

The Acadia Story

"Training Baptist Ministers in the Maritimes-the story of the Acadia Divinity School" prepared by former President Andrew MacCrae read in his absence to the Baptist World Alliance Academic and Theological Work Group meeting on Thursday 5 July 2001 at the July 2001 General Council held at Charlottetown, PEI.

The Canadian Baptist story, as we know it, really began in Nova Scotia, and the oldest continuing Baptist congregation in the country is in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, the home of Acadia University and Acadia Divinity College, its Graduate School of Theology. One other congregation, New Brunswick, was founded a little earlier, but went out of existence for many years, and was later re-formed, later than the formation of Wolfville Baptist.

If this brief presentation is to have any of the features of a case study, I need to personalize it a little. I first visited the campus of Acadia University in 1971, when the BWA General Council met on the campus in a summer which even Texans and southern Californians described as 'hot' although our Caribbean and Africans found it very pleasant. Little did I know that nine years later I would, with great difficulty and not a little internal struggle, leave my life and work in Scotland and throughout Europe, and instead work to establish the first Chair of Evangelism and Mission in any Canadian Seminary, denominational or interdenominational at Acadia. For the last 21 years Acadia has been the very satisfying base from which I have operated, for five years as a faculty member, and then for 13 years as the College Principal and University's Dean of theology. Now, three years into 'alleged' retirement, I still teach Evangelism and also serve as Director of doctoral Studies, half-time, while serving as a pastor the other half.

One of the best sources of information about the beginnings and the character of Acadia is to be found in a volume, edited by the late, and still missed, George Rawlyk, entitled Canadian Baptists and Higher Education, and published in 1988. Some other North American writers of Baptist History have been less aware of its existence and uniqueness.

The beginnings of Baptist life in Canada, and the influence of men of evangelical passion like Henry Alline, are still reflected in the essentially evangelical nature of Atlantic Baptist life, and in Acadia Divinity College, the Seminary of the Atlantic Baptist Convention. Our sister school at McMaster, in Ontario, and the smaller western school of earlier years in Brandon, Manitoba to some extent, became embroiled in the 1920's in a great fundamentalist-modernist split, led by the late T.T. Shields, of Toronto. He tried unsuccessfully to stir up the same conflict in the three Maritime provinces, Acadia, but for all the accusations and assumptions of others, it has remained close to its constituency, and to the evangelical position that has always characterized Baptist life in these parts; yet it has not fallen into the trap of unthinking fundamentalism and anti-intellectual rigidity.

Indeed, from the beginning, Acadia University as a Baptist foundation, was characterized by an openness untypical of the day. Founded in 1838, its original charter as a College, stated:

And be it further enacted, that no religious tests or subscriptions shall be required of the Professors Fellows, Scholars, Graduates or Officers of the said College; but that all the

privileges and advantages thereof shall be open and free to all and every Person and Persons whomsoever, without regard to religious persuasion.

This does not imply lack of conviction, but adherence to the Baptist principle of religious liberty. The second half of the clause I have just quoted reads:

And it shall and may be lawful for the trustees and Governors of the said College to select as Professors, and other Teachers or Officers, competent persons of any religious persuasion whatever, provided such person or persons shall be of moral and religious character.

The historical reason for this, I have no doubt was that the two major Universities of the day in Nova Scotia, were heavily controlled by Denominational structures which would not tolerate, accept or recognize deviant influences like the Baptists! King's College was an Anglican School and Dalhousie University, which was originally non-denominational, had placed itself under the control and direction of the Church of Scotland, of all bodies. Indeed, it was the failure of Dalhousie to appoint a prominent Baptist pastor and scholar, Edmund Crawley, to the Chair of Classics, as had been expected, that really thrust into the forefront of Baptist thinking the need for a College established and run by the Baptists.

There is a remarkable story of a little group of Baptist women, from the south shore of Nova Scotia, who walked across the Province, taking several days to cover the ground, to a prayer meeting in the little community of Nictaux in the beautiful Annapolis Valley. Here, in a meeting with local Baptist leaders, including Edmund Crawley from Halifax and the Nictaux pastor, Ingraham Bill, a decision was taken, after a whole night of prayer, to establish a Baptist College with the endorsement of the Baptist Education Society. This organization had been formed ten years earlier, when the Baptist-run Horton Academy had been founded. The College, soon to be University, began with 21 students in January 1839. The Baptist Education Society wanted to call it Queen's College, but apparently this did not sit well with Queen Victoria, so the name was altered in 1841 to Acadia College, and, 50 years later, to Acadia University. There's an irony in that, since the Acadians were the people whom Britain dispossessed of their lands, because they would not swear allegiance to the British crown. And now the University, which wanted to be Queen's college, called itself Acadia College, although it still sings 'God Save the Queen' at its Convocations!

It began with two professors only, Crawley and Pryor, but when a third was added in 1840, in the person of a 23 year old Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, named Isaac Chipman, who was a local boy, attempts were made to raise funds to build but, when that failed, Chipman urged that they appeal to their own people to build 'without money' by appealing for material and labour. And they did just that!

In 1851, John Mockett Cramp became President and, although 57 years of age at the time (which was much older then than it is now), gave dynamic and creative leadership, particularly in curriculum development, and by his emphasis on training men for ministry.

Acadia university has the oldest Alumni Association in Canada started in 1860, and it has exercised great influence in the University over the years, and has done much to raise the profile

and the funding of the University. Interestingly, among its Alumni have been some very distinguished people like:

Dr. Charles Huggins (1920) native of Halifax, N.S. winner of the 1966 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, and a former Chancellor of Acadia; **Sir Charles Tupper** (1839), Prime Minister of Canada; **Charles A. Eaton** (1890), who signed the United Nations Charter at San Francisco on behalf of the United States; **Dr. Edgar S. Archibald** (1905), 31 years Director of Canada's experimental Farm System; **Loring C. Christie** (1905), Canada's first Ambassador to the United States; **James L. Ilesley** (1913), Chief Justice of Nova Scotia, M.P., and Minister of Finance, 1940-46; **Dr Lillian Chase**, 1916, physician who assisted with the discovery of insulin; **Milton Gregg** (1916), winner of The Victoria Cross in the First World War, President of the University of New Brunswick, Minister of Veteran's affairs, and Canada's High commissioner to Guyana; **Norman MacLeod Rogers** (1927), Rhodes Scholar, Minister of Labour (1935-39), and Minister of National Defence; **Dr. Benjamin Gullison** (1927) medical missionary and Founder of Operation Eyesight, dearly loved by all Canadian Baptists; **Harrison McCain** (1949), Chairman of the International company, Mc Cain Foods Limited; **Dr. Freeman Patterson** (1959), internationally acclaimed photographer and author; **David Levy** (1972), co-discoverer of Periodic Comet Shoemaker Levy 9, which hit Jupiter in July 1994; The American Hubble Space Telescope was used to study the site soon after the collisions; as was every major telescope in the world. For Levy, an amateur astronomer who began his interest in the heavens while at Acadia, his involvement with 21 discoveries ranks him second among the world's comet hunters. Levy recently won a 1998 Emmy Award from the National Association of Television Arts and Sciences as part of the writing team of the Discovery Channel's program 'Three minutes to impact'; **Dr. Dale Frail** (1983), astronomer, discoverer in 1992 of a new planet outside solar system.

The College grew until and through its Jubilee in 1988, and under the Presidency of Dr. Artermas Sawyer, a Classical scholar, its charter as a University was approved. Sawyer saw to it that Theology was taught, by developing a Theological institute in 1853 with Courses in Church History, Hebrew and Systematic Theology. I'm not sure when Greek arrived, but OT scholars will be happy at the precedence given to Hebrew. In 1891 the University Charter was finally approved. Later Homiletics was added and in 1892 the Bachelor of Theology degree was approved. The Institute became a small School of Theology in 1923 and continued until 1968, when, as part of a secularization process, the University became a secular institution, committed a\to its Baptist history only insofar as it ensured liberty of religion and also gave some hope of continuing financial backing from key members of the Baptist community! And indeed that strategy has paid the University well.

Thanks to effective Development and Fund-raising including support from the Rockefellers and other significant donors, new programs were added. In 1903 the Bachelor of Science program was approved, with a strong emphasis on Applied Science. Engineering and Biology became prominent disciplines and a steady stream of Acadia graduates went on to study in Harvard, M.I.T., Mc Gill and Oxford. In 1905, the University's first Rhodes Scholar was named, and many other Acadia students have become Rhodes Scholars since that time.

Schools of Music and Education were developed, and later Schools of Engineering and Computer Science were funded. The beautiful campus was enriched by the construction of many student residences, which are central to the community life of the University.

The war years took their toll of some of Acadia's best and brightest students and graduates, but the University was led through the 1923-1948 period by the outstanding Presidency of Rev. Dr. Frederic William Paterson, under whose guidance the University flourished and grew without losing its strong sense of community. It is said that Dr. Patterson knew every student personally by name, and did a good deal of the recruiting himself. He was followed by the quite brilliant leadership of Dr. Watson Kirkconnell, an outstanding scholar and linguist, who led the school through considerable expansion, but also prepared the way, deliberately, for the transfer of authority in the University from the Baptist Convention to a board of Governors in which church interests were no longer a majority influence. Two years after his retirement, the secularization of the University was accomplished, and, of a new Board of Governors numbering 37, only 9 were appointed by the Baptist Convention, plus the Principal of the newly-established Acadia divinity College, while the University President assumed a seat on the College Board, and a relationship of mutual inter-institutional respect and co-operation was established, which has continued over the years.

At the point at which control of the University changed hands, the united Baptist convention of the Atlantic Provinces was granted the right, while relinquishing control of the university, to retain responsibility for theological Education, by the formation of an affiliated college, the Acadia Divinity College. While the college was empowered to award its own Degrees, a legally binding Memorandum of agreement was signed, which still operates, whereby the College suspends its right to award degrees independently, so long as it remains on the campus of the University, and has the guarantee that all degrees offered at the Divinity College, with courses recommended by the college Senate to the University Senate, will, once approved by the Senate, be awarded by the University at its major convocations. So to this day the Divinity College functions as an affiliate of the University, and as the Graduate School of Theology of the University, and its Principal, selected by the college Board, which comprises appointees of the convention for the most part, serves the University as its Dean of Theology, when approved by the Board of Governors.

From 1968, the renewed School of Theology has been directed and led by five Principals, each of whom has made a distinctive contribution to the life and development of the College. It may fairly be said that Dr. Millard Cherry, a former Southern Baptist from Kentucky, USA, who had served as the University's Professor of Theology from 1957, was the ideal person to lead the transition. His blend of warm Southern friendliness and superb theological scholarship contributed to the formation of a community of evangelical scholars, with deep pastoral concern, which earned the respect of the academic community and also brought effective leadership to the churches. After serving from 1968-1971 as the first Principal of Acadia Divinity College and University Dean of theology, he returned to the classroom, where he taught Systematic theology until his retirement in 1987. He was supported by some outstanding Faculty members, including the world renowned Dr. Jarold Zeman, our late beloved Church historian, and Dr. Charles (Charlie) Taylor, the 'founder' of Clinical Pastoral Education in Canada, and the Director of the Diploma in Prison Ministry, which is still unique in North America.

'Cherry' as he is affectionately known, was succeeded by Dr. Abner Langley, a man of world vision, but also a local Atlantic Canadian pastor who, of all people, may most fairly be described as the Baptist Bishop of Atlantic Canada. Held in the highest esteem by the Churches, he brought a pastoral maturity and commitment to the task, and ranged widely in his own ministry to the Baptist constituency, and in four short years, gave the college a nation-wide credibility. He also laid foundations, in his part in selecting Faculty persons, for the strong evangelical Faculty which has ever since that time, been the key to the School's impact. He was also active in the life of the BWA.

In 1975, he was succeeded as Principal and Dean by Dr. Harold Mitton, the Senior Pastor of the largest Baptist Church in Canada at that time, namely First Baptist Church, Calgary, who assumed the Principal's role and very quickly raised the profile of the School as a home for excellent preaching. He himself came as one of the most respected preachers in Canada not only by Baptists, but across the denominational spectrum. He carefully cultivated the relationship with the University, and played a very large part in the enhancement of the college's standing in University and Seminary circles. He served for ten years until his retirement in 1985.

It was during his leadership that I was persuaded to leave my work as General Secretary and Superintendent of the Baptist Union of Scotland, and my extensive involvements in the European Baptist Federation. In this organization, I served as President, and Chairman for Evangelism and Education. I was also extensively involved with the Baptist World Alliance around the World. So I came to Acadia as Professor of Evangelism and Mission in 1980 and served as Principal and Dean as it happens for longer than anyone else - thirteen years, retiring in 1998, purely because of my chronological age, which required it. I had the joy, in my early years, of having my three immediate predecessors in office as colleagues in the life of the College. This was the case until ill health forced Abner Langley to retire, while Cherry continued to teach till retirement, and then returned to lead a country church to the doubling of its membership in three years; Harold Mitton continued to teach preaching and direct Supervised Field Education for six years following retirement. That unusual 'team' of Principal and former Principals was an arrangement of unqualified enrichment and illustrates the stability and continuity of the School's community life.

Since 1983, the College has been a full member of the Association of Theological Schools and all its Master's degrees and its doctor of Ministry degree, are approved by ATS and awarded by the University. As a Baptist Seminary, it also prepares students for the Bachelor of Theology degree awarded by the University, for mature candidates approved for Baptist Ministry, and also in its own right, offers a two year Certificate in Ministerial Studies, which is designed in collaboration with the Convention to meet the ministry preparation needs of older ministry candidates preparing for Ordination within the convention, who have had no formal post-secondary education. It is important to know that Canadian Baptists in their several Conventions, arrogate to Boards of Ministerial Standards and Education, appointed by the churches, the prerogative of evaluating the commitment, call and preparation of persons seeking entry to Baptist ministry.

Acadia University is, for the most part, an undergraduate University, with some Masters' degrees in other disciplines, like Arts and Education, but its only earned doctorate is the doctor of

Ministry degree. This in no way reflects on the quality of Faculty in other parts of the University, but reflects the policy of an overarching Educational body called the Maritime Provinces' Higher Education commission (MPHEC) which approves all new University programs in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. That body limits the award of PhD degrees in Nova Scotia to Dalhousie University in Halifax, even when another University may have a stronger Faculty in a discipline in which a PhD is offered. In such cases, Dalhousie and the other University are expected to co-operate.

Interestingly, the DMin. Which was introduced in the early years of my first term as Principal and Dean, was made an exception by MPHEC, since it was freely acknowledged that Acadia Divinity College was the only institution in these Provinces competent to offer such a degree, and now the award of the D. Min. takes pride of place at all Convocation ceremonies, as Acadia's highest degree.

One of my dreams, which the college Faculty and Board shared, was to try to enlarge the influence of the college in partnership with schools in other lands and cultures. During the leadership of my predecessor, the College had succeeded in linking the French Baptist Seminary, a French language school, now named the Faculte de Theologie Evangelique in Montreal, Quebec with the University, for the award of the Acadia BTh Degree, a very high quality degree, closely resembling our Master's degree.

During my years in office, that College has been authorized to offer Acadia's Masters degrees also. Late in the 1980's in co-operation with Dr. Michael Odelami, one of our Nigerian graduates, and the President and co-founder of two interdenominational Nigerian theological colleges, I was able, after careful visits to Nigeria, and intensive academic review, to secure the unanimous support of the University Senate, to give to two Nigerian Schools, the Christ International Divinity College and the Universal Gospel Divinity College, the right to provide the entire training of students in Nigeria for the award of Acadia University Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Religious Education degrees. I have had the personal pleasure of conferring more than 160 degrees on Acadia graduates in Nigeria through the '90's, on the occasions of many visits. Finally, as a special joy, I was delighted, with the support of our Faculty and Senate to secure affiliate status for the Bethel Bible Seminary in Hong Kong, with the right to confer Acadia University Master of divinity and Master of theological Studies degrees to students entirely trained in Hong Kong. Two weeks before the hand over of Hong Kong to Mainland China, my wife and I had the privilege of presenting to that seminary Acadia University's official Certificate of affiliation, and to co-teach a course in Church Growth there, while remaining in Hong Kong, to be present during the handover ceremonies.

Of our overseas students on full scholarship, four Nigerians whom we brought to Canada for their Masters' degrees, are completing PhD degrees at Brunel University, the University of London, the University of Manitoba, and Fuller Theological Seminary, before returning to their native land to positions of Christian leadership.

I retired three years ago, and the College now carries out its expanding work under the leadership of my successor, Dr. Lee McDonald, who has brought a very strong and outstanding record of scholarly achievement and extensive published work to enhance the School's life and reputation.

He came to us from California, from significant pastoral leadership and experience in theological education. He has added great strength to the School's already very strong Biblical Studies department, while bringing new impetus and direction to its life and witness.

In the last few months, the School is one of forty Schools, and the only Canadian one, to win a Lilly foundation Grant of US \$300,000 for the upgrading of technology. It is, of course, on the campus of the most technologically advanced University in Canada. Already every undergraduate student has access to a personal laptop computer and to the most advanced technology in classroom and library, and from September this year, every Master's student in the divinity college will have the same provision. The access that is now open to research resources through technology for Acadia divinity college students is as advanced as anywhere in the world.

In recent years, we have also built our scholarship and bursary funds to the point where a higher degree of tuition support is being given to students at Acadia than at any other Seminary in Canada.

Although we live and work in a part of Canada known for its natural beauty, but regarded sometimes, as a bit of an economic backwater compared to the hustle and bustle of Toronto or Vancouver, we believe we are, at Acadia Divinity college, on the sharp cutting edge of theological education, and it continues to be my privilege, three years into my alleged retirement, to be part of the team, even if I have now gladly relinquished to my successor the tough decisions of his Executive role, and am happy to continue to serve the wider Christian community in its name.

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