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5th Heritage Essay Prize Winner Announced



Baptist Heritage Qld (BHQ) is pleased to announce that the winner of the 2014 Heritage Essay Prize is Dr Neil Parker, Associate Pastor of Toowoomba Community Baptist Church.

The prize is awarded to the top essay submitted as part of the unit taught every second year by Malyon College on Baptist history and principles. The winner is presented with a cheque, books published by BHQ and is given a year's membership in BHQ.

This is the fifth time the prize has been awarded, but there have been six winners because in 2012 two essays were judged to be of equal rank.

The 2014 prize was presented at the annual meeting of BHQ held 8 November by BHQ President, Eric Kopittke (pictured). Neil is a medical practitioner; he is also a member of the Queensland Baptists Board, as is a previous prize winner, Dr Anne Klose, and a runner-up, Rev Mark Mackay.

Dr Parker grew up in country Victoria. Soon after marrying Hilda whom he met at the House of the Gentle Bunyip, a 1970's Christian community, they moved to Bangladesh and worked there for 14 years. Their first three children were born in the village hospital where Neil was Medical Superintendent, while a fourth was born in Toowoomba. In Bangladesh Neil established a rural development project, then back in Australia, he established the Darling Downs Public Health Unit. Neil and Hilda became part of Toowoomba Community Baptist Church, where Neil served as worship coordinator and church council chair. In 2010 he was registered as a minister with Queensland Baptists. He has been the Queensland Education Coordinator and national Lead Fellow for Teaching and Learning for his specialty (Public Health). He is also a member of St Andrews Toowoomba Hospital board.

Dr Parker's essay was entitled 'Independence and Interdependence: Baptist Ecclesiology' and is published in this issue of *Queensland Baptist Forum*. The examiner said this essay, which was 'carefully conceived and thoughtfully executed', is a 'powerful defence of the principle of interdependence in Baptist polity', especially in suggesting the relevance of the concept of 'covenant' to the issue. Another strong feature of the essay was the reference to the contemporary situation among Queensland Baptists.

At the well attended Annual Meeting, the existing officers were re-elected and encouraging reports were presented. More details will be published in the next issue of *Forum*.

2015 Meeting Dates — 21 Feb; 13 June; 7 Nov (AGM) 2pm @ Archives! Come with your friends!

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Independence and Interdependence: Baptist Ecclesiology

Neil Parker

Neil Parker, Assoc. Pastor, Toowoomba Central Baptist Church, is the winner of this year's BHQ Essay prize, awarded to the best essay in Malyon College's unit on Baptist History and Principles. A medico, he worked in Bangladesh for 14 years; he is also a member of the QB Board.

1. Introduction

One of the challenges facing Queensland Baptists is how to apply 'biblical principles to the structure, leadership and governance of the churches and the denomination' (Parker 2005, 171). Baptists have long cherished congregational church government, with its emphasis on local church autonomy. Alongside this Baptists recognised that they were part of one universal church under Christ, and they expressed this by forming associations with like-minded churches. These two principles create a tension which has been resolved in different ways by Baptists at different times and in different places.

Handy (1979, 12) expressed the tension in this way. '... within a polity devoted to congregational freedom, how can sufficient unity and order be achieved so that effective Christian witness can be carried out ...?' This however states the issue in purely functional terms. It is important that Baptists work together in God's mission, but our being in covenant and in Christ is prior to and necessary for this.

Queensland Baptists support local autonomy, but also have control mechanisms to limit that autonomy. These are necessary to maintain a shared vision of faith, church and mission, and also necessary for church and ministerial discipline.

2. Early Baptist Confessions & Church Autonomy

The first Baptist church (which did not call itself 'Baptist') did not have to address the question of the relationship between an association of churches and the local church. There was only one local Baptist church! However, the relationship of their individual congregation to other bodies was an issue. In article 11 of the first Baptist declaration of faith Helwys states that Christ has given to each of the many different congregations 'all the means off their salvation' (Lumpkin 1959, 120). Each local congregation is 'a whole Church' able to 'administer in all the holy ordinances' whether they have a pastor or not. In Lumpkin's (1959, 114) opinion this clearly supports 'the independence and autonomy of the local church'.

The 1644 / 1646 confession of seven London churches states in Article XXXVI 'every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being', and has the authority to appoint its own officers. It goes on to say that 'none other have to power to impose them' (ie the officers). Article XLVII states 'yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule' and commends mutual assistance.

This confession then, balances autonomy and interdependence and expects all congregations to be subject to the same 'Rule'. Although 'rule' is used two other articles but beginning with the lower case

letter. So it is somewhat uncertain what 'Rule' all congregations should follow. Quite possibly it refers to the Confession itself. The 1646 version however substitutes 'rule of truth' for 'Rule'. Either at least allows the possibility of an association of churches determining a confession of faith which all are expected to follow.

'The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations' (1651) recommends that congregations help the poor in other congregations. Where a dispute cannot be solved in a local church, the 70th paragraph also commends the use of 'some other society which they are in fellowship with'. This statement is silent on the autonomy of the local church, but provides examples of interdependence. However, the preface notes the statement is 'Published (in love) by the consent of two from each Congregation' so the authorisation itself is an example of the interdependence of the churches.

With regard to autonomy the Somerset Confession says little beyond the right of the local congregation to ordain its officers (Somerset 1656, XXXI), while the Midland Confession mentions 'distinct churches, or assemblies of Zion' without touching explicitly on church autonomy (Midland 1655, 15th), so these confessions either assumed local autonomy or did not consider it important.

The Second London Confession (1689) was based on the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, but adopted much of its church polity from a 1658 modification by Independents (Congregationalists) called the Savoy Declaration of Faith (Mask 1997, 54). Both these later confessions state 'all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches' (Lowe and Anderson, 2007, XXVI-20 and 12 in Savoy and London respectively). Christ has given these local churches 'all the power and authority ... needful for their carrying on ... worship and discipline.' (XXVI-4 and 7). This includes the election of their own officers (XXVI-11 and 9) and discipline within the local church (XXVI-20 and 12). Both recognise interdependence, particularly in solving doctrinal and administrative disputes, by sending messengers to a meeting to resolve issues (XXVI-26 and 15). Both state that messengers do not have any 'church-power, properly so called, or any jurisdiction over the churches themselves', nor are they able 'to impose their determination on the churches or officers'.

These confessions omit the First London Confession's admonition to 'walk by one and the same Rule'. So the tone of the Second London Confession is more independent than the first, perhaps due to its dependence on the Savoy Declaration. However, the fact that around 100 churches agreed on a confession, and also

substantially copied confessions from other denominations, demonstrates a practical interdependence.

Another statement widely known as The Orthodox Creed (1678) contrasts with the Second London Confession in that it lists three offices, 'Bishops (or *Messengers*), and Elders, (or *Pastors*), and Deacons, or (*Overseers* of the poor)' (Monck 1679, 162, Article XXXI, italics original). The Second London Confession equated Bishops and Elders. The significance for local autonomy is that the messengers 'have the Government of those Churches that had Suffrage in their Election' (Monck 1679, 162). So the messenger is over several churches, the pastor / elder is over one - 'he may not act in any other Church before he be sent' (Monck 1679, 162). A pastor is ordained by the bishop (after election by the congregation), and a bishop by other bishops.

The role of bishop is further explained in Article XXXIX, *Of General Councils, Or Assemblies*. Bishops, Elders and other church representatives when meeting together 'make but one Church' so this 'one Church' has authority over the churches which are part of the assembly. The purpose of the assembly is 'to preserve Unity, to prevent Heresie, and Superintendency' among the congregations 'within its (geographical) limits' (Monck 1679, 171). If a charge of heresy or a complaint about misconduct was upheld in the assembly, the guilty congregation was expected to comply or be expelled.

It is difficult to know how or how often such determinations were enforced, and whether the tripartite office together with centralised authority was peculiar to the Midland churches which authorised this statement. The Creed suggests that General Baptists were more open to centralised control (Mask 1997, 58).

In summary, with the exception of the 'Orthodox Creed' the seventeenth century Baptist confessions of faith followed Congregationalist polity on the autonomy of the local church. There was no higher authority. However, churches were obliged to relate to each other, to support each other, and to offer advice and conciliation when requested to do so. There were as yet no cooperative programs.

3. The Development of Cooperative Programs

The movement for foreign missions spear-headed by William Carey and other Particular Baptists ushered in a new era of cooperation between churches. However, Carey's *Enquiry* envisaged a mission society, not organisationally linked to the denomination, although 'formed from amongst the particular Baptist denomination' (McBeth 1990, 137). The sermon that preceded the publication of Carey's *Enquiry* was preached to a meeting of a Baptist association so providing a ready forum which facilitated the uptake of his vision.

Similarly when Congregationalist missionary Judson became a Baptist *en route* to India, it was proposed that a society be formed to support him (Brackney 1998, 169). There were already local foreign mission societies formed by local

associations, but the vision of Judson's colleague Rice was for a General Convention of all American Baptists. His enthusiasm led to the establishment of the Triennial Convention (the forerunner of American Baptist Churches), which he hoped would have additional roles in home missions and theological education (McBeth 1990, 211-212).

The centralisation of authority necessary to administer common programs aroused opposition which was in part motivated by fear that the independence of local churches was threatened (McBeth 1990, 232). 'Money and power' wrote John Taylor in 1819, 'are the two principal members of the old beast'. Taylor also opposed home missions, alleging they were motivated by a desire to centrally control new churches (McBeth 1990, 234).

So in the nineteenth century the foreign mission and the home mission movements promoted cooperation between local Baptist churches at the cost of relinquishing local initiatives to central bodies. This brought into practical focus the tension between autonomy and interdependence.

4. Some Systematic Theology Texts

Systematic theology textbooks usually explore church government. A few introductory textbooks from Congregationalist and Presbyterian / Reformed viewpoints are surveyed, as these present somewhat differing views on the autonomy of the local church. Episcopalian views were not sought as these are further along the interdependence-independence continuum so add little to a discussion of Baptist polity.

Coming from a Reformed position Guthrie (1968, 362) argues that denominations diminish the unity of the catholic church. Further he implies that local churches should only exist when called into being by a higher authority. Baptists take the opposite view. Associations are created when local churches join together. Guthrie (1968, 355) also criticises Baptists and Congregationalists for calling the church a 'voluntary association of believers'. His section heading is '*God creates the church*' (italics original).

This is of course a misunderstanding of the Baptist position. The 'voluntary' nature of a Baptist church is contrasted with the involuntary nature of membership in a state church (Smith 2009, 392). As the 1644 Confession says, the Church 'is called & separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God' (Lumpkin 1959, 156). Early Baptists understood they were 'called together by God to be in relationship with God and one another' (Smith 2009, 405).

Berkhof (1938, 589), also from a Reformed position, has a more detailed description of his preferred ecclesiology. Reformed churches have neither 'one man rule' nor 'popular government'. He agrees with election of church officers, though noting (as do Baptist confessions) this is a confirmation of God's choice. His heading is intriguing, '*The relative autonomy of the local church*' (italics original). He goes on to say that 'When churches affiliate their mutual rights and duties are circumscribed in a Church Order or Form of Government' (Berkhof 1938,

590). So above the local church session are the presbytery and (assembly), then sometimes a general assembly (Berkhof 1938, 588). The higher 'church courts' must not interfere in decisions delegated to the lower, and the lower church courts must submit to the higher. As examples of what is decided at each level, a former moderator of NSW Presbyterians explained that pastoral settlement is initiated by the local church session then confirmed by the presbytery, while matters of church governance are decided at state assembly, and doctrinal matters at the national general assembly (personal communication).

While Berkhof (1938, 590) acknowledges there is no direct warrant for assemblies in Scripture, the biblical description of the church 'would seem to call for such a union'. There should be a 'tangible body' and a 'visible unity' and he accuses Congregationalists of losing sight of this.

Predictably Grudem (1994) and Erickson (1998) favour a congregational form of church government. Erickson is short on detail but notes as Berkhof implies that there is little direct evidence from the New Testament as to how local churches should relate (1998, 1095). Passages quoted include the Jerusalem council and its advice to Gentile churches (Acts 15) and Paul's instructions to churches through his epistles. Whether Paul's advice was binding or not is an issue.

In an earlier section Erickson's (1998, 1089-1090) outline of local church responsibilities under congregational government includes the authority to call a pastor, set a budget and purchase property. Churches can ask for advice from other bodies, but do not have to follow it. Affiliation is primarily for pragmatic reasons, for it facilitates mission, youth activities and other services. He states somewhat idealistically that churches can terminate the relationship at any time. In practice, issues such as insurance and ministerial superannuation not to mention loans for church buildings make termination problematic.

Grudem (1994, 928-936) is even more focussed on local church governance. In his description of the Presbyterian system (1994, 926-928) he notes the higher church courts, but only discusses their function in doctrinal disputes. Grudem (1994, 927) claims that while central authority may correct local doctrinal deviations, frequently central authorities have been the source of false doctrine, so is dismissive of any advantages in a higher authority. His discussion of Baptist affiliations is limited to joining together 'in fellowship'.

The Wesleyan position would also be of interest. The *Articles of Religion* available on the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia website give a glimpse of an ecclesiology which seems similar to the Reformed position. Their definition of 'The Wesleyan Church' (note the singular) is 'a denomination ... of local churches who ... hold the faith set forth in these articles ... and acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of its governing bodies' (Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia). While details are lacking, there are clearly constraints

on the autonomy of the local church.

In summary the responsibilities of local churches relative to their affiliating bodies is poorly dealt with by Systematic Theology texts. Arguments are advanced in favour of particular systems without the systems being described, and limited Scriptural warrant is found for any particular system.

5. The Queensland Experience, Home Missions

During the early expansion of the Baptist movement in Queensland, there were two prominent churches, Warf Street and the Jireh Strict and Particular Baptist Church (Parker 2005, 7). These churches planted others which found support through their respective 'mother' churches, thus linking them together before a formal association existed (Parker 2005, 9).

Baptists did come together for specific reasons. For example in 1873 there was controversy over state funding of denominational schools in 1873, and Baptists expressed a collective opinion (Parker 2005, 31).

The Baptist Association of Queensland was formed in 1877 with seven member churches (Parker 2005, 34). In common with early Baptist practice the objectives of the Association included promotion of relationships and conferences. However other objectives such as joint action, ministerial training, and superannuation for ministers clearly went beyond early English confessions. The Association quickly took over the supply of ministers, property oversight and the provision of subsidies to struggling churches (Parker 2005, 36). In spite of this central coordination, where towns prospered, so did the Baptist work; but where the towns not so well off, the work struggled. (Parker 2005, 30)

The logical extension of support for struggling (often new) churches and ministerial supply was the formation of the Home Mission in 1883. Home missionaries, rather than being called by a local church, could be directed by this organisation to 'act as supply' in churches without a pastor. A related objective of the Home Mission was 'to educate young men for the ministry' (Parker 2005, 36).

Parker (2005, 39) concludes that the assumption of responsibility by the Home Mission saw a parallel diminution of local church interest in church planting. He believes that by the 1890's local churches had ceded responsibility for the Great Commission to the Association.

The role of the denomination in church planting has waxed and waned. In the early 1900's Home Mission work became more regulated. Home missionaries were set a four year reading program and exam (Parker 2005, 43). The Baptist College in Queensland began in 1904 fundamentally in response to this initiative of the Home Mission.

The extent to which the Association formed around home mission is illustrated by the fact the first full-time paid officer of the Union was the Organising Secretary for Home Missions in 1911 (Parker, 2005, 48). The position was directly funded, principally through an annual appeal, the cooperative budget was yet to come! In 1934 the office of

General Secretary was combined with that of Home Mission Officer, diminishing the emphasis on home mission. The positions were split again in 1947 (Parker 2005, 70, 84).

Then in 1970 further changes again down graded the Union's involvement in systematic church planting. In response the 1981 Assembly approved a 'Mission to Queensland' (MTQ) which developed into a detailed centralised plan for church planting (Parker 2005, 128). Each home missionary had to raise their own support, but was subject to central control.

Through to the early 21st Century MTQ supported a centralised approach to church planting, although its funding remained outside the cooperative budget (Parker 2005, 167). From 2005 local churches were given the lead role in initiating church plants, with MTQ viewed as simply a supporting agency. The slogan 'Growing Health Churches' illustrated the change in focus (Parker 2005, 169). In May 2014 the Queensland Baptist Board received a report reviewing MTQ and concluded that the pendulum had swung too far, and that there should be central planning of new churches in parallel with local church initiatives (David Loder, 2014). Autonomy had gone too far, and interdependence expressed through central planning needed to be restored.

Direct Union control over local churches had been extensive. Immediately after world war two a third of churches were controlled by the Home Mission. This rose to nearly one half of all churches by the early 1960s (Parker 2005, 80, 107). Perceived as contrary to the principle of local church autonomy, a 1967 review determined that all churches would have the same status (Parker 2005, 107).

This section has focussed on the Union's Home Mission department for two reasons. Firstly it illustrates well the tension between local and centralised initiatives and control, and the pendulum swings which resulted. Secondly, home mission was almost the primary *raison d'être* for the Union, particularly in its formative years.

6. Conformity to Doctrinal Statements

Baptist associations must grapple with the extent to which local churches can determine their own doctrines but remain part of the association. As noted above, this is not an issue for Presbyterian models where doctrine is centrally determined. A Queensland example of tolerance of diversity occurred before the Association was formed. German immigrants worshipped at a 'German Station' associated with Warf St and were counted as members of that church. They were allowed to practice closed communion even though Warf Street was open communion (Parker 2005, 11).

When the Queensland Association was formed in 1877, the seven churches agreed it would 'consist of churches ... which hold the following' then stated four principles relating to biblical authority, salvation through faith in Jesus, believer's baptism by immersion and local church autonomy (Parker 2005, 40). This was a rather minimal summation of Baptist belief, perhaps necessitated by the differing views of

Jireh and Warf Street on such matters as closed communion. One wonders if Spurgeon would have used the 'down-grade' term to describe this statement, as he did for the basis for British Baptist Union (McBeth 1990, 197)! However, the statement 'to consist of churches ... which hold the following' left no room for local autonomy on these four principles.

In contrast, the preface of the rather more complete statement adopted in 1899 recognised that 'every separate church has liberty to interpret and administer the laws of Christ' and the statement was simply 'guidance' approved and adopted by the Association (Parker 2005, 40).

The preface was amended slightly in 1956 to include the phrase 'summary of some generally recognized doctrines' with the word 'guidance' retained. This seems to water down the already weak requirement to adhere to Union approved doctrines. In 2003 there was a marked change in wording of the preface, which almost became contradictory. Churches still had the 'liberty to interpret and administer the laws of Christ' but they 'must' adhere to the statement 'as a minimal doctrinal requirement for admission as a member and continuation of membership of the Union' (Parker 2005, 40; Queensland Baptists 2014, 3).

Similarly the NSW Baptist Union constitution has 'Qualifications for Affiliation' which include support for 'the foundational beliefs ... set out in this constitution' (NSW Baptists 2012, 35) but does not contain any reference to local church autonomy. By contrast the Victorian Baptist Union constitution mirrors the Queensland prefaces of 1899 and 1956, with the 'Doctrinal Basis' approved by the Union recorded for the 'guidance of constituents' (Victorian Baptists 2012, 1).

Thus in Queensland conformity to the Union's doctrinal basis changed from must conform to a very minimal standard of four principles, to guidance with regard to a more detailed statement, to a requirement to adhere to the more detailed statement. The Victorian constitution mirrors the Queensland situation from 1899 to 2003, while the NSW position is similar to the current Queensland position. The autonomy of local churches is circumscribed, at least if they want to remain within the Union. So in Queensland and NSW, the Reformed theologian's statement quoted above has come true, 'When churches affiliate their mutual rights and duties are *circumscribed*' (Berkhof 1938, 590, my italics).

Conformity to denominational faith statements has also led to schism in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In 2000 the Baptist General Convention of Texas withdrew \$5 million from the Convention budget over the adoption of a revised statement of faith (Althouse 2010, 177). The Texas Convention claimed the revision diminished the Baptist principle of 'soul competency' and amounted to creedalism (Althouse 2010, 185). This together with increasing centralisation within the SBC were important factors in the formation of the break-away Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (James et al 2006, 64, 83).

New associations are likely to be closer doctrinally as the stimulus for association comes from shared positions. Established associations will inevitably confront doctrinal change. Different groups may diverge in opposite directions from once commonly held values and beliefs, or give them different emphases. In the rift between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship the former emphasised biblical authority and the latter the independence of the local church, both cherished Baptist values (Bebbington 2010, 262-263).

The Southern Baptist Convention resolved the tension between the independence of the local church and other Baptist distinctives by adopting what amounted to a creed (James 2006, 15). The rival Fellowship resolved the tension by emphasising the independence of the local church. It claims it is not a denomination, just 'a fellowship of churches and Christians' which 'does not have a statement of beliefs' (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 2014). It claims not have an official position on homosexuality, but has a policy which excludes practising homosexuals from Fellowship employment, but this policy does not bind participating churches (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 2014).

The underlying question is 'How far can a church (or pastor) deviate from the Baptist 'norm' before they are no longer Baptist'? The SBC and the Cooperative Fellowship have given very different answers.

7. Facing Contemporary Issues

When Baptist associations first formed in England their functions were limited. Local congregations were responsible for ordination, Baptist Ministers could not register marriages, associations did not provide insurance and there were no joint ventures such as home and foreign missions. Nor did associations have to grapple with such contemporary issues as same-sex relationships, paedophilia by church officials and controversies between 'liberal' and 'conservative' factions.

As associations assume responsibility for registration and ordination of pastors they must decide on standards, including ethical and theological criteria. Similarly, those they must assess foreign or home missionaries for suitability. They must also decide on which churches are part of the association and so able to contribute to these decisions, and how and at what level these decisions are made within the organisation. As the environment within which associations work has changed significantly, it cannot be assumed that older systems of church polity will be appropriate.

Same-sex marriage has also brought the autonomy of the local church into focus among New Zealand Baptists. A current working party is considering not only the current position of the Assembly on same-sex relationships, but the 'Implications and issues relating to the autonomy of local Baptist churches and the limits thereof' (New Zealand Baptists 2014). The assembly's current

position opposes same-sex marriage, and this seems unlikely to change. So the major challenge for the working party is to resolve the tension between autonomy and cooperation.

An essential difference between the American and Australasian systems seems to be that local churches ordain pastors in the former but Unions register pastors in the latter. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship approach is simply not possible where the association of churches registers ministers. In Australia pastors obtain marriage licences through the Baptist Union of Australia, which allows that body a degree of control over how and whom pastors marry. Hypothetically this would allow that body to direct pastors not to marry same-sex couples.

The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse highlights the responsibility of institutions to protect children, whether the institution is a local church or an association of churches. Associations must hold local churches accountable, and associations must hold churches accountable. The Southern Baptist Convention has been criticised for being unwilling to address the issue of abuse by clergy, by invoking local church autonomy. The Convention 'has over 101,000 clergy, yet has no effective system of oversight for them' (Brown 2011, 1). The critique notes that the autonomy argument is inconsistently applied. The Convention has limited church autonomy by stipulating that women cannot be pastors and by expelling churches with gay members but will not act on child abuse (Brown 2011, 5; Rebeck 1992, 638).

8. How Much Central Control?

The limited examples cited clearly demonstrate that, despite the rhetoric of church autonomy, associations of Baptists have sought to exercise control over local churches. The degree of control has varied, perhaps reaching a zenith in the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years with increasing intolerance of diversity and greater centralisation of power. The President of the Convention has the extraordinary authority to appoint members of the committee on committees which controls other appointments in the convention, and through this mechanism gained control of seminaries and other opinion making bodies (Greer 2009, 114).

The Baptist Union of Queensland allows for more local autonomy, but can theoretically exert control over local churches by requiring them to adhere to the Minimal Doctrinal Statement, appoint as their minister or senior pastor a person registered with Queensland Baptists and comply with some fairly minimal elements of congregational governance such as election of the most senior pastor by the church members (Queensland Baptists. 2014, section 4.3).

The Queensland Baptist board does in fact often feel it has little influence over churches (personal observation). While in theory the Board can terminate the membership of a church (section 5.3) this is rarely (if ever) done. Even a casual glance at the Annual Queensland Baptists Directory reveals more than a dozen churches with only unregistered

pastors! Disaffiliation would be a significant act as it stops churches' access to financial services and insurance.

The Union has somewhat greater control over its registered ministers through the application process overseen by Ministerial Services and its ability to investigate misconduct through the Ethical Issues Response Group. A de-registered pastor not only loses credibility they also lose their marriage licence. So the central registration process has given the Union some control over pastors. At least one pastor has been de-registered, but he retained his position in the local church, and the church was not sanctioned (Parker 2005, 162).

Carter (1982, 42) argues convincingly that the principle of autonomy applies not only to the local church but to the association. Just as the local church is responsible for ordering its affairs, so the association has the responsibility to order its affairs, and this includes admitting and removing local churches from fellowship. The question is, on what basis shall churches be admitted and removed?

The current Southern Baptist Convention has been described as enforcing a 'narrow fundamentalist stance' (Greer 2007, 115). Whether that is true or not, it has certainly been controversial. The British Baptist Union of 1891 finally brought the Particular and General Baptists together on the basis of a simple statement drawn up in 1888. This was a simple statement about 'doctrines ... commonly believed by the churches of the Union (Lumpkin 1998, 345) which caused Spurgeon to remark 'no one can be heterodox under this constitution' and his church withdrew from the union (McBeth 1990, 202).

In Australia the Victorian and Queensland Baptist doctrinal statements are identical but as noted above the Victorian preface offers the doctrinal basis 'for guidance of constituents' (Victorian Baptists 2012, III) while the Queensland constitution heads this section 'Minimum Doctrinal Statement' (Queensland Baptists 2014, 4.1) and the board must take into account 'Whether the Church adheres to the Minimum Doctrinal Statement' (Queensland Baptists 2014, By-laws 2.2(a)). The NSW Baptist 'Statement of beliefs' is rather longer but not likely to be more controversial except perhaps for the use of the word 'infallible' with regard to Scripture (NSW Baptists 2012, 4). Support of the foundational beliefs is listed under the heading 'Qualifications for affiliation' (21.1).

In summary, both NSW and Queensland Baptists insist on affirmation of a statement of beliefs while Victoria leaves the affiliating church to decide whether they fit or not, and has no means of dismissing a fellowship on doctrinal grounds. The NSW and Queensland approach would seem to be more robust, but circumscribes local church autonomy and is contrary to at least some of the historic statements of faith.

9. Covenant

With regard to problems within the Southern Baptist Convention Sayles (1991, 542) recalls that a retired Alabama pastor observed, 'The problem is one of inadequate polity'. Baptists have mirrored the

current culture's emphasis on individualism. We have forgotten that it is God who calls the church together, and the act whereby we volunteer to join a Baptist Church is an act of obedience, and the act of affiliation of a local church to an association is also an act of obedience to God. It is God who calls the church into covenant.

Within this sacred covenant relationship the 'rights, powers and spheres of the parties' are to be negotiated under 'God's governance' (Sayles 1991, 542). Where 'truth' or 'right practice' are pursued outside God's governance covenant is broken. This is stark contrast to Erickson's purely functional view of association outlined in Section 4 above.

Handy (1979, 19) while reflecting on polity within the American Baptist Churches (ABC) emphasises the importance covenant relationships. Regional bodies wishing to join the ABC enter into a 'Covenant of Relationships', which 'begins with biblical and theological statements about the nature of the covenant relationship.' One stated assumption is that 'A local congregation ... should covenant with other like-minded organisations regarding cooperative mission and interdependence within the Body of Christ.' The statement goes on to say that 'The freedom of the congregation is genuine, but not absolute.' The ABC at this point allowed associations to be 'affiliating bodies' if they did not wish to enter into the covenant agreement. Such bodies could contribute to the cooperative budget but not elect delegates to the biennial meeting (Hart 1979, 20).

10. Conclusion

Baptists almost from the beginning have resolved the tension between independence and interdependence by practising a 'relative autonomy of the local church'. The quantum of this relative autonomy has varied widely, and has been inconsistently applied to different issues. Control over mission has been exercised centrally and by societies. The advantage of the former is that central bodies with an overview of needs can formulate a cooperative budget, and in church planting disadvantaged areas are more likely to be targeted. The advantage of the latter is that local churches (and individuals) can direct funds to areas they value most and be more engaged with these areas.

The Baptist Union of Queensland has essentially two mechanisms available to exert control over local churches. These are the abilities to disaffiliate churches and de-register pastors. Our constitution allows for these on both doctrinal and moral grounds. As associations should also be recognised as autonomous bodies, these restraints are appropriate and assist Queensland Baptists in meeting both community expectations and their moral obligations. However, the role of covenant in binding churches together in obedience under the lordship of Christ needs further exploration.

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2nd National Australian Baptist Archivists' Conference, Melbourne, Nov. 18-19, 2014

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