

## APPENDIX II

### A Baptist View of The Church

*Adopted by the Assembly of the Baptist Union of New South Wales  
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Baptists have a continuous history since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Many of their principles were explicitly proclaimed in the second half of the sixteenth century by the radical wing of the Reformation movement. They claim as their heritage also the great central stream of Christian doctrine and piety through the centuries, and have continuity with the New Testament Church in that they rejoice to believe and seek faithfully to proclaim the Apostolic Gospel and endeavour to build up the life of their Churches after what seems to them the New Testament pattern.

Although Baptists have for long held a position separate from that of other Communion, they have always claimed to be part of the one holy catholic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. They believe in the catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which He founded, of which He is the only Head, and in which He dwells by His Spirit, so that though manifested in many communions, organised in various modes, and scattered throughout the world, it is yet one in Him. The Church is the Body of Christ and a chosen instrument of the divine purpose in history.

It is in membership of a local Church in one place that the fellowship of the one holy catholic Church becomes significant. Indeed, such gathered companies of believers are the local manifestation of the one Church of God on earth and in heaven. Thus the Church at Ephesus is described in words which strictly belong to the whole catholic Church as "the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The vital relationship to Christ, which is implied in full communicant membership in a local Church carries with it membership in the Church which is both in time and in eternity, both militant and triumphant. To worship and serve in such a local Christian community is, for Baptists, of the essence of Churchmanship.

Such churches are gathered by the will of Christ and live by

the indwelling of His Spirit. They do not have their origin, primarily, in human resolution.

The life of a gathered Baptist Church centres in worship, in the preaching of the Word, in the observance of the two sacraments of Believers' Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in growth in fellowship and in witness and service to the world outside. Our forms of worship are in the Reformed tradition and are not generally regulated by liturgical forms. Our tradition is one of spontaneity and freedom, but we hold that there should be disciplined preparation of every part of the service. The sermon, as an exposition of the Word of God and a means of building up the faith and life of the congregation, has a central place in public worship. The scriptures are held by us to be the primary authority both for the individual in his belief and way of life and for the Church in its teaching and modes of government. It is the objective revelation given in scripture which is the safeguard against a purely subjective authority in religion. We firmly hold that each man must search the scriptures for himself and seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit to interpret them. We know also that Church history and Christian experience through the centuries are a guide to the meaning of scripture. Above all, we hold that the eternal Gospel—the life, death and resurrection of our Lord—is the fixed point from which our interpretation, both of the Old and New Testaments, and of later developments in the Church, must proceed.

The worship, preaching, observance of ordinances, fellowship and witness are all congregational acts of the whole Church in which each member shares responsibility, for all are held to be of equal standing in Christ, though there is a diversity of gifts and a difference of functions. This responsibility and this equality are focussed in the Church Meeting which, under Christ, cares for the well-being of the believing community and appoints its officers. It is the responsibility of each member, according to his gifts, to build up the life of his brother and to maintain the spiritual health of the Church (Rom. 15:14). It is the Church Meeting which takes the responsibility of exercising that discipline whereby the Church withdraws from members who are unruly and have ceased to share in her convictions and life.

The Church Meeting, though outwardly a democratic way of ordering the affairs of the Church, has deeper significance. It is the occasion when, as individuals and as a community, we submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stand under the judgments of God that we may know what is the mind of Christ. We believe that the structure of local Churches just described springs from the Gospel and best preserves its essential features.

Although each local Church is held to be competent, under

Christ, to rule its own life, Baptists, throughout their history, have been aware of the perils of isolation and have sought safeguards against exaggerated individualism. From the seventeenth century there have been "Associations" of Baptist Churches which sometimes appointed Messengers; more recently, their fellowship with one another has been greatly strengthened by Baptist Unions, the Baptist Missionary Societies and the Baptist World Alliance. Indeed, we believe that a local Church lacks one of the marks of a truly Christian community if it does not seek the fellowship of other Baptist Churches, does not seek a true relationship with Christians and Churches of other communions and is not conscious of its place in the one catholic Church. To quote from the Baptist Confession of 1677:

"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 occasions to further it . . . so the Churches . . . ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love and mutual edification."

This principle has been more recently re-stated by Dr. Hilyer Stratton in "Baptists, Their Message and Mission," namely—

"The associational principle becomes next to independency the most potent single development in Baptist Polity. Its rise seems providential, it operated for nearly three hundred years preparing the Churches for our era of large scale co-operation. The associational principle enabled Baptist Churches to maintain the independency of the local Church and at the same time it provided a means for them to co-operate with sister Churches in the larger work of the Kingdom."

A properly ordered Baptist Church will have its duly appointed officers. These will include the minister, deacons, Sunday School teachers and other Church workers. The Baptist conception of the ministry is governed by the principle that it is a ministry of a Church and not only a ministry of an individual. It is the Church which preaches the Word and celebrates the sacraments, and it is the Church which, through pastoral oversight, feeds the flock and ministers to the world. It normally does these things through the person of its minister, but not solely through him. Any member of the Church may be authorised by it, on occasion, to exercise the functions of the ministry, in accordance with the principle of the priesthood of all believers, to preach the Word, to administer baptism, to preside at the Lord's table, to visit, and comfort or rebuke members of the fellowship.

Baptists, however, have had from the beginning an exalted conception of the office of the Christian minister and have taken care to call men to serve as pastors. The minister's authority to

exercise his office comes from the call of God in his personal experience, but this call is tested and approved by the Church of which he is a member and in New South Wales by the Union of Churches. He receives intellectual and spiritual training and is then invited to exercise his gift in a particular sphere. His authority, therefore, is from Christ through the believing community. It is not derived from a chain of bishops held to be lineally descended from the Apostles, and we gratefully affirm to our non-episcopal communities, as to those episcopally governed, that the gifts of the Spirit and the power of God are freely given.

Many among us hold that since the ministry is the gift of God to the Church and the call to exercise the functions of a minister comes from Him, a man who is so called is not only the minister of a local Baptist Church but also a minister of the whole Church of Jesus Christ.