

# THE LEVER

THE BI-ANNUAL JOURNAL OF BAPTIST EVANGELICALS TODAY



## DENOMINATIONAL DIRECTION AND LEADERSHIP

### THE LEVER

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lever (lee-ver) n. 1. a bar or other device pivoted on a fixed point (the fulcrum) in order to lift something or force something open. 2. a flat projecting handle used in the same way to operate or control machinery etc. – v. to use a lever, to lift or move by this.leverage. n. the action or power of a lever. (Oxford Paperback Dictionary)

The Lever aims to open up healthy and respectful reflection in our denomination on the Bible’s role in our identity and decision making. We want us all to be moved by the fulcrum of the Biblical Gospel – the unmoving centre of the Apostolic witness to Jesus – and to revolve around that centre, and derive our power from that centre. The journal aims to be a biblical, loving, robust lever for such aims.

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## EDITORIAL

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Welcome to the fourth edition of *The Lever*. In this edition we address a number of issues related to Baptist denominational life and leadership. Our denomination in NSW and the ACT is currently undergoing a major process of self-assessment, and we thought it important to contribute to that ongoing conversation.

Determining what a denomination is agreed upon, with respect to doctrine and purpose, is vital for future planning and mission. Hefin Jones's article examines the place of confessions and statements of faith in our denominational life. It is a much contested topic in Baptist circles and you will find his article stimulating. David Starling examines the role of Assembly from a congregationalist perspective, and also offers a short article that puts forward the big questions worth asking. Philip Calman tackles the unenviable, but extremely important issue of the relationship between congregational autonomy and association, with a particular eye on how this ought to impact the property rights of churches. Paul D. Borden's book, *Hit The Bullseye*, has been the basis for denominational restructure in several denominations, and I offer a review of Dr Borden's book here.

We at BET support a courageous and honest examination of the health of our denomination. We encourage all pastors and churches to participate in the Directions 2012 process. Change for the mere sake of change achieves nothing but a greater trendiness, but if we as a denomination can agree upon the importance of a greater fidelity to the gospel, the need to prayerfully consider changes, and commit to a greater and wiser allocation of resources to evangelism in our churches, we believe Christ will be honoured.

Matthew Arkapaw



## FOUR QUESTIONS - THE COLUMBO GUIDE TO DIRECTIONS 2012

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I never watched Columbo, but those who did have told me (more times than I care to remember!) that the secret of his success as a detective was not the knowledge he brought to the case but the questions that he thought to ask. In denominational politics, as in a homicide investigation, getting to the right answers usually depends on starting with the right questions.

So in the spirit of Columbo, I thought I should figure out the main questions that I should be asking as I sift through the proposals that are going to be coming out of the Directions 2012 taskforces over the next few years.

Here are the four main questions that I came up with, which I intend to ask of each proposal that I see:

### 1. WILL IT ENHANCE OUR GOSPEL EFFECTIVENESS?

I want to see the gospel proclaimed more widely and more urgently and more creatively throughout the neighbourhoods and networks of our churches and beyond into the big wide world. I want to see churches growing in number and in godliness as the gospel itself grows and bears fruit among us. If there are traditions and structures that stand in the way of the gospel of Christ or inhibit its progress in our lives and in the world, I want to see them overthrown. To the extent that a proposal does that, I am going to be excitedly in favour of it.

### 2. WILL IT IMPROVE OUR CO-OPERATIVE EFFICIENCY?

I'm also glad to belong to a denomination where we our churches co-operate to give

one another counsel and help in doing the work that God has given us to do. I'm glad that we work together to care for widows and orphans, send and support cross-cultural missionaries, train pastors and evangelists, and so on. I don't like sitting in traffic jams, or in meetings that go round and round in circles. So – all things being equal – if a proposal looks like it will improve our co-operative efficiency as a denomination, I am interested in giving it a try.

Of course, question 1 and question 2 are not the same question. The vast majority of the things that need to be done in order to enhance our gospel effectiveness as a movement of churches will have nothing to do with improving the efficiency of our denominational structures. The real changes will need to happen in our quiet times and our family devotions, over a barbecue with the neighbours or around the water-cooler at work, in the P&C meeting at the local school or at the local soccer club; in our sermons and our prayer triplets and our discipleship groups; in our apprenticing of pastors and scripture teachers and church planters. There may well be some ways in which a more efficient denominational structure could lead to a more fruitful proclamation of the gospel in our churches. But the main action is always going to be at the grassroots.

So if I see an answer to question 2 dressed up as if it will be the main answer that we can give to question 1, I'll be sceptical. And if I see an answer to question 2 dismissed because it's not the answer to question 1, I'll come to its defence with a rousing two cheers (or maybe even three) for co-operative efficiency.

### 3. WILL IT ERODE OUR BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES?

While I have my sceptic's hat on, I'll also be asking about what any proposals may do to our historical distinctives as Baptists. Of course, it would be ironically un-Baptist to cling to a human tradition (even a Baptist tradition!) if it stood in the way of our faithfulness to the commission we have from Jesus and our stewardship of the resources he has entrusted us with.

If a sacred cow or two has to be slaughtered for us to obey the Scriptures and follow the Lord Jesus, then I'm all for slaughtering the cows. But if – to mix the metaphors! – there are 400 year old theological convictions at risk of being bulldozed by arguments that are driven by nothing more than managerial pragmatism, then I hope I'll have the courage to chain myself to those convictions like an activist to a tree.

### 4. WILL IT UNDERMINE OUR EVANGELICAL FAITHFULNESS?

As jealous as I am for our 400 year old Baptist distinctives, I want to be infinitely more jealous for the 2000 year old truths of the gospel and their centrality in the life of our denomination. So amongst all the other questions that I could ask of a proposal coming out of Directions 2012, the most important one is the question about what it will do to the cause of the gospel among our churches.

I want to ask, of course, whether a proposal will involve a direct and immediate compromise of our faithfulness to the gospel. But I also want to ask whether there is a chance that a proposal might have an unintended secondary

consequence of undermining our long-term faithfulness to the gospel - for example, by protecting our agencies and officers against the life-giving threat of grass-roots reformation and revival. If short-term efficiency comes at the expense of long-term reformability, I for one am convinced that is a price that is not worth paying.

So there are my four questions for Directions 2012: I look forward to trying to figure out the answers!

David Starling



*“As jealous as I am for our 400 year old Baptist distinctives, I want to be infinitely more jealous for the 2000 year old truths of the gospel and their centrality in the life of our denomination. So amongst all the other questions that I could ask of a proposal coming out of Directions 2012, the most important one is the question about what it will do to the cause of the gospel among our churches.”*

## ARE DOCTRINAL CONFESSIONS UN-BAPTIST?

### SOME HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NSW BASIS OF UNION

#### THE CAREY CONNECTION

Wednesday 16th April 1851 saw the first recorded Baptist ordination in NSW. The Church was the week-old Parramatta Baptist Church. The Ordinand was William H. Carey, grandson of missionary pioneer William Carey. Within the space of a week the church decided its character as an open communion closed membership Baptist Church, set apart its first deacons, declared its doctrines, and called and ordained its minister. Soon after the ordination the church published its detailed “Constitution and Laws.”

One of the most striking aspects of the whole church formation and ordination process is the prominence given to the theological character of the church and the convictions of its pastor. On the day the church was formed they wrote to their prospective pastor informing him of their doctrinal position, which was virtually identical to the 1813 basis of the Baptist Union in Britain. Carey responded by letter affirming those doctrines and also providing a restatement of them in his own words.

*“With reference to the doctrines mentioned in your letter, I consider them to be most thoroughly scriptural. I concur with you in believing them one and all, and in my pulpit ministrations shall hope to proclaim them freely, and in the strength and by the aid of the Spirit of God...”*

*(W.H. Carey to Parramatta Baptist, 15 April 1851)*

At his ordination Carey not only recounted his testimony and call to ministry but also declared his belief in the “leading doctrines of our religion” by publicly affirming a series of doctrinal statements. The church constitution he wrote emphasises the “articles of their faith” which are given a leading position, larger script, and underlining. All members of the church were to give assent to the doctrines listed and sign the rules.

Is this anything more than an interesting sidelight on the early Baptist Movement in NSW? First, it gives the lie to the idea that Baptists, and in particular NSW Baptists, are inherently and have historically been a non-creedal movement. Second, it raises a number of issues surrounding the use of doctrinal statements in the life of Baptist churches. Should churches and associations of churches have such statements? Are they merely descriptive or somehow definitive? And what about us? Can we and should we as NSW Baptists affirm and subscribe to creeds and confessions today?

#### THREE APPROACHES TO BAPTIST DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

Since the Mid-Nineteenth Century we have been frequently told that we are an inherently non-creedal movement. Some have rejected all creeds, all confessions, all statements of faith. Others have sought to distinguish between creeds and confessions. Yet others have rejected the idea of subscription. However, a careful reading suggests there is considerable confusion caused by inconsistent definitions and fuzzy arguments. Not all anti-creedalism or non-creedalism is

the same. For the purposes of this essay I’ll distinguish three approaches towards creeds, confessions and confessional subscription amongst Baptists using the following categories: **Anti-Creedalism; Non-Creedal Confessionalism; and Confessionalism**. Arguably each of these approaches emerged within the first century of the English Baptist movement. All three approaches can be seen at play in the early history of the Baptist movement in NSW. The first three pastors of the foundational Bathurst Street Baptist Church, Saunders, Ham and Voller, seem to embody the three approaches.

**Anti-Creedalism** rejects subscription to doctrinal statements and seeks to do without them altogether. For James Voller doctrinal statements had no role in defining the belief of the church and he removed as many as he could from the church’s constitutional documents. As the instigator of the abortive Baptist Association of NSW (1858) he proposed associational rules that contain no explicit doctrinal statements nor any form of subscription.

**Non-Creedal Confessionalism** rejects the idea that a church or association might require subscription to normative doctrinal statements, but allows entirely voluntary affirmations of belief and the publishing of descriptive doctrinal statements. This seems to have been the position of John Saunders who was quite willing to affirm his own “creed” and led the church to adopt trust deeds which initially (1836) referred to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (minus the section on infant baptism) and later (1844) the 1813 doctrinal basis of the Baptist Union of Great

Britain. However, Saunders was reluctant to impose his “creed” on other Baptists and argued that his wing of the Baptists had no custom of having creeds. In arguing this he was representative of one common mid-nineteenth century view. Particular Baptists had long held that it was inappropriate for the state to impose a creed, but by the early nineteenth century some were also arguing that it was inappropriate for the denomination to insist on normative doctrinal statements as a test of fellowship. At most, doctrinal statements were descriptive rather than definitive or normative. Other Particular Baptists like Andrew Fuller rejected this argument and argued that a voluntary association had the right to form its own rules including normative doctrinal statements .

**Confessionalism** sees doctrinal statements as definitive and normative and would require some form of subscription to them. John Ham’s influence on the formation of Parramatta Baptist and the ordination of William H. Carey is evident in the documents preserved, and his high view of the place of doctrinal statements is reflected in the call and ordination process. Such **Confessionalism** was no new thing within the Baptist Movement. The early Particular Baptists had written extensive confessions in the Seventeenth Century and required subscription to them from time to time. Local associations in England had their own confessions and often required subscription to them. Many English churches normally included doctrinal statements within their church covenants, constitutions, rules and trusts. Regular Baptists in the American Colonies did the same . When a national body was begun in 1812-13 the English Particular Baptists drew up a doctrinal basis. Andrew Fuller, one of the founders, understood such

statements as definitive and normative rather than merely descriptive. Ham was following a well-established Particular Baptist approach, though one which was under assault by the mid-nineteenth century.

A principled rejection of any doctrinal statements, what I’ve called **Anti-Creedalism**, is not an inherent Baptist principle or distinctive. Though occasionally seen before the nineteenth century, it seems to have taken off under the influence of Cambellite ideas , nineteenth century pan-evangelicalism, and the appeal to “liberality of thought” . An avoidance of subscription to confessions, or an avoidance of imposing of subscription on others, i.e. **Non-Creedal Confessionalism**, has a longer history extending back to the end of the seventeenth century, and by the end of the nineteenth century it morphs into seeing doctrinal statements as merely descriptive or personal. Side-by-side and quite probably predating that position is Confessionalism, the view that doctrinal statements are normative and should be used to define associational fellowship. Neither **Anti-** nor **Non-Creedalism** is intrinsic to Baptist identity.

#### MAXIMAL VERSES MINIMALIST CONFSSIONALISM

Were **Anti-** or **Non-Creedalism** intrinsic to Baptist identity then NSW Baptists as a denomination have never been true to it. Voller’s abortive Baptist Association of 1858 might have approximated the **Anti-Creedal** ideal, but from the beginning of the NSW Baptist Union in 1868 it has been **Confessional**, the real question being, how **Confessional**: Unlike the associational rules of 1858 the 1868 constitution included a doctrinal basis. However, it was a **Minimalist** basis:

*The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be received as the entire and complete revelation of God to Mankind and shall be the only rule of faith and practice. And we receive all Baptist Churches and Baptised Christians, who rest upon the work of Christ alone for salvation and believe that the salvation of the sinner can be effectively secured only by the Holy Spirit’s operations.*

The churches had considered a “lengthy” doctrinal basis but rejected it. What the “lengthy” basis was we do not know, but many Seventeenth Century Baptist confessions contain thirty or more detailed articles. The “brief” basis adopted is explicit in its affirmation of three or so doctrines and clearly implies a couple more. In order to accommodate open membership churches the second sentence of the basis was dropped in 1870. The single sentence basis would have been unobjectionable to most Anti-Creedalists. However, by 1872 a model trust deed was adopted and promoted by the Union which enshrined an expanded yet brief doctrinal basis, only very slightly different from our doctrinal basis today:

*‘Holding the doctrines of the sinfulness of man; the divinity of Jesus Christ and his atonement for the sin of man; the need of the Holy Spirit for conversion; the divine inspiration of the Scriptures; the resurrection of the dead, and rewards and punishments in a future state; and practicing the baptism of believers only by immersion.’*

Ministers and churches had to hold to these doctrines and ministers could be removed for ceasing to hold them. This doctrinal basis fully replaced the radical **Minimalism** of the 1870 basis when the Union’s constitution was revised in 1894 and has remained the

Doctrinal Basis of the Union ever since. Though varieties of **Anti-Creedalism** have been expressed repeatedly since the 1870s to the present, the Model Trust Deeds of 1872, the Union Constitution of 1894, the Incorporation Act of 1919 all enshrine a form of **Minimalist Confessionalism**. The 1919 Doctrinal Basis is a definitive and normative doctrinal statement.

#### THE 1919 BASIS AND THE 1979 STATEMENT

However, the Union’s official history criticised the doctrinal basis as “defective” and dissatisfaction with it led to the development and adoption of the BUNSW 1979 Statement of Beliefs. One can understand the criticism of the 1919 Basis. It is so brief that it omits doctrines that one would expect any Christian statement to include, it seems disorderly, and its phrases are terse to the point of vagueness. Placed back in its original context 1872-1919 one can see how it was intended to guard certain key Evangelical truths without excluding Arminians on the one hand or Calvinists on the other. Given the known doctrinal beliefs and emphases of some involved in its framing, they seem to have also deliberately avoided including overly specific eschatological schemes. The wisdom of the 1919 Basis is its focus on essentials. Its folly is that it simply took too much for granted.

In comparison, the 1979 Statement is better organised, more complete and fuller in detail. The 1919 Basis headings were supplemented, expanded and explained. Now there is explicit mention of God the Father, God as triune, Christ as fully human, the Holy Spirit as personal, humanity’s creation, justification by faith, the Church, the Communion and

the return of Christ. In its headings it is of similar level of comprehensiveness as the 1813 British Particular Baptist Basis or the 1851 Parramatta articles of faith, though in its expanded articles it maintains a balanced refusal to privilege Arminian or Calvinist views. One can even hear some echoes of the 1851 Parramatta articles that had been lost in the terseness of the 1919 Basis. A well-known lacuna is the 1979 Statement’s lack of fullness on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. However, on the whole it is a well-balanced Evangelical statement of faith with the addition of a single Baptist distinctive (The article on the church is hardly distinctively Baptist). Even though much expanded in comparison to the 1919 Basis it is still **Minimalist**, describing Baptist belief far less comprehensively and exhaustively than the **Maximalist** General and Particular Baptist confessions of faith of the Seventeenth century.

I believe this form of **Minimalism** is wise since the statement is neither so terse as to be vague, nor so detailed as to divide fellowship between people who hold the same Gospel and maintain like church order. It is wise since it focuses on the substance of the heart of the Bible, without reducing it to a series of litmus test beliefs. The 1979 Statement is in effect an exposition of the Gospel – the gracious death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins in order that we might have forgiveness and resurrection hope, received through faith – plus some of the necessary presuppositions of that Gospel and some of the actual ramifications of it too. The presuppositions include: who this Jesus is, and who God is; what sin is and why it needs atonement; who we are and what state we are in; where we learn this Gospel from... The ramifications include

the nature of the life of the believer and the community to which they now belong.

Our statement of beliefs is not to be imposed by the state, nor does it define who is or isn’t Christian (no Baptist confession has ever done that), but it does provide a centre around which we can associate freely. In this life, in this world, and from our human point of view, the degree of association depends on the extent of our agreement, and where we can agree to disagree. Common confession of the Gospel is surely the place to start. When it comes to institutional unity any given Evangelical’s ecclesiology will come into play and determine the closeness of unity that can be achieved. In certain contexts Gospel-believing Baptists can have extremely close fellowship and cooperation with Gospel-believing Pentecostals, Wesleyans, Reformed Paedo-Baptists, Episcopalians et al and etc. In other contexts Gospel-Believing Baptists can only have limited institutional cooperation with other Gospel-Believers because of our mutually incompatible ecclesiologies. Like a number of earlier Baptists I would argue that voluntary associationalism does not preclude the association having the right to determine who it will include or exclude. Unity around the Gospel & our Baptist ecclesiology implies maintaining that unity by excluding those who deny the Gospel as it has been understood among us. To say that is not un-Baptist, but is true to the oldest Baptist confessionalist approach and agrees with the purpose of the 1919 Basis as originally formulated in the 1872 Model Trust Deed.

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

## AUTONOMY & ASSOCIATION: A TENSION WORTH PRESERVING!

### OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Our life together as Baptist churches is under the microscope. Once again we are looking at how we might do things better than we have been. There is talk of restructure, suggestions are being made, and eventually recommendations will be brought to assembly as to what changes might be needed to improve the organisational efficiency of the Union and the ministry effectiveness of the churches.

This is not a bad thing but it is also not a new thing. Throughout the Twentieth Century similar reviews were undertaken with varying degrees of success.<sup>1</sup> Some of these reviews resulted in significant improvements of organisation and resulted in ministry gains. Other reviews didn't get very far, making recommendations that were either never accepted or would be later rejected by subsequent assemblies. In the case of the Investigation Commission of the 1930's Alan Prior wrote that it didn't get very far "because they were caught on the snags of ultra-independency and isolationism that have often impeded organised Baptist work and which Baptists everywhere generally recognise – and retain."<sup>2</sup>

While not necessarily agreeing with Alan Prior's negative assessment, it is important to recognise that there are certain things that Baptists have generally recognised and retained. One of these things is a tension between autonomy and association. When autonomous local churches come together they give birth to a particular type of associational life. For any change process to be successful this type of associational life needs to be recognised. It is always important to understand the character and culture

of the organisation that one is hoping to change. Baptists historically have had strong convictions about what it means to be in fellowship with one another and how that shapes our associational life.

### BAPTIST CHURCHES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Baptist churches have a long history of associating together. From early days Baptist churches expressed a strong desire to maintain fellowship with other like-minded churches. In 1644 seven churches in London came together and issued the first Particular Baptist confession. In 1651 thirty congregations from Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and other surrounding counties drew up one of the first joint General Baptist confessions of faith. These confessions were used both as polemical responses and also as bases for cooperation between churches. Lumpkin argues that the "Baptist confessions of faith which appeared during the period of the Commonwealth (1650-59) were closely connected with the association movement, and they often served as its unifying instruments." He goes on to say that before 1660 "permanent Associations had become typical Baptist institutions."<sup>3</sup>

In Australia associational life was extremely fragile in the early years. After an earlier attempt at an associational life had failed to survive its infancy a Baptist Association of NSW was eventually formed in 1868 and then reconstituted a few years later as the Baptist Union of NSW.<sup>4</sup> This second attempt began with the objectives to "promote brotherly love among its members; to originate and strengthen Baptist Churches without in any way interfering with the independent character of such Churches; aiding small and necessitous

*Churches in the maintaining of their Pastors; the training of suitable men for the ministry and the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom in the best way possible.*"<sup>5</sup> These objectives over the years have largely remained unchanged. In a 1976 NSW Baptist publication called "Growing Together – a member's handbook", the authors wrote that "the practice of associating together for fellowship, prayer, giving practical support, evangelism and to share in doctrinal guidance is a Baptist characteristic based on Biblical precedents".

Baptist churches therefore have come together in association in order to cooperate with other likeminded churches. Unlike other denominations where the churches grow out from the organisation like pumpkins on a vine, the organisation itself is the fruit of churches deciding to stand alongside one another and work together in a number of areas. It is sometimes bemoaned that the Baptist Union doesn't have the same control or leadership over the churches that other denominational bodies have over their members but this is to fail to recognise that we are a free association of churches and not pumpkins on a vine.

### ASSOCIATIONS AND AUTONOMY

The association of 1868 was formed with the desire to work together in order to plant (originate) and strengthen churches but doing so without "in any way interfering with the independent character of such Churches." It has been an important principle since the formation of the first Baptist associations in the Seventeenth Century for our associational life to be voluntary and free. In the 1976

But where are we today? The 1979 Statement is best understood as only an explanation of the 1919 Basis. However, some churches have adopted the 1979 Statement as their basis of faith. Some officers of the Union have to subscribe to it, and as I understand it, so do teaching staff at Morling College. The Union's Committee for the Ministry are also required to ascertain a candidate for accreditation's "stance" towards the 1979 Statement. The Union Handbook's preamble to the 1979/2003 Statement of Beliefs raises certain questions. It describes the Statement as "approved" – but for what exactly? In fact, strictly the Statement was "adopted" by the 1979 Assembly. Recent Union Handbooks have also described the 1979/2003 Statement "as a statement of beliefs commonly held by Baptists" – which seems to relegate it into the *non-creedal confession* category. These issues deserve further exploration in the future. However, it seems to me that committed Evangelicals would do well to celebrate the doctrines embodied in the 1979 Statement. It would also serve the association well if the Committee for the Ministry transparently fed-back to assembly the stance of accreditation candidates towards the 1979 Statement. One wonders to what extent the current malaise of our Union is traceable to our neglect of the gospel and self-conscious unity in it as expressed by the 1979 Statement?

The "defective" 1919 Basis remains the *minimalist confession* of the Union. The Union should not knowingly accredit a minister who could not in all conscience subscribe to it or who demonstrably denies it. Likewise the trustees of the Property Trust would be obliged to step in if a minister of a trust church demonstrably denied the 1919 Basis. So its

function in the Act of Incorporation and the Property Trust Act make it a definitive and normative doctrinal statement, but its terseness makes it questionably effective. Further, as Philip Calman argues in his article, the detail of the Property Trust Act, especially as amended in 1992, undermines the role of the 1919 Doctrinal Basis as an instrument of unity for a voluntary association of churches.

I suspect that both the 1919 Basis and the 1979/2003 Statement are too often regarded as hoops through which one must jump. For some they are hardly the kinds of thing to which they'd wish to give hearty assent. One wonders if the centre of interest for some Baptists lies elsewhere than the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins and our redemption? How many of us would be as forthright as Paramatta Baptist of 1851 and William H. Carey in declaring our beliefs? The whole idea of freely associating around a clear proclamation of the Gospel seems to have fallen on hard times. The idea of maintaining that unity and guarding the Gospel has fallen on even harder times.

Progressive and so-called "Mainstream" Baptists will paint the idea of Baptist confessionalism as somehow "un-Baptist" or at least as wisely discarded historical wreckage. However, it is hard to deny that a broad and long stream of Baptist heritage has seen the wisdom and utility of confessions and subscribing to them. For Evangelical Baptists it will not be the fact that this is our heritage, but it will be the scriptural wisdom that our heritage reflects that will persuade us to unite around and guard the Gospel (2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:2; Titus 1:9). Having said that, merely defending the confessions themselves will be of no avail

unless we also embrace and embody the truth they express.

*"I beg also to state that I cordially and sincerely subscribe to the doctrines recorded in your letter and incorporated in your trust deeds – I may add they have formed the basis of my ministry for nearly 30 years past & I trust they will ever constitute the basis of my ministrations as well as the foundation of my hope for future blessedness."* (Ham to Saunders, 1847)

*"Such are the doctrines I believe most firmly that the scriptures teach us, and these are they which I shall hope to preach among you. May the Lord give us grace to understand and to profit by them, that thus they may make that impression upon our lives, which they were of God designed, and revealed to produce."* (Carey to Parramatta, 1851)

Hefin Jones



publication just mentioned the autonomy of the local church is explained as follows:

*“The government of a local Baptist church is often described as the autonomy of the local church. By this is meant that it is self-governing. Now we have already shown that this is not really all that is meant, because we believe that God governs the church. What in practice is meant is that no other body, (other local church, Assembly, or State authority) can legislate for that local church. Believing that Christ is in the midst, the whole membership is competent to manage its own affairs; to appoint its officers, discipline members, receive new members.”*<sup>6</sup>

#### A TRUST

Historically the Baptist understanding of voluntary associational life grew from our understanding of the importance and the priority of the local church. From the early days Baptists maintained that the true expression of the visible church was to be found here on earth in the local gathering of believers who had been separated from the world by the Spirit of God through the word of God and by their response of faith.<sup>7</sup> This understanding has continued throughout Baptist history. It is evident for example in the response to the Lambeth Appeal of 1926 by the Baptists in Great Britain. The Baptist Union of Great Britain referred to the freedom of the local congregation as a trust that they must keep.

*“We believe that this holy society is truly to be found wherever companies of believers unite as Churches on the ground of a confession of personal faith. Every local community thus constituted is regarded by us as both enabled and responsible for self government through His indwelling Spirit who supplies wisdom,*

*love, and power, and who as we believe, leads these communities to associate freely in wider organisations for fellowship and the propagation of the Gospel.*

*We reverence and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, as the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Scriptures, and we hold that each Church has liberty to interpret and administer His laws. We do not judge the conscience of those who take another view, but we believe that this principle of the freedom of the individual Church under Christ has the sanction of the Scriptures and the justification of history, and therefore we cannot abandon it without being false to our trust.”*

The Baptist Union of Great Britain argued that they had been given a trust to preserve the freedom of the individual Church under Christ. It wasn't that wider fellowship with other churches was to be rejected, but that such fellowship was to be enjoyed by churches freely associating with one another. This they believed was to be preserved. In the midst of our present discussions on structural changes any proposal needs to continue to uphold this trust that, historically, Baptists believe they have received through the Scriptures. To tighten the structures in any way that would undermine the free and voluntary association of churches would be to break this trust.

How this works out in practice is not a simple matter. One of the implications of a voluntary association would be the maintenance of a church's ability not only to freely join the association but also to freely leave it. This is particularly important if churches are to be united around a common understanding of the gospel and not just around things

like believer's baptism and congregational government. Believer's baptism is itself not a sufficient unifying principle. As Baptists we came together not just because we hold to believer's baptism, but because of a desire to partner with other churches in the gospel. If an individual church no longer held to an understanding of the gospel that would make such a partnership possible, it would be better for such a church to exercise its freedom to leave rather than jeopardize the importance of gospel fidelity. If a church was to no longer believe that the association itself promoted a partnership in the gospel it too should be free to leave. This ought to be the case in a voluntary association. The freedom of a local congregation not only implies that it has the freedom to make decisions over its internal affairs but it also has the freedom to make decisions as to its external affairs and relationships.

The tightening of the Property Trust Act in 1992 in this respect was a step in the wrong direction. Changes were introduced that removed that part of the Act (Section 30) that gave the local congregation the ability to retire the Baptist Union controlled trust as its trustees. Section 30 had originally been included in 1984 by those drafting the Act because they believed that the autonomy of the local church was at stake. At the 1991 Assembly the Legal Advisor speaking on behalf of the Union argued that this was a mistaken fear.<sup>8</sup> What is hard to deny is that the removal of the clause greatly weakened the position of the local congregation.<sup>9</sup> There are some within the Union who would now argue that any Baptist church that decided to leave the association would also have to leave their property. This ought not to be the case in a free and voluntary association

and whether a Baptist church would lose their property is yet to be properly tested. It would be extremely sad if in the end our association prized property over gospel fidelity.

#### A TENSION

The Property Trust Act is not the only place where the maintenance of this tension between autonomy and association has been under threat. At times holding to our trust as Baptists to preserve the freedom of the local church has been felt to be in direct competition with the goals of effectively and efficiently managing the Union. For instance in 1934 the Investigation Commission was set up to look into the condition of the Churches and to review the policy and work of the denomination with a view of bringing recommendations for the strengthening of the churches and improving the efficiency of denominational life.

The Commission presented reports to the Annual Assembly in 1935 and 1936 arguing that one of the things that made their task difficult was the “independency of the Churches.” As a result of this the Commission brought recommendations which required churches “to loyally observe the decisions of the Union in all matters, other than those proper to be determined in accordance with Baptist principles exclusively by individual Churches.”<sup>10</sup> It also made a similar recommendation requiring all new ministers and churches before being accepted into the Union to provide an undertaking to loyally observe the decisions of the Union. Alan Prior has written that these “clauses provoked animated discussion and substantial opposition, and although adopted by the 1936 Assembly they were never very effective or

popular.” He goes on to comment: “Loyalty cannot be commanded by resolutions. The determination of what the matters to be decided by the Churches and the Union respectively was an impossible one. The requirements were never really enforced and have now been dropped.”<sup>11</sup>

At times autonomy seems to be in direct competition with organisational efficiency. It is a tension that many of us believe we need to live with but which some have at times tried to resolve. In the 1930s it was argued that the organisation could be more efficiently organised if denominational loyalty was a requirement and churches and ministers dutifully followed the instructions issued by the assembly or the departments of the Union. Such a system would certainly improve organisational efficiency, but ultimately it would do so to the detriment of our whole understanding of what it means to be a local church sitting under the authority of Christ.

#### ORGANISATION IS NOT ENOUGH

It's our beliefs and principles as Baptists that need to shape our organisation. Ultimately growth will come not just through an efficient restructuring but through the long-term faithful teaching of the Scriptures and through the work of the Spirit in the hearts and lives

of people. In the Forward of the Report of the Third Faith and Life Commission, presented to the Annual Assembly in 1964 the chairman, Fred Church, by this time having sat on all three of the commissions through the 1950s and 1960s offered some sound words which are still relevant today.

*“This Third Faith and Life Commission in continuing its review of the Union's activities over the last six years is fully conscious that “organisation is not enough”. One of the failings of the 20th Century Church is that it organises and re-organises and thinks it has done something.”*

If over the last decade or more our churches have not been bearing the fruit that we feel that they should have it might be more than our structures that are letting us down. We might need more than just another organisational reshuffle. Indeed we might need to dig a little deeper and look at our beliefs and how they might be affecting our life together. We also might need to ask whether our lack of cohesiveness is not because of the autonomy of our churches but rather because we have been afraid to discuss as an association those beliefs that bind us together. In our present review process more thought needs to be given as to how our doctrine and beliefs as Baptists ought to influence our structures and the management of them. Organisation

*“At times autonomy seems to be in direct competition with organisational efficiency. It is a tension that many of us believe we need to live with but which some have at times tried to resolve.”*

## ‘IN JOYFUL ASSEMBLY...’

### WHY ASSEMBLY MATTERS, AND HOW TO DO IT TO THE GLORY OF GOD

‘...thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly...’

Hebrews 12:22

‘...after there had been much debate...’

Acts 15:7

*14. As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.*

*15. In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together, do, by their messengers, meet to consider, and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not intrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers.*

Second London Confession (1677/89) ch. 26.14-15.

Joyful assembly’... Chances are, if you’ve ever been a delegate, it’s a combination of words that falls on the ears with a certain irony. The meagre quorum of hardy souls scraped together into the plastic seats of a Baptist church in some far-flung corner of the urban fringe is hardly the ‘thousands upon thousands’ of Hebrews 12, gathered in the heavenly Jerusalem, and while the delegates may be ‘messengers’ they are hardly angels. Sometimes, of course, assembly can be an experience that is deeply encouraging – lucid, frank, engaging reports that prompt intelligent questions and heartfelt thanks and praise to God; vigorous and charitable debate giving rise to wise and well-founded resolutions; delightful conversations with old friends whom the call of the gospel has taken away to some distant corner of the state. On a good year, assembly can have its joys. But for most of us the memories of assemblies past are as much about tears and tedium as they are about excitement and joy. What are we to do with that painful gap between heavenly vision and earthly reality? Should we abandon assembly altogether, replacing tedious reports and bruising debates with something more up-beat and inspirational? Should we leave it in place as a quaint and irrelevant appendix hanging off the side of a big denominational pep-rally, letting it slowly wither to the point where it can eventually be excised by a few quick, painless procedural motions? Or is there an important and continuing place for assembly, and a way of doing it that better promotes the glory of God and the joy of his people?

### ASSOCIATION

For almost as long as Baptists have been Baptists, they have agreed that ‘although the particular congregations be distinct and several bodies, every one a compact and knit city in itself’ it is a good thing for them ‘by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church.’<sup>1</sup> Local congregations are not the branches or franchises of some larger denominational super-entity; nor (on the other hand) do they join together in an arrangement that is merely pragmatic, like the motley collection of clubs and societies that shelter under the umbrella of a University Student Union so they can rent a room. Rather, they are joined to one another by bonds of shared conviction and loving communion,<sup>2</sup> and they co-operate to give each other ‘counsel’ and ‘help’ in fulfilling the mission that God has entrusted to them.

And for almost as long as Baptists have been Baptists, one way in which they have expressed and enacted this communion and co-operation has been by sending delegates or ‘messengers’ to meet in assembly, hammering out agreement on the theological underpinnings of their shared vision, resolving conflicts and offering counsel and (later) establishing and overseeing co-operative ministries like missionary societies, relief agencies, and academies for the training of pastors.

### DEBATE

Realists as they were, the framers of the early Baptist confessions recognised that one of the key functions of assembly was debate. They met (among other reasons) in order to address ‘difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration’, and they

itself is not enough. Again it might be helpful to draw upon the counsel of the Faith and Life Commission from the previous century:

*“The Faith and Life Commission has endeavoured to consider the matters referred to it in the light of the New Testament teaching and our distinctive principles as Baptists. Our practice and procedure have tended to grow away from our beliefs, and this has necessitated a re-thinking of many of our church and denominational procedures, and in its recommendations, the Commission has tried to reconcile our practices with our beliefs.”*

Philip Calman



### ENDNOTES

1 The following list of committees is not necessarily comprehensive: Investigation Commission (1934-1936); The Forward Movement (1937 - ?); Faith and Life Commission I (1950-1955); Faith and Life Commission II (1955-1958); Faith and Life Commission III (1962-1964); The Way Forward Committee (1994-1996).

2 Prior, AC., 1966, *Some fell on good ground: A History of the Beginings and Development of the Baptist Church in NSW Australia, 1831-1965*, Baptist Union of NSW, Sydney p. 143.

3 Lumpkin, W.L., 1969, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Judson Press, Valley Forge.

4 The first NSW association of Baptist churches was formed in 1858 but seems to have petered out after its second annual assembly in 1859.

5 Prior, AC., *Some Fell on Good Ground* p. 106.

6 “Growing on Together – a member’s handbook” p. 66.

7 See for example the London Confession of 1644 article XXXIII.

8 This seems to be the opinion of the Legal Adviser who in 1991 wrote that section 30 was apparently included by the sub-committee of the executive in the early 1980’s “in the mistaken belief that the autonomy of the local Church was at stake.”

9 It was discussed in 1991 at the Annual General Assembly in a meeting that unfortunately didn’t achieve the necessary numbers for a quorum. The recommendations of that meeting which formed itself into a committee of the assembly were later ratified on a different day in a meeting that had a quorum. It is uncertain from reading the minutes how much discussion if any was entered into on that second day.

10 Prior, AC., *Some Fell on Good Ground*, p.142-143.

11 Ibid. p.142

expected these difficulties and differences to be settled by discussion and debate among the gathered messengers of the churches.

Their primary model in this was the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, in which (even in the presence of a glittering cast of apostles and James the brother of Jesus) there was room for ‘much debate’ and careful argument about the meaning and implications of Scripture for the situation faced by the churches. They also appealed to the practice of the apostle Paul and his determination not to ‘lord it over’ the troublesome Corinthians but to ‘work with [them] for [their] joy’ (2 Cor. 1:24). In both cases, there was joy in the outcome (Acts 15:31, 2 Cor. 7:9), but it was a joy that was hard-won, through (in one case) the arduous journey and vigorous debate of the Jerusalem Council and (in the other case) the risk and confrontation involved in Paul’s ‘painful letter’ to the Corinthians.

The New Testament path to the ‘joyful assembly’ of the heavenly Jerusalem (and its delightful foretastes in the present) does not take a short-cut past the painful and patient debates that are involved in living

out a real and responsible communion of love and conviction and common purpose.

#### LORDSHIP

While Baptists have traditionally (and rightly) been champions of the liberty and responsibility of the individual conscience, the congregational government of the local church and the government by assembly of the affairs of the denomination, these Baptist distinctives should not be understood as an idolatrous commitment to democracy in and of itself as the highest good.

If Jesus Christ is the sole Lord of the church (and the sole Lord over the denominational assembly) then the ultimate aim of all the discussing and debating is not to achieve an acceptable compromise between the preferences of the delegates but to arrive at a decision that reflects the mind of Christ and his purposes for his people.

A good assembly debate is thus a theologically serious debate, in which delegates are conscious that they sit under the authority of the Word of God and are prepared to take a stand on the theological convictions that they have

in common as the doctrinal basis of their union. It is also a missionally purposeful debate that reflects the urgent command of Jesus as the Lord of the harvest and does not waste his precious time on triviality, pettiness and self-promotion. And it is a gracious and orderly debate in which delegates show their obedience to the Lord Jesus in the way that they defer to one another (and to the chairperson who presides over the debate), eager to outdo one another in showing honour even as they disagree vigorously on the matters that are under debate.

#### RE:ASSEMBLY?

How can that sort of assembly be achieved? Do we need to dismantle the current structure and re-assemble it from scratch? I suspect the answer is both less radical and more radical than that.

On the one hand, I suspect that the basic structures of assembly itself do not need to be replaced or radically redesigned. There may be ways of fine-tuning the structures and workings of assembly that would help it to better achieve its purposes. For example, we could perhaps make it easier (and more common) for the president to delegate the job of chairing assembly meetings to a person more experienced and proficient in chairing large meetings; there might be room for making use of communications technology to set up satellite venues that would permit delegates from remote churches to participate in assembly without making the long journey to Sydney twice a year; a simple booklet could be published (in hard copy and on the web) to provide new delegates – and old ones! – with a “dummies’ guide” to the purposes and workings of assembly.

All sorts of changes like these could be made to the structures and workings of assembly without changing its composition or its basic functions of accountability (through appointing officers and receiving their reports) and decision-making (through discussion, debate and resolution).

The more radical changes that we need are not to the structures of assembly but to the ethos of our churches. If we want to see assemblies that are theologically serious, missionally purposeful, and gracious and orderly in their conduct, then our first task will be to pray and labour toward the goal of local churches that are theologically serious, missionally purposeful, gracious and orderly. When the pastors and delegates who gather for assembly come from churches like that, then there will be an inevitable overflow from the ethos of the churches to the ethos of the assembly. Our conversations, our Bible study groups, our sermons, our members’ meetings all function (inadvertently) as training for assembly delegates in how to discuss, debate and decide as people who live under the Lordship of Christ.

In addition to that sort of indirect preparation, of course, there are things that we can do as local churches and local church pastors to prepare more specifically for assembly. We can talk and write about the notices of motion, for example, in a way that models the sort of serious, purposeful, gracious and orderly engagement that we hope to see on the assembly floor, discussing them in conversations, members’ meetings and position papers. We can pray for the assembly and pray for the delegates, asking God to exercise his rule over our hearts and over the outcomes. And we can show up!

But I suspect the real renewal and strengthening of assembly will be the second-hand effect that comes from the renewal and strengthening of our lives and our churches. Let’s work and pray for that sort of re-assembly.

David Starling



#### ENDNOTES

- 1 First London Confession (1644) Article 47. For an equivalent General Baptist statement from the following decade, see The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations (1651) Article 70.
- 2 The First London Confession goes as far as to say that they ‘are all to walk by one and the same Rule’ (by which – judging from the proof-texts like 1 Cor. 4:17 which they offer – they have in mind the apostolic rule laid down in Scripture) and that the congregations within the association are ‘members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only Head’.

*“The New Testament path to the ‘joyful assembly’ of the heavenly Jerusalem (and its delightful foretastes in the present) does not take a short-cut past the painful and patient debates that are involved in living out a real and responsible communion of love and conviction and common purpose.”*

## BOOK REVIEW - HIT THE BULLSEYE

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PAUL D. BORDEN, **HIT THE BULLSEYE: HOW DENOMINATIONS CAN AIM THE CONGREGATION AT THE MISSION FIELD**, ABINGDON PRESS, NASHVILLE, 2003, 144 PAGES.

It's hard to know what to do with books like this. These kind of church growth manuals are now legion, and offer a standard pattern. First, they offer concrete proof that their silver bullet solution to church growth actually works. In this case it's the numerical and financial growth that occurred in the author's own denomination, the American Baptist Churches of the West, between 1997 and 2003. Second, they contain an obvious zeal for the growth of the church. Third, they contain a plea that the whole suggested method is Biblically sound. Fourth, they demonstrate an embarrassing misuse or neglect of the Bible. These books are admirable in so many ways, often have excellent worldly wisdom, attempt Biblical justifications, and yet they struggle to convince the discerning reader because of their infantile approach to Scripture. All these things are true of Paul Borden's book. Let's briefly summarise the book, and then consider its strengths and weaknesses.

### OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

Dr Borden believes that denominational structures have been a major impediment to the formation of evangelistic congregations (chapter one). His solution has two major parts. The first is an understanding of the importance of accountability for fruitfulness (chapter two is entitled 'No Accountability: No Change'). The second is an emphasis

on the singular importance of leadership in denominational organizations and congregations (chapter three is entitled 'Leadership Leadership Leadership'). The two are related; effective leaders will be those who embrace accountability for fruitfulness. He acknowledges the many aspects of fruitfulness according to the New Testament (pp.54-55) but his method requires a strictly numerical measure of fruitfulness.

### IMPACT OF PRINCIPLES...

#### On Denominational Leaders

The radical nature of Dr Borden's method becomes clear when he outlines what his principles meant, in practice, for different parts of his denomination. The denomination agreed to suspend the operation of all previous boards and by-laws, and turn the running of those over to an Executive Minister and his staff (p.124) who were then accountable for generating the set target of growth, which was to see 70% of their churches experiencing numerical growth in five years (p66).

Regional consultants were allocated 7-10 local churches in which they were to run Dr Borden's church growth program. As he says on page 35:

"After I came we informed this staff of consultants that their future employment with the region *would depend not upon how well they serviced their respective congregations* but whether the seven to ten congregations they would work with intensely for a year grew in average worship attendance by a minimum of five percent. If most of the seven to ten congregations grew, they would get a raise. If, however, the majority failed to grow,

they would need to find new employment." (italics mine)

#### On Pastors

The impact on pastors was equally radical. Pastors were informed that those who failed to see numerical growth in their churches, and then sought to change churches, would not receive any assistance in doing so from the denomination (p.48). Those pastors who underwent the leadership training, and whose churches undertook the consultancy program, and yet failed to see numerical growth in three years, were encouraged to leave the ministry, or helped to find pastoral employment in another denomination or state (p.49).

#### On Congregations

Congregations who agreed to undergo the church growth consultations received a year of seminars on leadership, mission, fundraising, and pastoral leadership (p84-104). Those requiring a new pastor entered the 'Growth Track' option. This involved considering only those pastors the denominational consultants put forward for interview. The denomination promised to only recommend pastors with a proven track record of growth. Churches were encouraged to hire on the basis of proven performance, not potential. The denomination sourced these pastors from all over the United States and various denominations, but they had to subscribe to Baptist principles. It is not clear how many churches received new pastors along these lines, as page 53 implies that it may have been as high as 40% (86 churches), but page 105 implies that it may have been around 40 churches, or 20% of their churches. Either

way, it was a massive program of pastoral replacement.

Each chapter begins with an anecdote of how these changes impacted actual churches and pastors for the better, bringing much longed for growth to Dr Borden's denomination.

### STRENGTHS OF THE BOOK

The book contains many helpful practical suggestions for improving the efficiency of denominational bodies and improving their capacity to resource churches (p.38). There is also an admirable desire to see pastors commit to longer term ministries instead of changing churches whenever conflicts arise, or growth proves harder than expected to come by (p.65). The suggestion that effective pastors run networks of 'training clusters' for other pastors is a welcome one that encourages co-operation between churches and shows an appreciation of the fact that pastoral training must continue beyond college (p.103). The greatest strength of the book is Dr Borden's sense of evangelistic urgency, and zeal to see the local church as a dynamic entity of mission (p.138).

### WEAKNESSES OF THE BOOK

#### The Sheer Lack of Biblical Reflection

To oppose any of the suggestions in the book is difficult because you get the impression that to raise objections is to defend sloppiness, laziness, cowardice, and to have a greater concern for job security than the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, I'll venture the following criticisms.

Unfortunately, the weaknesses of the book are more obvious than the strengths. The first of these is the sheer lack of biblical reflection. In a

book of 144 pages, a mere four pages are given to 'Theological Assumptions' (pp.136-139). That's not a lot. The theological assumptions turn out to be truisms about God's missionary agenda and the need for evangelistic urgency. Such truisms could be used to justify any system that claims to be aimed at church growth. They fail to justify the specifics of Dr Borden's radical vision for denominational governance and pastoral employment. Such a lack of biblical reflection may be the result of his conviction that "Principles relating to leadership, organizational structure and behavior, culture, and how humans behave individually and in groups *are as true as those truths upon which we build our theology*" (p.13) (italics mine).

#### Poor Biblical Reflection

When Dr Borden does seek to demonstrate the biblical soundness of his approach, his treatment of the biblical text fails to do so. For example, he states that the New Testament epistles show the apostles evaluating the churches. They are essentially "consultations about things they had done well or aspects of ministry where they had performed poorly" (p.16). Similarly, Jesus is prepared to hold the seven churches accountable in Revelation 1-3 (p.137). This presumably justifies Dr Borden's insistence on numerical accountability. What he fails to note is that numerical growth does not appear once as a criterion for Jesus' judgments and commendations in Revelation 1-3.

Perhaps I'm being overly cynical, and shouldn't be so numerically obsessed myself, but what exactly are the number of New Testament verses that stress the importance of the churches being accountable for their

"numerical performance"? Approximately zero. What are the number of verses about the importance of the churches being accountable for their "moral and theological performance"? Approximately hundreds. Perhaps something is going on here that we are meant to notice. Now one could argue that this stark difference is present because all the New Testament churches were numerically healthy, and so the issue wasn't addressed but would have been if the churches were declining. And if one argued that, one may be right, but it would be an argument from a deep-space amount of silence. The fact is that the New Testament offers many grounds for repudiating the leadership of church leaders, but it never does so on the numerical grounds that Dr Borden suggests.

#### Insubstantial Anecdotes

The book is punctuated with anecdotes of churches that experienced significant numerical growth as a result of adopting the "Growth Track" method. The stories are short and 'magical'. They fail to convince, and leave the reader with a thousand questions. No indication is given as to what is taught in those churches, or their philosophy of ministry, music, preaching, or evangelism. Maybe those churches have been 'converted' to something better, or maybe not. It's impossible to tell from the anecdotes. All that is obvious is that they grew numerically and financially and endured hardship and sacrifice along the way. I suspect that if Charles Spurgeon ran a church that would be likely to happen. I suspect that if Robert Schuller ran a church that would be likely to happen. The gospel value of their respective ministries, however, would vary considerably. The anecdotes give

no indication as to whether the growing churches are being run by Spurgeons or Schullers, or whether that is even a valid question to ask. If John Piper or Mark Driscoll or John MacArthur were put forward to replace me in a pastoral position, perhaps I would be tempted to step aside for the good, and growth, of a congregation. If, on the other hand, Joel Osteen was my likely successor, I think they'd have to pry the congregation from my cold dead hands.

#### FINAL QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

The effectiveness of Dr Borden's program seems very reliant on the ability of the denomination to recruit, from outside itself, a large number of pastors who have a proven track record of growth. There is of course a question of principle here: how is this not robbing Peter to pay Paul? But there is also a practical question: how are denominations outside the United States going to access a pool of potential pastors large enough to fund such a large scale pastoral replacement strategy?

It is stated that small churches are a function of an agrarian way of life that is no longer relevant to a modern urban context (p.58, 140), but there is no explanation or defense of this statement.

The centralizing of denominational power that is essential to Dr Borden's model is a concern. He says on page 67, "I see my primary task as Executive Minister to be the keeper and caster of the vision and mission [of the denomination]." I would personally need a great deal more convincing that any person in a congregationalist denomination should have that role. Except for stating his belief that it worked in his context,

he fails to make the case that this is what denominational leadership is for. I would hope any denominational structure can supply first class help and resources for local churches, but that is quite different from suggesting that one figure will supply the vision for what those churches ought to be. We did try that for about a thousand years and then for rather good reasons decided to become Protestants.

A final thought: one wonders how Dr Borden can insist so adamantly that his kind of numerical accountability is essential for growth when previous eras of church growth occurred without it. As far as I am aware the Chinese churches have not had to set growth targets in order to grow. Neither did the pastors of the First Great Awakening promise to resign if churches didn't grow. If Dr Borden's numerical accountability wasn't on view in such cases, and yet the churches grew, perhaps something else was going on. The book seems oblivious to that possibility.

#### CONCLUSION

Dr Borden states that congregations should be upset when a year goes by without conversions (p.142). This is true, for the gospel is God's power for salvation, and if we don't see people being converted then deep soul searching is in order. But *Hit the Bullseye* nowhere explains why its particular model should be our response. If we're looking for Biblically justified suggestions for helping churches to be more evangelistic, and denominations to be more efficient, Paul Borden's silver bullet flies wide of the mark.

Matthew Arkapaw



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