal worship is becoming less and less important - the October Gathering will be a real test of this for me - and prayer no longer has anything to do with words. The stories of Jesus have become interesting guides as they tell of His journey to live out the Spirit He embodied. For me that was expressed my Meister Eckhart: "That which man acquires by contemplation he should spend in love."

Bruce Coombe

I have always been fascinated and drawn to mythology. Fairly early in my life (late teens or early 20's) I came to a strong conviction that a "myth" was a story of such depth and truth that it was irrelevant whether it was historical. A "Myth" was not a story that "wasn't really true", but was rather, a story that was profoundly true. It has opened up and set free my willingness to look at scripture, and stories like Noah and see the depth and force that these stories carry. It makes me less afraid about getting the stories "right", because the meaning of the symbols in the story open out and carry multiple meanings.

I often want symbols to have a particular and specific meaning. But the real beauty of a great symbol is the life it takes on as its meaning evolves and morphs too. In truth, symbols do change meaning, if they are alive. Like a poem, a symbol can operate at many levels, its meanings radiating out simultaneously.

Your comments about the anthropomorphic view of God are interesting. I think of God as anthropomorphic because it is a framework that helps me understand and feel compassion for God. It helps me identify with God.

I wonder if God self revealed to a star, would the star use "stellar" terms of reference to describe God? Of course my question is limited in its language. I only talk of God revealing "self" because I have a self; or should I say I **am** a self. I naturally think on my own terms.

Didn't God also "repent of the evil he was going to do to the people of Nineveh", in the book of Jonah. Another great and powerful myth. A story of profound truth.

The things I understand of as myth change as I get older.

I have never stopped believing in Santa Claus.

I don't have to be confused for the pint to sound like a good idea. Or maybe I am in a perpetual state of confusion and therefore do not "feel" confused.

Yes, this gathering is a fun place to kick ideas around.

Make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.

Not a hyper-space by-pass constructed by Vogons.

Joe Abbey-Colborne

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## Coming Events

These are events of interest to the Gathering of Baptists.

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Spring Gathering at Selkirk Baptist Church, 179 Main St. Selkirk ON N0A 1P0. 905-776-2555.  
Theme: **Exploring Emerging Ways of Worship** with Rob Shearer.

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Justfolks Festival at Aylmer Baptist Church, May 12-13. 153 John Street South, N5H 2C6, 519-773-7293 [www.justfolks.ca](http://www.justfolks.ca)

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**Baptist Peace Fellowship Summer Conference** - 10-15 July 2006 at Oglethorpe University and Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Theme: **Becoming the Beloved Community**.

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## Book Review

I've been enjoying reading a textbook. Not my usual style, I know, but Mary Ann Tolbert's Sowing the Gospel is, for me, a refreshing look

at Mark. The first half is a response to the way the gospel has been shaped and boxed-in by form and redaction criticism. Not that she rejects these, she just sees the limitations of them and the losses to the Gospel of completely buying-in to a particular way of seeing. In researching other forms of literature from the period of the writing of the gospel, Tolbert has found similarities to the form of ancient erotic novels. Erotic does not mean pornographic, it means a Greek or Roman love story where the protagonists are kept apart by fate until they are reunited at the end. She does not draw that direct a comparison, but says that the literary form of the Gospel is one of a narrated suspense, one that would appeal to a variety of readers, kind of like a 2000 year-old Davinci Code. That is my interpretation, and I am not comparing one to the other, but find it helpful to read the gospel again wondering how Mark developed it for his audience and how it was read. And, really, it's kind of cool to sit and read it as though it was a mystery. Besides that, you really can't skip to the last chapter to find out how it ends without feeling a little confused (like the women in ch. 16). Forgive the oversimplification of Tolbert's book. It is nice to be invited to another interpretation, to see a gospel through fresh eyes, particularly as we read through Lent.

Besides, you already know that I have a penchant for people who help us to see outside the box, and an ongoing concern for what we lose when we are required to buy-in to a particular way of seeing.

cam watts

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See page 6  
for  
Spring Gathering  
Poster



# Exploring Emerging Ways of Worship

With leadership by **Rob Shearer** and friends from  
**Parkdale Neighbourhood Church**, Toronto.

**At The Spring 2006**



**Saturday 29 April 2006**

**Selkirk Baptist Church**  
**179 Main St., Selkirk ON N0A 1P0**  
**905-776-2555**  
**Pastor: The Reverend Blake Eady**

To register, please contact  
bob paterson-watt  
at  
50 Brunswick Ave., Kitchener ON N2H 4E8  
Tel. 416-467-1462 E-mail: [registergb@gatheringbaptists.ca](mailto:registergb@gatheringbaptists.ca)

Registration starts at 9:00 a.m. followed by morning session, lunch and afternoon session.  
Cost for the day includes lunch. \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members



**Rob Shearer** is an elder at **Parkdale Neighbourhood Church** (BCOQ) and has worked in many ecumenical ministry contexts ranging from Catholic to Pentecostal to United to Baptist. He is a worship leader, musician & social justice activist. Much of his time is spent living in the Toronto Catholic Worker Community in a 'house of hospitality' which takes in folks in transition. On top of his Catholic Worker life, he currently volunteers with the Canadian Council of Churches as Coordinator for the Nidus Festival ([www.nidus2006.ca](http://www.nidus2006.ca)), as well as serving as music director for a 'Wine Before Breakfast' a campus worship community at the University of Toronto.