

# THE LEVER

THE BI-ANNUAL JOURNAL OF BAPTIST EVANGELICALS TODAY



## D IS FOR DENOMINATION REVISITING THE BAPTIST FUTURE

### 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 sixth edition of the Lever. This time we delve back into the dreaded area of denomination deliberations. For most, it's very easy not to get excited about such matters: 'It's the coalface of church ministry that's important', 'let the powers that be shuffle things around – it doesn't impact me one way or the other', 'yaaawn'. But it *is* important that we consider these things. The Baptist Churches of NSW and the ACT will soon have proposals before them that have potentially far reaching consequences for their collective work (which involves the expenditure of monies your local church has contributed), the role of the bi-annual Assembly of church delegates (which involves the extent to which local churches can influence denominational agencies), and the authority of denominational leaders (which involves the extent to which they can influence local churches). No one who cares about the freedom, orthodoxy, and health of their local church should be indifferent to such consequences.

We hope Lever readers who belong to our denomination will familiarise themselves with the 'Directions 2012' recommendations, and make their reactions known to the relevant taskforces. As for BET, some of our main concerns remain jealously guarding the place and integrity of Assembly, being exceedingly cautious about moves to centralise denominational authority, and having a strong, but not isolationist, view of the autonomy of the local church in areas such as property, finances, pastoral appointments, and so on. This issue of the Lever will address some of these matters under the following headings: Directions, Definitions, Dollars, Data, and Debate. We hope you find it helpful.

Matthew Arkapaw



## DENOMINATIONAL DIRECTION: 'DO TWO WALK TOGETHER UNLESS THEY HAVE AGREED?'

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For the last three years in NSW Baptist circles, following the denominational planning day in 2007, there has been a lot of talk about denominational direction. The slogan hanging like a banner over the whole conversation has been 'Directions 2012'. The first working paper issued by the Directions 2012 research steering group in April 2009 pictured our denomination parked "at the crossroads" and asleep at the wheel, needing to wake up and decide which way it would go; the pastors of the denomination, according to that report, "want [an] appointed denominational leader to take primary responsibility for developing the denomination's vision." And when the taskforce reports were published a year later, in June 2010, the governance task force diagnosed the denomination as lacking "an overarching ... vision" (defining "vision" as "God's 'big picture' direction for the future of the denomination") and proposed that the denomination appoint a Director of Ministries who would be "an inspirational leader ... for the local churches," responsible to "give spiritual leadership and vision to the churches of the Union."

What are we to make of all this direction-talk? Should a denomination have a "direction", and (if it should) how should that direction be determined, communicated and maintained?

At one level the rhetoric of direction is hard to argue against. It is difficult to make a credible case for stagnation, confusion or aimless wandering. There is something inspiring about being part of a unified, purposeful movement, and (conversely) something heart-breaking and soul-destroying about belonging to a group that spends all its time travelling in circles or debating which way to turn.

But when we drill down beneath the unobjectionable generalities on the surface of the issue, it becomes clear that there are some crucial distinctions and clarifications that need to be made – distinctions and clarifications that go to the heart of what it means to follow Jesus and to belong to his people, and to be a family of churches serving him together.

And so, with our current denominational conversations in mind, I want to propose three theses as basic principles that ought to inform our understanding of direction and denominations:

### 1. THE DIRECTION OF THE CHURCH IS GIVEN TO IT BY THE LORD JESUS

The first and most important thing that needs to be said about the direction of churches and denominations is that it comes from the Lord Jesus. The work of Christ (in his proclamation of the Kingdom, his death in our place on the cross, his resurrection and ascension, his outpouring of the Spirit and his commissioning and empowerment of the apostles) provides for us his people not only the salvation by which we live but also the cause *for* which we live. He is the pioneer on whom we are to fix our eyes; he is the shepherd whom we are to follow.

It is tempting to dismiss that basic principle of the sole Lordship of Christ over the church as a pious platitude that can be safely taken for granted while we move on to the more interesting topics of vision-casting, direction-setting and strategic management. But Christ's Lordship over his church is not like the symbolic rule of an absentee figurehead; it is the kind of rule that ought to make a real,

discernible difference to the direction that his church travels in and the way in which that direction is set. The church that lives under the Lordship of Jesus is not like a ship sitting at anchor in the harbour, waiting for a visionary leader to come along and tell them what "God's 'big picture' direction" might be; it is a ship that has already set sail and has been told God's big picture direction in Christ. When we read the Scriptures, Christ is speaking to us by his Spirit, setting the direction for us to travel in.

### 2. THE TASK OF A PASTOR IS TO LEAD THE CHURCH IN FOLLOWING CHRIST

If Christ is the one who sets the direction for his church, it is no accident that it is to pastor-teachers that the New Testament gives the principal responsibility of reminding the church to follow in that direction. It is the elders/pastors of the church whom Peter and Paul charge with the task of serving as the "shepherds" of the flock (1 Peter 5:1-5, Acts 20:28); it is "those who spoke the word of God to you" that the writer to the Hebrews tells his readers to remember, and whose example he urges them to imitate (Hebrews 13:7).

The fact that it is the pastors/elders/overseers of the local church to whom the New Testament gives this responsibility fits well with the nature of their work. They are to lead as teachers, whose work it is – day by day and week by week – to "speak the word of God" to his people, reminding the church of the Lord Jesus and exhorting them in his name. And they are to be the kind of teachers who teach not only by word but also by example – hospitable, accessible, local leaders, whose

“way of life” is transparent and familiar to those whom they lead.

When the church looks to other sources for its direction-setting leadership – whether it is to bishops and popes or to charismatic leaders or to denominational administrators and market researchers – the result is to undermine a critical dimension of how the New Testament teaches us to expect that the Lordship of Christ will be exercised over his church.

### 3. A DENOMINATION WORTH BELONGING TO ALREADY HAS A COMMON DIRECTION TO TRAVEL IN

If that is the case, then a denomination that is worth belonging to is one that already has a common direction to travel in. We do not first decide to associate with each other in a denomination and then start enquiring about what direction we might travel in; we walk together because we have already found that we are agreed about the direction we should travel in and we have some common convictions about the right way of travelling toward that destination.

There is of course a place for denominational leaders, who exercise a responsible stewardship over the co-operative agencies and activities of the denomination and see to it that the work of those agencies is done with faithfulness and creativity, in keeping with the shared convictions of the churches in the Union. There may be a role for a ‘Director of Ministries’ to give that sort of oversight to the various agencies of the denomination; the pros and cons of that proposal are beyond the scope of this article.

But to give that person the added, episcopal, task of telling the churches of the union what their vision ought to be is to rely on a human, earthly leader to do what is the work of God’s Spirit speaking through Scripture. The inevitable outworking of that is to take away from the responsibility of the pastors of local churches to be shepherds of the flock entrusted to their care, exercising real leadership by word and example, and to diminish the expectation that the churches and pastors of the union will offer each other a ministry of mutual counsel and exhortation, urging each other on to remain faithful to the calling we have received from Christ.

#### A PLEA TO OUR PASTORS

If it is true that the pastors of our denomination (or a sizeable proportion of them) are feeling a lack of direction, waiting for a visionary leader to tell us what “God’s ‘big picture’ direction” is for us, then it seems to me that it may well be among us, the pastors, that the renewal of vision and direction in our denomination will need to begin. The answer for us is not an inspirational human leader, standing high on a pedestal over the churches and telling us which way to go. The answer is a prayerful return to the Scriptures, asking God to remind us of the vision that is already ours in his word, and to fill our preaching and our pastoring with that great “big picture direction”, so that our churches are infused with a deep conviction about the Lord Jesus whom we follow and the Kingdom he proclaimed.

David Starling



## DENOMINATION DEFINITIONS (AND OTHER STUFF)

### INTRODUCTION

A central feature of the recommendations in the Directions 2012 proposals is the belief that a more empowered and obvious leadership would benefit the denomination. In what follows I venture my own reservations about this, arguing that such a belief can only arise without an accurate understanding of what a Baptist denomination actually is, by definition, and what its co-operative ministries are designed to do.

### CURRENT ASSUMPTIONS

The Directions 2012 recommendations are in favour of the Executive Committee (EC)/ Assembly Council (AC) providing denominational leadership and vision. This is assumed not least because one of the objects of the EC, as stated in By Law 6 and quoted on page 47 of Directions 2012 Taskforce Reports, is ‘to develop strategic plans for the Union as a whole’<sup>1</sup>. I don’t think we should assume that this objective is a right one. It needs to be argued for. To be convinced that the EC should provide greater ‘denominational leadership and vision’ I’d need to hear an argument that this was 1. Possible, and 2. Appropriate. I can think of reasons why it is neither.

I’ve never felt my local church should have leadership or vision from the denominational departments, agencies, or their staff. I hope they can provide excellent personal and technical *resources for helping* local churches be better churches, but this is all I see as their brief. The ‘union’ consists of the churches themselves. Properly understood, the ‘leaders’ are the leaders (lay and accredited) of local churches. Our strengths or weaknesses will be found there. Our denominational agencies

are for *help and resourcing*, not leadership *per se*. I don’t think the EC has a role to play in telling churches what they ought to be; with this one exception: they ought to be churches that believe in the 1979 Statement of faith (because they’ve agreed to believe it) and they ought to be churches that support the co-operative budget (because by virtue of joining the Union they’ve agreed to do that).

The problem with desiring ‘denominational leadership and vision’ from the EC/AC is that it is a categorical error. It fails to understand what a denomination is. We often point to the way a corporation benefits from ‘strong leadership’ and ‘clear vision’. Likewise, we see how this is the case in a local church.

### DEFINITIONS

But the denomination is neither a corporation nor a church. ***The denomination is a collective of independent churches who form a union in order to do co-operative ministries they cannot do on their own.*** My church can’t run a Bible college, or a mission agency, or an aid organisation, so it partners with a large group of other churches for the purpose of running those co-operative ministries. Via an assembly of those churches, and a variety of organisational structures, those churches instruct the co-operative ministries in their task, and monitor their performance. The agencies are not responsible for instructing the churches in what the churches ought to be or do. ***In other words, the agencies are not responsible for setting a ‘vision’ before the churches.*** The departments and agencies have a bunch of discreet tasks they will either do well or not so well, and the EC has a role in monitoring that. So, as I say, local pastors have no reason to look

to the denominational bodies for their ‘vision and leadership’. The EC is not a church. The Local church gathers around the word of God and has the Spirit of God, thus giving it all it needs to lead and envision itself, under God. I don’t elect the EC to give me vision and direction, but to look over the work of the co-operative ministries that my church helps to fund.

### IMPOSSIBILITIES

An axiom of leadership is that if a person has responsibilities they need to be given commensurate **authority**. There’s no point telling someone they have to do something and then not giving them the power to carry it out. Similarly, the responsible person has some kind of **accountability**; if they are given appropriate authority and fail to meet their responsibilities, or actualise their goals, then something will happen to them (talk to the boss, get more training, get demoted, whatever). When a good corporation fails to meet profit objectives it takes action (people get fired, plants close down, etc).

If the EC said the denomination ought to achieve certain things and the denomination failed to, it’s impossible to sack a few churches, or even change a few churches! It thus seems fruitless to develop ‘overall strategic goals’ for the denomination. To put it bluntly, what is the point of developing goals and vision for the churches when there is no authority to make them happen, and no consequences for when they don’t?

If the EC is responsible for providing a strategic plan for the denomination (whatever that means), then exactly what authority and accountability is being suggested? This is in *desperate* need of explanation. As I’ve

said, I believe that the very nature of our denomination means this whole idea is by definition impossible. I'm yet to hear an argument that it is possible, let alone an argument that it is desirable. It would be very frustrating to develop a strategic plan for the denomination only to discover that it was impossible to implement, and not what people wanted anyway.

Goals *can* be set for the departments and agencies, and enforced to some extent (through the hiring and firing of staff, annual review and so on). But as I understand it, each of the departments and agencies already have their own goals and vision – so there's nothing lacking in that respect. If they find their own structures to be inhibitive, then by all means choose a new structure and set new goals, but that is an entirely different thing to 'setting objectives for the denomination as a whole.'

#### DEFINITIONAL CONFUSION IN DIRECTIONS 2012

This confusion over the nature of the denomination can be seen in a few particular tendencies in the Directions 2012 recommendations. For example, it is clear in the willingness to compare the Union of churches with Morling College and Baptist Community Services (BCS); pointing out the benefit of a more unified corporate structure by pointing to their successes<sup>2</sup>. This, however, is to compare apples and oranges. Morling and BCS are not affiliations of independent departments; the Principal or CEO has powers over each part of their organisation that no person can ever have over local churches.

We see in this example the ambiguity in Directions 2012's definition of 'the Union.' Chiefly, is the denomination *the denominational agencies and sub-committees* (head office, the Executive Committee, MSD, committee for the ministry, etc) or are we talking about *the associated churches as a whole*?

When the recommendations speak of the Assembly Council providing direction and goals for the denomination this should be narrowed to 'providing direction and goals for the agencies and sub-committees of the denomination', and not the associated congregations. Thus, the Recommendation for the Assembly Council ought to be for it 'To develop in consultation with all members of the Leadership Co-ordination Team an overall strategic direction for the *agencies and sub-committees of the Union* including communication, implementation and promotion.'*(italics added to the original recommendation)*<sup>3</sup>.

To suggest the AC should provide goals and aims for the denomination as a whole is to give it a responsibility without the requisite authority; how could they be accountable for meeting those goals without having the power to hold churches accountable for meeting those goals, or without having the power to hire and fire the local church leaders (the most significant persons in the equation)? The Director of Ministries, or the AC, or anyone for that matter, cannot direct the churches to do anything (except adhere to the doctrines they have voluntarily covenanted together to keep), so it should be made clearer that what is proposed is a system where such persons are responsible for the effectiveness *of the agencies under their control*, not the autonomous congregations which are not

under their control. To do anything other than this would be unfair to all parties.

Given this, it becomes clear that the reason the EC does not currently meet its third objective to 'develop strategic plans for the Union as a whole'<sup>4</sup> is because the third objective, unlike the second (which has to do with departments), is impossible, as well as 'baptistically' inappropriate. Consideration should be given to removing it from the objectives of the EC, and from the objectives of the proposed Assembly Council.

#### ASSEMBLY MATTERS

If one were tempted to take the above point as a rationale for giving the AC, or Director of Ministries, the requisite authority over local congregations, our Baptist value of autonomous congregationalism ought to protect us from such temptations.

Implicit in such temptations is negativity toward the role and value of Annual Assemblies. The notion that assembly is somehow *intrinsically deficient* and ought to give way so some kind of 'empowered leadership' model is a shift in baptistic assumptions and needs to generate more discussion than it has. Again, it shouldn't just be assumed, it should be argued for.

The suggestion that someone or some group ought to lead without constant reference to the Assembly of delegates from local churches is simply oxymoronic when it comes to the nature of Baptist churchmanship. It is *only with* constant reference to the fact of, and the notion of, Assembly, that one should presume to offer any kind of leadership in a congregational denomination.

In a similar vein, the negativity I hear from many toward committees that 'merely process business rather than casting vision' is, I admit, baffling to me, but I suspect it arises again from the confusion about denominational leadership. As stated, committees are there to resource and help the real (local) leadership of the churches, not create 'vision' and 'progress' *per se*. Committees, by their very diversity and slow moving nature, guard against persuasive agenda driven people (of any theological persuasion) from being an undue influence in a congregational denomination.

#### FINAL MUSINGS, RANDOM OPINIONS

One final comment on another general aspect of the 2012 recommendations: The inefficiency of the Union, in its current structural set up, is not demonstrated with particular examples. It is assumed, and backed up by way of non-specific quotations.<sup>5</sup> But more needs to be done than simply noting 'a strong perception that the agencies of the Baptist Union are acting in their own interests.'<sup>6</sup> Perceptions without proof are not sufficient reason for widespread change.

Similarly, just how the proposed system would improve efficiency is not demonstrated with particular examples; it is assumed by way of positive references to other organisations that operate something like the proposed new system. What is missing is an explanation from persons in the departments about how under the current system they'd like to do X (some specific action), but cannot because... (and give reasons) - but under the new recommendations they could do X, because... (and give reasons). What is it in particular that MSD or GiA, for example, *cannot* do

under the present structure, that they *could* do under the proposed structure? This is nowhere made clear. Without such specifics the rationale for change seems like hearsay.

One final comment on a very specific recommendation: I would be opposed to the removal of faculty appointments from assembly.<sup>7</sup> These are arguably the most important appointments in the life of our association. Recently in Victoria a faculty member was re-elected to their college though his published views on homosexuality are progressive. Accepting the proposal to remove faculty appointments from assembly would leave people at the grassroots of our movement unable to impact such appointments. I say this as a matter of principle, not out of any concerns about the current state of Morling College, the orthodoxy of which, and in light of the direction of other colleges, I give great thanks to God for.

#### CONCLUSION

So long as Directions 2012 recommendations regarding denominational 'leadership' continue to conflate the Union's departments and agencies with the local congregations themselves, I encourage Baptist pastors in NSW and the ACT to view them with a thoughtful suspicion.

Matthew Arkapaw



#### ENDNOTES

1. NSW & ACT Baptist Churches, Directions 2012, 'Growing a Mission-Shaped Family of Churches' TASKFORCE REPORTS, 28 June, 2010 (hereafter, TASKFORCE REPORTS).
2. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 44, 52 [nb.4].
3. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 62, point 3.c.
4. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 47.
5. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 39, 41 [8.a-f], 42 [11], 43 [22]).
6. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 60.
7. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 58.

## DENOMINATIONAL DEBATE

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### DENOMINATIONS AND DEBATE

Denominations exist because of debate.

The birth of the main evangelical denominations took place in the context of the theological debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The process began with the parting of the ways between the Roman Catholic church and the reformers, whose convictions about the gospel were declared to be incompatible with that church's official doctrines. It continued with the separation of the dissenting denominations from the State churches of the reformation – this time without mutual anathemas and without the necessary implication that each of the churches separating from one another was claiming to be the sole guardian of the true gospel, but still with a recognition that the differences in understanding were serious enough to warrant the breaking of the bonds of institutional communion.

The very existence of the evangelical denominations thus resulted from the tension between two gospel-driven impulses: the impulse toward association (in response to the gospel-reality that our identity as the church is possessed in common with 'all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours') and the impulse toward liberty of conscience (in response to the gospel-reality that 'we will all stand before the judgment seat of God', when 'each of us will give an account of himself' to the Lord Jesus).

From the beginning, therefore, the dissenting denominations took debate seriously. They had broken away from State churches and from the Roman Catholic church with the

conviction that individual Christians and congregations of believers must not sign over their freedom of conscience to some higher earthly authority. With those painful debates and costly decisions still fresh in their minds, they framed the terms of their own associational life in a way that preserved a continuing space for discussion and debate.

The framers of the Second London Confession, for example, carefully stipulated the function of Assembly as a forum that ought to enable the airing and resolution of differences:

'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.'<sup>1</sup>

### GOOD DEBATE

Of course, not all debate is good debate. As I have argued in an earlier Lever article, a good Assembly debate is shaped and determined by the Lordship of Christ of the churches,

and aims not simply 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 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.<sup>2</sup>

### FOSTERING GOOD DEBATE

Who has the responsibility of fostering that sort of quality of debate in our Assemblies? I would argue that we all do, but that there are particular responsibilities that rest on the pastors of our churches and the officers, committees and agencies of the denomination.

To start with the latter of those two groups, I would argue that, as delegates and appointees of the Assembly, the officers, committees and agencies of the denomination have a responsibility to the Assembly to schedule it with adequate time for discussion and

debate, to chair it with impartiality and firmness, and to furnish it with clear, succinct reports, timely and transparent notices of motion, and lucid, informative answers to questions. The standard of Assembly debate rises and falls in response to the respect with which Assembly is treated by the committees, agencies and officers it has appointed.

But the responsibility for the quality of Assembly debate does not rest solely on the shoulders of the officers and entities that it appoints. There is an equal responsibility carried by the member churches of the union and their pastors. We can contribute to the quality of debate at Assembly by showing up with prayerful and purposeful seriousness, by engaging with the notices of motion in the lead-up to Assembly to catalyse a constructive discussion and evaluation of what is proposed, and by contributing with graciousness, clarity and boldness to the discussions on the floor of Assembly.

Over the next twelve months, as the long process of the Directions 2012 discussion arrives at the stage where proposals will be brought to Assembly for decisions to be made, we will have the opportunity to show as a union of churches whether we know how to have a debate that is genuine, robust and glorifying to God. Let's work and pray together toward that goal.

David Starling



### ENDNOTES

1. Second London Confession (1677/89) ch.26.15
2. "In Joyful Assembly...": Why Assembly matters, and how to do it to the glory of God, The Lever 4 (2009): 13-15.

# DENOMINATIONAL DATA

## INTRODUCTION

*There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics*

This much quoted quotation rings a bell with most of us. We seem to know instinctively that Scripture isn't the only thing that can be manipulated – numbers can just as easily be twisted in order to grind one's own axe, so to speak. On the other hand, statistics can tell a story. Properly obtained and interpreted data can wake us up to a reality we had previously denied as 'merely anecdotal'.

## DIRECTIONS 2012 AND THE NCLS

In 2009 the Baptist Union of NSW and the ACT conducted a major survey of church attendees. The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) were enlisted and, with some additions particular to Baptist churches, used their standard survey format. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on the churches that could be used by the Directions 2012 program. Directions 2012 is a wide-ranging assessment of the denomination in which various taskforces have been assigned the job of making recommendations to improve church health in the areas of Mission, Baptist Identity, the well being of pastors, the use of resources, and governance. Over 13000 people, from more than 200 churches, completed the survey. Churches received their own results, and an interpretation of the denomination wide results in the two books "Directions 2012 Taskforce Reports, 28 June 2010"<sup>1</sup> and "Directions2012 Final Report from the Directions 2012 Research Project, 18 June 2010."<sup>2</sup>

## CAUTIONS

What to make of all this information? As I've tried to think through how to sensibly use this information in my own church I've ruminated on the pros and cons of the NCLS. Perhaps you'll find my very brief observations a helpful starting point for forming your own views.

Here's how I began a written report to my congregation on our results: *The NCLS assesses a church's strengths and weaknesses according to the perceptions of those who fill in a 15 minute survey. Nine core qualities are placed into three categories: Internal core qualities are faith, worship, and belonging. Inspirational core qualities are vision, leadership, and innovation. Outward core qualities are service, faith-sharing, and inclusion. The NCLS in its current form assumes the gospel orthodoxy of each church, as it does not seek to assess what the church actually believes or teaches. In other words 'truthfulness', perhaps the most vital core quality, does not feature.*

That last sentence is the most problematic aspect of the NCLS. The NCLS seems oblivious to the possibility that a faulty gospel may well lie at the heart of a church's or a denomination's problems. To be fair, some churches did receive a version of the survey with a section entitled 'What You Believe' which had a question each on Jesus' divine and human natures, his resurrection, the virgin birth, and life after death. In addition, the Leader Surveys (filled out by church staff and leadership teams) had a question on inerrancy. A mere 1800 of the 13688 forms had these questions.<sup>3</sup> Our church received no results on belief. So, few questions were asked in this vital area, and they were only asked of about 1 in 7 respondents. As a result, the survey's capacity to help me think

accurately about the congregation and the denomination is greatly diminished.

One more general note of caution, before moving on to a positive. Just because the data may successfully isolate problems (such as numerical decline) does not necessarily justify the particular solutions offered in the Directions 2012 recommendations. It can be very easy to become so despondent at the statistics that we shout out 'something must be done!', and what we really mean is 'anything must be done!' As a result, wholesale changes to the denomination's governance can be proposed as a solution to numerical decline without ever having determined if denominational governance was even a factor in that decline. We ought to be wary of such question begging proposals.

## POSITIVES

More positively, the NCLS threw up some hard hitting data on evangelism. I suspect that we needn't look elsewhere for the answers to our concerns about congregational and denominational growth. At my church faith-sharing ranked 9th of the 9 core qualities; an upsetting statistic if ever there was one. Across the denomination it ranked the same. "When attendees in NSW/ACT Baptist churches were asked to identify up to three aspects they most valued from a list of 13, the main two options relating to mission ranked 8th and 9th...By contrast, use of contemporary styles of worship and music came in 3rd, behind bible teaching and small groups." "When attendees were asked to identify up to 3 aspects of church they most wanted addressed, 'encouraging people to share their faith or invite others' came in 5th out of 11 options' ".<sup>4</sup> Being alerted to these things is very helpful. Another helpful

aspect to the NCLS data is the way it makes a distinction between types of newcomers to church. By separating church transfers from genuine newcomers churches are better able to see whether the church is helping people become Christians, or just attracting other local Christians. The best recipe for evangelistic apathy is to be stable or growing numerically, but without conversions. The NCLS assessed 14% of churches to be in this category. In a narrower study, Dr Jonathan Pratt found 9 of 16 churches sampled to be in this category.<sup>5</sup> Such findings have been a great spur at our church to revisit our seriousness about evangelism. Perhaps they will be at yours.

## CONCLUSION

Let me encourage you to make a sensible use of the Directions 2012 data at your church. Be open to any tough truths it may reveal, especially in the area of evangelism. On the other hand, be wary of taskforce recommendations that trade on statistics but fail to demonstrate how they will actually improve things. Most especially, remember that the faithfulness of our churches to the gospel, something barely touched on in the NCLS, must remain our great ambition.

Matthew Arkapaw



## ENDNOTES

1. NSW & ACT Baptist Churches, Directions 2012, 'Growing a Mission-Shaped Family of Churches', TASKFORCE REPORTS, 28 June, 2010 (hereafter, TASKFORCE REPORTS).
2. NSW & ACT Baptist Churches, Directions 2012, 'Growing Healthy Churches' Final Report from the Directions 2012 RESEARCH PROJECT, Dr Jonathan Pratt, 18 June, 2010 (hereafter, RESEARCH PROJECT).
3. Commissioned Research Report For the Baptist Union NSW and ACT: Directions 2012 Identity Task Force – Selected Results Catalogue, pp.19-22. Information available from directions2012@baptistnsw.asn.au.
4. TASKFORCE REPORTS, p.9
5. RESEARCH PROJECT, pp.35-38.

## DENOMINATIONAL DOLLARS

How we use our “denominational dollars” is the pointy end of the relationship between the local church and the “denomination”. I must declare my interests up front. As a lecturer at Morling College, my salary is partly paid by these “denominational dollars” and I think that is a great thing! I have also been the church treasurer at Macquarie Baptist Church for the last 2 years or so and see finances from the side of the local church as well. There are two issues related to finance that the Directions 2012 papers raise for me.

The first is the need to clarify the confusion about what the “denomination” actually is. This confusion is present throughout the taskforce reports, not just taskforce 5, but let me illustrate with a statement from the report of taskforce 5:

“The Baptist Union exists to provide services and motivation to member churches that the churches are unable to obtain in isolation.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement highlights the confusion. What is the Baptist Union? In this sentence it initially seems to refer to what is earlier called the “Departments and Agencies of the union”<sup>2</sup> agencies such as MSD, BIF, Morling College, etc. But when you read this sentence further, you find that the “Baptist Union” also comprises “member churches”. The meaning of “Baptist Union” has shifted from the agencies that support the churches to now comprise the “member churches” themselves and the sentence becomes nonsense: “The Baptist Union exists to provide services and motivation to the Baptist Union”? Or, “Baptist Churches exist to provide services and motivation to Baptist Churches that the churches are unable to obtain in isolation”???

If you remove the first phrase “The Baptist Union” and replace it with “The departments and agencies of the union”, the sentence becomes: “The departments and agencies of the union exist to provide services and motivation to member churches that the churches are unable to obtain in isolation.” With this statement, I am almost in complete agreement – it is only the role of “motivation” that I will quibble with, and I’ll come back to this. Apart from this, the statement is right and captures the important role of the agencies and departments of our union of churches. The churches do not exist to serve the departments and agencies – that is not Baptist ecclesiology. The churches are not franchises. The departments and agencies exist to serve the churches.

This is such a crucial point. It is in the local church first and foremost that the mission of Jesus is carried out. The agencies exist to support churches in their task - theirs is a serving and equipping role for the churches. However, with all the right talk of “mission” in recent years, I think that we may have loaded up the agencies with greater sense of responsibility than is warranted. Of course each of the agencies has a different role, and some, like BCS, will also have direct mission involvement as part of their brief. However, I wonder whether much of the “Directions 2012” discussion can have the effect of making the denominational agencies such as MSD, feel that they also have to bear the mission load directly themselves (and find the money to do this), rather than seeing that the mission does not have to happen directly through them, but that they exist to support the local churches, who are the ones engaged in mission. This is where my quibble about providing “motivation” comes into it. It is

the Gospel that provides the motivation for mission, the Gospel that is to be proclaimed in the local church and its ministries. It is not the role of the departments and agencies of the union to provide “motivation” to the churches. The advance of the Gospel in our churches should be a key part of the motivation for them! Let’s not get the cart before the horse! As churches, we need to be looking for ways to encourage MSD in the stories of Gospel growth in our churches so that they maintain the motivation in serving us. Motivation should run the other way.

Clarity here puts finances into perspective. For instance, the issue of the “poverty mentality” is a recurring one, particularly in relation to MSD.<sup>3</sup> It is not right that we lay more and more expectations on MSD so that they feel under resourced and overworked.

However, speaking of a “poverty mentality” makes me think of an illustration that might help to reframe the issue. Aid agencies who seek to meet the needs of those in poverty have administration costs. Generally those with low administrative costs are to be favoured over those with high admin costs, because more dollars go to those who are in need. The same is the case for the agencies and departments of our union of churches. If the local church is the front-line of Jesus’ mission, then it is simply a statement of fact that any money that is taken out of the church to support the administration is being taken away from front-line mission. There is not as much money to pay church staff (over 75% of our church budget at Macquarie Baptist goes to staff and college students and we would always love to put on more). Streamlining the administration and costs of the agencies and departments

of the union means more money can go into local church ministries. This is where Gospel growth will occur for our denomination. One of the concerns that I have is that many of the taskforces recommend putting on more centralized staff to drive the “mission”. The real danger here is that this takes financial resources away from the front line and may actually hinder our growth. If MSD is feeling under resourced and overworked, perhaps there needs to be a trimming of some of their services or some lateral thinking about how these services could otherwise be provided – and if they are not sure which ones to cut, maybe they could ask the churches what they could go without.

Now, do not get me wrong, I think there are very good reasons for supporting the co-operative budget (within reason), but those who have oversight of these agencies must continue to work for efficiency and be able to demonstrate how they will be able to provide their service better than the average local church can. The taskforce 5 recommendations along these lines are to be commended.

I must also say at this point, that as a church treasurer, I have found the support and resources of Church House to be very valuable. The staff have been very obliging and provided expertise that has proven very helpful. Indeed, one of the benefits of operating as part of a union of churches is the economies of scale in things like insurance and licences that reduce costs to individual churches and mean that more can be invested in local church ministry. My comments are in no way a criticism of those who currently support us so well in so many ways.

But the question has to keep being asked whether the services provided by the agencies and departments of the union are better than the average church can provide for itself. If not, then a redeployment of funds may be called for. Those who lead the various departments should not just seek to expand their services without consultation, which could have a negative effect on our sense of partnership in the Gospel.

This leads to the second issue for me, the issue of transparency and accountability in how these agencies and departments function. Without transparency and accountability, there is a reduced sense of ownership by local churches, and with no sense of ownership, financial support to the co-operative budget will always be limited.

I believe there needs to be greater accountability by the agencies to the churches for there to be ownership and greater support by the churches. The assembly plays a key role here – rather than dumbing it down, it needs to be ramped up. There needs to be a constant review process, through the committees of the union, that report back to the assembly and bring real decisions to the church representatives. Some might cry that this is inefficient, which it probably is, but the cost of bypassing the assembly is always going to be lack of ownership and ultimately a lack of support by the churches.

It was interesting to read the Anglican archbishop’s comments in the SMH on the 13th October accounting for the Sydney diocese’s huge losses through the GFC. He blamed church boards with an ethos “too trusting of one another and not sufficiently acute in seeking accountability”. Should we not learn from the mistakes of others?

Greater clarity about the nature of our union of churches and the role of our agencies and departments in serving the churches, and greater transparency and accountability of these agencies and departments are issues that need to be addressed if we are to effectively use the dollars given by our churches for the mission that Jesus has given our churches.

Anthony Petterson



### ENDNOTES

1. NSW & ACT Baptist Churches, Directions 2012, ‘Growing a Mission-Shaped Family of Churches’, TASKFORCE REPORTS, 28 June, 2010 (hereafter, TASKFORCE REPORTS), 133.
2. TASKFORCE REPORTS, 124.
3. For example, TASKFORCE REPORTS, 127.

## BOOK REVIEW: A NEW KIND OF BAPTIST CHURCH

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**A New Kind of Baptist Church: Reframing congregational government for the 21st century. Brian Winslade. Morling Press, 2010.**

A New Kind of Baptist Church is a disappointing book. Brian Winslade is an acute, articulate, intelligent observer, participant and practitioner within Baptist circles. His background, wide experience and the opportunities afforded by his current role as National Director of Australian Baptist Churches allows him to speak with some authority on the state of Baptist churches, and especially their polity. Dr. Winslade knows that this topic of polity is likely to induce yawns, but it is not this that disappoints. What disappoints me is that the book fails to deliver on its promise. What could have been a provocative book exploring possibilities and prospects for rethinking Baptist congregational polity or governance, really ends up being an argument for one kind of Baptist Church, and not a particularly new kind at that.

The book is quite ambitious and does a creditable job: Winslade divides his material into three: a largely historical review of how Baptists especially in the English-speaking world have inherited the distinctive polity that they have; a re-examination of the Biblical basis for Baptist polity with an emphasis on the mission of the church; and finally, he presents a case for larger churches adopting a sanctified 'Carver model' of governance. More on that last point later. For those who know little of Baptist history Winslade does a decent job of covering some of the key points in the emergence of 'BU' Baptists and their style of churchmanship. Along the way he has lots of positive and useful observations. I appreciated his clarity on the voluntary

character of Baptist associationalism, his willingness to critique the idea of ordination, his advocacy of eldership, and his recognition that in reality many diaconates are functional elderships. I think few would disagree with his critique of 'the one man ministry'.

A few years ago I was struck by a comment Dr. Winslade made in conversation. He suggested that the future for the mid-sized church would become increasingly bleak, and that the future lay with small and very large churches. Unfortunately A New Kind of Baptist Church deliberately focuses exclusively on a case for large churches and their governance. The emerging church movement gets brief positive comment but it is disappointing that Winslade decided not to address the question of how such emerging churches fit within Baptist ecclesiology. One is left with the impression that the way ahead for many churches is to become larger churches and consequently they need to renew their governance models as part of their growth.

Throughout the book there is a steady drumbeat of criticism against the traditional church members' meeting and the following of parliamentary style rules. Valid criticisms are sometimes made of seeing this model as 'democracy' and its openness to abuse by the articulate and quick-witted. Where Winslade offers "Alternative Models of Governance" in chapter 10, it turns out to be an adaptation of the "Policy Governance™ Model" formulated by Jim Carver. Like Winslade I do not think that a blanket objection can be made to the use of wisdom from the field of business, and I think that there is some wisdom to be gleaned from this chapter on the way in which larger churches in particular need to focus on policy issues rather than operational issues

in their principal decision-making bodies. The sanctified Carver model advocates a CEO style of church-leader, to whom all staff are solely accountable, and that he is then in turn accountable to a governance board who represent the interests of the owners. Sounds somewhat familiar? Isn't the denomination contemplating adopting for itself a model that 'works' for some of our larger churches? Some ambivalence exists in Winslade's account, however, as he makes clear that 'church members' are 'stakeholders' and not 'owners' but the governance board is really answerable to the owner only. To translate that into more traditional terms it seems Winslade is advocating a kind of Presbyterianism at the local church level. The tension between this and not merely the traditional outworking of congregational polity but also its very essence is not adequately explored.

Too often I felt that Dr. Winslade put up straw men when describing positions he wanted to deny, for instance regarding those who see Baptist polity as mandated by the New Testament rather than merely being a possible consistent outworking of it. Church planting as an alternative to growing larger churches also gets short shrift. Without being an expert in statistics one gets the feeling that some of that evidence was presented in a one-sided fashion. The scholarship he interacts with has a somewhat dated or parochial feel, which is also disappointing since there have been some interesting and rigorous treatments of Baptist polity in recent years. And too often unexamined ideas crop up. For instance 'vision-casting' turns up as a key requirement of leaders, a requirement beloved of many 'leadership' gurus, yet one which is oddly absent from the scriptures.

Even 'leadership' itself deserves more critique. In Winslade's account it is a central concept and 'teaching' occasionally gets a look-in. In the scriptures, however, the church leader is primarily a *teacher*-leader.

The book would have been the stronger if Dr. Winslade had chosen to discuss smaller churches and the emerging church movement. It would have been both stronger and more useful if he'd also directly addressed mid-sized churches, which is what most of us belong to in the BU NSW. It would have been stronger if he'd had the benefit of a good editor. At one point I winced; Winslade is defending the use of the 'CEO model' in contrast to the 'pastor model', "It needs to be recognised that shepherds in Biblical days were not actually there for the sake of the sheep. They were businessmen, not animal-care advocates. The sheep under their care were economic units to be tended for the purpose of maximum yield." Micah 3 & Ezekiel 34 instantly came to mind.

Hefin Jones



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