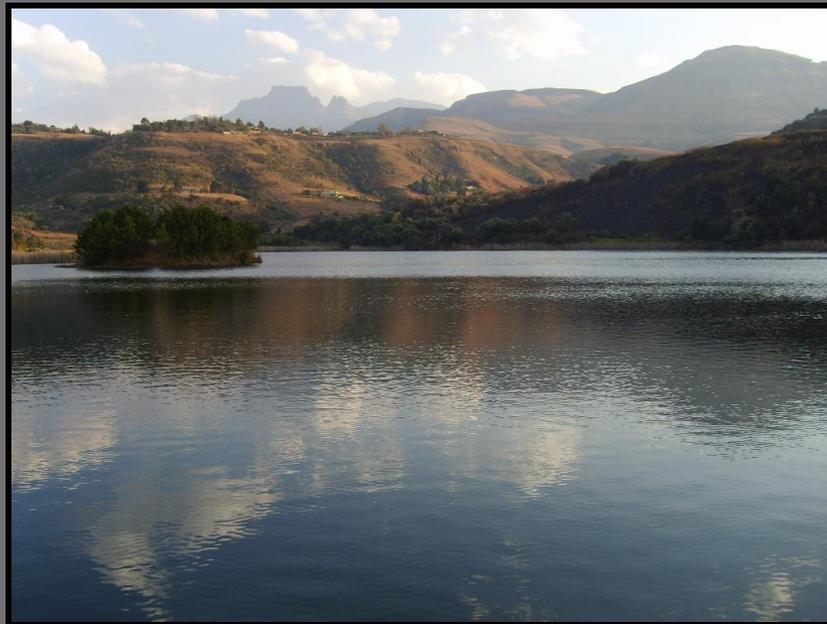


Baptist

# Denominationalism

Volume 2: Baptist denominationalism in Southern Africa



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I would like to express my gratitude to my dear wife and children, who have patiently endured my long hours of study over many years. Thank you.

Lastly, I am deeply conscious of the God of grace, whose kindness to sinners always amazes me. All glory to Your Name.

# VOLUME 2: BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

The analysis and evaluation of the three Baptist groupings in Southern Africa in this book is based on the framework developed in Volume 1: Baptist Denominationalism. This evaluation will not make sense unless there is some understanding of the framework. It is therefore recommended that Volume 1 is at the very least perused to get a gist of how the framework was put developed.

As a summary, the main headings of the framework together with a brief explanation are noted below. If Volume 1 has already been read, this first chapter can be skipped, as it is largely a repetition of the last chapter of Volume 1.

### 1.2 A FRAMEWORK FOR BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM

It needs to be noted that this framework is developed to evaluate Baptist groups in South Africa, where currently religious liberty is upheld. The framework below is developed in this context, and so religious liberty and soul competency will not be listed as key, *independent* principles in the framework.

#### 1.2.1 Strongly confessional

A Baptist denominational group needs to be confessional, and strongly so, if it is to be faithful to Baptist distinctives and biblical principles. This section describes four qualities of a suitable confession.

A critical point needs to be made at the outset to avoid confusion or misconstruing this section. The justification for a strong confessional basis is not made on the basis of the denominational structure having ecclesiastical authority over the local churches and issuing binding decrees. That is not the motivation for a strong confession. Rather, as the previous sections have demonstrated, a strong confession allows a group of autonomous churches to meaningfully establish and express their identity and beliefs so that they can enjoy unity in pursuing the goals of the denomination.

### ***1.2.1.1 Sufficiently comprehensive confession***

A clear and comprehensive confessional basis for a Baptist group can be motivated from four considerations.

Firstly, a clear, unambiguous confession is essential when a Baptist group is established, as it protects the liberty of conscience of the churches that are participating. Baptists have always insisted on the autonomy of the local church, and that membership in a group is entirely voluntary. In order to ensure denominational unity, member churches therefore need to know what they are participating in.

Secondly, Baptists have always upheld doctrinal and moral standards. Their churches and denominational bodies have historically separated from deviating individuals or churches on the basis of a confession. The confession provides a clear basis for these types of censures.

Thirdly, a confession gives practical expression to the Lordship of Christ in the group. The confession states what the group believes Christ's revealed will is from the scripture, and subjects itself to that.

Fourthly, a minimalistic confession of faith is not compatible with the goals of a Baptist denomination. For example, theological education is one of the main reasons for

Baptist denominationalism. However, a theological institution must have a clear theological position for teaching purposes. It cannot offer a variety of options on key doctrines. Doctrinal differences are a frequent cause of contention and splits within a denomination.

As shown in Volume 1, this principle is at variance with some modern Baptists who imply that confessionalism undermines the liberty of the participating groups.

### ***1.2.1.2 Scripture and authority***

The scriptures are the sole authority for Baptists. It is therefore essential for the confession to clarify scripture's authority. In particular, the confession has to clearly articulate the inspiration, clarity and sufficiency of scripture. Volume 1 also showed that the doctrine of inerrancy has been a contentious issue amongst church groups, including Baptists. It does impact on the authority of scripture, and should be dealt with in the confession. Although not the major emphasis of Volume 1, it was argued that errancy views are problematic for the historical Baptist view that the scriptures are the very word of God and display the divine quality of perfection. Volume 1 therefore argued that those Baptists who believe that the doctrine of inerrancy is tantamount to bibliolatry are mistaken.

### ***1.2.1.3 Primary and secondary issues***

Any group that treats matters of indifference or secondary issues as fundamental issues negatively impacts on Christian liberty. A confession therefore needs to differentiate between these issues so that members can properly assess their participation in the group.

This does not mean, however, that a denominational confession can only insist on the absolute fundamentals of the faith and nothing else. Baptists have insisted on

believer's baptism as a distinctive, for example, although they acknowledge that it is not essential to salvation. The confession therefore needs to specify those fundamental issues and denominational distinctives that the group will uphold. However, in doing so, it also needs to differentiate between issues that will be treated as matters of liberty within the group.

#### ***1.2.1.4 The confession must remain relevant***

Baptists have always been “anti-creedal” in the sense that their confessions were never elevated to the authority of scripture. However, this did not differ significantly, in principle, from the other Protestant denominations. The “anti-creedal” distinctive of Baptists has therefore been overstated by some modern Baptists. While all Baptist confessions are revisable in principle, this does not mean that the fundamentals of the faith are subject to review by each generation. Baptists adhere to the unchanging, apostolic truth that has been entrusted to the church, and these truths remain constant.

However, confessions need to remain relevant to contemporary theological and social challenges (Waldron, 1989:21-22). They can therefore be updated and modified by the particular group responding to them.

#### **1.2.2 Some application of principles**

The pursuit of Baptist identity does indicate that often a traditional confession of faith is not sufficient for a Baptist group to enjoy true unity and fellowship. Some of the distinctives in the confession may be in apparent tension, and there is a need to clarify how some of these are to be resolved. Volume 1 showed how very often Baptist groups experience disunity due to the fact that they have interpreted Baptist distinctives differently, or seen some distinctives as having priority over others.

Statements on the application of some of the Baptist principles or doctrines to relevant issues, contemporary controversies or social sins can be very helpful in clarifying a group's theological identity.

### **1.2.3 Meaningful adherence to doctrinal standards**

A denominational body has the obligation to set the doctrinal standards and maintain them in a meaningful manner. This does not violate liberty of conscience, as the group is voluntary and those who are not in agreement may freely leave and associate with others of like mind. However, as noted under the first principle, a strong confession of faith from the inception of the group should ensure a substantial degree of unity amongst members.

Maintaining doctrinal standards will ensure that the group remain unified in doctrine and will enjoy peace within itself. This will involve at least two courses of action. Firstly, regular compliance to doctrinal standards must be ensured, and secondly, the gracious but firm exercise of separation from deviating churches.

#### ***1.2.3.1 Procedures to ensure regular compliance***

It needs to be noted that often doctrinal standards become a mere token, with few of the members taking them seriously. Some members may even impose different meanings to the words they profess to hold to when in fact they believe something entirely different to the intent of the confession. This has been identified as a common problem in contemporary denominationalism (Young, 1957:7; Weeks, 1988:228-232; Edwards, 1993:12-15; Waldron, 1989:11-12, 22).

### **1.2.3.2 Gracious but firm separation**

It was demonstrated in Volume 1 that the early Baptists, both in a denomination and local church context, exercised church discipline and separation. It must be stressed that this action does not violate liberty of conscience or Christian liberty, but is entirely consistent with it.

### **1.2.4 Local church participation**

Baptists have always stressed the autonomy of the local church in kingdom work. This means that denominational structures cannot exert ecclesiastical authority over the participating churches. Rather, participating churches co-operate voluntarily.

Baptists have also insisted on the primacy of the local church. This means that the whole aim of the denominational structure is to allow local churches to interact to pursue gospel ministry.

One of the main conclusions of Volume 1 was that the historically dominant Baptist views that denominational bodies consist of *individuals*, on the basis that Baptist churches are autonomous and congregational in polity (and therefore cannot be represented by individuals), is erroneous and inconsistent. Denominational structures are not *independent* of the local church. This is considered profoundly inconsistent with scripture and Baptist principles. Three issues are crucial in this regard.

#### **1.2.4.1 Direct representation of local churches**

Local churches can be represented by their elders to a limited degree. The scriptures insist that elders do exercise a rule, and therefore have some authority in a local church. A modified congregational system of church government therefore is more

consistent with scripture. It is essential that denominational structures represent local churches directly, and ministries they undertake are accountable to these local churches.

This does not mean that the elders, in representing the local churches, dominate the local church and have complete authority. Rather, these representatives can get mandates from their churches and limited delegated authority, thus preserving essential congregational church government, yet allowing local churches to be represented meaningfully in the denomination.

#### ***1.2.4.2 Under local church control***

Importantly, the denominational structure must be under the control of the local churches. The New Testament shows no evidence of any independent, denominational structure pursuing kingdom work and ministry. The only evidence Baptists have found are local churches interacting to pursue ministry.

Very importantly, ministries that have historically been the domain of denominational structures, such as theological education and missionary endeavour, must never be removed from the control of local churches. These ministries must at least be accountable to the local churches collectively.

#### ***1.2.4.3 Denominational bodies and ecclesiastical authority***

A group of Baptist churches do not collectively have authority over the participating individual local churches. This means, in effect, that the denominational body will limit its areas of jurisdiction to the stated goals of the group, typically set out in the constitution. It also means that the manner and approach of the body will be respectful toward the participating local churches.

A few areas of application will clarify this principle. Firstly, the programmes of the denominational body should be voluntary, and participation should not be forced on all the local churches. Secondly, matters such as church discipline and the calling of pastors to fill vacancies will be left to the individual churches. If the denominational group is asked to get involved in some of these aspects, then their decisions are advisory only, and the local church still must have freedom to make its own choice in the matter.

In this regard, the need for the strong confessional basis to provide substantive unity within the group can be seen. A wide degree of theological diversity will result in the collective programmes of the group not being supported by some or many within the group. It could also result in any advice given by the denominational body to the local church being disregarded unduly due to different theological perspectives. Finally, great theological diversity can result in local church discipline not being upheld and respected by the group.

However, the principle that the denominational body must not exercise authority over the individual local churches must never be taken to mean that the denominational body cannot regulate the standards of membership within the group. Baptist denominational groups can and must maintain essential biblical standards if they are to remain Christian. They must also reflect important Baptist distinctives if they want to maintain a Baptist witness. These acts are not done on the basis of the ecclesiastical authority of the group, but on the basis of membership in a voluntary organisation. Those churches no longer subscribing to the agreed theological standards can either withdraw or be removed from membership without threat of persecution.

## **1.3 REFLECTION**

The framework described above is used as a basis for the evaluation that follows. If the framework is incorrect, all the conclusions that follow will be adversely affected. Substantial effort has therefore been required to ensure the framework is robust and accurately reflects early Baptist distinctives and scripture.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **EVALUATION OF THE BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section, by way of introduction, gives an historical overview of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, describes its structure, and then notes the powers and functions of the denomination. This is followed, in the second section, by a detailed evaluation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in terms of the framework developed in the previous chapter.

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

This section gives a brief overview of the historical development, structure and powers and functions of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. This overview is necessary to provide a background to the evaluation that follows. It is brief, because much of the historical development relevant to this book is noted and evaluated in the second section. However, a few points need to be made with regard to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in relation to the other two denominational groupings that are dealt with in the following chapters.

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa has a much longer history than Sola5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa. This means that, practically speaking, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa could be easier to criticise for inconsistencies. The analysis of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa will include actual events over its one hundred and thirty three year history, whereas the analysis of Sola5 and Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa will be based largely on their stated intentions in their constitution and confessions of faith. It may well be that as Sola5

and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa continue to function, inconsistencies will arise due to the complexity of the denominational life.

The longer history of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa also means that there is a greater wealth of resources for their evaluation than the other two Baptist groupings. These resources include academic research, handbooks, published books, surveys, letters, confessions, articles and official statements.

### **2.1.1 Historical overview**

Hudson-Reed (1977) has done extensive research on the history of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and his general outline will be used in this section with some minor adaptations and consolidations.

#### ***2.1.1.1 Baptist beginnings in South Africa***

The first English Baptists landed in the Cape in 1819, under the leadership of William Shepherd. They came as a small company of Baptists from York Street Chapel in London (Hudson-Reed, 1977:11). One of the members of this group, William Miller, is honoured as the founder of Baptist churches in South Africa (Hudson-Reed, 1977:13).

The first ordained minister, William Davies, was sent by the Baptist Missionary Society to a church in Grahamstown. The first extension church was formed at Kriega, 16 miles away (Hudson-Reed, 1977:14). From these humble beginnings, churches were formed in other towns, such as Port Elizabeth in 1854, and Durban in 1864 (Hudson-Reed, 1977:23).

The first German Baptists arrived in the Cape in 1857, with two subsequent groups arriving in 1858 and 1859. This early group of German Baptists was largely

leaderless, until Carl Gutsche arrived from Germany (Hudson-Reed, 1977:19). Gutsche was based at King Williams Town, and under his leadership a Baptist “bund” was set up in 1867, comprising all the German Baptist churches, which were divided into three associations (Hudson-Reed, 1977:20).

### **2.1.1.2 The formation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa**

On 11 July 1877, a small gathering of the English and German Baptist churches decided to form the Baptist Union of South Africa. A brief constitution was drafted and adopted. The aims of the Union were:

- (i) To reach and help those Baptist churches that were isolated;
- (ii) To expand the witness to the truth in South Africa;
- (iii) To co-operate with other free churches in evangelising South Africa (Hudson-Reed, 1977:24-25).

Subsequent sections evaluate this constitution which includes a basis for the Union, and also notes some of the debates that took place at the time concerning what should be included in the constitution. Membership in the Union was voluntary, and the original intent was that the churches would rule the Union, and not *vice versa* (Parnell, 1977:63-64).

What is significant, however, is that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa did not have an inward looking or isolationist mentality, but had the intent of co-operating with other non-Baptist church groups.

### **2.1.1.3 The growth of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa**

Parnell (1977:63-140) describes the history of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa under five headings. These headings will be used to give a very brief overview of this

history. The aim is not to be exhaustive, but to note significant events relevant to this thesis to provide context for the analysis that follows.

(i) Coming of age (1877-1898)

A number of points or events need to be noted in this period of the Union. Firstly, there was initially strong support for the Congregational Union and the Baptist Union to closely co-operate in geographical areas which could only support one church, with the hope that eventually the two Unions would merge (Parnell, 1977:64). For various reasons, however, this did not come about, and the Baptist Union remained distinctively Baptist.

Secondly, this period saw the emphasising of Baptist distinctives and principles, and many of the addresses at the Assemblies were devoted to this topic. This served to strengthen the identity of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

Thirdly, in 1892 the South African Baptist Missionary Society was established, which was essentially a sub-committee of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The main aim was to evangelise the “heathen” in South Africa (Parnell, 1977:73).

Fourthly, the South African Baptist magazine was issued in 1894 after two years of planning and debate. This magazine was used to promote “unity and brotherly love,” which was one of the main objectives of the Union (Parnell, 1977:76).

(ii) Through wars and change (1898-1918)

This period encompassed the South African War (1899-1902) and the First World War (1914-1918). This period was therefore turbulent, although the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was not seriously affected. Parnell (1977:84) notes that:

*No strong denominational outreach took place during this period. New churches were founded, but the vision, enterprise and vigour of the Union which led to the*

*formation of such churches as Kimberley and Johannesburg seems to have diminished.*

A number of relevant events took place. Firstly, fifteen South African Baptists attended the formation of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905 (Parnell, 1977:80). The Baptist Union of Southern Africa subsequently became a member.

Secondly, the Presbyterian Church of South Africa proposed a union of Baptists, Methodists, Dutch Reformed, Congregationals and Presbyterians in 1906. After some interaction on these issues, the Presbyterian Assembly decided against union in 1910 (Parnell, 1977:81). The Presbyterians also raised the possibility of a united theological training institution, although this also did not come to pass. This point is important, as it demonstrates that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was willing to consider co-operation and co-action with other denominational groups.

Thirdly, in 1899, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa tasked the Examining Committee (who were responsible for recommending a candidate for ministerial recognition), to establish a 3 year course for candidates who could not attend a formal theological institution. These candidates would be mentored by accredited ministers (Parnell, 1977:90). However, only a few ministers ever participated in this programme (Parnell, 1977:91).

### (iii) The steady years (1919-1947)

As the title of this section indicates, this period was characterised by steady numerical growth within the Union. A number of relevant points are highlighted. Firstly, the Baptist Bible School was started by an individual, Ernest Baker, in 1928 (Parnell, 1977:97). The Union expressed its appreciation to Baker, but the relationship of the Bible School to the Union was never resolved, as the School closed down in 1932.

Secondly, in 1943, the Assembly resolved to explore the possibility of establishing a theological faculty with the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational denominations at one of the university colleges (Parnell, 1977:98). This did not materialise, but was an initial step in the formation of the Baptist Theological College. This again shows that the South African Baptists did not have an exclusivist or isolationist mentality, but were willing to consider joint initiatives with other denominational groups.

Thirdly, in 1927, the Executive set up a Ministerial Settlements Committee to assist their autonomous churches when a pastoral vacancy occurred. Initially, this consisted only of a confidential advisor who would approach a church with a vacancy to offer his services. However, the Executive wanted to establish more centralised control of ministerial placements (Parnell, 1977:98-99). After some debate, in 1944 it was finally agreed to establish a Ministerial Settlement Committee consisting of a minister, layman and a Confidential Advisor. This Committee:

- (i) Was not answerable to the Executive
- (ii) Had to be consulted before any church called a minister
- (iii) Did not have the final authority over the local church (BUSA, 1944:64).

This arrangement was soon rescinded, however, as it was deemed to undermine the autonomy of the local church. Although the Ministerial Committee was retained, the “authoritative tone” was dropped (Parnell, 1977:100).

Fourthly, the Assembly saw ministerial recognition as one of its central functions. It therefore kept a list of recognised Baptist ministers, and set in place regulations that set the standards of such ministerial recognition (Parnell, 1977:100-101).

Fifthly, in 1924, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa adopted a Statement of Belief to give some guidance and stability to the Union, as the initial basis of the Union had very little doctrinal content. Importantly, this Statement was not officially binding on

any church, but rather commended for consideration as a “statement of general Baptist belief” (BUSA, 1924:27).

(iv) Forward movement (1947-1970)

This period was characterised by growth (both numerical and financial) and heightened denominational activity in a number of areas. Some of these activities are relevant for this thesis. They will only be mentioned briefly at this stage, as some of the issues receive further attention in the analysis that follows.

Firstly, in 1951, the Baptist Theological College was started at the Rosebank Union Church, under the acting principal, CM Doke. A year later, AJ Barnard was called as the Principal. However, in 1954, Barnard was removed from office due to his views on the doctrine of scripture. One of the primary reasons for establishing the College rather than joining with other Colleges was to protect the truth that the “Bible is the very Word of God, and the final authority for faith and life” (Green, 1954:86).

Although the details are not clear, Barnard was asked to resign as Principal because of his “Barthian views” of scripture. The validity of certain books of the Bible (or portions of them) were called into question by him. The Executive believed that the 1924 Statement and the BU required “verbal inspiration” to be the acceptable view of inspiration. This was ratified by the subsequent Assembly (Miller, 1987:61-62). It is significant to note that the Executive acknowledged that the 1924 Statement of Faith:

*...did not specify in detail the doctrine concerning the inspiration of scriptures which the majority of the Executive requires to be taught in the College* (Parnell, 1977:108).

In 1973, a Western Province Branch of the Baptist Theological College was opened in Cape Town.

Secondly, in 1958 a Home Missions and Evangelism Committee was appointed, that aimed to establish Sunday Schools, to propagate Baptist principles in the churches, and to encourage individual Baptists to be active evangelists (Parnell, 1977:115). The activities of this Committee also included organising conferences, establishing book rooms and distributing audio-visual aids.

Thirdly, in 1962, steps were taken by individual Baptists to start a private school with Baptist principles. The Treverton Boys Preparatory School was purchased and re-opened. Although not directly a work of the Union, the Executive appointed two members of the school Board.

Fourthly, in 1964 the South African Baptists Historical Society was formed, with the aim of recording and spreading the history of the Baptists in South Africa (Parnell, 1977:140).

Fifthly, in 1969 the Union finally withdrew from the Christian Council of South Africa, mainly due to:

- Its relationship with the World Council of Churches;
- That the freedom of the individual church may come under jeopardy, as the expression of Christian unity is not achieved fully by organic union;
- The Christian Council was making political pronouncements with which many Baptists disagreed (Parnell, 1977:123-124).

(v) Structural adaption to growth (1971-1977)

This period saw some internal restructuring of the Union and the Executive. The only relevant issue during this period was the role of associations and local churches in the Union. In 1976, the Assembly accepted that the Union should be a union of churches only. The two general associations (Baptist Men's and Women's Associations) were no longer to be seen as members of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Also, the roll of Personal Members of the Union was discontinued.

Similarly, Ministers would no longer be considered as members of the Union (Parnell, 1977:138). Parnell (1977:138) notes that by 1977, there were only fourteen recognised associations.

### **2.1.2 Overview of the structure and functions of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa**

The Constitution and By-laws of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa describe the structure, functions and powers of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. This section will give an overview of these.

As at 2010, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa consists of over six hundred and fifty churches, fellowships and associations in the Southern Africa region (the vast majority of churches are from South Africa, but other countries include Zimbabwe and Zambia).

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa essentially is a union of local churches represented by delegates. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa functions through its annual assembly (BUSA, 1933b:7.1). Each local church may send up to three delegates (BUSA, 1933a:7.1). The delegates actually represent the local churches, and make decisions on behalf of the local churches. There are seven regional associations, which comprise the local Baptist churches in a geographical area. Each of the seven regional associations may also send one delegate to the Assembly.

The Executive of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is also represented at the Assembly. The Executive consists of the Officers of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and representatives from the associations and boards (BUSA, 1933b:9.1.1).

The functions of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa are to co-ordinate and combine the efforts of the local churches for missionary and evangelistic endeavour,

theological education and works of benevolence, amongst others (BUSA, 1933b:6.1-6,16).

The evaluation that follows demonstrates that there is mixed evidence regarding whether the decisions of the Assembly are binding on the local churches. The General Secretary believes that there is a real sense that the decisions of the Assembly are binding on the local churches, because the local churches have voluntarily “bound” themselves together in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (Appendix A, section C, question 1). However, as will be demonstrated below, the very basis of the Union is that every church has liberty to interpret the scripture for themselves.

## **2.2 EVALUATION OF THE BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

The framework developed in the previous chapter is used to evaluate the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Each of the headings will be discussed in turn. Due to the fact that some events in the history of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa may touch on a number of the points in the framework, some repetition is unavoidable.

The approach adopted in this section is to extract relevant events and statements from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in order to assess each point of the framework. Conclusions are drawn at the end of each section.

## 2.2.1 Strength of the confessional basis

### 2.2.1.1 Sufficiently comprehensive confession

The 1877 Constitution of the Baptist Union includes a Declaration of Principle, which forms the basis of the Union. This Declaration is critical to this assessment, and is quoted in full. The basis of the Union is:

*4.1. That the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy scriptures, and that each Church has liberty to interpret and administer His Laws.*

*4.2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who "died for our sins according to the scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day."*

*4.3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.*

(BUSA, 1933**b**:4.1-4.3).

In essence, this Principle contains the following doctrines stated very briefly:

- The Lordship of Christ
- The Primacy of scripture
- The autonomy of the local church
- Believers' Baptism
- Personal testimony to the gospel

It needs to be emphasised that at the time of adopting this Declaration, the German churches were motivating for a more authoritative and comprehensive statement to

be the basis of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The German Association had a single, more comprehensive confession of faith for all their churches, and therefore controlled the membership of their group more closely. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa, however, emphasised the autonomy of the local church, and opted for the brief declaration above (Jonsson, 1977:40-41). This was therefore a conscious decision to leave the doctrinal basis of the Union very loose. This decision and reasoning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa must be challenged at the outset. As has been previously noted, there is no conflict between a detailed confession of faith and the autonomy of the local church. The previous chapter argues that a detailed confession of faith allows autonomous churches to interact meaningfully with a common identity and purpose. The danger of a loose doctrinal basis is that churches group together based only on a *presumed* unity, which in fact may prove otherwise in important areas.

Jonsson (1977:35) believes that this original statement was sufficient for the Union, as the theological liberalism on the Continent “was not yet prevalent” in South Africa. Similarly, in his Presidential address in 1884, King, in acknowledging the authority scriptures, expressed the view that “formulated beliefs” are often a hindrance, and therefore to be rejected (King, 1884:28). King insisted that the Baptist Union did not have a formulated creed, and that confessions are “human things” (King, 1884:27-28). The reasoning of King is confused, however. The original basis of the Union was not a direct quote from scripture but in fact a “formulated” statement of belief. The fact that it was so brief does not change the fact that it was formulated by the founders of the Union. Baptists, like any other denomination, have formulated beliefs (whether these are written down or not). There is no escaping this in a church or denomination, as it must have some doctrinal standards if it is to be remotely Christian and Biblical.

This original Declaration can only be described as exceptionally weak and naïve. It was not substantial enough to provide the group with a common understanding and identity, and was certainly ambiguous. Three strands of evidence can be given for the fact that the original basis of the Union was weak and insufficient for the

establishment of the Union. The first is from the internal inconsistency or lack of clarity of the Declaration itself, the second is from the historical difficulties that followed in the Union because of this weak basis, and the third from significant theological diversity leading to conflict or confusion.

(i) Internal inconsistency

The first principle of the Basis of the Union indicates that the churches are at liberty, within the Union, to interpret the scriptures for themselves. In other words, the Union did not want to impose any doctrines on the churches, but seemingly allowed them full autonomy. However, the second and third principles impose Scriptural interpretations (such as believer's baptism) on the churches. It is therefore apparent that, as the Union was a *Baptist* Union, the churches did not have full liberty to interpret the scriptures for themselves, and they had to be Baptist to join. However, this tension is not clarified anywhere in the Declaration, and is, strictly, speaking, contradictory. The section that follows also shows that further developments in the Union upheld such doctrines as congregational government, with the result that some churches had to leave the Union in 1987 (BUSA, 1988:165). The fact is therefore, that the churches within the Union had to hold to certain doctrines, and they did not in fact have full liberty to interpret the scriptures for themselves. Also, churches or their ministers who defected morally from biblical norms could also be disciplined. Neither the ministers nor the churches have freedom to re-interpret the moral norms of scripture. None of this is clarified in the original basis.

(ii) Historical difficulties

A number of subsequent difficulties in the Union arose due to this lack of doctrinal clarity and inconsistency. While the particular doctrinal issues mentioned below are not immediately of consequence (they are evaluated in a later section), they are relevant to demonstrate the confessional weakness in the Baptist Union of Southern

Africa. The historical survey focuses mainly, but not exclusively, on the development of the doctrine of scripture in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

(a) The Doke/Ennals controversy

From 1924 to 1925, a controversy arose between WH Doke and JE Ennals on the doctrine of scripture. While Doke upheld the historical and verbal accuracy of the scripture, Ennals stated that the scriptures contained many contradictions, including numerical and genealogical inaccuracies. He questioned the canonicity of the Song of Solomon, and differentiated between the moral standards of the Old and New Testament (Miller, 1987:52-53).

The Basis of the Union provided absolutely no direction as to what the Union was meant to uphold concerning the nature of inspiration and the authority of the scriptures. It needs to be borne in mind that when the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was established, considerable debates had taken place internationally regarding the nature of inspiration.

(b) The 1924 Statement of Belief

In order to give some guidance to the churches in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa following the controversy of the previous year, the 1924 Assembly adopted an eleven-point statement. This Statement provided some doctrinal detail and precision, and included brief statements on the inspiration of scripture, the Trinity, the Person of Christ, the nature of the Atonement, the physical resurrection, the personal return of Christ, the new birth, the eternal states of the just and unjust, the universal and local church, and the two ordinances of believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper.

This Statement was a vast improvement on the original doctrinal basis of the Union, although it can still be described as a "minimalistic" confession. However, in order to preserve the liberty of each church to interpret scripture for themselves, this

Statement was not officially binding on any church, but rather commended for consideration as a “statement of general Baptist belief” (BUSA, 1924:27).

Two crucial issues need to be noted. Firstly, the qualification that it was not binding was confusing. Did it mean that churches could deny the Trinity, for example? Clearly, this would not have been acceptable. The hesitation of the Union to officially adopt a statement that is binding on the churches and sets the boundaries of the doctrinal standards is problematic and shows confusion with regard to understanding liberty of conscience in an ecclesiastical group. The previous chapter argues that any church or group of churches must set explicit doctrinal standards as conditions of membership in the group. This does not impact negatively on the liberty of conscience of the members due to the voluntary nature of the group.

Secondly, with regard to the doctrine of scripture, the 1924 Statement made little progress. It rather evaded the issue. The first article dealt with the inspiration of scripture:

*We believe in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament in their original writings as fully inspired of God and accept them as the supreme and final authority in faith and life* (BUSA, 1924:27).

A few points need to be noted. Firstly, the 1924 statement was ambiguous in that it did not clarify completely what it meant by “fully inspired.” Secondly, the general ineffectiveness of the 1924 Statement needs to be noted. For example, Ennals was elected as the President of the BU again in 1933, nine years after the “adoption” of the Statement. His views on scripture are seemingly far removed from the intent of the Statement, and yet he could still be elected to the highest office in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Further prove of the ineffectiveness of this statement is given in the next section.

### (c) The Barnard incident

In 1952, AJ Barnard was appointed as the first full-time Principal of the Baptist Theological College of South Africa in Johannesburg (BUSA, 1952:32). Although the details are not clear, Barnard was asked to resign as Principal because of his “Barthian views” of scripture. In the case of Barnard, even the validity of certain books of the bible (or portions of them) was called into question. The Executive believed that the 1924 Statement and the BU required “verbal inspiration” as the acceptable view of inspiration. In this difficulty, the Executive acknowledged that the 1924 Statement did not clarify which view of inspiration was required by the *majority* of the Executive (Green, 1954:318-319). This statement by the Executive is equally disturbing, as it implies that there must have been a *minority* in the Executive that did not hold to verbal inspiration, and this did not seem to pose any problems for the Executive.

At this stage of the historical analysis, the evidence cited above already shows the weak confessional basis of the Union. With the regard to the example of the doctrine of scripture, it demonstrates confusion regarding the early Baptist understanding of religious liberty and liberty of conscience. As argued in the previous chapter, the early Baptists upheld doctrinal standards articulated in confessions in an ecclesiastical context. This did not violate liberty of conscience, as individual or church membership was voluntary, and they were free to leave or join the group. Even when the Baptist Union of Southern Africa adopted the 1924 Statement, it was not officially binding on any of the churches. Yet, the Union indicated that certain views were unacceptable. This form of confessional weakness and lack of clarity in fact negatively impacts on the individuals and churches in the Union. Barnard, for example, had to endure the embarrassment of being asked to resign only two years after accepting the position of the Principal, simply because the Union did not clarify the exact nature of inspiration that it wanted to uphold. Up until 2005 this has still not been clarified (Aucamp, 2008:101).

#### (d) The 1987 Statement of Baptist Principles

In 1987, a Statement of Baptist Principles was adopted by the Assembly. This Statement was largely aimed at highlighting Baptist distinctives which the Union upheld. These distinctive included the direct Lordship of Christ over every believer and the local church, the autonomy of the local church, believer's baptism, congregational church government, the priesthood of all believers, religious liberty and separation of church and state. It should be noted that these Principles were introduced because some Baptist churches were departing from historic Baptist principles, and the Baptist Union of Southern Africa wanted to prevent this from spreading. The Executive would therefore "view with disfavour" any church whose constitution did not include these Principles (BUSA, 1989:164-165). This is important, as it shows the Baptist Union of Southern Africa had started to insist more strongly on the doctrinal standards, and this was therefore a move towards more consistent denominationalism. Unfortunately, the inconsistency between this action and the original Basis of the Union (where it is stated that every church has the right to interpret scripture for itself), was seemingly not even an issue.

This Statement provided some additional doctrinal detail for the Union. It is an improvement on the original basis of the Union, and supplements the 1924 Statement of Belief.

#### (e) The 1990 Statement on scripture

In 1990, after some concerns were raised by churches in the Union, a Statement was produced, which included views that the inspiration of the scriptures extended equally to all the parts, and also that it is "wholly reliable, trustworthy and true, without any mixture of error". However, because the Executive indicated that they had no authority to adopt a statement on scripture, they merely recommended it as a general statement for the consideration of the churches. Importantly, the Executive also indicated that if anything in the statement was construed to be inconsistent with the

Declaration of Principle in the Constitution, the Declaration of Principle should prevail (BUSA, 1990:167). The result of this is that if any church construed the already admittedly ambiguous Declaration of Principle to mean anything else, they could do so. In effect, the 1990 Statement therefore did not achieve anything.

(iii) Significant theological diversity leading to conflict or confusion

As noted in the first chapter, in 1980 a church complained that the Union had become so doctrinally diverse that they questioned whether they could even talk of being united or even “Baptist”. They argued that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa must surely have some “beginning and end to it” (Springs Baptist Church, 1980). In other words, there came a point when, doctrinally speaking, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa would become so diverse that it would be meaningless to speak of being united or even Baptist. They noted in particular the diversity in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa with regard to Reformed theology, the charismatic movement and open membership churches (Springs Baptist Church, 1980). Miller (1987:120) notes that even the Executive has on occasions expressed concerns about the theological diversity.

A number of conflicts have arisen in the Union due to this doctrinal diversity. The existing confessional statements at the time provided little guidance or direction. Some of these conflicts are discussed below.

(a) The charismatic movement

The charismatic movement has impacted many denominations over the last few decades. In 1975, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa instructed the Executive to examine some of the teachings of the charismatic movement, especially the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, in order to formulate a statement on the subject for the guidance of the churches (Miller, 1987:77). The issue was becoming divisive in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. For example, Springs Baptist Church (1980) complained to the

Baptist Union of Southern Africa of “Pentecostals masquerading as Baptists,” and asked the question of how far Baptist theology can diverge but still speak of “unity within the denomination”. The Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa (1978) also expressed concern at the Pentecostal doctrine that was being taught in some of the Baptist Churches. Some who expressed preference for Pentecostalism had graduated from the Colleges and pastored churches, which eventually led to “tensions” and an “unpleasant situation” within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The Principal expressed the view that it was “beyond him” that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa allowed these doctrines to be taught in their churches. Lynwood Baptist Church (1996), in their letter of resignation, also noted their discomfort with the degree of differences accommodated in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, including churches that were “extremely charismatic”.

A letter from Emmaus Baptist Church (1997) proposing a statement on the sufficiency of scripture, included a clause that the “so-called private revelation” needed to be tested with scripture, which remains the “sole and final authority”.

In 1979, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa circulated a summary statement on the charismatic movement which was commended by the Baptist World Alliance, of which the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is a member. The statement, while acknowledging some benefits of the charismatic movement, nevertheless saw some dangers. In particular, it believed that the view of the baptism of the Spirit as a further and necessary stage after salvation was unbiblical. It also stated that there was some evidence that the charismatic emphases on prophecy produced an absolutism that could not be challenged, and this compromised historic Baptist principles such as “soul liberty” and “congregational freedom” (Swart, 1979:59-79). However, no statement on the charismatic movement has been adopted that is binding on the churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

## (b) Women ordination

In March 1989, two conferences were held to discuss the role of women in the church. The main issue of contention was whether women should be permitted to teach publicly in the local church, and whether they could be elected to the position of elder or pastor. At the 1989 Assembly, a sub-committee tabled a report on the role of women. Their conclusions were that the differences of opinion were of a hermeneutical nature, and the issue of the authority of scripture was not being threatened in the debate. The final result was that “as there was no restraint upon a church’s right to appoint its own leaders,” women ordination became a matter of toleration within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA, 1989:165). An article published in the Baptist Today highlighted the debate and diversity in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa on the issue, but concluded that the debate was “not about biblical authority,” and took place within the framework of a complete commitment to “to an authoritative and inerrant word” (Gilfilan, 1989:1-2).

Others within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa were not convinced. Newcastle Baptist Church (1989) wrote a letter to all members of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, which included a six-page paper. The paper presented arguments from scripture indicating that women ordination was unbiblical. Furthermore, the paper concluded that women ordination “undermined the authority of scripture”. Lynwood Baptist Church (1996) included women ordination as one of their reasons for resigning from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Constantia Park Baptist Church (1989) expressed extreme difficulty in accepting that there had been such a dramatic shift from what they perceived to be the historical and biblical position on the matter of ordaining women. Furthermore, the letter raised the issue as to why the matter of women ordination, which had no historical precedence in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa or in early Baptist movements, was a matter for toleration, while congregational church government, which was based on “not much biblical evidence,” was not a matter of toleration (as noted earlier). They concluded that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa had come to a place where each church could “interpret and

believe the word as they desire". The question that remained was what the basis of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa actually was. They further expressed the view that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was tolerating views that their Baptist forefathers would not have found tenable.

Hillcrest Baptist Church (1997) expressed concern at the position on women ordination adopted by the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. They believed that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa had failed to guard the "fundamentals of evangelical Baptists," and that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa had moved closer to "liberals" within the denomination. They believed that women ordination was clearly unbiblical, and not a "variety issue". However, they concluded that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was "not yet liberal," and therefore withdrawal at the time would not be appropriate.

#### (iv) Conclusion

The original confessional basis of the Union can only be described as weak. It failed to provide doctrinal clarity on a number of issues, and certainly was insufficient to give a common identity to the Union. The 1924 and 1987 Statements were a substantial improvement on the original basis, and did clarify some of the Union's doctrinal standards and principles.

However, the general confessional basis of the Union still has substantial shortcomings. Firstly, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has been reluctant to explicitly adopt doctrines as conditions of membership, although in practice it does insist on doctrinal standards. In this regard, the Union has misunderstood the nature of "liberty." As has been argued in the previous chapters, every ecclesiastical group must establish clearly what the doctrinal conditions of membership are for the group. This does not impact in the least on the liberty of the churches or individuals joining the group, but rather protects their liberty, as they have a clear understanding of the group they are joining in.

Secondly, the evidence cited above regarding the doctrine of scripture and the confessional statements shows that Union has been reluctant to explicitly deal with this matter. There is no valid reason why it should not consider and adopt a doctrinal position of the nature of inspiration it requires for membership in the Union. However, the fact that it has adopted other doctrines as conditions of membership creates confusion and gives the impression of a lack of consistency. The overall confessional basis of the Union must therefore be described as poor.

Thirdly, there is evidence of tensions, difficulties and confusion in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa with regard to growing theological diversity, even to the point of pastors questioning where and when the theological lines will be drawn delineating what it means to be Baptist. The confessional statements of the Union are therefore not sufficient to provide a common identity and unity for the denomination.

Fourthly, there remains an inherent problem in the confessional Basis of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The original Basis gives all the churches liberty to interpret the scriptures for themselves. This is clearly not true, as the Baptist Union of Southern Africa does insist on some doctrines. Members within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa have also expressed concern at the doctrinal diversity and lack of doctrinal standards. However, when some doctrinal standards were insisted upon, some of the members have then questioned why seemingly more important doctrines were also not insisted upon.

### ***2.2.1.2 Scripture and authority***

The previous section partly used the controversy on the doctrine of scripture to demonstrate the confessional weakness within the Union. This section explores the doctrine of scripture in the Union itself in more depth to assess its impact on the authority of scripture. There will of necessity be some repetition from the previous section.

Due to the strong emphasis of Baptists on the primacy and authority of scripture, it is critical for Baptist groupings to be explicit about the nature of scripture and its authority. Matters of controversy need to be dealt with in the doctrinal statements.

With regard to the matter of the confessional standards of the Union on the doctrine of scripture, it has already been shown that the original doctrinal basis of the Union was poor and insufficient, generally speaking. The first article simply describes the scripture as “holy”. The events below are an historical analysis of how the Union has attempted to deal with the controversies on the doctrine of scripture, and will provide additional detail to the brief overview already given above.

(i) The Doke/Ennals controversy

In 1923, WH Doke (BUSA President in 1932) published an article in the South African Baptist magazine on the testimony of Christ to the Bible. He noted Christ’s use of the Old Testament (and the Pentateuch in particular) that confirmed its verbal, historical accuracy and inspiration. He emphasised that Christ’s use of scripture laid value on each individual word. He further criticised the higher critical attack on the books of the Bible as being Satanically inspired (Doke, 1923:86-92).

In 1924, JE Ennals (BU President in 1919 and 1933) responded by letter opposing verbal inspiration, asking for an equivalent space in the next edition to set out his arguments. The Editor, who happened to be Doke at the time, turned down this request on the grounds that “modernist articles” were not accepted (Doke, 1924:7). In a later, private publication, Ennals gave full expression to his views, citing evidence that the scriptures contained many contradictions, including numerical and genealogical inaccuracies. He questioned the canonicity of the Song of Solomon, and differentiated between the moral standards of the Old and New Testament (Ennals, 1924:1-11). On the basis of Peter’s fallibility in the second chapter of Galatians, Ennals further concluded that the words of the apostles could also be fallible. It is

staggering that the views of a person who was President of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (twice!) would not be published in the official magazine of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. It is also staggering that the views on scripture between two Presidents could differ so radically. Clearly, the original basis of the Union provided no direction in the debate.

(ii) The 1924 Statement of Belief

This Statement has already been quoted in the previous section. However, some further discussion is necessary. Firstly, the statement was ambiguous in that it did not clarify completely what it meant by “fully inspired,” which led to further controversy in later years (Miller, 1987:56-57). The phrasing of the statement, in referring to a quality of the *originals* that presumably was not present in copies, would indicate that the intent of the statement was that of “verbal inspiration”. This certainly was the understanding and interpretation of the Executive in 1954 in dealing with Barnard (discussed in more detail below). It is critical to note, however, that the 1924 statement retained the phrase “fully inspired” that had already become ambiguous in the debate between Doke and Ennals.

Secondly, the general ineffectiveness of the 1924 Statement needs to be noted. Two strands of evidence can be cited. In the first instance, as mentioned above, Ennals was elected as the President of the BU again in 1933, nine years after the “adoption” of the Statement. His views on scripture were seemingly far removed from the intent of the Statement, and yet he was still eligible for election to the highest office in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. In the second instance, as will be dealt with later, by 1987 a significant portion of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa held to errant views of scripture that are incompatible with “verbal inspiration”.

Thirdly, this incident highlights the rather acute difficulty the Baptist Union of Southern Africa had in trying to resolve the tension between the liberty of the individual churches to interpret scripture themselves and in trying to establish some sort of

doctrinal orthodoxy. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa realised that low views of scripture would undermine the basis of the Union, yet was unable to effectively deal with it due to the liberty it wanted to grant all the churches. The fact that the issue concerning verbal inspiration was controversial should not have been a hindrance, as the early Baptists certainly took clear and unambiguous stands on controversial issues, even when under threat of persecution. As will be emphasised later, there certainly appears to be some inconsistency in the approach by the Union. For example, other points of doctrine, such as believer's baptism and congregational church government, were considered inviolate and insisted upon, even to the point of excluding churches from the Union. Yet a clear position was not taken on the nature of scripture, which fundamentally affects the very basis of the Union.

### (iii) The Barnard incident

In 1952, AJ Barnard was appointed as the first full-time Principal of the Baptist Theological College of South Africa in Johannesburg. One of the primary reasons for establishing the College rather than joining with other Colleges was to protect the truth that the "Bible is the very Word of God, and the final authority for faith and life" (BUSA, 1954:86).

As noted in the previous section, Barnard was asked to resign as Principal because of his "Barthian views" of scripture. This view proposes that the Bible only becomes authoritative in a spiritual encounter. The Executive believed that the 1924 Statement and the BU required "verbal inspiration" as the acceptable view of inspiration, and this was ratified by the subsequent Assembly (Miller, 1987:61-62).

In the statement issued by the Executive, it acknowledged that Barnard had not been devious in not disclosing his doctrinal position. Barnard had read and accepted the 1924 Statement on scripture (Miller, 1987:61-62). Rather, the fault lay with the 1924 Statement that did not clarify the view of inspiration that was required (Green, 1954:318-319).

This incident highlights the consequences of a lack of clarity on issues fundamental to the basis of the Union. Barnard believed the 1924 Statement to be compatible with his views on scripture. The whole incident could have been avoided if the 1924 Statement clearly defined what view of inspiration was acceptable to the Baptist Union. The continued, subsequent debates and incidents on the doctrine of scripture are symptoms of this lack of clarity within the Union in the name of liberty of conscience.

#### (iv) Standards for Baptist ministers

During the period 1955 to 1958, an attempt was made to include “verbal inspiration” in the 1924 Statement as a minimum requirement for ministerial candidates. However, after receiving numerous objections (one of which was that the liberty of conscience of the individual churches would be compromised) and a legal opinion that such a policy could not be adopted except by *unanimous* consent because of the constitution, the proposal was not upheld (Miller, 1987:68). It was argued that “verbal inspiration” went beyond the original doctrinal basis of the Union, and that in adopting such a position the constitution was in effect being changed, and a unanimous vote was required to do this. The following year, in order to at least exercise some control, the Executive of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa introduced a compulsory interview for ministerial applications, as it was within their mandate to make a recommendation on every case. They were determined to protect the Union from “theological liberalism” in the area of the doctrine of scripture (Miller, 1987:69).

During this period, the claim that liberty of conscience and the autonomy of the local church would be compromised by adopting a position on inspiration was forcefully articulated, with the result that no resolution was passed that clarified the doctrine of scripture. A plea during this period was that liberty must prevail and churches must be able to interpret the scriptures as the Holy Spirit guided them, and not blindly accept any “decision of a Pope or Council” (Miller, 1987:68). Also, the original constitution

and basis of the Union could not be undermined. Claims were made that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was behaving in an “un-Baptist” way in trying to make “verbal inspiration” mandatory (Miller, 1987:68).

A number of crucial observations need to be made in this regard. Firstly, as noted earlier, this incident highlights the real tensions that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa faced with the competing principles of maintaining and defending orthodoxy, yet allowing each liberty of conscience. On the one hand, there was extreme unhappiness concerning the Barnard incident, and it was acknowledged that some doctrinal clarification was required to prevent a similar incident. On the other hand, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was not able to achieve this due to its application of the principle of liberty of conscience.

This dilemma is also apparent in a survey of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa done in 1986. Ninety three percent of respondents believed that the inspiration of scripture was of primary importance for the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Yet sixteen percent believed that introducing a particular view of inspiration would contradict the Baptist distinctive of liberty of conscience (Miller, 1987:100). However, some views of inspiration do negatively impact on the authority of the scriptures. Their view and application of liberty of conscience therefore prevented them from protecting a distinctive that they believed was of primary importance.

Secondly, the claim of the unconstitutional nature of including verbal inspiration needs to be challenged. For example, the original basis of the Union did not even mention congregational church government. However, this was later added into the 1987 Statement of Principles (see below) and made a condition of membership. The constitutionality of this action was never challenged.

(v) The 1987 Statement of Baptist Principles

In 1986 a Statement of Baptist Principles was presented to the Assembly for consideration and discussion. The first paragraph, on the subject of scripture, read as follows:

*We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is our God and only Saviour and that He has absolute authority. The Holy scriptures are the inspired word of God, and their authority is inextricably linked with that of Christ; they are therefore the final authority for the Church and its members in all matters of faith and practice* (BUSA, 1987:3)

Holdt proposed that the term “inerrancy” (or alternatively, a phrase such as “truth without any mixture of error”) be included in the first paragraph of the Statement. Opposition to this amendment was voiced, and after some discussion, it was not included. While the rest of the Statement of Principles was still subject to change and discussion, “the question on the inspiration of scripture was regarded as no longer open to debate” (Miller, 1987:83).

Clearly, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was not prepared to define the doctrine of scripture beyond the fact that scripture was “inspired”. As noted previously, this term had already been included in the 1924 “semi-official” Statement of Belief, and had not clarified exactly what was meant by it. Therefore, despite the controversy over Barnard, and the subsequent attempts to define the doctrine of scripture, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa made little progress (if any) since 1924.

(vi) The 1990 Statement

In 1989, a small group of Reformed Baptist Pastors within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa expressed their concern at what appeared to be a “departure from the authority of scripture”. The evidence they cited for this included the Baptist Union of Southern Africa accepting women ordination, and also lecturers within the

Theological Colleges teaching unacceptable views of scripture. These views of scripture included the historical inaccuracy of the Genesis account, that the resurrection was not necessary for salvation, and that the scriptures contained “many errors and contradictions, making it impossible to hold to a doctrine of infallibility and inerrancy” (Roberts, 1990:18).

After a meeting with several members of the Executive Committee, it was agreed that a doctrinal statement on scripture needed to be drawn up, and presented to the 1990 Assembly *as a condition of membership* in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. A group worked on a statement of scripture, which included the phrase that scripture was “infallible, in that it is wholly reliable and trustworthy, and inerrant, in that it is entirely without any admixture of error” (Roberts, 1990:18).

This statement was brought before the March Executive, which formed a new Committee to look at the issue. A slightly modified Statement was produced, but still included a statement that the inspiration of the scriptures extended equally to all the parts, and also that it is “wholly reliable, trustworthy and true, without any mixture of error”. However, because the Executive indicated that they had no authority to adopt a statement on scripture, they merely recommended it as a general statement for the consideration of the churches. Importantly, the Executive also indicated that if anything in the statement was construed to be inconsistent with the Declaration of Principle in the Constitution, the Declaration of Principle should prevail (BUSA, 1990:167). This last qualification in effect made the 1990 statement on the reliability of the scriptures useless and irrelevant. Due to the fact that the original Declaration of Principle is vague and ambiguous in the current theological debate on the doctrine of inspiration, members could essentially “construe” anything they wanted, and this would prevail.

(vii) Interview with a Baptist pastor in 2001

In 2001, a Baptist pastor in good standing with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was interviewed. A summary of the pertinent views expressed by the pastor are indicated below.

- a) The original autographs of the scripture could and did contain significant error (not just harmless errors). This came about due to the strong, human influence in the production of scripture. The synoptic gospels, for example, evidence many of these differences.
- b) While there are historical or geographic errors and contradictions in the scriptures, there are no “doctrinal” errors as such, only differences due to progressive revelation.
- c) The early Genesis account (chapters 1-11) is an allegory. It is impossible to know exactly how God created the universe. There is much evidence for evolution, and at some point “a gorilla would have stopped being a gorilla and become a man with a spirit and conscience”.
- d) There is a very real place for Karl Barth’s understanding of scripture, where the Bible becomes the word of God in a personal encounter.
- e) If someone was true to his conscience and used the revelation in nature, that person would be saved although he never heard about Christ. In other words, he would be covered by the blood of Christ and go to heaven. The scriptures are therefore not absolutely essential for a saving knowledge of God. (Aucamp, 2008:92).

The interviewee indicated that some of these views were made known at his interview with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa for ministerial recognition. Also, this pastor was identified for the interview by another pastor in the Union. In others words, many of the views of the interviewee were generally known to others in the Union. No action was taken against this Pastor.

This interview confirms that the confessional position and doctrinal statements on the doctrine of scripture are generally ineffective. The doctrinal statements of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa did not seem to exclude the views represented by the interviewee.

#### (viii) Conclusion

The above analysis and evaluation shows that the confessional basis of the Union with regard to the authority and inspiration of scripture is poor and inadequate. As shown in a previous chapter, views which allow for errors in scripture must impact on the veracity of scripture as a whole, and therefore on its authority. Roy (see Appendix A, section D, question 1.1) acknowledges this fact. Errors in the verifiable data of scripture must cast doubt on the closely linked spiritual truths, which cannot be verified (Enns, 1989:169). The Baptist Union of Southern Africa has consistently failed to define and adopt a view of the inspiration of scripture despite theological controversy and calls to clarify a statement.

Historical evidence can be given that this lack of doctrinal clarity has had a practical, negative effect on the doctrine of scripture amongst the Baptist community in the Union. In 1986 a detailed, five-page altitudinal survey of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was undertaken by GG Miller, mostly focussed on the inspiration and authority scripture. It was distributed to some “500 Baptist pastors, students at the Baptist theological colleges, laymen and laywomen throughout Southern Africa” (Miller, 1987:95). A response rate of 43% was received, which equates to some 215 individual responses. The questionnaire was completely anonymous, and could not distinguish between respondents.

The results of this survey are shown in Table 1. It should be noted that respondents were not constrained to select only one option, and therefore Miller reported that while 93% of the respondents indicated that they supported full inerrancy, 15,5% of them also selected contradictory options.

The options presented and percentage responses were as follows:

Table 1: Responses to options regarding the inspiration of scripture

Options	Percentage responses
a) Full inerrancy	93,3% (but 15,5% of these selected contradictory responses)
b) Bible contains the word of God	6,1%
c) Neo-orthodox view of inspiration	8,0%
d) 'Limited inerrancy' – spiritual message only inspired	13,2%
e) Inerrancy futile due to absence of autographs	6,6%
f) All scripture inspired but not of equal value	61,3%
g) Jesus accommodated His knowledge to error	0,47%

An analysis of the table above shows that between 15,5% (those reported by Miller who selected errancy views) and 27% (a summation of options b, c and d) of the Union held to errancy views.

The fact that the doctrinal formulation on the doctrine of scripture within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has not kept abreast of theological developments, means that *in practice* the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is tolerating “limited inerrancy” and “Barthian views.” The survey results are clear evidence of this. The *de facto* situation is that in not updating its doctrine of scripture, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has in fact adopted a position. This position is that “limited inerrancy” and “Barthian views” are acceptable in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, as those who hold to such views are under no form of censure.

### **2.2.1.3 Primary and secondary issues**

There is evidence to show that there is considerable inconsistency in the Union in differentiating between primary and secondary issues. Apart from the fact that there is no explicit statement drawing a distinction between the two, the application of doctrinal standards has often emphasised lesser issues while brushing over more fundamental issues. Two examples are cited.

Firstly, the views of Ennals on the doctrine of scripture have been noted above, and included questioning the canonicity of certain books, believing that scripture contradicted itself, and even questioning apostolic authority in the formulation of scripture. Yet Ennals was elected to the highest office in the Union twice.

The views of Ennals and the interviewee noted above have a direct and significant impact on the authority of the scriptures. This ought to be of utmost concern for Baptists, who have historically insisted on and defended the authority of the scriptures. A rigorous defence of the doctrine of scripture ought to be one of the highest priorities of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. However, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa consistently refused to adopt concepts such as inerrancy or verbal, plenary inspiration as conditions of membership in the Union.

This lack of decisive action by the Union needs to be seen in the light of the issue surrounding congregational church government. Miller (1987:78) notes that of a number of churches changed their constitutions to restrict the

*...role of active participation in the government, business and decision-making life of the congregation to a small elite or leadership group...rather than with the total membership.*

As a result, it was felt that a church could no longer fellowship in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa if it did not subscribe to congregational church government. At the 1984 Assembly, a resolution to exclude churches from the Baptist Union of Southern

Africa on the basis of a deviation from congregational church government was overwhelmingly (but not unanimously), passed (Miller, 1987:79). As a result, nine churches left the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. This position was further enforced when, in 1987, the Statement of Baptist Principles was passed, which included the principle of congregational church government. In 1988, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa adopted guidelines to prevent churches from deviating from Baptist principles. It therefore agreed that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa will “view with disfavour” any application for membership from a church not having the Statement of Principles enshrined in its constitution, and that if any church deviates from the Principles, this would be grounds for their removal from membership of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. In the same resolution, ministerial recognition would be on the basis of acceptance of the Statement of Principles (BUSA, 1988:165).

There appears to be no adequate basis as to why, for example, a particular view of church government can be insisted on, but other, more fundamental issues that directly impact the authority of scripture, cannot. As another example, noted previously, Constantia Park Baptist (1989) raised the issue as to why the matter of women ordination, which had no historical precedence in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa or in early Baptist movements, was a matter for toleration, while congregational church government, which was based on “not much biblical evidence”, was not a matter of toleration. To some members, there appeared to be no consistent application of Baptist principles in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. There is also differentiation between primary and secondary issues.

The doctrinal statements of the Union must still therefore be viewed as minimalistic. This fact, together with the silence on what constitutes secondary issues, leaves many questions unanswered. For example, there is no mention of the doctrine of creation in any of the doctrinal statements. One would therefore presume that evolutionary views are a matter of toleration. This must consequently mean that theistic creationism, and extremely strong biblical theme, is considered a secondary

issue (see comment by Roy, Appendix A, section C, question 5). No clarity with regard to this is provided.

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa can therefore be charged with a significant degree of inconsistency and with a notable lack of clarity on matters of importance to the Union.

#### ***2.2.1.4 The confession must remain relevant***

There is conflicting evidence in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa regarding the status of its confessional statements. On the one hand, the 1924 and 1987 Statements do show some degree of progress with regard to defining doctrinal standards. The 1924 Statement of Belief was modified in 2000 to include a statement opposing homosexual marriage. This is evidence that, consistent with early Baptist views, confessions are modified and updated to remain relevant.

On the other hand, however, it has been shown above that the Union has consistently refused to update its doctrinal statement on the doctrine of scripture in line with the modern debate. The existing statements are ambiguous and cannot give the Union clear direction on what views of inspiration are acceptable to the Union as conditions of membership. The relevance of these statements is therefore questionable.

#### **2.2.2 Some application of principles**

The previous chapter argues that due to the apparent tensions of some of the Baptist distinctives, the application of some of the principles can give guidance to resolving them. These statements could be included in the confession of faith, or be a separate document.

When the Union was started in 1877, there was a notable lack of any application of principles. In 1987, the Statement of Baptist Principles did, to a very limited extent, address some of doctrinal diversity and conflicts. For example, as noted previously, the charismatic movement within the Union was partly evaluated by its impact on congregational church government, which was one of the principles. However, many of these principles were simply a restatement of Baptist distinctives without any application.

There is still inconsistency and a lack of clarity in the Union as to why some doctrines are insisted on (such as congregational church government), why others are tolerated (such as women ordination and the doctrine of creation), and why some are simply not considered important enough to address as conditions of membership (such as inerrancy and the nature of inspiration). One of the responses given in the Sola 5 survey as to why they chose not to join the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was because the Union had not defined itself theologically (see Appendix B, section B, question 4). In other words, Sola 5 believes that the doctrinal standards of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa are minimalistic and try to accommodate many different theological persuasions. They lacked theological distinctives (apart from the basic Baptist distinctives) that would give them a more cohesive identity and therefore unity.

There is evidence to support this position of Sola 5. The previous sections demonstrate that there is significant doctrinal diversity within the Union that has led to some degree of conflict. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa includes groupings of Reformed and Arminian churches, charismatic and non-charismatic churches. There are churches who support women ordination, and those who oppose it strongly. There are churches who strongly believe that inerrancy should be included in the confession, and those who have historically opposed this. As shown previously, many in the Union have expressed concern at this diversity. This is evidence that the existing doctrinal statements of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa can be described as “minimalistic” and lack theological distinctives (apart from being basically Baptist), that could effectively provide a cohesive identity for the Union.

Miller (1987:151) also notes that the seemingly conflicting distinctives of the authority of scripture and liberty of conscience require some form of prioritisation. In other words, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has yet not yet come to a position when it, as a body, has a common understanding of these two issues. Miller, for example, contends that the authority of scripture takes precedence over liberty of conscience (Miller, 1987:151). This thesis, on the other hand, argues rather that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has *misunderstood* liberty of conscience. If the Baptist Union of Southern Africa insisted on a particular view of inspiration, it is only doing what it has already done with other doctrines, with no impact on liberty of conscience.

It can therefore be concluded that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa requires some form of application of its theological distinctives so that it can achieve more substantial unity, and deal with apparent conflicts and inconsistencies.

### **2.2.3 Meaningful adherence to doctrinal standards**

The framework in the previous chapter demonstrated that the early Baptists did not produce confessional standards as mere tokens. There was a sincerity and seriousness in adopting doctrinal standards. These were genuinely believed and upheld.

As a general comment, it has already been shown that in some areas of doctrine, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa confessional statements are ambiguous. For example, evidence has been produced of widely differing views on the inspiration of scripture. It is simply impossible to impose doctrinal standards when confessional statements are ambiguous. The results of the 1986 survey of the Union and the 2001 interview with a Baptist pastor are ample evidences of this. Also, the fact that neither the 1924 Statement of Belief nor the 1987 Statement of Principle are explicitly made a condition of membership in the Union (it is rather recommended to the churches), creates uncertainty of exactly what the standards are that must be upheld.

### ***2.2.3.1 Procedures to ensure regular compliance***

There are no explicit procedures with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa to ensure regular compliance with the confessional statements (Appendix A, section C, question 4). Ministerial applicants make a once-off declaration of their adherence to the 1924 Statement (BUSA, 1998:2.1.1). There is no formal procedure to ensure that these applicants or churches still maintain the intent and spirit of these standards. For example, it is argued that the pastor interviewed in 2001 held views far removed from the intent and spirit of these Statements. No form of censure was pursued.

### ***2.2.3.2 Gracious but firm separation***

There is evidence of inconsistent application of doctrinal separation in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

On the one hand, there has been separation on some issues. Firstly, the explicit adoption of congregational church government and resultant withdrawal of nine churches gives evidence that some degree of separation does take place. In this regard, the Executive in 1984 declared that if a church “departs from a principle it once held in common with other churches with which it sought fellowship, it isolates itself” and must not feel that the group has rejected it (Miller, 1987:79). It should be noted, however, that the principle of congregational church government was never in the original basis of the Union nor stated in the 1924 Statement of Belief. This incident simply reinforces the first principle of the framework that Baptists have to be strongly confessional so that the doctrinal standards are made explicit.

Secondly, the fact that Barnard was asked to resign from being the Principal of the theological seminary also shows evidence of separation. In this instance, however, it does need to be noted that it is uncertain whether Barnard, if he was also a pastor in

the Union, would have been asked to resign from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa as well. Similarly, Miller (1987:83) notes that in 1985, certain churches threatened to withdraw financial support from the Baptist Theological College due to one of the lecturers denying the historical nature of Genesis by questioning whether Adam and Eve were historical individuals or mere teaching models. The Executive took action and the issue was settled in the same year.

Thirdly, as noted above, in 1969 the Union finally withdrew from the Christian Council of South Africa, mainly because:

- Its relationship with the World Council of Churches;
- That the freedom of the individual church may come under jeopardy, as the expression of Christian unity is not achieved fully by organic union;
- The Christian Council was making political pronouncements with which many Baptists disagreed (Parnell, 1977:123-124).

On the other hand, there has been a puzzling lack of action on more fundamental issues that concern the authority of scripture. Not only was Ennals tolerated after his views on scripture were published, but he was even elected to the highest office in the Union. The results of the 1986 survey which indicated that groupings within the Union held to views which seriously undermined the authority of scripture, sparked no investigation or action. Lastly, the pastor interviewed in 2001 made known some of his views at his interview for ministerial recognition with no resultant censure.

It can therefore be concluded that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa must be considered as inconsistent in its attempts to meaningfully uphold its doctrinal standards. While there is evidence of separation on some issues, other, more fundamental issues are not addressed. Also, the fact that the Union does not necessarily impose its statements as conditions of membership, and that these statements are ambiguous in areas, undermines attempts to uphold doctrinal standards.

## **2.2.4 Local church participation**

The previous analysis shows that Baptist denominational structures that consist of individuals rather than local churches are unbiblical and inconsistent. Rather than protecting the autonomy of the local church, they tend to sideline the local church and displace critical ministries outside the control of the local church.

### ***2.2.4.1 Local church representation***

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa essentially consists of local churches (BUSA, 1933b:3.1.1; Appendix A, section C, question 1). In 2010, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa consisted of some 500 churches and 200 fellowships. Fellowships are groups of believers who are meeting regularly for worship, but are not yet self-supporting. Fellowships do not have a vote at the Assembly. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa also considers its seven associations as members of the Union, and each association is also allowed to send a delegate to the annual Assembly (BUSA, 1933a:3[b]). The delegates represent the local churches, and vote on their behalf.

This representation must be considered a real strength of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa represents a group of local churches acting together, and it is explicitly acknowledged to be so. There is also a very healthy emphasis on local church development, and facilitating local church ministries. For example, Coertze (2001:13) asserts that the *local church* is God's instrument for missions, and that this ministry cannot be taken away from the local church. The programme of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa from 2010 to 2015 is "Local Church Alive." Its aim is to strengthen and equip local churches in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa for ministry (Appendix A, section F, question 1.1).

#### **2.2.4.2 Local church control and accountability**

The fact that local churches are directly represented in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa does mean that all the ministries of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, such as missionary endeavour and theological education, are essentially under the control of the local churches collectively.

The functioning of the Baptist Theological College will demonstrate this principle. The Baptist Theological College is governed by a Council, which consists almost exclusively of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa Executive (BUSA, 1952:4). This Council has authority to appoint and remove members of staff (BTC, 1952:5[c]-[d]). The Principal is appointed by the Executive of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA, 1952:6).

The confession of the Baptist Theological College is the same as that of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, which in principle ensures theological compatibility. However, the previous historical analysis has also shown that some of the Baptist Theological College lecturers have been removed due to theological differences with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, which points to an inherent problem caused by a weak confessional basis. This point is developed below.

The intent of the original basis of the Union (that the local churches have authority to interpret scripture for themselves) was an attempt to let the churches govern the Union, and never allow the Union to govern the churches (Parnell, 1977:94). This principle is correct, as argued in the previous chapter. However, a weak, ambiguous doctrinal basis has the opposite effect in practice. A weak doctrinal basis gives neither the Union nor the local churches authority to govern, but rather ties up the Union in legal bureaucracy. It must be remembered that the Union is a Union of churches. A weak doctrinal basis allows neither the Union (the local churches collectively) to insist on doctrinal standards, nor individual local churches to challenge the participation of other churches or members who deviate from scriptural norms.

There is therefore conflicting evidence of the effectiveness of the control of the local churches in the Union. On the one hand, the incident involving nine churches leaving the Baptist Union of Southern Africa due to lack of adherence to congregational church government does show that the local churches, through voting in the Assembly, do express their standards of membership.

On the other hand, the incident with Barnard mentioned above shows considerable weakness within the Union. The majority of the Executive required that “verbal inspiration” (in other words, the very words of scripture were inspired, not just the thoughts behind them) was to be taught in the College so that the future ministers being trained there would firmly hold to that view (Miller, 1987:61). The Assembly (which is the collective voice of the local churches) endorsed this view (Miller, 1987:61). However, in 1958 when the Executive wanted to make verbal inspiration a matter of acceptance for ministerial candidates, one of the issues raised was that it required *unanimous* support (Miller, 1987:68). This means, in effect, that a single dissenting church in the Union can prevent the entire Union from adopting a particular view on inspiration. This is clear evidence that a weak doctrinal basis for the Union can, in some instances, remove control from the local churches collectively and place them in the hands of a small minority through a poor constitution. Clearly, this alleged constitutional issue needs to be resolved.

The majority of the churches collectively must always be able to determine the doctrinal standards of the Union. These standards must be updated in response to the ever-changing theological challenges, as long as they do not contradict the original basis of the Union. In this regard, adopting a particular view of inspiration would simply clarify what the original basis intended, and certainly not contradict it.

It must therefore be concluded that the Union does in principle have local church participation and control. However, a misunderstanding of liberty of conscience in an

ecclesiastical setting and a weak doctrinal basis undermines this control with regard to important theological issues in the Union.

#### ***2.2.4.3 Denominational bodies and ecclesiastical authority***

There is no evidence to indicate that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa seeks to exercise ecclesiastical authority over the individual churches. Firstly, local churches are able to call their own pastors and elect their elders without any reference to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa if they so choose. If these pastors, however, have not been trained in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa institutions and they want to be placed on the list of accredited pastors, then certain procedures apply (BUSA, 1998:2). It must be noted that between 1937 and 1943 the Executive of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa did attempt to regulate and centralise ministerial placements. A 1943 proposal even stated that no ministerial appointments could be made in the local churches without consultation with the Ministerial Settlements Committee (BUSA, 1944:64). This proposal was adopted in 1944, but then subsequently rescinded in 1949 by the Baptist Union of Southern Africa as it was perceived to undermine the autonomy of the local church (Parnell, 1977:99-100).

Secondly, the local churches are not compelled to participate in the programmes of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, nor are they compelled to attend the Annual Assembly.

An area of complication, however, can be noted in the survey response from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (Appendix A, section C, question 1), where the General Secretary believes the decisions of the Assembly are “binding” on the local churches. This statement is not qualified in any way. On the one hand, it is clear that the doctrinal standards adopted by the Assembly are binding on the local churches, as the incident of the resignation of nine churches due to congregational church government indicates. However, it is not clear how this relates to other decisions of the Assembly. For example, in 1989, the Assembly concluded that women ordination

would become a matter of toleration in the Union, with local churches free to ordain women to the office of pastor. However, Hillcrest Baptist Church was one of the churches that informed the Union that they disagreed with the decision, and that woman ordination was unscriptural and a movement to “liberal” churches. No action was taken against Hillcrest Baptist Church for this dissent. However, this example is still inconclusive, as the fact that Hillcrest Baptist Church has stayed in the Union is an indication that it has, by its very action, accepted women ordination as a matter of toleration. Otherwise, it would have left the Union.

Despite this lack of clarity, however, it can be concluded that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa does not seek to exert ecclesiastical authority over the local churches.

## **2.3 Conclusions**

The evaluation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa shows a number of positive and negative elements. The main strength of the current functioning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is its focus on local church participation, control and accountability. There is certainly an emphasis on empowering the local church to function more effectively. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa does not consist of individuals, but local churches that are directly represented through their delegates. The control of the local churches is, however, undermined by the weak confessional basis of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

However, the history and functioning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa demonstrates some significant weaknesses. The confessional basis is weak, ambiguous in places, and partly ineffective. This is particularly prevalent with regard to the doctrine of scripture. There is evidence that the authority of scripture has been weakened in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

There is an inconsistent application of doctrinal standards, with a notable lack of differentiation between primary and secondary issues. This, together with a defective view of liberty of conscience, has resulted in a significant degree of unhealthy doctrinal diversity in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

It can therefore be concluded that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa currently displays significant departures from consistent Baptist denominationalism.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **EVALUATION OF SOLA 5**

This chapter follows a similar structure to the previous chapter, and is divided into two main sections. The first section, by way of introduction, gives an historical overview of the Sola 5, describes its structure, and then notes the powers and functions of the denomination. This is followed, in the second section, by a detailed evaluation of the Sola 5 in terms of the framework developed in an earlier chapter.

It needs to be noted that due to the recent nature of Sola 5, the evaluation will mainly focus on the formal documents of Sola 5, the minutes of the annual business meeting and the survey (see Appendix B). This chapter is therefore not as extensive as the evaluation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1.1 Historical overview**

Sola 5 was formally established in October 2005. It grew out of the Spurgeon Fraternal meeting and the Reformed Baptist Association Southern Africa. The Spurgeon's Fraternal started in 1998, and met regularly two to three times a year for fellowship and encouragement. At a meeting in July 2004, concern was expressed at the weakness and fragmentation that was visible amongst churches with a Reformed persuasion. At the next meeting in October 2004, there was an enthusiastic response to the idea of setting up a new association of churches (Sola 5, 2010**b**).

At a subsequent meeting of the Reformed Baptist Association of Southern Africa, an interim committee was established to draft a suitable Confession of Faith, Declaration of Values and Constitution. These documents were based on the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, but the language was modernised and the more lengthy confession summarised to a shorter version. A Declaration of Values was also developed to supplement the confession, and dealt with issues such as ethics, the environment and hyper-orthodoxy.

At a gathering in Heidelberg, South Africa, from 6-8 April 2005, the documents were discussed by a group of some 45 people representing churches from Zambia, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Botswana. The title “Sola 5” with the subtitle “An association of God-centred evangelicals in Southern Africa” was adopted, although there was some debate regarding whether “Baptist” should have been included. On 8 April 2005, a Declaration of Intent to establish Sola 5 was signed (Sola 5, 2010b).

In October 2005, at its first Conference, Sola 5 was formally established with eleven member churches and over thirty associate members. In 2006 a handbook was produced, which contained the Confession, Constitution and Values of Sola 5. By 2008, there were twenty two churches belonging to Sola 5. This number had grown to twenty four by 2010 (Sola 5, 2010a).

The Antipas Reformed Baptist Church, one of the Sola 5 churches, had been trying to establish a theological seminary. It soon became apparent that a single church would not be able to properly establish such a seminary. It was therefore suggested that Sola 5 establish a seminary (called the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary) under the auspices of the University of Africa (Sola 5, 2006b:1).

There were advantages to the affiliation with the University of Africa: it was independent, had Christian businessmen as its founders, and each faculty was autonomous (Sola 5, 2006b:5). This meant that Sola 5 would be able to completely control the doctrinal standards at the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary. This

proposal was accepted at the 2006 Sola 5 Conference in Windhoek (Sola 5:2006b:1), and the first students were enrolled in January 2008 (Sola 5, 2008:3).

### **3.1.2 Overview of the structure and functions of Sola 5**

Sola 5 is essentially an association of local churches (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1). Individuals may also join Sola 5 as associate members. However, they have no voting rights. The intent of the associate members is to encourage individual Christians who are in essential agreement with the Confession and Core Values of Sola 5 but who are unable to find suitable local churches (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1; 5.2).

The essential business of Sola 5 is conducted by representatives of the member churches at an Annual Business Meeting. Each member church has one vote at these meetings (Sola 5, 2005a:6.2[c]). Every year, a Steering Committee is elected to execute the decisions made at the Annual Business Meeting (Sola 5, 2005a:6.3). It should also be noted that Sola 5 does make provision for either full-time or part-time officials or assistants. In this regard, the Constitution emphasises that the intent is not to create an institution in its own right that has authority over the local churches, but rather to facilitate local church co-operation (Sola 5, 2005a:6.8).

It is clear from the Constitution that member churches are truly represented at the Annual Business Meeting, and that decisions made by the representatives are on behalf of the churches (Sola 5, 2005a:6.2).

The functions of Sola 5 are stated both in the negative and positive. Sola 5 is not meant to be an institution apart from the local churches, but rather to “facilitate co-operation amongst local churches in the work of God’s kingdom” (Sola 5, 2005a:6.3[a]). The purpose of Sola 5 is essentially to:

- Unite and promote fellowship amongst local churches and individuals
- Support and encourage local churches

- Facilitate cooperation in joint projects
- Nurture the formation of new local churches  
(Sola 5, 2005a:3.1)

Provision is also made for Sola 5 to maintain a list of teaching elders that the local churches may choose to use in the event of a pastoral vacancy. This has not yet been implemented, however. Importantly, these candidates are not imposed on any of the churches, and churches are still free to select pastors from other groups or institutions (Sola 5, 2005a:6.7). As mentioned above, Sola 5 are also involved in the training of pastors. The Academic Advisory Board for the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary was originally appointed by Sola 5, and it shares the same Confession of Faith and Core Values as Sola 5 (SGTS, 2008:2.1, 2.2). However, in the recent past, the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary was ceded to the four Zambian churches of Sola 5 (Appendix B, section B, question 2) partly out of fears of becoming a “denomination”. This issue is evaluated in a subsequent section of this chapter.

## **3.2 EVALUATION OF SOLA 5**

This section evaluates Sola 5 in terms of the framework developed in an earlier chapter. In addition, each section also includes a comparative statement of Sola 5 with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in order to assess if any improvement on Baptist denominationalism has been made.

### **3.2.1 Strength of the confessional basis**

The Confession of Faith of Sola 5 was adopted in September 2005 at the same time that the association was established. While Sola 5 does allow member churches to

have their own confessions of faith in addition to that of the association, these must be consistent with the doctrinal standards of Sola 5 (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1[d]).

### **3.2.1.1 Sufficiently comprehensive confession**

The Sola 5 Confession of Faith can be described as comprehensive. Although not as lengthy as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, it covers the doctrines of God, scripture, Creation, the fall of man into sin, the Person and work of Christ, the church, Christian life, marriage, death, resurrection, the final judgement and the final state. It is distinctively Calvinistic (Sola 5, 2005b).

The Confession of Faith is supplemented by a statement on Core Values (Sola 5, 2005c), which covers contemporary issues such as God-centeredness, logic and reason, authority, marriage and sexuality, discipline, gender roles, the sanctity of life, religious freedom, pluralism, the sufficiency of scripture, evangelism, hyper-orthodoxy, the unity of the church and expository preaching.

The purpose of the Confession and Core Values is to enable an “unambiguous shared identity” that will effectively facilitate prayer, fellowship, theological education, missionary endeavour and church planting (Sola 5, 2006a:3). These doctrinal statements contain enough detail to make the doctrinal values of the group explicit.

These doctrinal statements are in stark contrast to those of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The previous chapter noted a significant degree of confusion and unhappiness from many members in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa regarding growing doctrinal diversity. Some of the issues related to the authority of scripture (and the nature of inspiration), the charismatic movement and gender issues with regard to leadership in the church. The Sola 5 doctrinal standards take an unambiguous position on each of these issues. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa doctrinal standards also left a number of issues unanswered, such as whether views of evolution were acceptable or not.

The previous chapter also demonstrated that some of the lack of doctrinal clarity in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa resulted from a defective understanding of liberty of conscience. The response to the survey of Sola 5 regarding the liberty of individual churches should be noted:

*We are being restrictive in a sense, but we are not imposing on anyone's liberty. Churches and individuals join freely and can leave freely. The association is there to enable churches and individuals who freely adopt the doctrinal standards to co-operate effectively with one another. Without doctrinal standards there would be no basis for cooperation (Appendix B, section D, question 1.1).*

This understanding of liberty of conscience and maintaining biblical standards corresponds closely with the historical and theological evaluation in an earlier chapter. The early Baptists certainly did maintain doctrinal and moral standards in their churches and denominational groups, and did not believe that it impacted on the liberty of members as membership was entirely voluntary.

It must therefore be concluded that the doctrinal standards of Sola 5 are a significant improvement on those of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. It is therefore predicted that a significant degree of unity will exist amongst the churches that will enable effective co-operation. One issue that has caused some differences relates to the fear of becoming a "denomination," with a subsequent change in the accountability of the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary from Sola 5 to the four churches in Zambia (Appendix B, section B, question 2; Sola 5, 2009:2). This is discussed and evaluated in a subsequent section dealing with the local church.

One objection may be that Sola 5 has been too comprehensive in its doctrinal standards, and therefore in danger of becoming isolationist. Three points need to be made in response to this possible objection.

Firstly, the Confession and Core Values of Sola 5 are less comprehensive than the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The popularity of the 1689 Confession amongst the early Baptists and the subsequent popular Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742 has already been noted (Torbet, 1950:32). In other words, the comprehensiveness of the Sola 5 documents is not out of line with the historical practices of many of the early Baptists.

Secondly, the Sola 5 doctrinal standards recognise the danger of hyper-orthodoxy (Sola 5, 2005c:23), and insist on liberty within the association on “non-essentials”. This point will be further taken up in a subsequent section. In addition, although the association is “baptistic,” it does express the desire to “co-operate with like-minded, non-baptistic church associations” (Sola 5, 2006a:5). This does give evidence of a spirit of unity across denomination lines.

Thirdly, the doctrinal standards need to ensure sufficient unity within the group for it to achieve its stated purposes. Factionalism within the group will hamper it achieving its goals. However, if the doctrinal standards are too narrow, Sola 5 will remain small and be unable to muster sufficient resources to achieve its goals. By 2010, Sola 5 consisted of 24 churches from six different countries, and a theological seminary has already been established. Although Sola 5 is still a relatively recent group, this is an indication that the doctrinal standards are proving effective for them to achieve their goals.

### ***3.2.1.2 Scripture and authority***

The Sola 5 Confession of Faith contains a chapter on the scriptures. This chapter contains four paragraphs, and articulates the following:

- The sixty six books of the Bible are God’s revelation.
- The original autographs are inspired by God, which is verbal and plenary.
- The scriptures are therefore infallible, inerrant, sufficient and authoritative.

- The Bible alone is the final authority of the church.
- The interpretation of scripture must be according to the author's original intent, and therefore, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, the normal "grammatico-historical rules of interpretation" must be followed (Sola 5, 2005b:2.1-2.4).

The Core Values of Sola 5 also elaborate on the sufficiency of scripture, stating that the canon of scripture is closed. A cessationist position is also endorsed (Sola 5, 2005c:15).

The aim of this evaluation is not to assess the validity of each of these doctrines, but rather to note that the Confession of Faith and Core Values deal explicitly with each of the issues that can impact on the authority of scripture. The doctrinal standards therefore deal with the more modern issues confronting the church such as errancy views and the charismatic movement with its claims of continued direct revelation from God.

The doctrinal standards of Sola 5 therefore show a substantial improvement on the doctrine of scripture to those of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The previous chapter noted the continued ambiguity on the issue of inspiration of scripture in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Despite a number of controversies on the doctrine of scripture, the ambiguity has not been clarified. The previous chapter also provided evidence of a negative impact on the authority of scripture in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

### **3.2.1.3 Primary and secondary issues**

The Core Values of Sola 5 contain a statement on hyper-orthodoxy. This is quoted in full due to its relevance for this section:

*Our Lord has warned his church against straining out gnats while swallowing camels.*

- *Therefore we affirm that in essentials there must be unity, in non-essentials liberty and in all things charity.*
- *We deny that our understanding of infallible truth is itself infallible, and that all matters are equally important; therefore we deny that all matters require contention and division among those who differ.*

*For the purpose of fellowship in Sola 5, we consider non-essentials to be those matters which are outside of our Confession of Faith and Core Values. (Sola 5, 2005c:23).*

This statement shows sensitivity to the danger of being over-prescriptive with regard to standards for membership. It also makes explicit that issues not addressed in the doctrinal standards are considered to be non-essential issues, and liberty will be allowed on these issues. A church considering joining Sola 5 will therefore have clarity with regard to what it needs to subscribe to.

This again shows a drastic improvement to the current doctrinal standards of Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The previous chapter shows that a number of critical doctrines are simply not addressed in Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The responses from the survey of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa indicated that, for example, some views of evolution may not be acceptable. The survey also showed that Roy believed that errancy views did in fact negatively impact on the authority of scripture and should not be acceptable in the Union, yet the doctrinal standards fail to deal with this. The case of the nine churches resigning from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa on the issue of congregational government is another case in point. Prior to 1987, the Baptist Union's doctrinal standards did not contain a reference to congregational church government. These resigning churches may have assumed that it was therefore an issue of tolerance. However, with the adoption of the 1987 Principles, it turned out that it was not a secondary issue. The previous chapter therefore concludes that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa can be charged with a lack of clarity on what are considered secondary issues in the Union.

The Sola 5 standards have therefore moved to a more consistent Baptist position.

#### **3.2.1.4 *The confession must remain relevant***

Two points need to be noted with regard to the Sola 5 doctrinal standards. Firstly, the central teachings of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith have been simplified and modernised. They have therefore showed continuity with their historical Baptist roots, but also demonstrated that they are mindful of the current generation.

Secondly, the Confession of Faith and especially the Core Values have included statements on issues that are relevant for today. Some of these issues include:

- Inerrancy
- The sanctity of life as it relates to abortion and the death penalty
- Marriage and sexuality, including sexual perversions
- Role relationships between men and women
- Racial harmony
- Animals and the environment

(Sola 5, 2005c:2-11)

The previous chapter shows that there is conflicting evidence regarding the relevance of the doctrinal standards of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in the current theological climate and culture. While the 1987 Principles did update the doctrinal standards to a certain extent, and a statement on heterosexual marriage was endorsed in 2000, the doctrinal standards are notably silent on many contemporary issues. As also noted, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has not updated its confession to deal with the inerrancy issue.

The Sola 5 doctrinal standards show a healthy recognition of the current cultural values and theological issues. While remaining faithful to the historic Calvinism of the

1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standards can be described as contemporary and relevant. A modern reader would be able to clearly understand the position of Sola 5 on a range of relevant issues.

### **3.2.2 Some application of principles**

There is evidence that Sola 5 has defined itself theologically. The earlier framework argues that often minimalistic Baptist confessions are not sufficient on their own to give a group a common identity and a sense of cohesion. Often, seemingly competing distinctives such as liberty versus maintaining doctrinal standards are left unresolved. When new issues arise, the group finds itself divided on how to apply its original principles.

Firstly, the Sola 5 Confession of Faith contains theological distinctives (apart from being Baptist) that provide an understanding of how they apply their doctrines. They are strongly Calvinistic, and have taken a position, for example, on the charismatic movement and evolution. They have in fact defined themselves theologically on a number of controversial and currently potentially divisive issues.

Secondly, as already noted, Sola 5 has in fact included a statement of Core Values to supplement its Confession of Faith. A review of the Core Values of Sola 5 reveals that a wide range of additional, contemporary issues are addressed. These do in fact indicate how they have applied their principles in the modern context. This has a two-fold effect. Firstly, it promotes a clearer identity. Secondly, because some Scriptural and Baptist principles have already been applied to relevant issues, the Core Values show how the group harmonises seemingly competing principles.

The evaluation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in the previous chapter shows that there is some degree of confusion and inconsistency. There is still lack of clarity in the Union as to why some doctrines are insisted on (such as congregational church government), why others are tolerated (such as women ordination and the doctrine of

creation), and why some are simply not considered important enough to make as conditions of membership (such as inerrancy and the nature of inspiration). The growing doctrinal diversity also indicates that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is lacking meaningful cohesion and common identity.

The Sola 5 doctrinal standards provide a greater degree of consistency and cohesion for the group. It is anticipated that Sola 5 will therefore enjoy greater unity and harmony than the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and offers a substantial improvement in more than one aspect, on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

### **3.2.3 Meaningful adherence to doctrinal standards**

The previous chapters show that the early Baptists did not hold their confessions and doctrinal standards as mere tokens. There was a seriousness and integrity in embracing the truths they professed, even to the point of suffering persecution. The previous framework expresses this sentiment in terms of the two principles below.

As a general comment, however, it needs to be noted that the Sola 5 doctrinal statements are clearer and more precise than the Baptist Union of Southern Africa statements. For example, the issue of the authority of scripture in relation to inerrancy has been explicitly dealt with. Also, the separation of primary and secondary issues has also been made clear. As noted in the previous chapter, given the ambiguity and lack of clarity in the standards of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, maintaining doctrinal standards has been difficult in some areas. The Sola 5 statements show a marked improvement.

#### ***3.2.3.1 Procedures to ensure regular compliance***

Sola 5 include in their Constitution the specific requirement that the member churches renew their commitment to Sola 5 every year at the Annual Business Meeting (Sola 5,

2005a:5.1[e]). Failure to do so results in membership lapsing. This commitment includes acceptance of the doctrinal standards of Sola 5 (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1). There is therefore a clear procedure that requires members to renew their commitment to the association and its doctrinal standards every year. This does not guarantee that adherence to the doctrinal standards does not become a mere token, but it does show recognition of the importance of maintaining doctrinal standards and is an improvement on the stance of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

### ***3.2.3.2 Gracious but firm separation***

Due to the relatively recent nature of Sola 5, there is no historical evidence to give an indication of how Sola 5 has or will deal with those churches deviating from the doctrinal standards. All that needs to be noted here is that the Constitution makes provision for members to be removed by a 75 percent majority vote at the Annual Business Meeting (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1[g]). Importantly, this clause in the Constitution notes that termination of membership must only take place after the Steering Committee has diligently sought to resolve the matter.

It should be noted that one of the main reasons Sola 5 did not join the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was because of its doctrinal diversity (Appendix B, section B, question 4). This does give an indication that Sola 5 is prepared to separate from churches it considers to be diverging from Scriptural norms. There is no historical evidence to contradict this.

In principle, therefore, both the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Sola 5 make adequate allowances for deviating members to be removed after due process. However, some of the historical inconsistencies in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa are noted in the previous chapter in regard to this aspect.

### **3.2.4 Local church participation**

#### ***3.2.4.1 Local church representation***

Sola 5 essentially consists of local churches (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1). Although individuals are allowed to be Associate Members, they have no voting rights (Sola 5, 2005a:5.2). Also, these Associate Members, if they are not members of a local church, need to offer an acceptable explanation as to why they are not able to join a local church (Sola 5, 2009:2). This shows a true commitment to keep the local church the centre of ministry, and not to allow Sola 5 to act as a substitute for the local church.

Each church sends a nominee to the Annual Business Meeting. The Constitution prefers this nominee to be an elder of the local church (Sola 5, 2005a:5.1[c]). These nominees vote and act on behalf of the church. There is some debate in Sola 5 as to whether these nominees need an explicit mandate from their churches for every decision they vote on (Appendix B, section B, question 1). Irrespective of whether the individual local churches take differing positions on this issue regarding mandates, the fact is that the local churches are represented in Sola 5.

The purpose of Sola 5 is centred on encouraging and strengthening local churches (Sola 5, 2005a:3.1). In this regard, Sola 5 is very similar to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Neither sees its group as consisting of individuals. Local churches are truly represented through their delegates or nominees.

#### ***3.2.4.2 Local church control and accountability***

The fact that local churches are directly represented in Sola 5 does mean that all the ministries of Sola 5, in principle, are accountable to the local churches and under their control.

Sola 5 also shows a consistency in keeping local churches at the centre of ministry. This can be seen in the functioning of the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary. Firstly, the Seminary offers correspondence study (with only a “contact” week each year with lecturers), partly to allow students to fall under the oversight and mentorship of their local church pastors (Sola 5, 2006b:6).

Secondly, members of the Seminary Board (appointed by Sola 5) could originally only be comprised of men who are members of local churches and therefore directly accountable to their elders (Sola 5, 2006b:7). However, this provision has subsequently been relaxed.

Thirdly, in the event that disciplinary action is required against one of the lecturers, this is left up to the relevant local church in the first instance; only if the local church does not act, will Sola 5 act collectively (Sola 5, 2006b:7).

An issue of some importance, however, has arisen in Sola 5. In 2008, a change occurred with regard to the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary. As noted in the historical overview, prior to 2008, the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary was governed by an Academic and Advisory Board appointed by Sola 5 and therefore directly accountable to the local churches in Sola 5 collectively (Sola 5, 2006b:1). In 2008, partly out of fears of becoming a “denomination,” the accountability and control of the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary was ceded to the four Zambian churches in Sola 5 (Appendix B, section B, question 2; Sola 5, 2009:2). In this context, it needs to be understood that the term “denomination” is used by Sola 5 to describe a body that *controls* the local churches.

While this change has not moved the control and accountability away from the local church, it is nevertheless problematic and inconsistent. Firstly, as the previous chapters argue, the early Baptists saw the need to co-operate with one another to achieve goals that they could not achieve individually, such as missionary endeavour

and theological education. The New Testament also has evidence of certain ministries being accountable to local churches collectively. Sola 5 was established on these very principles, but now seems to have partly shifted away from its original intent. The Confession and Constitution of Sola 5 make it clear that it is merely an association to strengthen and equip local churches, and to promote ministries that none of the local churches can fulfil on their own. In order to do this, some form of a body or organisation does need to be formed to facilitate this co-operation and agree on the basis upon which the co-operation will take place. If this comprises “denominationalism,” then Sola 5 should disband altogether. Conversely, if Sola 5 is a body that represents and is accountable to a group of local churches for the express purpose of pursuing certain ministries, then there is no reason to remove these ministries away from being accountable to the local churches collectively. This is clearly inconsistent.

Secondly, nothing has been gained by the change in principle. The Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary is still accountable to a *group* of churches, but now just a smaller group. If the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary can be accountable to a group of four churches, there is no reason why it cannot be accountable to a group of twenty four churches. In other words, whether explicitly recognised or not, Sola 5 has established a group within a group. This issue needs to be resolved and Sola 5 needs to come to terms with the fact that inter-church co-operation does by definition require some form of organisation, and that it is still consistent with Baptist principles and scripture for some ministries to be accountable to that collective body. The issue is whether that organisation truly represents local churches, and whether it exercises ecclesiastical authority over the churches or merely facilitates local church co-operation and co-action.

This inconsistency in Sola 5 must not be overstated, however. The Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary is still accountable to local churches within Sola 5, and the robust doctrinal standards and common identity within the group should ensure that

the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary is governed to the satisfaction of Sola 5 collectively. In other words, it will most likely still fulfil its intended aim.

#### ***3.2.4.3 Denominational bodies and ecclesiastical authority***

The Sola 5 Confession clearly states that the denominational structure does not have authority over the local churches and that any direction given is advisory. It does require, however, that such direction be taken seriously, in a spirit of seeking Christ's will (Sola 5, 2005b:7).

There are no requirements for Sola 5 to ratify any ministerial placements, and the autonomy of the local churches is generally upheld. There is no evidence in either the Constitution or the minutes of the Annual Business Meeting that Sola 5 attempts to exercise ecclesiastical authority over the local churches. For this reason, Sola 5 is deemed to uphold this principle in a manner similar to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

### **3.3 CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation of Sola 5 shows that it is largely consistent with Baptist denominationalism. In particular, its doctrinal standards are clear, unambiguous and preserve the authority of scripture. There is substantial doctrinal definition to provide a cohesive identity and unity within the group. There is also a healthy focus on local church representation and accountability.

The evaluation does, however, show an area of moderate inconsistency and confusion with regard to accountability to the local churches collectively. In response to fears of "denominationalism," it has created a group within a group which has no practical benefits or theological advantages.

It can therefore be concluded that Sola 5 provides substantial improvements to critical weaknesses in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. On the whole, Sola 5 is a good example of what consistent Baptist denominationalism should look in practice.

# **CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF BAPTIST CHURCHES OF SA**

## **4.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

### **4.1.1 Historical overview**

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa was established in 1991, and by 2010 consisted of 10 churches (FBCSA, 2009).

The grouping was essentially started by The Association of Baptists for World Evangelism missionaries who planted their first church in South Africa in 1981, namely, the Community Baptist Church in Westville. In 1983, a second church was established in Queensburgh, namely, the Grace Baptist Church (FBCSA, 2009). Successive churches were added, mainly from the activities of other Association of Baptists for World Evangelism missionaries working with the local leadership at the established churches.

The Church Ministries Institute was initiated in 1981 by an Association of Baptists for World Evangelism missionary, and the training of local leaders commenced. The Church Ministries Institute was replaced with the Baptist Bible College of Natal in 1991. The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa was also established in 1991, and controlled the Baptist Bible College (FBCSA, 2009). The purpose of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is “mutual encouragement, fellowship, and strategic planning” (FBCSA, 2009).

#### **4.1.2 Overview of the structure and functions of Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa**

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is essentially an association of local churches (FBCSA, 1991a:6.1). Each church is represented by authorised messengers. These messengers vote on behalf of the churches (FBCSA, 1991a:8.2).

A KwaZulu-Natal Ministry Team leads the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa. This team consists of the full time pastors (and spouses) of the member churches, as well as the missionaries of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism who are assigned to the Durban Field Council (FBCSA, 1991a:8.1). This Ministry Team calls the meetings, reviews and presents applications for membership, appoints individuals to perform tasks, appoints a treasurer and also approves expenditure for the Fellowship (FBCSA, 1991a:8.1.1.1-8.1.1.6).

The objectives of the Fellowship are stated as follows:

- To promote inter-church fellowship, edification and the mutual encouragement of those churches that are in agreement with the aims and doctrinal statement of this Fellowship.
- To assist the churches in maintaining and propagating sound biblical teaching.
- To promote world missions, church planting, evangelism, Christian education and inter-church gatherings at local, provincial and national levels.
- In the pursuance of these objects, the Fellowship will in no way violate or impinge upon the autonomy of its member churches. (FBCSA, 1991a:4).

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa has established the Baptist Bible College of KwaZulu-Natal. It is run by a College Board, which is composed entirely of members of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa (Appendix C, section B, question 2).

## **4.2 EVALUATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF BAPTIST CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is evaluated in terms of the framework developed in an earlier chapter. In addition, each section includes a comparative evaluation of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Sola 5, in order to assess if any improvement on Baptist denominationalism has been made.

### **4.2.1 Strength of the confessional basis**

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa Confession of Faith is an integral part of the Constitution of the Fellowship (FBCSA, 1991a:3). Every church wishing to join the Fellowship must subscribe to the Confession of Faith and Constitution, and re-affirm this commitment every year (FBCSA, 1991a:6.2).

#### ***4.2.1.1 Sufficiently comprehensive confession***

The Confession of Faith can be described as comprehensive. It covers the doctrines of God (each Person of the Trinity in turn), scripture, Creation, Satan, the fall of man into sin, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, the freeness of salvation and justification, the church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, eternal security, civil government, resurrection, the final judgement, the charismatic movement, tongues, healing and finally, Biblical separation. It is distinctively Dispensational, as it insists on a pre-millennial and pre-tribulational return of Christ (FBCSA, 1991b:4, 20). The Confession also has hints of Calvinism, as it articulates the depravity of man (FBCSA, 1991b:8) and eternal security (FBCSA, 1991b:17).

There is considerable detail and doctrinal content. It must therefore be concluded that the doctrinal standards of Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is a significant improvement on those of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Consequently, a significant degree of unity should therefore exist amongst the churches that will enable effective co-operation.

The Confession of Faith is also supplemented by a statement on Core Values, which has a practical slant to it in advocating teamwork and openness. However, apart from the last section which deals with the primacy of the local church (FBCSA, 1991c:10), there is little explicit doctrinal content in the Core values.

A similar objection to that dealt with for Sola 5 may be raised in that the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa may be too restrictive in their doctrinal standards. As noted in the previous chapter, doctrinal standards need to provide enough clarity and detail to ensure solid unity to achieve the objectives of the group. The doctrinal standards of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa do achieve this. Although the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is the smallest of the groupings evaluated in this book, as long as it is able to consolidate sufficient resources to meet its objectives, then the group can be considered as functioning effectively. There is no evidence currently to suggest that the group is too restrictive.

The doctrinal standards of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are considered as comparable with Sola 5. They both contain doctrinal distinctives to a significant level of detail.

#### ***4.2.1.2 Scripture and authority***

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa Confession of Faith contains a relatively brief statement on the scriptures. It articulates that:

- The original autographs are verbally inspired by God

- There is no mixture of error in the scripture
- The statements of scripture concerning science, history, ethics or religion contain no error
- The bible is the supreme standard by which all human actions, creeds and opinions will be tried (FBCSA, 1991**b**:1).

The Confession also elaborates on the sufficiency and finality of scripture when it deals with the modern charismatic movement, advocating a cessationist position (FBCSA, 1991**b**:24-25).

These doctrinal standards show a significant improvement on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa doctrinal statements, although they are not as comprehensive as the Sola 5 statements. They include verbal inspiration, and explicitly uphold the authority of statements of scripture that relate to science, history or ethics. This is the basic inerrancy position as detailed by the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy mentioned previously. The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa has therefore made explicit the attributes of scripture it believes preserves its authority. The Confession is therefore unambiguous in the current theological climate.

#### ***4.2.1.3 Primary and secondary issues***

The Constitution of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa makes it clear that a church wanting to join the group must subscribe to the full Confession and Constitution (FBCSA, 1991**a**:3, 6.1). Although not explicitly stated, this implies that the group considers the doctrines in the Confession as primary in terms of membership in the Fellowship. Presumably, those issues not articulated in the Confession are considered as matters where the churches may differ with each other.

Two points need to be noted. Firstly, the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa shows an improvement on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa statements and

practices. A church wanting to join the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is presented with the doctrinal statements it needs to agree with, and these doctrinal statements are sufficiently comprehensive to allow meaningful comprehension of the groups beliefs.

Secondly, however, the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa should still clarify the issue of what is considered secondary issues with an explicit statement as made by Sola 5. Therefore, while the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is an improvement of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, it is inferior to the doctrinal statements of Sola 5.

#### ***4.2.1.4 The confession must remain relevant***

The Fellowship's Confession and Core Values do display an appreciation of issues relevant to the current theological climate and deals with them explicitly. For example, as noted before, the confession deals with the inerrancy issue, the modern charismatic movement (including healings and tongues), evolution and the relationship of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa to other ecumenical groups in South Africa and the rest of the world.

As with Sola 5, the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa therefore shows a significant improvement on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in this regard, and is comparable with Sola 5.

#### **4.2.2 Some application of principles**

The Confession of Faith contains numerous instances where Scriptural principles have been practically applied, which further sharpen the identity of the group. For example, the Confession deals explicitly with evolution, the personal nature of Satan, the freeness of the gospel offer, financial support of gospel work, a detailed section

on bodily healings and tongues in the light of modern practices and claims, and lastly, specific application of the doctrine of separation from groups such as the World Council of Churches, the South African Council of Churches and the Baptist World Alliance. Their particular justification for this separation is not of significance for this book.

This shows a considerable improvement on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, although is not as extensive as Sola 5. It is therefore not surprising that there has been little or no conflict within Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa with regard to doctrinal issues (Appendix C, section D, question 1.2).

#### **4.2.3 Meaningful adherence to doctrinal standards**

The Fellowship shows a healthy appreciation of the need to maintain doctrinal standards, as evident in the following two points.

##### ***4.2.3.1 Procedures to ensure regular compliance***

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa includes in its Constitution the following requirement:

*During the month of December in every calendar year the member churches shall confirm in writing their recognition and endorsement of this Constitution and the Confession of Faith. Refusal to do so shall result in automatic forfeiture of membership (FBCSA, 1991a:6.2).*

There is therefore a clear procedure that requires members to renew their commitment to the doctrinal standards every year. This does not guarantee that adherence to the doctrinal standards will not become a mere token, but it does show recognition of the importance of maintaining doctrinal standards. As with Sola 5, the

Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa shows a significant improvement on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

#### ***4.2.3.2 Gracious but firm separation***

The Constitution of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa has an annual procedure, noted above, which automatically excludes members who do not renew their commitment to the Constitution and Confession of Faith. This at least shows in principle a commitment to maintaining doctrinal standards and separating from those who no longer subscribe to the beliefs of the group.

Due to the relatively recent establishment of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa, no evidence could be found regarding churches that have been expelled from the group for doctrinal or moral reasons. However, the Confession of Faith does devote an entire section to personal and ecclesiastical separation from Christian groups who, in the opinion of the Fellowship, are compromised (FBCSA, 1991**b**:26). It also needs to be noted that one of the main reasons for the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa not joining the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was the degree of doctrinal diversity amongst the churches (Appendix C, section B, question 4). This is evidence that the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is prepared to practise separation where warranted in its view, and again shows an improvement on the practices in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

#### **4.2.4 Local church participation**

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa can be identified as an “independent” Baptist Group that has adopted an “anti-denominational” position (Blackwell, 2002:63, 99). However, it still fits the definition of a denominational group in this book. Consistency would therefore demand a strong emphasis on the local

church. This section details the functioning and structure of the group as it relates to the local church.

#### ***4.2.4.1 Local Church Representation***

The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa consists of local churches. These local churches are represented by their “authorised representatives” (FBCSA, 1991a:6.1; Appendix C, section B, question 1) for the purposes of signifying agreement to the Constitution and Confession. No provision is made for individuals to be members of the Fellowship. At the meetings of the Fellowship, each local church may send up to three messengers, who vote on behalf of the churches on items such as receiving members and general decision-making (FBCSA, 1991a:8.2).

The focus of Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is strongly on supporting the local church (Appendix C, section E, question 1). Even missionaries are accountable directly to the local church, and not to the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa as a body (Appendix C, section B, question 3). Local churches belonging to the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are also free to work independently of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa in instances (Appendix C, section E, question 1.3). This is similar to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Sola 5, where local churches also pursue ministries outside of the denominational body.

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are therefore similar in terms of promoting the local church, and the organisational structures all consist of local churches with direct representation.

#### ***4.2.4.2 Local church control and accountability***

As noted above, the member churches through their official messengers make decisions at the meetings of the Fellowship. This means that the ministries of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are under the direct control of the churches, and accountable to them. The Bible Baptist College is controlled directly by the Board, which consists of members of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa. This ensures doctrinal alignment and that the objectives of the Bible Baptist College are also consistent with the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa.

There is therefore a close similarity between the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa in terms of local church accountability. Sola 5 appears to be the only group which has a minor inconsistency in this regard and which created a group within a group, as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

#### ***4.2.4.3 Denominational bodies and ecclesiastical authority***

The Confession of Faith of the Fellowship is clear that each local church has the right to self-government “free from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organisations” (FBCSA, 1991b:15). There is a sustained emphasis on the voluntary nature of the group, and that the programmes of the Fellowship are also voluntary. The individual churches in the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are also free to work independently of the programmes of the Fellowship (Appendix C, section E, question 1).

There is no evidence in either the Constitution or the general meetings that the Fellowship seeks to exercise ecclesiastical authority over the local churches. For this reason, the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is deemed to uphold this principle in a similar manner to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Sola 5.

### **4.3 CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa shows that it is substantially consistent with Baptist denominationalism, and shares many of the strengths of Sola 5. As with Sola 5, its doctrinal standards are clear, unambiguous and preserve the authority of scripture. There is substantial doctrinal definition to provide a cohesive identity and unity within the group. There is also a healthy focus on local church representation and accountability.

It can therefore be concluded that the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa also provides substantial improvements to critical weaknesses in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

# CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1 KEY FINDINGS

In this thesis, the term *denomination* is applied to any group of Baptist churches that co-operate on the basis of a confession and faith and constitution, irrespective of whether they call themselves an association, fellowship or even “anti-denominational.”

The following conclusions shape the comparative evaluation of the three Baptist groups reviewed in this thesis..

Firstly, Baptist denominationalism is legitimate. It is consistent with scripture and with the practices and principles of the early Baptists. More specifically, Baptist denominationalism is justified on the basis of the unity that believers enjoy in Christ, the recognition that isolated churches cannot fulfil the great commissions by themselves, and the examples of churches in the book of Acts being organised to act together in certain instances. This means that the Baptist distinctive of autonomous local churches and independence must never result in isolationism. Baptist churches can and must co-operate with other churches within the bounds of Scriptural norms. Baptist churches should always see themselves as interdependent rather than entirely independent.

Secondly, the particular form of Baptist denominationalism must be shaped by giving equal recognition to each of the key Baptist distinctives, and not seeking to use one distinctive to shape the others. These Baptist distinctives include the primacy and authority of scripture, the primacy and autonomy of the local church, and a correct

understanding of liberty of conscience. In this regard, the following modern notions found in *some* Baptist circles are unwarranted:

- (i) The notion that “anti-creedalism” and the primacy of scripture exclude the legitimate role of confessions of faith in a Baptist denomination. Rather, consistent Baptist denominationalism demands sufficiently comprehensive confessions that will ensure the unity and identity of the group to pursue common, biblical goals.
- (ii) The notion that defending the authority of scripture rigorously in a confession automatically equates to bibliolatry. Rather, the confession of faith needs to clearly set out the attributes of scripture that defines and defends scripture’s authority, and also deals with current theological trends that have an impact on the authority of scripture.
- (iii) The notion that it is acceptable for Baptist denominational structures to be comprised of individuals. Rather, Baptist denominational structures must represent local churches, be under their direct control, and focus on strengthening the local churches to collectively pursue common goals.
- (iv) The notion that defining, defending and applying doctrinal and moral standards impact negatively on the liberty of the member churches. Rather, religious liberty and liberty of conscious are upheld as long as membership is voluntary and the sanction for deviating churches is exclusion (as opposed to persecution).

A rigorous analysis of key Baptist distinctives with regard to denominationalism provides a framework within which three Baptist groups in Southern Africa are evaluated and compared. The framework together with the results of this evaluation and comparison, are summarised in the following section.

## 8.2 COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF THREE BAPTIST DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Table 2 below provides a summary of the key findings of the evaluation of the three denominational groups. Each of the groups is rated in terms of being weak, moderate, or strong in relation to the comparative framework. The detailed evaluation of each group which provides the basis for the rating is given in the previous chapters and is not repeated here.

Table 2: Key findings of the comparative evaluation

	<b>BUSA</b>	<b>SOLA 5</b>	<b>FBCSA</b>
<b>1. Strongly confessional</b>			
1.1 Sufficiently comprehensive confession	Weak	Strong	Strong
1.2 Scripture and authority	Weak	Strong	Strong
1.3 Primary and secondary issues	Weak	Strong	Moderate
1.4 The confession must remain relevant	Weak	Strong	Strong
<b>2. Some application of principles</b>	Weak	Strong	Strong
<b>3. Meaningful adherence to doctrinal standards</b>			
3.1 Procedures to ensure regular compliance	Weak	Strong	Strong
3.2 Gracious but firm separation	Moderate	Strong	Strong

	<b>BUSA</b>	<b>SOLA 5</b>	<b>FBCSA</b>
<b>4. Local church participation</b>			
4.1 Direct representation of local churches	Strong	Strong	Strong
4.2 Under local church control	Moderate	Strong	Strong
4.3 Denominational bodies and ecclesiastical authority	Strong	Strong	Strong

It is clear from the above table that Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa show a substantial improvement over the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in their denominational practices. There are a number of areas where the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is weak and inconsistent with historic Baptist principles, with reference to the following concerns, in particular:

- (i) the growing theological diversity resulting from insufficient and ambiguous doctrinal statements has led to confusion, lack of unity and inconsistency. This needs to be addressed in the Union.
- (ii) the incorrect understanding and application of liberty of conscience with regard to adopting a specific position on the inspiration of scripture. This needs to be rectified.
- (iii) the ambiguity and inconsistency in the 1877 Declaration of Principle. This needs to be corrected.

It can therefore finally be concluded that the two relatively recent groupings of Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa have been a necessary corrective to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and a return to more consistent Baptist denominationalism.

### 8.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

From this book emerge a number of areas for further research. Four areas are of particular importance. Firstly, the framework of principles used to evaluate the three Baptist groupings, while sufficient for this study, could be fleshed out to a greater level of detail to provide Baptist denominations with some practical models of consistent denominationalism.

Secondly, this thesis has highlighted the growing theological diversity in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. It would be beneficial to monitor this diversity in the Baptist Union, especially around the doctrine of scripture, to determine its impact on the authority of scripture. More specifically, a new survey on the doctrine of scripture in the Baptist Union could provide valuable information on trends within the Union.

Thirdly, this book concludes that Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are a healthy movement towards more consistent Baptist denominationalism, and therefore predicts that these groups will be successful in achieving their goals. However, due to the relatively recent establishment of these groups, it would be beneficial to monitor and evaluate them in subsequent years to ascertain if the prediction is correct. If these groups do not achieve their respective purposes, it would be important to understand what theological or practical issues resulted in this lack of achievement.

Fourthly, this book has suggested that “pure congregationalism” is not compatible with texts such as Hebrews 13:17 that speak of a rule of elders. Rather, a modified form of congregationalism is proposed in this book to resolve the dilemma that Baptists face regarding church representation in denominational structures. Further research to crystallise the nature and role of elders (that properly accounts for a rule by elders) in a congregational form of church government, would contribute substantially to Baptist polity.

## APPENDIX A

### Survey: Baptist Union of Southern Africa

Responses from Angelo Scheepers and Kevin Roy (original wording of the respondents retained)

#### A. PERSONAL

Can you please state:

1. How long you have been a member/pastor/official in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?

*Kevin Roy: I have been a student pastor and then pastor from 1981 i.e. 29 years*

*Angelo Scheepers: I been a official for 20 years in Baptist Union of Southern Africa.*

*Also a pastor in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.*

2. Do you presently or have you previously held any position in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa structures?

*Kevin Roy: I have been a lecturer at Cape Town Baptist Seminary and chairman of the SA Baptist Historical Society.*

*Angelo Scheepers: Area co-ordinator for Western Cape. General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.*

#### B. CLARIFY MEMBERSHIP

How many churches are members of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa currently?

*Angelo Scheepers: About 500 churches and 200 fellowships (not yet self functioning churches)*

How many associations?

*Angelo Scheepers: Seven*

Is there a difference in the membership between associations and local churches?

*Angelo Scheepers: Fellowships don't vote. If a member of an association, automatically a member of the Union*

What is the total current membership of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?

*Angelo Scheepers: Estimated at around 50 000 people. This is complicated because some churches have adherents who functions as members for all practical purposes, but are not counted as members. There has been a 14% increase in the number of adherents in last few years.*

### **C. GENERAL DENOMINATIONAL ISSUES**

Question 1: There has always been some debate amongst Baptists as to how churches are represented in denominational structures. Some insist that denomination structures are in fact comprised of individuals who are only messengers of the churches i.e. churches cannot be presented by individuals because of their congregational church government. Therefore, churches are not truly represented in the structures. Other Baptists disagree and believe that churches can be representatives by authorised representatives, and therefore when assemblies are convened, it is the churches that are represented.

Can you please clarify this issue with regard to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa? Are churches represented in the Assemblies, or does the Assembly consist of individuals who are merely messengers?

*Kevin Roy: I would have thought that churches are represented at an Assembly by their duly authorised delegates, who are often instructed how to vote on certain issues.*

*Angelo Scheepers: The Baptist Union of Southern Africa is an assembly of CHURCHES. The delegates represent the churches at the Assembly. The decision of the Assembly is binding on the churches, as the churches have voluntarily joined themselves to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa – they therefore have to co-operate with the other churches. The Assembly is the highest authority in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. This is nuanced by the attitude of the local church – whether they see their delegate as fully representing them, and the decisions binding on them. But the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is not a denomination in that it prescribes forms of worship as the Anglican denomination does.*

Question 2: Can you please explain the relationship between the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and the Baptist Theological College (BTC).

2.1 Is the College independent of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa? If so, when did this happen, and for what reasons?

*Angelo Scheepers: Not independent. The Colleges are a ministry of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The Council (on which the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is represented) controls the college.*

*The change that took place with the BTC was that the Colleges were allowed to collect its own funds, and also apply directly to local churches to support. Previously, the Colleges were funded only from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.*

2.2 Does the Baptist Union of Southern Africa still have any say on the appointment of BTC staff?

*Angelo Scheepers: Yes, the Executive is represented on the Council. The Council has full control.*

2.3 Does the Baptist Union of Southern Africa still have any say on the doctrinal position of the BTC?

*Angelo Scheepers: Yes. The Confession is identical, and also due to the Council.*

2.4 Does the Baptist Union of Southern Africa have any authority to remove a member of staff from the BTC for doctrinal reasons?

*Angelo Scheepers: Yes – via the Council.*

Question 3: Can you please explain the relationship between the Baptist Missions Department and the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

3.1 Does the BMS fall under the authority of the BUSA?

*Angelo Scheepers: This Department has the emphasis of facilitating sending of missionaries by groups of churches, or supporting a local church in sending missionaries. Department also sends out missionaries.*

3.2. Do the missionaries have to belong to a particular Baptist church in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?

*Angelo Scheepers: Yes – ought to be on the ministerial recognition list.*

3.3 Do the missionaries have to be accountable to particular Baptist church, or are they only accountable to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?

*Angelo Scheepers: It depends who sends them. If the local church, then accountable to the local church. If the Baptist Union of Southern Africa sends them, then accountable to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.*

Question 4: It is often the experience that people in a denomination indicate they uphold the doctrinal standards but have mental reservations etc. Is there any way that the Baptist Union of Southern Africa tries to ensure that pastors or churches uphold the doctrinal standards on an ongoing basis?

*Angelo Scheepers: This is difficult to do. Baptist Union of Southern Africa acts in good faith. The constitution does allow the Baptist Union of Southern Africa to approach a church if concerned. Lots of negotiation takes place before separation.*

*Kevin Roy: There is no formal requirement for an annual signing of statements. Remember that Baptist churches are essentially autonomous, and therefore vary in their individual practice. Some churches are more specifically confessional e.g. requiring subscription to the 1689 statement.*

Question 5: The Statement of belief and Baptist principles do not mention a number of doctrines. Does this mean that these are considered as matters of toleration? For example, is evolution versus theistic creation a matter of toleration in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?

*Kevin Roy: The statement of belief is brief and does not cover many issues. Therefore latitude is permitted. The BU has not adopted a specific view on creation/evolution, but its statement on the authority of the bible should bear upon that issue, at least when it comes to radical views of evolution. The CTBS, when I was there, affirmed theistic creation, but recognised variations even within that view (e.g. young earth and old earth).*

## D. SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

Question 1: There have been a number of attempts to introduce the inerrancy of scripture into either the Baptist Union of Southern Africa Statement of Faith or Principles, but without success.

1.1 Do you believe the presence of minor or incidental errors in the autographs would undermine the authority of scripture?

*Kevin Roy: Yes*

1.2 Does the fact that inerrancy has not been made a condition of membership in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa mean that it is a matter of toleration?

*Kevin Roy: Not necessarily. It could be a recognition of the difficulty of finding a suitable formula everyone is satisfied with.*

1.3 Would the Baptist Union of Southern Africa be comfortable with pastors in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa holding to errancy views?

*Kevin Roy: I hope not. Most ministerial interviews I have been involved with have examined candidates pretty closely on their view of scripture.*

## E. LIBERTY

Question 1: Baptists have always been known as champions of liberty.

1.1 The original Baptist Union of Southern Africa declaration of principles indicates “that each Church has liberty to interpret and administer His laws.” On what theological basis does the Baptist Union of Southern Africa then insist on any doctrinal standards if each church has in fact liberty to interpret scripture for themselves?

*Kevin Roy: This has always been a difficulty for Baptists, holding on the one hand a Bible-based evangelical faith, and on the other hand, liberty of conscience. It can be argued, historically, that liberty of conscience was never intended to be liberty to question the faith, but rather liberty to interpret the word of God honestly.*

1.2 Are you aware of any debates or tensions within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa relating to liberty versus doctrinal or moral standards i.e. where some churches want more liberty or other churches want the Baptist Union of Southern Africa to allow less liberty?

*Kevin Roy: Yes. A case in point would be the article published in Baptists Today by G Codrington on homosexuality and the Bible. Some individuals and churches defended the right of such an article to appear in Baptist Today. Others (far more, I think) were offended and expected disciplinary action.*

## **F. LOCAL CHURCH**

Question 1: Baptists have always asserted the primacy and autonomy of the local church, especially over denominational structures.

1.1 Do you believe the Baptist Union of Southern Africa can improve its denominational organisation to promote the local church more?

*Angelo Scheepers: The Baptist Union of Southern Africa is already doing this. The strategy of the next 5 years is "Local church alive." Focus on local church leadership and missions.*

1.2 Do you believe there are areas in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa where the significance of the local church has been diminished?

*Angelo Scheepers: Not really. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa never interferes with the local church. Only steps in when requested to do so. The beauty of the*

*Baptist Union of Southern Africa is that it can have churches which vary considerably, such as extreme charismatic and extreme Reformed. Local churches are interdependent. They are independent, but because joined to the Union, acknowledge their dependence on other local churches. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa is not an office in Roodepoort – it is the local churches.*

*Kevin Roy: Probably so. But the very question shows a tension. Strong advocates of local autonomy would advocate a radical reduction of BU structures and posts to a bare minimum. So there is nothing much BU can do to enhance local autonomy other than dismantle itself and many of its ministries. This in turn would probably lead to complaints of neglect by some local churches.*

1.3 Can you identify areas where you feel that some ministries in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa have lost touch with the local church?

*Angelo Scheepers: Possibly the Youth, Missions and theological education – but also happening at the local level. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa more keeps tabs on what is happening in the local churches.*

*Kevin Roy: Not easily, at this stage, as for the last three years plus I have had little involvement with BU. (I am an accredited BU pastor, but serving in a non BU church.)*

## APPENDIX B

### Survey: Sola 5

Response from Bruce Button (original wording of the respondent retained)

#### A. PERSONAL

Can you please state:

1. How long you have been a member/pastor in the Sola 5?

*From its inception in September 2005.*

2. Do you presently or have you previously held any position in the Sola 5 structures?

*Not at present. I was on the committee that drafted the initial documents and did the groundwork for establishing the association. I was also the chairman of the Steering Committee for the first two years after the association was formally established.*

#### B. GENERAL DENOMINATIONAL ISSUES

Question 1: There has always been some debate amongst Baptists as to how churches are represented in denominational structures. Some insist that denomination structures are in fact comprised of individuals who are only messengers of the churches i.e. churches cannot be presented by individuals because of their congregational church government. Therefore, churches are not truly represented in the structures. Other Baptists disagree and believe that churches can be representatives by authorised representatives, and therefore when assemblies are convened, it is the churches that are represented.

Can you please clarify this issue with regard to Sola 5? Are churches truly represented, or do the Sola 5 “Annual Business Meetings” consist of individuals who are merely messengers?

*I'm not sure that we thought about this in as nuanced a way as what you speak about here, but I think it is fairly clear from the Sola 5 Constitution that the churches are truly represented. The decisions are regarded as decisions of the churches acting together, rather than of individuals. There would be some debate as to whether the representatives are empowered to use their initiative on behalf of the churches, or whether they must have an explicit mandate from their churches for every decision.*

Question 2: Can you please explain the relationship between the Sola 5 and the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary (SGTS).

*As a preliminary comment, it is important to point out that a significant change occurred in this relationship during the last part of 2008 up to September 2009. Initially SGTS was regarded as a ministry of Sola 5, to be run by and accountable to Sola 5 through the Steering Committee and the ABM. However, at the ABM of September 2009, SGTS was “ceded” to four churches in Lusaka. These churches now have full responsibility for running SGTS. There is no formal accountability to Sola 5, although there is a desire for SGTS to be acceptable to Sola 5 and partially supported by Sola 5.*

2.1 Does Sola 5 have exclusive authority regarding the appointment and removal of staff to SGTS?

*Initially this was the case, but now the four churches in Lusaka have this authority.*

2.2 Does Sola 5 have exclusive authority regarding the doctrinal position of the SGTS?

*Initially the doctrinal position of SGTS was the Sola 5 Confession and Core Values. The way SGTS was set up would have meant that whenever those doctrinal standards changed, the doctrinal position of SGTS would have changed accordingly. As things stand now, the doctrinal position of SGTS is the Sola 5 Confession and Core Values, but the responsible churches have authority over the doctrinal position and may modify it provided the modification “does not constitute a deviation from reformation theology or the articles of Sola 5”. That is how the articles read now, but the responsible churches could modify that, so they actually have exclusive authority over the doctrinal position of SGTS.*

2.3 Who do the Academic Advisory Board and the Administrative Board represent? Sola 5 or their respective local churches?

*This Board has now fallen away, but I don't think that a distinction would have been made between the Board representing Sola 5 or its constituent local churches. One might have said that it represented the local churches through the association. At present there is a Board of Directors which represents the four local churches that are responsible for SGTS.*

Question 3: Does Sola 5 currently support any missionaries? How do these missionaries relate to Sola 5 and the local churches?

*Sola 5 as an association doesn't directly support missionaries, but some of the local churches have sent out missionaries who are supported by some of the other churches in Sola 5. From time to time Sola 5 as an association makes financial contributions to SGTS. The missionaries don't really relate directly to Sola 5 in any formal way. They are directly responsible to their churches, but there is an effort to keep the churches of Sola 5 informed about their activities and progress.*

Question 4: When Sola 5 started, it obviously had the option of being part of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Can you please explain?

1. Some of the main reservations for not joining the Baptist Union of Southern Africa

*The Baptist Union of Southern Africa is not theologically defined and has firmly resisted any attempt to define itself or to address important theological issues. There was a strong feeling that there was a need for an association of churches that was clearly God-centred and committed to the 5 Solas of the Reformation in order to address the spiritual needs of the day.*

2. Any perceived weaknesses in the denominational functioning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa that Sola 5 is aiming to improve on?

*There is a diversity of opinion within Sola 5 on this point. The original idea of Sola 5 was to move away from the “local church only” approach that characterised the Reformed Baptist Association before Sola 5 was formed. (Sola 5 was actually an initiative of the RBA and represented an attempt to escape some of the weaknesses - especially the lack of effective cooperation - that had prevented the RBA from accomplishing anything significant.) Thus, Sola 5 as it was originally conceived allowed for churches to act together and to engage in projects that were equally owned by all the churches. Also, provision was made for the churches to admonish one another and to address issues within or between churches, without creating a body or structure that had authority over the churches. As things have developed there has been a strong resistance amongst many of the churches to anything that is perceived to be characteristic of a “denomination” (although the concept of “denomination” has not been clearly defined). The result has been that it is difficult for Sola 5 to engage in any joint project; anything like a joint project tends to get delegated to a church and regarded as that church’s project with participation from other churches in the association as they see fit.*

*My personal answer to the question would be to say that the doctrinal diversity within the Baptist Union makes it difficult to ensure that scripture and theology*

*provide the driving force and guiding principles in all decision-making and joint action. There are so many important issues over which member churches and individual role players disagree that the focus often shifts to organisational matters. Thus, the Constitution represents an attempt to recognise the need for cooperation with other like-minded churches for the sake of the kingdom rather than a simple concern for the association as an organisation. An administrative structure was provided but it was intended to be a servant of the biblical and kingdom concerns. As things have worked out, I think that the fear of “denominationalism” has meant that many of the role players have been unwilling to implement the administrative structure as it was originally conceived.*

3. How do you see your “associationalism” as differing from “denominationalism?”

*This is a difficult question to answer because it depends on how you define the two terms. One might define “denominationalism” to allow for an “associational” structure, or one might define it to mean a system where some or other body has authority over the local churches. In the latter case, there can really be no such thing as a Baptist denomination; but since many Baptists are comfortable with calling themselves a denomination, the word must (at least by some) be understood to include groupings of autonomous churches. I therefore prefer to work with concepts rather than mere words.*

*I suppose the general feeling would be that an association has the emphasis on local churches co-operating whereas a denomination has a life of its own, even if it is composed of local churches. In practice the distinction can only be observed in the way the role of the local church is emphasised in the life of the association. The formal structure cannot by itself ensure that an association does not become a denomination in this sense. The names by themselves are not determinative. In relation to Sola 5 it may be observed: (1) that there is no body with authority over any local church; (2) even where associational structures and procedures are put in place, there is no effort to coerce the local church (e.g. by requiring it to forfeit its buildings if it leaves the association); (3) there is a consistent attempt in the*

*Constitution to acknowledge that there are true churches of Christ outside the association, and that biblical principles for inter-church relationships apply to all true churches irrespective of associational boundaries.*

## **C. SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY**

Question 1: The Sola 5 Confession of Faith includes inerrancy.

1.1 Do you believe the presence of minor or incidental errors in the autographs would undermine the authority of scripture?

Yes

## **D. LIBERTY**

Question 1: Baptists have always been known as champions of liberty.

1.1 On what theological basis does Sola 5 then insist on doctrinal standards? How would you defend an accusation that you are being too restrictive with your doctrinal standards?

*We are being restrictive in a sense, but we are not imposing on anyone's liberty. Churches and individuals join freely and can leave freely. The association is there to enable churches and individuals who freely adopt the doctrinal standards to cooperate effectively with one another. Without doctrinal standards there would be no basis for cooperation.*

1.2 Are you aware of any debates or tensions within Sola 5 relating to liberty versus doctrinal or moral standards i.e. where some churches want more liberty or other churches want the Sola5 to allow less liberty?

*I don't think there are any tensions as far as doctrinal or moral standards are concerned. Everyone agrees that there must be doctrinal and moral standards as a basis for cooperation.*

## **E. LOCAL CHURCH**

Question 1: Baptists have always asserted the primacy and autonomy of the local church, especially over denominational structures.

1.3 Do you believe the Sola 5 can improve its denominational organisation to promote the local church more?

*At the moment the emphasis is very strongly on the local church and away from denominational organisation. However, this does not necessarily strengthen the local churches.*

1.4 Do you believe there are areas in Sola 5 where the significance of the local church has been diminished? Conversely, do you believe there are areas where local church autonomy is undermining associational interests?

*As stated above (Question 4.2 under General Denominational Issues), there is currently an emphasis which pits local church autonomy against associational cooperation. Personally I think that this is a false dichotomy. The original idea of Sola 5 was to strengthen local churches by helping them to co-operate in a definite and meaningful way without infringing on their autonomy. I believe that both the association and the local churches are weakened when local church autonomy is understood in such a way as to exclude genuine cooperation and joint action.*

1.5 Can you identify areas where you feel that some ministries in Sola 5 have lost touch with the local church?

*I think that some people may at times have felt that the Steering Committee was acting in an authoritative way and had lost touch with the local church.*

1.6 Can you relate any current or previous debates in Sola 5 regarding the autonomy of the local church versus associational interests?

*This was an issue in relation to SGTS (although, strictly speaking, it is not a matter of local church autonomy). Initially SGTS was established as a joint ministry, accountable to the whole association. However, as things developed, some people came to the belief that the joint ministry model was wrong and that one church should take responsibility for SGTS. That led ultimately to the Seminary being “ceded” to the four churches in Lusaka.*

## APPENDIX C

### Survey: Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa

Response from Joshua Ausfahl (original wording of the respondent retained)

#### A. PERSONAL

Can you please state:

1. How long you have been a member/pastor in the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa?

*I have been a member of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa since May 2004 - 6.5 years.*

2. Do you presently or have you previously held any position in the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa structures?

*I am currently the secretary.*

#### B. GENERAL DENOMINATIONAL ISSUES

Question 1: There has always been some debate amongst Baptists as to how churches are represented in denominational structures. Some insist that denomination structures are in fact comprised of individuals who are only messengers of the churches i.e. churches cannot be presented by individuals because of their congregational church government. Therefore, churches are not truly represented in the structures. Other Baptists disagree and believe that churches can be representatives by authorised representatives, and therefore when assemblies are convened, it is the churches that are represented.

Can you please clarify this issue with regard to Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa? Are churches truly represented, or do the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa “Administrative committee” consist of individuals who are merely messengers?

*The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is not a denomination, but is made up of pastors and their wives of churches which voluntarily join the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa. There is no obligation of the joining church except their assent to the Constitution of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa and the Confession of faith. All the churches choose to represent themselves at the monthly meetings by the pastors of the church.*

Question 2: Can you please explain the relationship between the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa, ABWE and the Baptist Bible College (BBC).

2.1 Does Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa have exclusive authority regarding the appointment and removal of staff to BBC?

2.2 Does Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa have exclusive authority regarding the doctrinal position of the BBC?

2.3 Who do the College Board represent? Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa, ABWE or their respective local churches?

*The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa consists of South African pastors and ABWE missionaries. The Baptist Bible College is a separate organisation of which many of the members of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are lecturers. BBC has a board consisting of pastors in the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa and others in the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa churches who are not pastors which meet on a regular basis.*

*The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa has no direct say with regards to appointment and removal of staff at BBC. This is done by the BBC board.*

*The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa has no direct say with regards to the doctrinal position of BBC. This is also maintained by the board. However, since most of the board and lecturers are involved with BBC, then they have huge indirect say which would prevent the two from diverging doctrinally.*

Question 3: Does Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa currently support any missionaries? How do these missionaries relate to Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa and the local churches?

*The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa as a team does not support missionaries. Our Biblical stance is that the local churches support missionaries. However, many of our churches support the same missionaries.*

Question 4: When Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa started, it obviously had the option of being part of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Can you please explain:

1. Some of the main reservations for not joining the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.
2. Any perceived weaknesses in the denominational functioning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa that Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is aiming to improve on?
3. How do you see your “Fellowship” as differing from “denominationalism?”

*We choose not to align ourselves with the Baptist Union of Southern Africa because of the increasing broadness of theological views within that group.*

*We do not compare ourselves to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, so we do not attempt to improve any denominational structure. The functioning of the structures of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa was not the cause of the formation of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa. We differed with the broadness of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa’s doctrinal position and the range of theological positions of individual churches within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.*

*Fellowship focuses on the voluntary participation of the church whereas denominationalism requires dues and obligatory participation.*

### **C. SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY**

Question 1: The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa Confession of Faith includes inerrancy.

1.1 Do you believe the presence of minor or incidental errors in the autographs would undermine the authority of scripture?

*There are no errors in the original autographs therefore the authority of scripture is not undermined. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states that all scripture is God-breathed, so to suggest that there is error means that God is in error.*

### **D. LIBERTY**

Question 1: Baptists have always been known as champions of liberty.

1.1 On what theological basis does Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa then insist on doctrinal standards? How would you defend an accusation that you are being too restrictive with your doctrinal standards?

*Our doctrine is based exclusively on historical and grammatical approach to scripture. Views of being restrictive are typically caused by culture influencing the church. If culture smacks up against the bible, we re-evaluate and allow the bible to take precedence over culture.*

1.2 Are you aware of any debates or tensions within Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa relating to liberty versus doctrinal or moral standards i.e. where some

churches want more liberty or other churches want the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa to allow less liberty?

*At present there are no tensions and debates with regards to liberty versus doctrinal issues within the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa.*

## **E. LOCAL CHURCH**

Question 1: Baptists have always asserted the primacy and autonomy of the local church, especially over denominational structures.

1.1 Do you believe the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa can improve its denominational organisation to promote the local church more?

*Again we do not consider ourselves to be a denomination. We are active in promoting the autonomy of the local church and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa cannot force any autonomous church to do the bidding of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa.*

1.2 Do you believe there are areas in Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa where the significance of the local church has been diminished? Conversely, do you believe there are areas where local church autonomy is undermining associational interests?

*No. The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa does everything it can to promote the local church. The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa serves the local church.*

1.3 Can you identify areas where you feel that some ministries in Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa have lost touch with the local church?

*Not at present. Our Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa ministries do not exist if the local churches do not participate. For example, our youth camps are for*

*the benefit of and are a service to the churches. However, if those churches do not contribute valuable staff (i.e. counsellors) then the service cannot occur. The two work closely together or the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa cannot serve the local church. Yet, the local church can choose to work independently of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa.*

1.4 Can you relate any current or previous debates in Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa regarding the autonomy of the local church versus associational interests?

*No.*

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