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BOOK REVIEW

Bruce G. Fawcett and Dale O. Stairs, eds. *Roots and Resurgence: Atlantic Baptist Youth Ministry at the Turn of the Millennium*. Baptist Heritage in Atlantic Canada Series 18. Wolfville, NS: Acadia Divinity College, 2013. 220 pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9780968729212.

Roots and Resurgence comes to us as the eighteenth and latest entry in the recently revived “Baptist Heritage in Atlantic Canada” series. It is the first volume from the series to appear since 2000, placing it on the heels of the memorial volume dedicated to George Rawlyk, who passed away in 1995. The editors, Dr. Bruce Fawcett and Rev. Dale Stairs have divided the content into two sections to cover the history of youth ministry among Atlantic Baptists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even, to a lesser extent, into the first years of the twenty-first century. Their collective experience working in various youth-oriented initiatives, along with their academic credentials, make them well-equipped to oversee the topic.

After a foreword by Robert C. Berry and a brief introduction by the editors, the volume opens its first of two sections, entitled “Historical and Theological Background,” with an essay co-authored by Daniel C. Goodwin and Cathy Rogers. The chapter begins with a brief analysis of the controversy that erupted in Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century over the competing views of infant and adult baptism. As the authors suggest, because the Regular Baptists championed adult baptism, it was necessary for the Baptists to develop a theology that answered questions about the soul of the unbaptized infant and the role of the family in a child’s upbringing. Consequently, as the authors show, the Baptists believed that the responsibility to educate the child would fall primarily on the parents instead of on the local church. This

chapter does not pretend to be the definitive work on the topic, and instead, the authors note that their findings are “based on an admittedly selective reading of the evidence” (19; cf. 48–49). Despite this, the chapter displays potential as a solid primer on the topic, and opens the matter up to further scholarly discussion.

The second chapter comes from Robert S. Wilson. This chapter deals with ecumenical trends in Atlantic Canada—primarily co-operation between Baptists and the United Church of Canada—in the early-to-mid twentieth century, and the subsequent impact on youth ministry. This relationship was most evident through the 1919 creation of an interdenominational venture, the Maritime Religious Education Council (MREC), which opened the door for the shared use of Sunday School curriculum, and the growth of summer camps. As Wilson shows, it was a “liberal” view of Scripture as well as the Social Gospel movement that fuelled the Baptist involvement in cross-denominational work. In the Post-World War II period, however, the Maritime Baptist Convention shifted towards the conservative end of the spectrum, and by the 1960s, the more modernist United Church of Canada had dissolved the MREC. Although this chapter focuses largely on Moncton, New Brunswick, Wilson provides an interesting look at the growing tension that existed between the conservative and liberal elements of the United Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces and the changing landscape of interdenominational ministry in the Maritimes during this period.

The second section of the book, entitled, “Youth Ministry Events and Initiatives,” opens with the third chapter by Rob Nysten discussing the creation and growth of one of the most popular annual youth events in Maritime Baptist history: Springforth (a weekend conference for middle and high school students). Since there is not much written on this event, the author relies quite heavily on oral history. While these reminiscences are certainly valuable records, it would have been interesting to see the reactions printed in the *Atlantic Baptist* newspaper at the time of these events (even if the reactions were scarce, any observation in this regard would have been interesting in charting the development of the conference, and how Maritime Baptists perceived it).

This chapter is suitably written for popular consumption, but as is sometimes the case in a history of this scope and novelty, it provides a very surface-level analysis of the events. In particular, it focuses much of its time on the positive changes that have taken place since 1979, but relatively little on any serious difficulties the organizers may have experienced.

In the fourth chapter, Jody Linkletter looks at the various youth programs, conferences, and miscellaneous initiatives that developed and evolved in the twentieth century, particularly those facilitated by a youth leadership core. Her analysis begins with the creation of the Maritime Baptist Young People's Union in 1892, which was reorganized in 1959 to become the Baptist Youth Fellowship, and rebranded in the 1990s as Atlantic Baptist Youth. In this process, a number of programs were developed—particularly during the mid-to-late twentieth century—including Springforth, Tidal Impact (a week-long gathering focused on local missions), Oasis Youth (the youth program that runs concurrent to the annual Convention gathering), and several others. This chapter provides valuable background information highly relevant to the second section of the book. It looks at information directly pertinent to Nylén's study of Springforth and would have better served the project had it been placed as the introductory piece to the section. Despite this potential editorial shortcoming, viewed independently, it provides a good analysis of the topic.

Bruce Fawcett, one of the editors of this book, offers the second-last chapter, focusing primarily on Atlantic Baptists and their view of "missions"—on both a global and a local level. The chapter begins in the eighteenth century with William Carey, whose focus on the "Great Commission" from Matthew 28, as Fawcett maintains, profoundly impacted Atlantic Baptists and their concept of missions. In particular, the Atlantic Baptists' emphasis on the Great Commission influenced their view of ministries "at home," and led to the emergence of programs and conferences that focused on the spiritual formation of Atlantic Canada's youth, like the aforementioned Springforth and Tidal Impact. In the course of his study, Fawcett continually returns to the call found in Matthew 28 and shows how its implications

affected these various mission projects conducted by the Atlantic Baptist youth.

The other editor, Dale Stairs, provides the sixth and final chapter of the book, which revolves around the change in landscape of youth work in the Atlantic Baptist denomination from 1912 to 2012. Stairs begins in 1912 with the founding of the volunteer-based Board of Young People's Work, which was the first of its kind in the Maritime Baptist Convention. This paved the way for the Board of Religious/Christian Education, which was restructured in 1974 to focus on "leadership development and youth ministry" (156) and again in 2001 to create the Youth and Family Ministries Department. As these initiatives evolved, they transitioned from simply offering resources to actually training leaders for effective ministry among youth. This chapter serves as something of a celebration of the focus of the entire book. While it may be that some of the earlier chapters would have better lent themselves to the project had they appeared in a different order, there is no doubt that Stairs's chapter belongs at the end, as it successfully ties the whole of the project together.

This book covers a great deal of ground and only sparks a few necessary criticisms. As noted, the organizational structure of the second section does not appear to have any kind of chronological or thematic coherence. Perhaps most perplexing is why the editors opted to place Nysten's as the opening chapter of the section. The book would have had better flow had Linkletter's chapter come at the beginning of the section.

It is best that one read this book with the knowledge that many of the contributors were directly involved in the events recorded. This, at times, gives the writing something of an autobiographical feel. For instance, on pages 160–61, Stairs reflects on the impact that various leaders had on the development of the youth program within the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, and individually names each of the contributors that appear in the latter section of the book (himself included). The authors' proximity to these events gives them all valuable first-hand experience but also poses a potential problem for the historical completeness of the account. Where this is the

case, typically, there is the possibility of limiting or excluding negative or critical comments. This does not negate the validity of this particular text, but it *does* require caution on the part of the reader.

There are a few typographical errors (including one worth noting on the cover page: “Millenium”; cf. 83) that generally do not detract from the usefulness of this volume. Much to its credit, none of the essays within the collection are guilty of the common pitfalls often associated with works of religious history: hagiography and triumphalism. Where much of the Baptist history in Atlantic Canada remains relatively unexplored, this recent publication arrives as a welcome addition to the prolific series that began in 1979. As Robert Berry says in the foreword, “These stories are God’s stories and ours. Make sure you read them” (13).

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