

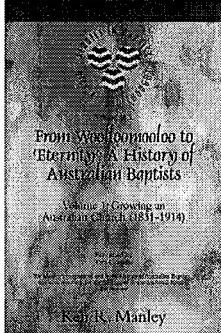
# The Queensland Baptist Forum

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No. 63 Aug 2006

## 'Extraordinary treatment of an important Baptist community'



Dr Ken Manley's long awaited history of Australian Baptists, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'* is being launched in Sydney and Melbourne during July; pre-launch copies at subsidized prices have sold briskly. Printed in two volumes and running to 856 pages altogether, it is set on an extremely broad canvass. It covers the history from the earliest days (represented in the title by Woolloomooloo—the site of the first baptisms) up to the present (represented by 'Eternity'—the display on the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the millennium celebrations honouring Arthur Stace's unique witness on Sydney streets), and describes a wide range of Baptist people and activities in between—especially the diversity that has existed between states and various branches of the Baptist family in Australia.

Cameos of many different people from pastors, evangelists and missionaries to women, politicians, business people and professionals are a highlight, while changes in the forms of Baptist life over almost two centuries, including the radical 'reinvention' in recent times, make fascinating reading. A whole chapter on the Baptist overseas missions provides a valuable panorama of dedicated, difficult and sometimes dangerous work, while detailed treatment of Australian Baptist involvement in various wars reveals another arena of sacrifice and hardship. The thinking of Baptists on topics from sublime to trivial and religious to secular as reflected especially in many newspapers, magazines and books provides many surprises. The mass of detail and the range of topics are handled with an ease that reflects the skills of the author, who has an amazing ability to manage the vast amount of information that has been amassed in the preparation of the book.

It is interesting to read a national history like this from a state perspective. It becomes apparent that there had been a substantial development of many different aspects of Baptist life in the south prior to the establishment and growth of work here in Queensland—especially as reflected in documents and publications. However, even though there were many exchanges of people and ideas across the country at that time, the progress in the south did not flow through to benefit our early churches as much as might have been expected. This is a legacy which has not been overcome in subsequent periods, and adds to the regional differences, compounding the problem of seeking unity within even the Baptist family, let alone with the wider church. From the perspective of Baptist Heritage Queensland, it is satisfying to see that much research and publication undertaken in this state has been taken up and synthesised into a masterful narrative of Baptist life which will quickly become a standard reference work.

This book sets a high bench mark for Baptist historical work, and seals the author's reputation as our premier historian—as RV Pierard states on the cover, it is an 'extraordinary treatment of an important Baptist community'.

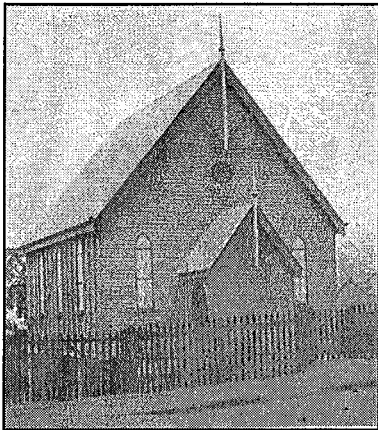
<p><b>Baptist Heritage Queensland</b> <i>The Baptist Historical Society of Queensland</i> (est. 1984)</p> <p><b>Membership (2006)</b> Individual \$10 p.a. Family \$15 p.a. Corporate \$20 p.a.</p> <p><i>Qld Baptist Forum</i> 3 issues p.a. Free to Members Others \$2 each posted</p> <p><b>President: Mr Eric W. Kopittke</b> 98 Yallambee Rd., Jindalee 4074 Phone 3376 4339 kopittke@tpg.com.au</p> <p><b>Secretary: Dr Ken G. Smith,</b> 110 White St, Graceville 4075 Phone 3379 6117 tizzardsmith@hotmail.com</p> <p><a href="http://home.pacific.net.au/~dparker/bhsq.htm">http://home.pacific.net.au/~dparker/bhsq.htm</a></p> <p><b>BWA Baptist Heritage &amp; Identity Commission</b> <a href="http://www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org">www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org</a></p>	<p><b>CONTENTS</b></p> <p><b>Qld Baptist Forum No 63 Aug 2006</b></p> <p>Book Review—Ken Manley's history of Baptists in Australia p 1</p> <p>Early Baptist Churches No 17 Gympie p 2</p> <p>Baptists Relations with Churches of Christ by David Parker p 3</p>
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## Early Baptist Churches in Queensland—No 17

### Gympie Baptist Church

Reproduced from *The Queensland Baptist* Aug 1902 p 105

We continue the reproduction of a series of articles on early Baptist churches in Queensland which appeared in *The Queensland Baptist*. These articles present some interesting details of the churches and buildings. One of the features of the original series was a photograph of the church with each article. Recent pictures of these churches are also shown where available.



The first record of Baptist existence on Gympie is in 1870, when, we learn, services were conducted by Messrs. W. J. Daniell and James Pyne. How long these services were continued there is nothing to show.

Later history gives us an account of a second effort, when the Rev. W. Bowser, seventeen years later, established a church, services being held in the Rechabites' Hall. About 21st October, 1887, a building fund was started, and in February, 1889, the newly-formed church joined the Baptist Association of Queensland. In March of the same year, Rev. A. G. Weller received a call to the pastorate, and resigned about the same time the following year. After a lapse of two months, Mr. Barnett received and accepted a call; but in November, the church decided that they could not continue, the land was sold, and the church disbanded.

The third attempt at establishment was made in October, 1897, when Mr. J. Bowering started services in the old Congregational Church. In November, the Rev. Chas. Boyall, of Maryborough, formed a church with ten members, also consenting to take the position of honorary pastor, and Mr. Bowering was chosen as local leader of the work. Since that time services have been regularly conducted, and after much difficulty a building, 30 feet x 28 feet, was erected on Caledonian Hill. The opening took place on November 7, 1899, in the form of a tea meeting, at which the various denominations on the field were represented. Subsequently the building was painted and the land fenced. In October, 1900, a meeting was held to consider the advisability of asking the assistance of the Association in inviting a pastor to take charge of the church. The Rev. C. Boyall then resigned the office which he had gratuitously filled for more than three years.

On May 25, 1901, Rev. Robert Robertson, of Victoria, arrived to take charge, and under his leadership we have continued until the present time.

The membership is at present 22, an increase of 8 for the past year. The Sunday school numbers 30. A new organ has been purchased, and the church debt has been considerably reduced during the same period. Monthly services have been established at Deep Creek and Jones' Hill. The work at the latter is most encouraging, about 40 scholars being on the Sunday school roll. The work is progressing steadily, and every effort is being made to overcome the feeling of instability caused by past failures.

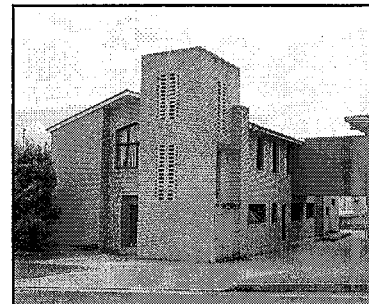
**Editor's Note:** The first building on Apollonian Vale, known as City Baptist Church or the Tabernacle, seated 120 and cost £150 with the land £20. It was renovated in 1925 with the addition of a symbolic 'cruciform baptistry',



Corrella Road, Two Mile building

new facility on Corrella Road Two Mile was opened 26 Aug 2000.

pulpit and collapsible vestries! A hall was added in 1944, but in 1958 the church was considered unsafe and too expensive to repair. So a site on the corner of Horseshoe Bend and Lawrence St was bought. Materials from the old building were used, and by 1961 the new church and manse were completed. Further work was done later including brick veneer, but by the 1990s it was time for another move—the last service was held on 29 May 1994 and a



Horseshoe Bend building

# Baptists Relations with Churches of Christ

by David Parker

## Thriving Together

In 2004, Baptists in Queensland held a successful joint convention with the Churches of Christ, under the slogan, 'Thrive.' After a break in 2005 when the Baptists met separately to celebrate their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there will be more cooperation in 2006—in fact twice—in Cairns and in Brisbane! This is an interesting development because just 100 years ago talks between these two denominations about merging failed to produce any tangible result. But an announcement in the *Queensland Baptist* June 1906 optimistically reported the outcome by saying, 'whilst regretting that no common basis of organic union can be agreed upon, yet [this conference] desires to express its conviction that a greater measure of fraternal intercourse between the two denominations would pave the way to closer relations.'

No details of the substance of those talks have been preserved, but similar talks in NSW about the same time failed on account of irreconcilable differences over the role of baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to conversion. (BU NSW, 1906-07, p. 22) A century later, however, the Queensland Baptist Assembly has not been given any opportunity to discuss 'fraternal intercourse', but presumably the same idea existed in the minds of leadership as that expressed a century earlier.

## Tense relations from the beginning

The impetus for the talks in 1906 came from the Churches of Christ, which, in the light of the previous history, was a significant reversal of attitude to say the least. The first appearance of the Churches of Christ in Queensland (which came about 50 years after the movement began in USA) was a matter of bitter hurt for the Baptist church, which lost out in the process.

There was a small English-speaking Baptist church meeting in a chapel at Zillman's Waterholes (Zillmere), which for about ten years had been home to a thriving German Baptist church; then the majority of its members moved to the Rosewood Scrub area to take up farming in that area, leaving the building for an English speaking church. In August 1882, a Church of Christ evangelist from Melbourne, Mr Stephen Cheek and a Queensland colleague, FW Troy, were invited by one of the church members (Thomas Geraghty, a brother in law of Troy, who was a school teacher formerly stationed in Toowoomba) to conduct a mission at the church. Each night of the week Cheek taught openly that 'to be saved men must first believe, then repent, then make confession with the mouth, and then be immersed.'

Several people responded to this teaching which was claimed to be 'the ancient order of things' according to the New Testament, and were baptised on the Saturday night. At an unannounced meeting led by Cheek, at which only a few Baptist church members were present, the new converts were accepted for membership in the Baptist church. On the Sunday, Cheek once again took charge of the service, despite protests from one of the Baptist deacons, and welcomed the new members into the fellowship of the church. Cheek thus effectively took over the Baptist church and turned it into a Church of Christ.

This is claimed by the Church of Christ as their first church in Queensland. The property was lost to the Baptists despite efforts to reclaim it legally through the Baptist Association, and the building was used by the Church of Christ for ten years until they erected one of their own (QF 1882; Haigh, pp. 9f, 107f; Williams, 2001). Carl Fischer, one of the founders of the German Baptist church and converted by Cheek, became a leading figure in the Church of Christ (Haigh, p. 251).

The same kind of proselytising activity, common in the early history of the movement elsewhere, continued in Queensland. The evangelists went on to Rosewood where German Baptists in the area were converted to the new views and formed into a church. Troy had previously been a Baptist lay preacher in Toowoomba (although not a member), so when the evangelists reached there in October, they had an entree to the Baptist church; again they persuaded many to accept the new views, and formed a Church of Christ as a consequence. Records of the Toowoomba church indicate that it lost up to about 20 members to the 'Disciples' (as they were known at the time) and perhaps many more adherents. Cheek died soon after in the Warwick district, but he was replaced by another evangelist from Victoria, David Ewers. Ewers later became engaged in a heated controversy with William Higglet who had become pastor of Toowoomba Baptist Church in July 1882.

As a result of the work of Ewers, Troy and another evangelist, Ed Bagley, many Churches of Christ were formed around the Lockyer and Downs area in the 1880s. One of these was at Marburg, where in 1885 Evangelist Bagley was invited to conduct a wedding amongst the German Baptists and took the opportunity to propagate 'the ancient order', splitting the Baptist Church. At nearby Vernor, the pioneer German Baptist church of the area, the evangelists secured an opportunity to speak, teaching the 'old Jerusalem doctrine' about the necessity of baptism for salvation. Sixteen Baptists were converted, including some of the original members, thus splitting the church there also.

## Origins and Tensions

The Churches of Christ began in the US in early 1800s when Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander, who had Presbyterian background, reacted against the ecclesiastical sectarianism and doctrinal divisions of the time and sought to eliminate denominational differences. They aimed to achieve this by restoring primitive Christianity through the direct application of church life and structures as pictured in the NT and by rejecting creeds and 'human' theological speculation. For them, there would be 'no creed but Christ' and it would be a case of 'Where the Bible speaks we speak, where it is silent we are silent' (DCA, p. 1005). This meant a ban on musical instruments in worship, outlawing non-church organisations like Sunday Schools, Christian Endeavour and missionary societies; there would be no denominational structures, paid and ordained clergy, or titles like 'Reverend' or academic degrees. Under the dictum of using 'Bible terms to describe Bible things' they would only employ names like 'Christian', 'disciples', or 'elders'.

When they became convinced that the NT taught believers'

baptism by immersion, they linked their newly formed church to the Baptist denomination, even though they openly stated their opposition to fundamental Baptist beliefs and practices—including confessions of faith, ordination, church associations, infrequent communion, the testing of candidates before baptism and baptism as symbolic of the convert's faith. Their aim was to 'reform' the Baptists according to what they believed was the 'ancient order of things' as found in the NT. As they pushed their views on the restoration of primitive Christianity, they succeeded in persuading a large number of Baptists (and others) to accept their views, but they failed to 'reform' the denomination as a whole. So after 18 years of growing tension, their links with them came to an end in 1831, and they formed themselves into a separate denomination, thus denying their non-sectarian principles. The Disciples, whose ethos seemed to suit the culture of the US frontier, went on to become the fastest growing religious body in the US in late 19<sup>th</sup> century (DCA, p. 253).

The 'Restoration Movement' (as it is often called) first appeared in Australia in the late 1840s with churches formed in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney by British migrants. The British stream of the movement, which was also impacted by

#### MR. HIGLETT'S REPLY

In the *Toowoomba Chronicle* of April 26th Mr. Higlett inserted an advertisement a column and a-half long, in reply to the review of his pamphlet which was noticed in last *Pioneer*. Want of space will not permit so full a criticism of this extraordinary advertisement as I could wish. I will, however, dissect everything worthy of notice.

My friend contends that, upon the question in dispute, the design of baptism, "All true baptists are agreed," and says that "otherwise they are Campbellites, for therein lies our main difference." We could fill this issue of our little paper with quotations from eminent Baptist authorities, substantially agreeing with us in our understanding of Acts 2:38.

the US founders, had connections with the 'Scotch Baptists' (established 1765), who were also to be found in small numbers in Adelaide and a few other places (Talbot; Manley, 2006, pp. 12, 47ff).

Influenced by this source, as well as the American branch of the movement, the Disciples adopted a simple form of Sunday services in which weekly Communion was the prime focus of worship; Communion was followed by mutual ministry of the Word by the men of the congregation instead of the normal Protestant pattern of a sermon delivered by a trained, ordained minister. (This was rather like the Plymouth Brethren which had their origin in the 1820s, although out of an Anglican context.) In time, the pattern emerged of the elders being responsible for conducting the first part of the service including Communion, while the 'evangelist' (minister) was given responsibility for the preaching (Chapman, 1988, p. 165).

The churches were governed by a group of elders, who at first were responsible for interviewing new converts and approving them for baptism. However the influences coming from American evangelists, who were the most successful promoters of the movement in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, soon changed this. Baptism took place immediately after conversion purely on the basis of the convert's profession of faith, with no prior teaching or examination to test the genuineness of the faith and life of the convert (Roper, p. 155). This practice, which resulted in a vastly increased rate of conversions, became the standard because it was in harmony with the belief that baptism was integral to the process

of conversion and was the means by which the forgiveness was received and the Holy Spirit was bestowed on the believer, in terms of Acts 2:38.

At first, Australian Baptists welcomed the Churches of Christ because of their practice of baptism of believers by immersion. But other factors, including their negative attitude to denominationalism, and especially their view that baptism was an essential part of the process of salvation (often referred to, not completely accurately, as belief in 'baptismal regeneration'), soon caused tension.

Thus in NSW it was the doctrine of baptism that was in dispute, while in Adelaide baptism, open membership and the name 'Baptist' were issues, as was the frequency of Communion. In Tasmania, a Baptist church split over the issue of allowing their baptistry to be used by the Church of Christ (Manley, 2006, p. 95). In NSW suspicions were raised when the minister of the mother church at Bathurst Street, James Voller, was thought to have adopted Church of Christ views because of his decision to hold Communion services weekly, although there was never any question of him abandoning the Baptist position (Parker, 1997, p. 23; Manley, 2006, pp. 82f, 454).

#### Changes and Demarcation

The establishment of the Churches of Christ in Queensland was much later than in the southern states—by about 35 years—and they were relatively slow in developing thereafter (Chapman, 1989, p. 87). But during the initial period from 1882 up to the conference with the Baptists in 1906, there had been considerable change in the movement both in Australia and elsewhere, which modified many of the original hard line stances which had caused so much tension with the Baptists. Areas affected were attitudes to revivalism, the professional ministry and the role of elders, the use of doctrinal statements and 'Bible names', and especially the use of musical instruments in worship (Chapman, 1989, pp. 69, 93, 101f, 152). As they became more like the other denominations they were more ready to fraternize with, and relate more positively to them.

It was natural for them to look to the Baptists who seemed to be closest to them in beliefs and practices. So a conference was held in the 1890s in Adelaide which discussed issues such as denominational names, the frequency of Communion and the meaning of baptism. A series of articles published in Baptist papers also discussed similar issues. Further conferences were held in NSW and Western Australia in 1904, which, despite the optimism of people like Silas Mead, all came to nothing because of fixed positions on both sides (Manley, p. 453ff). There was a successful but short-lived merger of congregations at Beechworth, Victoria in 1871 (Chapman, 1989, p. 75; cf Wilkin, p. 97).

The initiative from the Churches of Christ which led to the 1906 conference in Queensland was part of this overall trend, reinforced by a move amongst some of the other Protestant churches at the time to explore the possibilities of church unity, a venture which did not see tangible results until the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977.

The trend towards better relations with other denominations by the Churches of Christ reflected one of their founding 'pleas'—the elimination of sectarian division. But this push for unity was in tension with their other purpose—the 'restoration' of NT Christianity. 1906 was the year in USA when the tension between these two tendencies became so great that it resulted in organisational separation, with the

'Disciples' (taking the former emphasis) being officially recognized as a separate group from the 'Churches of Christ' (who took the latter view). Issues of liberal theology also affected this process. In 1927 another division also occurred, so there are now three groups in USA: Disciples, Churches of Christ (Independent) and Churches of Christ (Non-Instrumental)—of which the latter two are by far the strongest and most virile. But in Australia formal separation did not occur, at least until after World War 2 when the Non-Instrumental or Non-Denominational Churches of Christ emerged; however they have remained a separate smaller minority (Chapman, 1989, p. 177f; Roper, pp. 316-423, 326-335, 351-364; Ward and Humphreys, pp. 153-4).

### Hope Revived and Dashed

In Australia there were occasional efforts at better relations, even union, with other denominations on sporadic occasions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These were matched by similar initiatives in the UK where the Churches of Christ were, however, very much smaller in size than the Baptists (Cross, pp. 67f, 148-152; BUGBI, p. 19). There have been various talks in USA (Roberts-Thompson, p. 152) over the years, all unsuccessful, but recently there have been some signs of convergence by theologians (Fowler, 2003). There has never been any discussion at the global level involving the Baptist World Alliance.

There was, however, little achieved in Australia. For example, in West Australia where Baptists came on the scene after the Disciples, there were informal agreements to avoid competition in church planting and some fruitless talks around 1904 and 1920, but nothing further (Moore, p. 112; correspondence). In South Australia, a combined church was formed in 1909, but it failed in 1917 because of the Baptist practice of open membership which was common in that state.

In Tasmania, where both denominations were small and not often in direct competition with each other geographically, prospects for union appeared to be good. Talks in 1942 produced a doctrinal statement that seemed to be acceptable to both. It stated that faith was essential to salvation but faith was to be understood as 'the entire response' of the believer, and that it should be followed by baptism which is 'linked to the gift of the Holy Spirit'. However, the Baptist Assembly amended the statement to read, 'Baptism, though not a necessary pre-requisite to the gift of the Holy Spirit, is in scripture linked to it.' This resulted in a stalemate between the two parties which has never been overcome (Roberts-Thompson, p. 156).

In Victoria there were discussions in 1912 and mutual exchanges at Assemblies with some promises of consultation on church planting, and further abortive merger attempts (Chapman, 1989, p. 120). There were further conferences during World War 2. Some progress was registered with the establishment of a standing committee of the two denominations to explore possibilities, and extensive cooperation between the two denominational theological colleges from 1975; the current principal of the Churches of Christ Theological College is a Baptist. At the national level, there was cooperation on the publication of Christian Education materials in the 1950s; this outcome was attributed largely to Victorian Baptist influence, but under pressure from NSW, the name 'Church of Christ' was not permitted to appear on materials distributed to Baptists (Roberts-Thompson, p. 154; Blackburn, p. 96).

The stakes were higher in NSW where both sides were more

rigid and Church of Christ evangelists seemed to be more emphatic about the necessity of baptism for salvation, a position stoutly resisted by the Baptists (Roberts-Thompson, p. 154). Talks initiated in 1903 came to nothing. The Churches of Christ initiated similar efforts in 1920-21, and 1933-34—again without any progress. The respective Ministers' Fraternals conducted a conference featuring College Principals GH Morling (Baptist) and AR Main (Church of Christ) in 1942 which again ended in stalemate when definitive answers to key issues about denominational names and baptism were not forthcoming from the Churches of Christ. One final attempt was made by the Churches of Christ in 1962, which, after considerable informal and official discussion, resulted once again in lack of agreement, despite identification of some commonalities (Manley, p. 458; BU NSW 1962-63, pp 47f).

### The Queensland Experience—Minimal relationships

Contrary to the situation in some other states, neither denomination in Queensland made any efforts to restart talks after the 1906 meeting. From the mid-1970s there was some indirect connection via the Church Growth Movement which was associated with names of the Americans Donald McGavran (a Disciple) and Win Arn; this new approach was taken up strongly by the Churches of Christ in some areas (as seen, for example, in 'How to Grow an Australian Church', written by Gordon Moyes when he was still a Church of Christ minister), followed closely by Baptists in Queensland (Parker, 2005, p 120; Chapman, 1989, pp. 168f, 180). Then during the 1980s there was a limited amount of cooperation in theological education when the Baptist Theological College, the Bible College of Queensland and the Churches of Christ Kenmore Christian College worked together to teach under the auspices of the Australian College of Theology (Nickerson and Ball, 2004, p. 25), but this foundered for doctrinal and logistical reason.

In recent times, there has also been some movement of church members and pastors between the denominations; it has been estimated that during the last 15 years about five pastors have entered the Baptist ministry (probably only slightly more than from the Salvation Army); the most prominent example was the appointment of Rev Tim Hanna to the charismatic Gateway Baptist Church in 1997, then the largest church in the Union.

But at the local church level, relationships have varied from tense to cordial. An example of the former was William Higlett's skirmish with Ewers and the Disciples in Toowoomba over baptism, their interpretation of the Bible and the way they arrogated to their exclusive use terms like 'Christian' and 'disciple'. Higlett strongly rejected their views on baptism (Higlett, 1884), and in the process referred to his opponents as 'Campbellites' which was considered 'offensive' by the Churches of Christ because of their desire to be known as 'simply Christians'; despite the acute polemicism of his reply, Ewers was considered by later conservatives to be a progressive! (Parker, 2002, p. 56f; Roper, p. 263ff; Ewers, 1884)

### Recent Efforts in Queensland – A New Day?

At the other end of the scale, there has recently been one example of complete cooperation—viz, Charters Towers, where the Baptist and Church of Christ came together in 1996 to form one combined church, using the Christ of Christ property. At Thrive 04, where details of this event were presented in a seminar, it was made clear that a long



Charters Towers Church of Christ-Baptist Church

period of close relationships had preceded the merger. It was viewed as an initiative of the local church rather than the denomination, designed to preserve a witness in the town when declining numbers threatened the demise of both churches. It was reported that the main aim of the merger was greater effectiveness in outreach, which required the sacrifice of lesser issues including differences over doctrine!

A 'compromise' over the practice of Communion was reached whereby the 'Church of Christ way' (integral to the service) was practiced fortnightly, and the 'Baptist' way (optionally after the service) on the other Sundays. Other issues, such as property and financial matters, and denominational involvement, were also solved pragmatically, because it was 'largely a logistics exercise' rather than a matter of 'underlying conviction'. The seminar was also told that, although there had been involvement by the Churches of Christ in other cooperative schemes around Australia, this arrangement with the Baptists was unique. An informal personal evaluation of the scheme at the Thrive 04 seminar by a current participant indicated that the initial period of growth following the merger had not been sustained, and that some fundamental differences between the two former denominational positions had not been eliminated (BUQ, 2004).

On the other hand, another presentation at Thrive 04 by the leaders of the two denominations, Dr David Loder (General Superintendent Baptist) and Mr John Crosby (CEO and Executive President, Churches of Christ) indicated that personal interests had drawn them together initially. (Loder reported that he had been baptised in the Churches of Christ while serving in the Army.) This development was backed strongly by the pragmatic view that because of the missional goals of each denomination, cooperation would yield positive results through the avoidance of unnecessary duplication and economies of scale in services, resources and infrastructure (BUQ, 2004).

Importantly, it was stated that differences between the denominations were a thing of the past, and therefore cooperation was entirely practicable. These 'differences' (which history shows had caused such hurt earlier and kept the denominations apart for more than a century) were not identified, and neither were the details of the changes.

### What has changed?

Certainly there have been changes in both denominations. The process which began for the Church of Christ late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has continued unabated since, although not without reaction, as evidenced by the emergence of Non-Denominational branch, and also by divisions within the 'Conference' body, seen most clearly in tensions over ministerial training. This resulted in the establishment of two other theological colleges (in Sydney and Brisbane) as alternatives to the original one in Melbourne which was associated with liberal theology in the minds of many (Chapman, 1989, pp. 127, 156f, 174f).

One of the more significant changes is the development of strong centralised state and national Conferences (Unions), which were arguably much tighter and more effective than those of the Baptists. This resulted in particular in the creation of well organised agencies, a step which would have been unthinkable earlier, working in fields such as Australian and overseas missions, social welfare, youth and camping ministries and theological education.

Membership doubled in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with census figures showing the highest concentration in 1921—1% of the population, and the greatest numerical count in 1966—102,000. But there has been steady decline overall since, with the drop of 18% in the period from 1996 to 2001—by the far the greatest of all Protestant churches! Although the performance in Queensland was generally better than elsewhere—the 2001 census figures were 12,000, compared with 70,000 Baptists. At Thrive 04, it was reported there were about 70 Churches of Christ in Queensland, compared with 170 Baptist. Nationally Baptists had 935 churches and 63,000 members in 2005. In response to this situation, Churches of Christ have in recent times enthusiastically adopted church growth and contemporary church strategies. At Thrive 04 there was a detailed explanation of the strong moves the leader of the Queensland denomination was taking to modernise the churches.

In the light of these facts, it is not clear how the issues that gave rise to tension in the past now stand. Differing attitudes within the church, the policy of non-creedalism and the use of Bible terminology only, all created difficulties in identifying their position, as William Higlett reported after a conference in NSW in 1921: 'The representatives of the Churches of Christ then present did not appear to regard baptism as essential to salvation, but declined to allow it to be recorded that they did not. Similarly, they declined to place it on record that baptism was a condition of salvation' (BU NSW, 1920-21, p. 76). In contrast with the Baptists (Manley, 2006), there has been no recent official history of the Churches of Christ to document these changes, but some literature suggests that most of the earlier distinctives have been lost and now there is a search on for 'relevance' and 'common purpose' (Stirling, p. 63).

There have also been many changes in Baptist churches, but at least until recently, there has been much greater consistency on points at issue. Thus in Queensland, support for theological expressions of faith was reinforced at the official level when a comprehensive revised statement of faith was adopted in 2003; there is no sign of change in beliefs about the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to salvation or in the traditional Zwinglian memorialist view of baptism and Communion. On church unity, Baptists have opted for a spiritual and functional approach, rather than an organisational one, thus remaining clear of the ecumenical movement; the Churches of Christ on the other hand have actively partici-

pated in the ecumenical movement as members of the World and Australian Council of Churches from an early stage.

However, other changes are much more significant for Baptist/Church of Christ relationships. The strong trend towards open membership (or some form of it)—which destroyed union moves in South Australia a century ago—is one that will cause problems because of the low value it places on baptism for salvation and church membership; even more extreme tendencies now appearing which down-play membership itself in a consumerist or anti-denominationalist direction will result in even greater disparity. A further decline in the already low emphasis, in practice, on Communion also will have a similar effect.

On the other hand, the reduced role of the pastor in the leadership of worship is a trend which seems to be compatible with early Church of Christ principles, although the use of worship leaders in conducting the service is fundamentally different from the role traditionally played by elders in the Church of Christ. The accompanying change of worship patterns from the classic Baptist (and broadly Protestant) forms is more ambiguous. The older forms did correlate generally with the practice of the Church in the early centuries and with the historic Christian liturgy; however, the contemporary 'praise and worship' styles are much more ad hoc in nature rather than being an emulation of NT church practice as was the case in the early days of the Disciples.

However, there are contrary tendencies to be seen in the trend away from some historic Baptist forms towards pragmatic solutions, ostensibly motivated by considerations of outreach and relevance. These are often based simplistically on a purported NT pattern; this trend is particularly noticeable in changes to leadership and church structures, and the sympathy shown with the Charismatic movement regarding some of its distinctive practices such as glossolalia and healing. Another significant example of this is the considerable lessening of importance on the ordained ministry as a life-long calling to 'the cure of souls', in favour of a functional and professional approach, in which the focus is on managerial leadership. This trend is reflected, for example, in the recently adopted system of 'registration' of ministers, which is likely to bypass the classic understanding of ordination entirely. Similarly, the restructuring the Baptist churches away from being a 'gathered church' governed by its members to a corporatised church that is controlled by a board or by elders is a striking example of convergence with traditional Church of Christ practice. This is particularly clear at denominational level where local church involvement in Baptist Union decision making is now minimal (Ball, pp. 111-115), and seems to parallel Church of Christ developments.

However, the strong trend to post-denominationalism amongst Baptists with its focus on the entrepreneurial efforts of local church growth at the expense of united denominational work is an anomalous move in the opposite direction. This was clearly illustrated in the recent comprehensive study of Queensland Baptist church life showing, as the President, W. Gynther reported, 'we are Baptists in crisis, [but] independent in health' (QB, 1999, p. 3). This contrasted strongly with the inaugural presidential address of the Baptist Union (Association) in 1877 when James Voller declared that 'Unity is the essential force of our movement... the oneness of interflowing spiritual life' (Voller, p. 3). Another development that is contrary to the early Disciples' strongly argued opposition to the use of non-biblical terminology in church life is the widespread use of creative

names for churches and their distinctive organisational 'branding' in compliance with modern marketing practice.

### Conclusion – what is the point??

Edward Roberts-Thompson stated in 1950 that, from a global perspective, there was not much difference between the two denominations, apart from baptism. Although overly optimistic, he did realise that there was little likelihood of Baptists adopting the views of the ordinances advocated by British scholars such as Wheeler Robinson (and later especially George Beasley-Murray (Cross, 210-243, 341-348) which would have gone a long way to eliminating this difference. There appears to be no evidence of this kind of change taking place in Queensland now fifty years later! (Roberts-Thompson, pp. 123, 164-4, 121f; Manley, p. 457)

But Roberts-Thompson did observe, 'It is extremely difficult to arrive at a clear conception' of 'the design of Baptism' adopted by the founders of the Church of Christ (Roberts-Thompson, pp. 118, 119; Gates, p. 112), or for that matter, many of their successors. Not wanting to make baptism essential for salvation, and trying to avoid saying anything more than the New Testament did, Alexander Campbell explained that 'Baptism *formally* washes away sin' but 'the blood of Christ *really* washes them away' (Gates, p. 108; emphasis added); in dialogue with Baptists in Adelaide one Australian leader said, 'the believer experiences a change of *state* but no change of *character*' in baptism (Chapman, 1989, p. 77; emphasis added).

Baptists have mostly rejected the Church of Christ position as 'baptismal regeneration' because it has been presented as necessary for and effecting salvation. However, it is not the same as the teaching of mainstream sacramental churches because Campbell always connected baptism with personal repentance and faith. Rather, it is considered one of the essential parts of the whole process of conversion, as Stephen Cheek preached in Zillmere. But even though Baptists give high importance to baptism, they find it hard to accept it as a necessary addition to 'faith alone'; they prefer instead to retain the view that it is a symbol of the gospel and a post-conversion profession of faith.

The Campbellite view is not arbitrary, but is derived from a particular approach to the use of the Bible, in which the explicit words of Scripture (in this case Acts 2:38, John 3:5), are used without explanation or expansion, and in isolation from other related texts. This view also often argues from silence, and makes the assumption that there is no need to take the original context into account when interpreting and applying Scripture; furthermore, the Campbellites negated the authority of the 'old covenant' in favour of the 'new covenant', thus eliminating the witness of the Old Testament for Christian teaching. All of this reflects an approach to the authority and use of Scripture which is at fundamental variance with the typical Baptist position on hermeneutics, exegesis and the role of theology.

There are also fundamental differences in understanding the process of salvation, stemming not only from the Campbells' view of the Bible, but also from their rejection of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist position on the role of the Spirit and the nature of faith. For the Campbellites, faith was not the supernatural 'gift of God' (Eph 2:8, 9) or connected with the work of the Spirit in conviction (John 16:8-11), but a purely human and logical process—the 'rational acceptance of an intellectual position based on an unquestioning acceptance of Biblical authority' (Chapman, 1989, p 102; DAC p. 1007) or in Alexander Campbell's words, 'hearty belief of the

divine testimony concerning Jesus' (Gates, p. 24; cf Chapman, 1989, p. 31). Confession of faith and immersion were required to complete the process of salvation—baptism being the point at which the Holy Spirit entered into the process (Acts 2:38). This explains why the highly successful 'passionate evangelist and restorationist' from Queensland, EC Hinrichsen, could preach: 'We must be baptised into this sacred name if we are to be saved' (Roper, p. 284-5).

Thus there are far deeper issues at stake than simple practical

matters such as the frequency and timing of Communion and baptism. Although some of the earlier distinctives appear to have been dropped or are held only as practices carried over from the past, (Stirling 1999; Vital), these deeper issues need proper consideration and clarification; some of them are important enough in themselves for Baptists in Queensland, as much as in other places (George), to revisit, whatever their relationship might be with other denominations.

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