



The Queensland Baptist Forum

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Toowong Baptist Church 135th Anniversary

BHQ President reports on the first stage of the BHQ Heritage Plaque Project

On Sunday 3rd July it was my privilege to represent Baptist Heritage Queensland at the 135th Anniversary celebrations at Toowong Baptist Church. The Toowong church building was opened on 4 September 1881 with seating for 100 people having cost £250 (\$500), the architect and builder being Mr William Richer who was also pastor and founder of the church. It is the oldest Baptist church building still in use as a church. The main part was enlarged and vestries added in 1884, doubling its size. It is recognised as a modest example of a timber framed church in the Federation Carpenter Gothic style; these beautiful features are on view inside the main sanctuary.



The bilingual program (in English

and Cantonese with the aid of an interpreter) commenced at 12 noon in the church. Pastor Andrew Teo's opening remarks covered the history of the church, mostly the past forty years. Seven longstanding members summarised how they had come to be in the church, and how God had blessed them. I brought a greeting from Baptist Heritage Queensland. To mark the occasion, a large plaque outlining the significance of the building as the oldest Baptist church still in use has been fastened to the front of the church. I was honoured to assist Pastor Andrew Teo unveil this plaque, standing with the pastors and deacons of the church.

Participating in a bilingual service reminded me of the great promise in Rev 7:9 'After these things I saw a large crowd from every nation, tribe, people, and language. No one was able to count how many people there were. They were standing in front of the throne and the lamb.'

Eric Kopittke, President of Baptist Heritage Queensland.

BHQ—Meetings 2016: 29 October (AGM) 2pm @The Baptist Archives

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The Autonomy of the Local Church— Biblical or Historical?

By Dean Sandham

6th BHQ Heritage Prize Winning Essay—2016

Baptist Heritage Qld is pleased to announce the winner of the 6th Heritage Essay Prize—Dean Sandham. The prize is awarded to the highest marked essay submitted as part of a unit taught every second year by Malyon College on Baptist History and Principles. The winner receives a cheque, books published by BHQ and honorary membership in BHQ for the following year.

The topic set by Malyon College required students to respond to a statement made by a New Zealand Baptist Union Leader in 2009 claiming that the devotion to the well known feature of Baptist churches, local church autonomy, was not so much the result of biblical teaching but of historical influences in the 16th century, namely, the Anabaptist movement in Europe. The students were asked to evaluate this claim and discuss the relevance of this issue to the Queensland situation.

1. INTRODUCTION.

In regards to the beginning of the Baptist movement, Leonard (2003, 1) quotes Paul Harrison's observation that it was "...freighted with ambiguity, and those who strive to establish the singularity of the tradition are on a weak foundation".

With that in mind it is intriguing that in the Baptist World Alliance's *Baptist Connect* (September 2009), Rodney Macann, the New Zealand Baptist Union leader, is quoted in regards to the appointment of new staff positions aimed at creating healthier churches that work better together, as stating; "We recognized that we can be hampered by an ecclesiology which can be shaped more by our beginnings emerging from the Anabaptists than by the New Testament values of the different parts of the body enhancing each others [sic] ministry as described in Ephesians 4:16."

This raises questions that need to be investigated. Firstly is Macann correct in assuming a distinct beginning for the Baptist church in the Anabaptist movement, or as Harrison stated above, does claiming a singularity in our origin create a weak foundation? There certainly was influence from the Anabaptist movement, but how much, and would it create the hampering of Baptist ecclesiology Macaan has alluded to?

Secondly what does Ephesians 4:16 speak into the



A Mennonite (Anabaptist) church in Utrecht, Netherlands

ideas of church individuality and unity, and does Macaan's current environment with his New Zealand churches influence his idea of ecclesiology as much as he believes Anabaptist heritage has influenced Baptist ecclesiology throughout history?

Finally it is important to examine how these different influences and the significance of this statement relates particularly to the current local Baptist environment in Queensland. Are Queensland Baptists acting on a traditional adherence to Baptist distinctives, such as the autonomy of the local church, and the separation of state and church, based in Anabaptist origins as Macann implies, or do they strive to conform to the two key Baptist distinctives of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Authority of Scriptures, which lead them to preserve other distinctives as well?

2. STATEMENT CONTEXT

The focal statement for this document, which was made by New Zealand Baptists' National Leader Rodney Macann, finds its background in the creation of two new department head roles, after the formation of two new departments at a union level – the department of Church Health and Development, and the department of Pastor Health and Development. These "Two new roles are to reshape the way the New Zealand Baptist Union fosters church and pastor development in the future" (*Baptist Connect* September 2009).

These departments are charged with centralising a culture among all New Zealand Baptist churches in both mission and pastoral development, diverging from a current culture of independence and individuality throughout the country. Edgar (1982, 6) outlines the problem that caused this current culture;

"Because of the geographical features of New Zealand, especially its elongated shape and the separation of the two islands by Cook Strait, close integration of church work is not easy. While delegates from churches can meet annually at Assembly to make important policy decisions, the implementing of many of these requires some decentralisation"

This decentralisation came in the form of auxiliary associations to act both as a "manifestation of the union in their areas" and also to provide points of communication where "the common needs of the

churches could be assessed and met” (Edgar 1982, 6).

However some churches were so remote they did not fit into an auxiliary area, or lay on undefined borders with several associations, and so influence was constantly changing. Also the wide distribution of churches meant even auxiliary areas could not always bring local churches into close and regular contact. There were also cases of each association moving in slightly different veins of vision depending on their current local environment.

Macann (*Baptist Connect* September 2009) acknowledged the result of this, stating “The thinking behind the creation of the two new roles was to unite our churches in thinking strategically about their future direction.” By bringing the roles back to a centralised position, the New Zealand Baptist Union is calling for churches to be less independent in their local vision and strategies for church growth. It was with this background that

Macann made his statement regarding an inherent leaning towards independence in Baptist ecclesiology because of a hindering Anabaptist influence.



Zwingli—statue in Zurich

3. ANABAPTIST INFLUENCE.

3.1 Anabaptist Ecclesiology

Before confirming whether or not the Baptist church was negatively influenced by Anabaptists, one must first examine the Anabaptist ecclesiology. The origin of Anabaptists is found in the Swiss Reformation. In Zürich, in 1577, a young priest, Ulrich Zwingli, had resolved to study the New Testament and preach nothing but the Gospel. As a priest, Zwingli progressed this reformation with a distinct sense of order as he used his influence and pulpit to eventually guide the local magistrates and government to legalise his methods (Blanke 2005, 7).

By 1522 Zwingli’s teaching had roused a group of disciples “zealous for reform” (Estep 1996, 13) and their convictions quickly surpassed those of Zwingli, especially on beliefs for believers’ baptism, the Lord’s Supper and the very nature of the church (Leonard 2003, 19). Conrad Grebel opposed Zwingli’s continued parish ecclesiology with the idea that the church “...was to be made up only of those confessing Christ as Lord” (Estep 1996, 20). This dispute culminated in a council deputation in January 1525 where the magistrate ruled in favour of Zwingli forcing this group of disciples to either conform or leave.

They left, defining this element of ecclesiology

they would be most recognised for, namely that they understood the church to be an independent entity apart from the magistrates, not to be held under their authority. Their conviction came from their New Testament studies; Grebel, quoted in Blanke (2005, 14), himself stated; “We were listeners to Zwingli’s sermons and readers of his writings, but one day we took the Bible itself in hand and were taught better.”

Their principle of the church not being governed by local councils was born from the example of the New Testament Church and a “type of Christianity which has been present from the beginning and which, indeed, represents the kind of movement the Christian church was in its origins” (Wright 2005, 33).

3.2 Influence on Early Baptists

It is well understood that the Baptist Union of Great Britain began as two different and autonomous movements. These became known as the General Baptists and Particular Baptists – named after their principle of the atonement being either general and to all in an Arminian vein, or limited and only for those elect in a Calvinistic understanding. They operated independently of each other with only minimal cooperation until the formation of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1891 (Wardin 2004, 11-12).

The question then remains whether either of these groups emerged from the Anabaptists, as Macann suggests? If not, was their influence on either group so great as to create the culture of independence New Zealand Baptists found themselves in when the Union created these new departments to “reshape” their future culture, as the *Baptist Connection* article (September 2009) states?

3.2.1 Particular Baptists

It is largely concluded that the Particular Baptists “had no connexion [sic] with the Anabaptists of the continent, but represent the last stage in the evolution of English Separatism as it moved forward to its logical conclusion in believers’ baptism” (Underwood 1947, 56). However, Bebbington (2010, 29) notes that “Distinctive Anabaptist ideas... [had] seeped into England...” by the mid sixteenth century. Records of the state executing heretics with definite Anabaptist beliefs, as well as King Edward’s Archbishop Cranmer including several stern denunciations of Anabaptist views in his Forty-Two Articles of 1553, indicate that there was at least some Anabaptist influence among those English Separatists.

However, this influence was only minor as it had not extended to the notion of believers’ baptism. It was instead the influence of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey (LJL) church which in 1638 became “convinced that baptism was not for infants but professed Believers” and then in 1640 extended its understanding “that also it ought to be by dipping ye body into ye water, resembling Burial and rising again” (Resource 3.5 “Formation of a Particular Baptist Congregation in London”, 30).

By 1644, seven churches of Particular Baptist persuasion, including the LJL church, published the

London Confession. The full title however is recorded as “The CONFESSION OF FAITH Of those CHURCHES which are commonly (though falsely) called ANABAPTISTS” (Resource 3.9: “London Confession” 1644, 153). Therefore it can be concluded that though certain similarities could be seen between Particular Baptist and Anabaptist beliefs and ecclesiology as outlined by the confession, this Anabaptist influence had little to no bearing since Particular Baptists purposely distanced themselves from it in the title given to their confession of faith.

3.2.2 General Baptists

Bebbington (2010, 31) states “There is a greater scope for positing a link between Anabaptist and the General Baptists.” This is because of their origins from John Smyth’s church while in exile in the Netherlands. Smyth had emerged from the Church of England as a Separatist attached to an illegal church in Gainsborough which grew until the threat of persecution became too great in 1608 and a congregation of about forty fled to Amsterdam (Morcom 2016, Module 3, 3).

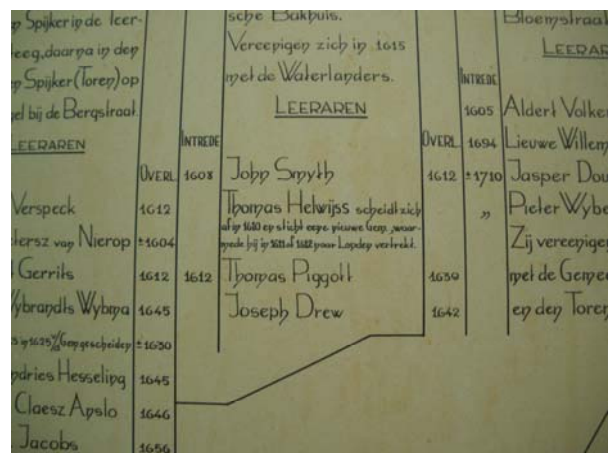
While in the Netherlands, Smyth published his *Short Confession of Faith* (Resource 3.1 1609, 101) where he states, “[B]aptism is the external sign of the remission of sins, of dying and being made alive, and therefore does not belong to infants.” Lumpkin (1983, 98) suggests that Smyth “who was known to be an independent thinker, made this discovery of the truth of believers’ baptism by means of his own research and processes of logic.” However, this was all while Smyth’s congregation was renting living quarters from Mennonites – the name given to Dutch Anabaptists after their most influential leader, a former Dutch priest named Menno Simmons (Estep 1996, 160). Therefore it could be easily suggested that General Baptists were significantly influenced in their ecclesiology as their church grew in a location of high Mennonite influence. However numerous aspects of the new Baptist movement suggest otherwise.

Firstly the already mentioned independent thinking Smyth displayed. Secondly when Smyth himself concluded his self-baptism – which he performed on himself before baptising his congregation – was not valid, he went to a Mennonite community to be baptised by them. Other leaders of his church, namely Thomas Helwys, “disagreed with Smyth’s decision to join the Mennonites. They excommunicated Smyth and declared themselves to be the true church” (Leonard 2003, 25). Thirdly (and most convincingly) it was this church – that had particularly dissociated itself from Smyth and Mennonite influence – which returned to London in 1612 establishing the first Baptist church on English soil.

So again there can be debate over the influence Anabaptists had on early Baptist movements (Wright 2005, 37), but to state, as Macann did, that Baptist have “be hampered by an ecclesiology which can be shaped more by our beginnings emerging from the Anabaptists than by the New Testament values” is to make an assumption where no evidence lies.

4. NEW TESTAMENT VALUES.

In his statement Macaan refers to Ephesians 4:16 as his sole Scriptural authority for a less locally independent ecclesiology and one having a much more centralised influence on vision and strategy for New Zealand Baptists. Ephesians 4:16 is referring to Jesus; “from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”



Poster in Mennonite Church, Amsterdam with names, including John Smyth and Thomas Helwys (see lower centre column)

4.1 The Ecclesiology of Ephesians 4:16

By citing only Ephesians 4:16, Macaan ultimately exposes his view that church ecclesiology should be focused predominately on being a unified body with each part being joined to the other and working well by being well equipped. This body being thusly joined does so best when the individuality of the local church’s vision and strategy for mission and pastoral development is collapsed and centralised to the Union’s departments, validating his “thinking behind the creation of the two new roles” (*Baptist Connect* September 2009).

However, Paul uses Ephesians 4:16 to conclude this section of his letter where he “explicitly outlines the fundamental principles of how God grows churches in all times and all places” (Coekin 2015, 113). Ultimately it is all of Ephesians 4:1-16 which gives a complete view of Paul’s ecclesiology.

Stott (1989, 172-173) states: “Here, then is Paul’s vision for the church. God’s new society is to display charity, unity, diversity and growing maturity. These are all characteristics of ‘a life worthy of the calling’ to which God has called us... [T]he apostle sets before us the picture of a deepening fellowship, an eagerness to maintain visible Christian unity and to recover if it is lost, an active every-member ministry and a steady growth into maturity by holding the truth in love.

Earliest manuscripts of the letter do not contain the name of Ephesus in 1:1 and so it can be assumed it was intended to be shared with other churches in

the region (Coekin 2015, 8) as well, culminating in a wider view of the church than just a local setting. Yes, there are different parts of the body of Christ, both within local churches and across cities, which have to work properly in unity, but that doesn't appear to exclude the notion of local individuality.

Ephesians 4:11-13 says: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Sons of God, to the mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

There seems to be both an overarching unity as well as an inherent local independence expressed in this passage as Paul moves from the apostles – having been with Christ and revealing his Word to the whole church – down to shepherds and teachers who work in individual flocks. All these people, both at a larger centralised point of influence and also at a local incarnation of teaching, have been given to the church so all the saints are equipped for ministry (Derickson 2009, 443).

This body analogy in Ephesians 4:16 then appears to illustrate that the church must firstly draw to Christ as its head (Eph 4:15), for the benefit of others in each local situation, rather than drawing to others for the benefit of Christ and relinquishing that sense of local individuality to which Macaan appears opposed. As Coekin (2015, 125) states; "Clearly, church growth needs all the limbs of the body to be united in gospel ministry, all the supporting ligaments of Bible teachers training us in our ministries, and the head of the body who is Christ directing the whole body through his word."

4.2 Baptist New Testament Values of the Autonomy of the Local Church.

Maring and Hudson (2012, 57) state that "in order to fulfil its calling as the body of Christ, the church must be embodied in some visible shape in the world." Baptists believe that visible shape is seen in the local church, with each church allowed the freedom to govern its own affairs, or to have 'autonomy'. This autonomy is "...not the freedom of the local church to do anything it wants... but its competence and ability because of Christ in its midst and the gift of the Spirit to discern for itself and within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy how to govern its own affairs and to undertake its own mission" (Wright 2005, 40).

The Declaration of Principle (Resource 10.1, 1904, 361) concurs; "That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws."

This is seen as a biblical value because essentially Christ has Lordship over the church and has given Himself, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to each church and each believer. The Second London

Confession of 1677 (Resource 4.5, 286-287) states: "To each of these Churches thus gathered, according to his mind, declared in his word, he hath given all that power and authority... for them to observe; with commands, and rules for the due and right exerting and executing of that power." A local church can gather and make decisions with the authority Jesus gives them. The Second London Confession cites Matthew 18:18 and 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 here, which speak about the church's right to rebuke, correct and discipline sinful members.

Other instances where churches in New Testament times displayed autonomy included Acts 6:3-6 where the church set aside people themselves to care for poorer members, Acts 13:1-3 where the church in Antioch was spoken to by the Holy Spirit and so they obeyed and commissioned Barnabas and Saul for mission, and even how each letter in Revelation 2 and 3 to the seven churches of Asia Minor direct them to act individually as the Spirit commands them (Pinson 2010).

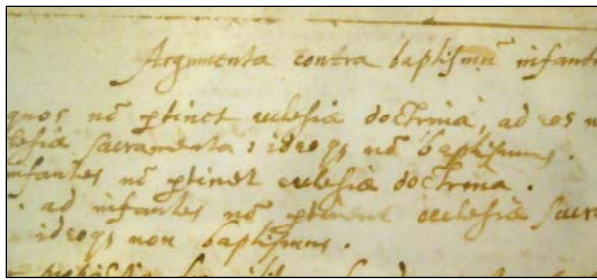
This autonomy also rests on other Baptist distinctives such as the priesthood of all believers. As alluded to above, Ephesians 4:1-16 shows that Jesus' Lordship is over each individual believer (or 'saint') as they are equipped for ministry to build up the church. If each individual is equipped to know and follow Christ, then it is logical to assume that local incarnations of the church will be equipped to autonomously know and follow Christ's will as well.

Yes, New Testament values proclaim there is an inherent unity in all of the church, as Christ's body all being joined to the head, which is Jesus himself. But there is also a true sense of New Testament values which assert a level of autonomy throughout all believers which Baptist Churches have correctly held as a distinctive of their ecclesiology.

5. THE INFLUENCE OF CURRENT ENVIRONMENTS ON UNDERSTANDING BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES.

Wright (2005, 39) states "Despite a common label, Baptist... churches across the globe are very diverse, reflecting the varieties of culture and religious context in which they have emerged and their varying responses to spiritual movements and trends in the wider church." For Macann and the New Zealand Baptists it is a culture of independence caused by wide geographical dispersing and an individualistic nature that has resulted in the Union's desire to centralise to a common strategy for church growth and pastoral development. This culture has left the New Zealand Baptist Union leader with a biased and somewhat incorrect view of Anabaptist influence as well as a hampered interpretation of the body analogy Paul presents in Ephesians 4:16. This is seen in a further email correspondence from Mr Macann where he says;

"Our Anabaptist forefathers with their passion to see the church governed by believers and not the state unwittingly left us an inheritance of determined independence which has become a part of our dna. It is totally understandable and I believe their action was



John Smyth's *Argumenta Contra Baptismum Infantum* (ca 1609)

right in their own context.

The scriptures unequivocally encourage us to be in harmony, to be the body of Christ etc. and we live in a totally different context to that of our forefathers therefore it is time to temper our independence.”

Macaan's statement, and email does not suggest that he holds to the Anabaptist Spiritual Kinship Theory. This theory is described by Morcom (2016, Module 2, 5) as a concept for "...a traceable spiritual relationship of Baptists to the dissenting or radical groups of the Reformation often called 'Anabaptists'." Though seeming to embrace the notions of the Spiritual Kinship Theory, Macaan's point of view appears much more prejudiced by his local culture than by a predetermined theory of Baptist origins.

His biased idea that Baptists hold to a "determined independence" due to Anabaptist influence shows that his understanding of both Anabaptist ecclesiology and Baptist distinctives are hampered.

In regards to Macaan's view on Anabaptists, it was seen in section 3.1 above that Anabaptists were intent on devising a church structure founded in the ideals of the New Testament Church. Yes, the culture of their time, during the European Reformation, caused them to radically remove themselves from other representations of the church, and particularly to disconnect themselves from the ruling of the state to a position of independence. However that was simply a reflection of the culture and religious context surrounding them as they emerged (Wright 2005, 39), which is not unlike Macaan reflecting his culture and context.

Similarly his push against the Baptist distinctive of the autonomy of the local church reflects the religious context he has found himself in; it was not the passions of the Anabaptists that caused autonomy to become part of our "dna [sic]", but the Baptist commitment to upholding a Scriptural implementation of the church as seen in section 4.2. Therefore for Baptist churches to "temper our independence" as Macaan suggests is not to disconnect from Anabaptist influence, but deviate from Scriptural interpretation.

The same could be said of Macaan's exegesis of Ephesians 4:16. Again he has taken the unity he wishes to promote as a means of changing the culture of the churches he currently influences and he has allowed that to impede the full ecclesiology Paul was expressing in the first sixteen verses of Ephesians 4, as well as the complete set of New Testament values that sit upon the church and from which Baptists have, since their beginning, set their ecclesiology.

To call churches to give up local individuality because of the New Testament influence of one verse, without taking into the account the many other New Testament values such as autonomy of the local church, the Lordship of Christ over churches and individual believers and subsequently the priesthood of all believers is diametrically opposed to yet another Baptist distinctive, the authority of Scripture.

6. THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF A LOCAL SETTING: QUEENSLAND BAPTISTS

To look at the local setting of the Baptist Union in Queensland Australia then is not to simply ask the question, are they hindered by a dependence on Anabaptist ecclesiology? But instead it is to examine what are the current cultural influences and religious contexts that impact Queensland Baptists, and decide whether any of these hamper or buffet the churches' determination to hold to Baptist distinctives.

In regards to Baptist distinctives Fiddes (2003, 12) states: "We can readily name a number of convictions that belong to a Baptist community – notably the gathered church, the priesthood of all believers, the final authority of Christ, believers' baptism, the call to faithful corporate discipleship, and religious freedom. These convictions in themselves are not unique to Baptists, but the way Baptists have held them is still important. We might further say, that there is something distinctive about the way that Baptists have *held these convictions together*; the combination or constellation is more distinctive than the single items."

If then it is the collection of all of these conviction (or distinctives) that especially define the Baptist movement, which of them have been tested, and influenced recently by culture in a Queensland context?

6.1 Believers' Baptism

It is interesting to note that it was the conviction of believers' baptism and subsequently that mode of baptism by immersion which really distinguished Baptist churches from other Protestant and Separatist movements during the Reformation. Initially the term 'Baptist' was not used by those churches to identify themselves, but by others as a description of separation (Morcom 2016, Module 3, 12).

Yet today a religious context of tolerance and acceptance (in an arc wider than just the Baptist denominations) is causing the once tightly held distinctive in the Baptist Union that churches consist of members who are true believers, signified by the action of submitting to believers' baptism by immersion, to be loosened somewhat.

Goodliff (2015, 113) states: "...churches are less adamant about their own baptismal practice, as witness the now widespread practice amongst Baptist churches of remaining open to people joining their membership despite not being baptized as believers, often betraying what their detractors say is a post-modern loss of conviction, or those welcoming such openness, of a desirable ecumenical spirit of cooperation."

This is certainly the current case within Queensland Baptist churches. There are many churches these days with what has been called ‘open membership’, allowing either (or both) unbaptised or other baptised people to become members of their local congregations – where ‘other baptised’ refers to those who received either infant baptism or baptism by a means other than immersion in accordance with different denominations’ belief systems (Wright 2003, 6).

Recently the Queensland Baptist Board proposed to the Assembly of delegates that though the Union held to the doctrinal importance of believers’ baptism, the implications of the current practices of individual churches meant that “there is some ambiguity in the Constitution regarding the requirement of church membership for being a delegate to Assembly and membership in the local church” (139th Annual Assembly of The Baptist Union of Queensland, Section F). The board then recommended changing the Constitution by replacing this current definition of “Church Member” from; “...means a person baptised by immersion who is recognised by a Church as a member of that Church”, to; “...means a person who is recognised by a Church as a member of that Church” (139th Annual Assembly of The Baptist Union of Queensland, Section F).

This, in principle, removes the very identifying marker of the original Baptist movement from the agreed upon standard of church member for the entire Queensland Union. This was also presented not because there had been further investigation for a Scriptural basis on church membership, but because the current culture in some local churches had created an ambiguity for the whole. The result of this change (if it had passed) would have heightened the local independence of churches in their autonomy to change their membership standards, to the point of taking them outside the origins of the Baptist movement itself.

Just as the New Zealand Baptists’ culture caused Rodney Macann to incorrectly weigh the Scriptural basis for church independence and autonomy in his statement, so too did the Queensland Baptist Board react to the culture among certain local churches. After heated debate at Assembly the motion was tabled for further review. It would be more agreeable to see the Board open a discussion on baptism from a Scriptural authority standpoint for all to be involved in, rather than to continue to try and explain how they are simply attempting to meet a current cultural context.

6.2 Independence verses Interdependence

As highlighted in the previous section, the question is, “At what point do the independent choices of a church move them beyond the bounds of a Baptist statement of faith”? If as an assembly, Queensland Baptists hold doctrinally to the importance of believers’ baptism by immersion, would allowing individual churches to alter their commitment to that in a practical sense (which could then be recognised at an Assembly level as seen above) mean that the Union in Queensland has moved from an interdependence, where autonomous churches work together in unity, to complete independence, where churches are virtually

allowed to set their own agenda?

The practices of Queensland Baptists promote a sense of interdependence. Each year the General Superintendent, David Loder (2016, 5), presents a unified annual vision at “Area Meetings around the state for pastors”, there is also a unified call to prayer with churches again encouraged to meet within their ‘areas’ (“Prayer Focus 2016”) as well as regional pastoral gatherings, Malyon College, and an encouragement to be involved with the mission visions of Baptist World Aid and Global Interaction. These all promote the working together in unity while keeping a diverse and autonomous local church.

However as Pinson (2007, 29) states; “Much of the testing of the polity of autonomy focuses on how confessions of faith are utilized in Baptist life.” This is the hinge point, the place where the common unity set out at Assembly level can be pushed by the individuality of action at a local level. At what point does the hinge bend too far and local churches begin acting independently from the unified faith statement of the whole?

The “Queensland Baptist Guidelines for Belief and Practice” (2014, 5) states, “Unity among Queensland Baptists does not mean ‘uniformity’; and diversity does not mean ‘division’.” This allows for local churches to make individual decisions, however they should be seen in the light of this “Guideline for Belief and Practice” which is seen to set an acceptable baseline – and this document certainly promotes a sense of interdependence over independence.

All Queensland Baptist churches then must be dedicated to knowing, checking, and working with this statement, because as Maffly-Kipp (2013, 361) states, “it may lead us to a false sense of security that we are unfettered agents if only we can free ourselves from the brick and mortar structures like the church [or Union] that hold us down.”

Macann’s statement showed an aspiration to restrain the independence of local churches in New Zealand. However it seems Queensland Baptists need to be wary of a current culture of independence against the Union, and realign themselves again with all the Union is doing to promote interdependence.

7. CONCLUSION

Rodney Macann’s statement in the Baptist Connect (September 2009) raised the questions of a correct understanding of Baptist origins, a correct understanding of New Testament values for ecclesiology and how much the local culture and religious context influences individuals, and churches, interpretations of Baptist distinctives and Scripture. Goodliff (2015, 113) suggests, “...a quick resolution to these century-old conflicts is unrealistic, but hope that greater understanding of one another’s traditions might nudge us just a bit closer together as baptized followers of Jesus Christ.”

In examining the understandings of the Baptist tradition and history it has been seen that neither the General or Particular Baptists emerged from the Anabaptist movement as Macann suggested. Neither were they hindered by an Anabaptist ecclesiology, for they were only minimally influenced, if at all, by Anabaptist movements and even if they were, it can be seen

that though the culture at the time promoted a distinct independence from other movements and state rule, the basis for this ecclesiology came from a desire to hold to the New Testament traditions of church polity (Wardin 2014, 12).

Baptists have traditionally held to the lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture as distinctives which hold together the rest. In this light it was with a high regard for New Testament values that a Baptist ecclesiology was formed, and Ephesians 4:16, while promoting a great unity and connectedness for each part of the church, did not exclude the notion of local autonomy as other passages highlight the priesthood of all believers and local incarnations of the church rightly acting in an autonomous way.

Finally it must be understood that it is the cultural influences which ultimately create the hindrance Macann himself was warning against. For the New Zealand church it was a dispersed church and independent culture which brought their Union to try and centralise the vision and plans for the whole. In Queensland the Union is promoting and providing a platform for interdependence, but still an independent culture can be seen developing. In both cases addressing these cultures by investigating the Scriptural basis for what churches believe and practice is the key, not reacting to culture contexts.

Notes

- Resource 3.1: "Short Confession by John Smyth" 1609. Contained in Lumpkin, W L. 1983, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia: Judson. 97-101.
- Resource 3.5: "Formation of a Particular Baptist Congregation in London" 1640. Contained in Lumpkin, W L. 1983, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia: Judson. 29-31.
- Resource 3.9: "London Confession" 1644. Contained in Lumpkin, W L. 1983, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia: Judson. 144-171.
- Resource 4.5: *Confession Faith put forth by the ELDERS and BROTHERS Of many CONGREGATIONS OF Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country*. 1677. Contained in Lumpkin, W L. 1983, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia: Judson. 241-295
- Resource 10.1: "Declaration of Principle", Doctrinal Basis for Baptist Union. 1904. Contained in McBeth 1990. *A Sourcebook for Baptist History*, 361-362
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