

**A comparative evaluation and theological analysis of the
denominational practices of the Baptist Union of Southern
Africa, SOLA 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in
South Africa**

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NOTICE

This is to notify that the opinions expressed and the study results published in this thesis do not necessarily represent those of the promoter of the Faculty of Theology of the North West University.

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ABSTRACT

This study has two main focus areas. Firstly, it attempts to construct a theological model or framework for Baptist denominationalism. In order to achieve this, the historical origins of Baptist denominationalism are noted, together with the main forms of denominational structures. The theological grounds for denominationalism from a Baptist perspective are set out to ensure that Baptist denominationalism is a legitimate pursuit. Historical Baptist distinctives and Baptist identity are investigated, critiqued and discussed from a theological point of view, and their implications for Baptist denominationalism noted. These implications are drawn together into a framework which is presented as key principles for consistent Baptist denominationalism.

Secondly, the theological framework for consistent Baptist denominationalism is used to evaluate three Baptist denominational groupings in South Africa, namely, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5, and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa. The objective of this evaluation is to establish whether the latter two groupings, being more recent, provide an improvement of Baptist denominationalism when compared to the longer established Baptist Union. In order to do this, the structures and functioning of each of the groupings are examined and critiqued.

The findings of this study suggest that the Baptist Union of South Africa has a number of crucial weaknesses that are substantially improved in the structures and practices of Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa.

Key words: Baptist denomination, Baptist distinctives and identity, Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5, Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie is om op twee gebiede te konsentreer. In die eerste plek, is dit 'n poging om 'n teologiese model of raamwerk vir die Baptistekerkverband te skep. Om dit te bewerkstellig moet die historiese oorsprong van die Baptistekerkverband in ag geneem word tesame met die vernaamste formasie van kerkverband strukture. Die teologiese gronde vir kerkverband uit die Baptiste perspektief word uiteengesit om te verseker dat die Baptistekerkverband geloofwaardig nagestreef word. Historiese Baptiste afsonderlikheid en Baptiste identiteite word ondersoek, krities ontleed en beredeneer uit 'n teologiese oogpunt, en hierdie bedoelings wat dit vir Baptistekerkverband inhou word aangeteken. Hierdie gevolgtrekkings word saamgesnoer en aangebied in 'n raamwerk wat die hoofbeginsels vir koersvastheid van die Baptistekerkverband bepaal.

Tweedens, die teologiese raamwerk vir volgehoue Baptistekerkverband word uitgewys om drie Baptistekerkverband groeperinge in Suid-Afrika uit te lig, naamlik die Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5 en die Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa.

Die doelstelling van hierdie beoordeling is om te bepaal of die twee laasgenoemde groeperings, wat die jongste is, 'n verbetering is van die Baptistekerkverband wanneer dit vergelyk word met die langer gevestigde Baptist Union. Om dit te bewerkstellig word die strukture en werking van elke groepering ondersoek en beoordeel.

Die bevindings van hierdie studie dui daarop dat die Baptist Union of South Africa 'n aantal beslissende swakhede bevat wat aansienlik op verbeter word in die strukture en praktyke van Sola 5 en die Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa.

Sleutelwoorde: Baptistekerkverband, Baptistekenmerkendheid en identiteit, Baptist Union of South Africa, Sola 5, Fellowship of Baptist Churches of South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Baptists have traditionally been characterised by a number of distinctive doctrines (Robinson, 1927:148ff; Draper, 2001:53-56). While other Christian groups may share some of these individual characteristics, they are collectively unique to Baptists.

Some of these distinctives include:

- The authority of Christ mediated through scripture
- The supremacy of scripture in all matters of faith
- Local church autonomy and congregational government
- Liberty of conscience
- Non-creedalism
- Believer's baptism

When individual Baptist churches come together in a denominational context, some unique challenges arise. For example, a strong insistence on local church autonomy may conflict with the need for the group to collectively speak or act on a particular matter. Alternatively, some may argue against collective doctrinal standards on the basis of liberty of conscience. Goen (1985:59), for example, notes that it will be more difficult for Baptist churches to bond in a denominational context due to their strong adherence to congregational church government, the autonomy of the local church and individual freedom.

These potential denominational conflicts amongst Baptists are not merely a hypothetical possibility. Tensions can be demonstrated in the formation and functioning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa was established in 1877 (Hudson-Reed, 1977:24-25), and in 2010 consisted of over six hundred and fifty churches 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 established two training institutions, namely the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa and the Cape Town Baptist Seminary (Parnell, 1977:107-111). The 1924 Statement of Faith of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA, 1924:27) can be described “basically Baptist,” with no distinctive doctrines regarding soteriology or eschatology. For the sake of this research, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa will therefore be considered as “Mainstream” Baptists.

The 1877 Constitution of the Baptist Union included a Declaration of Principle, which states:

The basis of the Union is:

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 (Baptist Union of Southern Africa, 1989:5).

This declaration reveals two distinctives that create a significant challenge for the Union. On the one hand, the Union wanted to be a body that would submit to Christ’s authority as revealed in the scriptures and therefore uphold sound doctrine (Hudson-Reed, 1983:357). On the other hand, the founders also wanted to allow each of the individual churches liberty to interpret the scriptures for themselves.

The question that naturally arises, is how a Baptist denominational body can have a common doctrinal basis when the member churches have liberty to interpret the

scripture for themselves. There is evidence that even those within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa are confused as to where to draw the line. For example, in 1980, a pastor complained that the Union had become so doctrinally diverse that he questioned whether they could talk of being united or even “Baptist”. He 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. He noted in particular the diversity in the Union with regard to reformed theology, the charismatic movement and open membership churches (Springs Baptist Church, 1980).

This is not the only example of some degree of confusion and inconsistency. The tension between liberty of conscience and doctrinal orthodoxy began to manifest itself early on in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. A number of controversies and conflicts arose. In the late 1920s, a controversy broke out between WH Doke and JE Ennals on the doctrine of scripture (Miller, 1987:52-55). Doke believed in the absolute integrity and inerrancy of the scripture, while Ennals believed that the scriptures contained errors and contradictions. During this controversy and subsequent events, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa acknowledged that it had not articulated a clear view of scripture, and that it needed to do so. One of the objections cited by members in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa that hindered the formulation of a doctrine of scripture was that such an attempt would conflict with the liberty of the individual churches to interpret scripture for themselves. For example, during the 1957 attempt by the Executive to introduce stricter doctrinal standards to be applied to ministerial applications, the objection was that it violated the Baptist principle of freedom of conscience or individual liberty (Miller, 1987:68). A survey done in 1987 revealed that while 93% of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa members believed that the doctrine of scripture was of primary importance for the well-being of the Union, 16% believed that adopting a specific doctrinal position on the inspiration of scripture would violate the principle of liberty of the member churches (Miller, 1987:101). This is evidence of some degree of contradiction, where Baptists can believe that certain doctrines are

essential to their denomination, but in adopting a detailed doctrinal statement, liberty of conscience would be violated. To date, the issue of what the Baptist Union of Southern Africa believes in terms of the exact nature of inspiration remains unresolved (Aucamp, 2008:101).

These types of tensions are not unique to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. In 2004, the Southern Baptist Convention decided to withdraw from the Baptist World Alliance on grounds of theological compromise (Mohler, 2003:9-11). Two factions became apparent. The first group saw Baptist identity rooted primarily in liberty of conscience and freedom of individual churches to interpret scripture for themselves. They therefore accused the Southern Baptist Convention leadership of being un-Baptist in withdrawing on doctrinal grounds. The second group saw Baptist identity primarily rooted in the supremacy of scripture and maintaining Biblical standards (see Estep, 1987:600; Mohler, 2003:4-5), and therefore argued that they were being consistently Baptist by seeking doctrinal orthodoxy (Norman, 2001:182; Wills, 2005:18). They insisted that the other party was un-Baptist.

Relatively recently, two new Baptists groupings have emerged in South Africa that have chosen to define themselves independently from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Both have a formal declaration of faith and a constitution, and are engaged in church planting and theological education. The first grouping is Sola 5, named after the five-fold Reformation creed of *Sola Scriptura* (scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Sola Fide* (by faith alone) and *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone) (Sola 5, 2006a:5). They were established in 2005 and consist of 22 churches in the Southern Africa Region (countries include Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland and Namibia). They have established the Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary, which is accredited by the University of Africa under the Zambian Department of Education. As indicated by the name, this grouping adheres strongly to a Reformed tradition. Their confession of faith is Calvinistic, and many of the churches hold to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.

For the purpose of this research, this group will therefore be considered as “Reformed” Baptists in Southern Africa.

The second grouping is the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal. It was established in 1991, and currently consists of 10 churches (FBCSA, 2009: Historical overview). The Fellowship has established the Baptist Bible College of KwaZulu-Natal, which offers a licentiate, degree and honours programme, which are accredited by the North-West University. This grouping has taken an “anti-denominational” position (Blackwell, 2002:63, 99). Mark Blackwell researched the historical development of this group under the title of *The History of the Independent Fundamental Baptist Church in Southern Africa* (Blackwell, 2002:7). This group will therefore be considered as “Independent” Baptists for the purpose of this thesis.

While these two groups offer denominational alternatives to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, the question arises as to whether this fragmentation and duplication is justified. How have these two groupings structured themselves to overcome the perceived denominational weakness and inconsistencies of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and most importantly, are they a movement towards or departure from the historic Baptist tradition?

It should be noted that in this thesis, a Baptist “denomination” is defined as a group of Baptist churches that have formalised their relationship with a constitution, and have articulated specific goals for their co-operation. The presence of a constitution indicates that a defined, ongoing, formal arrangement has been made between the member churches. This definition is more fully discussed in the following chapter.

1.2 CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

The central question in this research is formulated as follows:

How should Baptist churches function in a denominational setting, and are the two relatively recent Baptist groupings in South Africa a movement towards more consistent Baptist denominationalism to that found in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?

The following questions will therefore need to be answered:

- (i) How should Baptist principles be harmonised in a denominational context that will remain faithful to Baptist identity and distinctives?
- (ii) What are the main denominational weaknesses and inconsistencies currently in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa?
- (iii) How has Sola 5 structured and organised itself? How has it sought to overcome the perceived weakness in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and harmonise Baptist principles for denominational consistency?
- (iv) How has the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa structured and organised itself? How has it sought to overcome the perceived weakness in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, and harmonise Baptist principles for denominational consistency?
- (v) Are there any relative strengths or weakness in the denominational models when comparing the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa and Sola 5?

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research is to develop a robust theological framework for consistent Baptist denominationalism, and then to compare and evaluate the Baptist Union of Southern Africa with Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa in the light of this framework.

It is therefore imperative that this framework for Baptist denominationalism harmonises Baptist distinctives, yet is faithful to the spirit of the Baptists and their historic identity.

The comparative analysis of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5 and Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa will provide a detailed evaluation of each grouping, highlighting how they have interpreted, applied and harmonised Baptist distinctives, and how faithful they have remained to Baptist identity.

1.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The research shows that the two relatively new Baptist groupings are a healthy movement towards more consistent Baptist denominationalism, making substantial improvements to current weakness in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Theological and historical overview of early Baptist principles

A theological and historical overview of the *early* Baptist motivation for denominationalism, Baptist distinctives, Baptist identity and Baptist denominational bodies is given. As Maring and Hudson (1965:8-9) note, modern Baptists are hopelessly fragmented and it is very difficult to determine their common mind on any particular subject. However, an investigation of their *historical roots* will shed light on their views. They continue:

Therefore, a review of their original principles will shed light upon their doctrine of the church and their views on church polity (Maring & Hudson, 1965:9).

These early distinctives and polity are discussed, analysed and critiqued from a denominational perspective, and conclusions are drawn that form the basis (or framework) for consistent Baptist denominationalism. This framework is essentially the principles by which the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, Sola 5 and the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa are evaluated. As Maring and Hudson (1965:7) note:

Before deciding upon an appropriate form of polity, one needs some kind of standards by which to judge the various possible forms.

It should be noted that due to the current debate and argumentation amongst Baptists of what it means to be a Baptist, this section of the thesis has to be sufficiently robust to be a valid basis for evaluation. Failure to pay sufficient attention to the framework could lead to the criticism that the evaluation of the three Baptist groupings is flawed because the framework does not reflect and harmonise Baptist principles correctly. It therefore comprises a substantial part of the research.

1.5.2 Evaluation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa

An evaluation of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in the light of the framework is undertaken. This evaluation has two key focus areas:

- (i) The official documents and doctrinal statements of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa are analysed. These include the 1877 Constitution and Declaration of Principle, the 1924 Statement of Belief, and the 1986 Statement of Baptist Principles.
- (ii) The practical functioning of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa is analysed, including its structure and organisation, and how it has attempted to resolve conflicting principles during denominational tensions from 1877 to 2006.

1.5.3 Evaluation of Sola 5

An evaluation of Sola 5 in the light of the aforementioned framework is undertaken. This evaluation focuses on the official documents (such as the doctrinal statements, core values and constitution) of Sola 5.

1.5.4 Evaluation of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa

An evaluation of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa in the light of the aforementioned framework is undertaken. This evaluation focuses on the official documents (such as the doctrinal statements, core values and constitution) of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa.

1.5.5 Informal survey

A brief, informal survey was done of each of the groups, and is included in Appendices A, B and C. It must be stressed that these surveys were informal in the sense that they only establish the views of key officials within the three groups, and do not necessarily represent the views of the entire group. These key officials, however, do have substantial insight into the functioning of their respective groups. This informal survey was deemed necessary due to the relatively recent beginnings of two of the groups in particular, and the corresponding sparse resources for them relative to the older group. Having said that, it needs to be noted that not much weight is placed on the results of the survey, and they are primarily used to *supplement*, *clarify* or *confirm* any areas or discrepancies in the main sources.

1.6 UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

The unique contribution of this research has two focus areas. The first area consists in the rigorous and systematic evaluation of Baptist principles, distinctives and identity from a denominational perspective. The results of this evaluation are synthesised into a framework of principles that facilitate consistent Baptist denominationalism.

The second area consists of the comparative evaluation of two relatively recent Baptists groupings in Southern Africa with the more traditional and historic Baptist Union of Southern Africa. They are compared and contrasted in terms of their denominational practices relative to the framework.

1.7 KEY ASSUMPTIONS

It should be noted that the purpose of this research is not to biblically justify Baptist doctrine and distinctives against other church traditions. These Baptist principles are assumed as being generally biblical. The theological analysis rather relates to a correct and biblical understanding of these principles in the light of modern debates and differences amongst Baptists, and how these principles are to be harmonised in a denominational setting. The basis of the evaluation is therefore primarily Scriptural, although *historic* Baptist practices will also be brought to bear on the discussion.

This research is therefore aimed at contemporary Baptist groups grappling with Baptist identity and distinctives in denominational settings.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT AND GROUNDS OF BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the origins and development of the Baptist movement, and mention significant issues or events that relate to denominationalism. The intention is not to be comprehensive, but to provide some historical context for the research. For this reason, the origin and development of Baptist denominationalism will be limited to the English and American Baptists, as they have been historically dominant. This can be demonstrated by the fact that they take up eleven chapters in Vedder's *A Short History of the Baptists*, while Baptists in other countries are combined into a single chapter (Vedder, 1907:ix-xii). This not to discount the Baptist witness in these other countries, but rather reflects the rich history and important contribution of the early Baptist movement in England and America.

This chapter also provides a list of the main denominational structures that Baptists have used, and their main characteristics. It is again acknowledged that there may be some minor historical variations to these structures. Nevertheless, those that are listed and described have been dominant in Baptist life.

It needs to be stressed that the aim of this chapter is not to comprehensively evaluate and critique the historical origins and development of Baptist denominationalism. Rather, this overview provides an introductory context to what Baptists have historically practised. It shows the range of denominational forms that have been dominant, and some of the historical tensions and issues that have developed in England and America as Baptist churches have sought to co-operate with each other.

The subsequent chapter is devoted to the evaluation of these structures and tensions from a theological point of view.

Lastly, this chapter discusses and evaluates the theological justification that Baptists have used for their denominationalism. In other words, the biblical evidences and motivation for inter-church co-operation is articulated and evaluated. This therefore provides an apologetic for Baptist denominationalism for those who may argue that Baptists should never go beyond independent, autonomous local churches.

2.1 THE ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM

2.1.1 Introductory comments and definitions

In order to begin a discussion on denominationalism amongst Baptists, some definitions are required at the outset to give specific meanings to terms that are used. This is done at this stage to promote clarity so that the discussion does not begin with any apparent ambiguity. Research into Baptist denominationalism faces the immediate problem of many Baptist groups claiming they are not a “denomination.” For example, the three groups that are the focus of this research do not claim to be a “denomination” (see for example Appendix A, section C, question 1; Appendix B, section B, question 4; Appendix C, section B, question 1). Yet these three groups have established organisations to facilitate local church co-operation similar to other “denominations.” Some discussion on definitions is therefore required to facilitate this research.

It is important to note that this opening section does not attempt to theologically justify the existence of denominations or to theologically define what exactly constitutes a denomination. The aim of this section is rather to give precise English meanings and

definitions to terms that need to be used to initiate the discussion. The theological evaluation follows in subsequent chapters.

2.1.1.1 Definitions regarding denominational groups within Christianity

Hobbs and Mullins (1978:33-34) use the term “denomination” in a loose and popular way. They draw on other Baptist researchers and define a denomination as:

...those who are bound together by a large measure of agreement with regard to doctrines and polity and by a desire for co-operation among the various churches holding to these tenets (Hobbs & Mullins, 1978:33).

They then draw a distinction between conventions and the Baptist denomination. They note that while there are various conventions in America, there is only one Baptist denomination worldwide (Hobbs & Mullins, 1978:33). In other words, they apply the term “denomination” to the broad Baptist movement. This corresponds closely to an earlier Collins Dictionary (1982:298) definition, which defines a denomination as:

A group having a distinctive interpretation of a religious faith and usually its own organisation.

The two definitions noted above show two common denominational characteristics, namely, similar doctrine and a desire for co-operation expressed in some organisational form.

While it is admissible to apply the term “denomination” in this loose and popular way, a number of problems arise with this usage when it is applied to the global Baptist community. Firstly, a denomination requires a large measure of doctrinal agreement. In this regard, while Baptists do indeed share some doctrinal distinctives, they can also be extremely diverse. The Baptist emphasis on soul competency, the independence of the local church, liberty of conscience and an anti-creedal tendency has also resulted in significant doctrinal diversity within the modern, global Baptist

community. It is therefore problematic to classify all churches who call themselves “Baptists” as a “denomination” in the sense used above, due to considerable doctrinal diversity.

Secondly, the Collins definition of a denomination alludes to some form of organisational structure amongst the churches holding these similar doctrinal distinctives. In this regard, it again needs to be noted that while localised and even national Baptist denominational structures do exist, the worldwide Baptist community is not strongly linked from an organisational point of view. The Baptist World Alliance, for example, is more a forum for dialogue amongst Baptist churches than a denomination *per se*, although it does also have ministries and programmes. The Baptist doctrine of the independence of the local church has also resulted in rather weak organisational structures where they do exist.

The point that is being made is that churches across the world who call themselves “Baptist” do not strongly bear the two marks of “denominationalism” that the above definitions require. It is rather the smaller Baptist groupings that show more uniform doctrine and stronger co-operation, and therefore display the features of a denomination according to the above definitions.

For this reason, whenever a group of Baptist churches establish a relationship amongst themselves so that they can act together to achieve specific goals, a Baptist denomination can be said to exist. It is in this sense that the words *denomination* and *denominationalism* are used in this thesis with regard to Baptists. In other words, a group of Baptist churches that co-operate and establish a working relationship amongst themselves to achieve specific goals will be deemed to comprise a Baptist *denomination*. The structures they use to facilitate this co-operation are termed *denominational structures*.

The global group of churches that call themselves “Baptist” will rather be referred to as a “movement” in this thesis. The Collins Dictionary (1982:738) defines a

“movement” as “a group of people with a common ideology”. No reference is made to an organisational structure. In other words, a “movement” can describe a group with some similar distinctives, but that are not necessarily organisationally linked. It is therefore not as formal or structured as a “denomination.” Consequently, all Baptists collectively are referred to as a *movement* in this thesis rather than a *denomination*, to avoid confusion.

From a practical perspective, however, when can a group of Baptist churches be said to have formalised their relationship? Dagg (1990:128) notes that a “society is organised when its members are brought into such connection and relation that they can act together as one body”.

The adoption of a constitution and confession of faith by a group of Baptist churches is a good indicator that the members have formalised their relationship so that they can jointly pursue ministry. It shows that the group of churches has the clear intent of an ongoing, structured relationship and united action. A constitution typically sets out the nature of the relationship, and clarifies the limits of the authority of the organisation. A confession of faith typically sets out the doctrinal standards of the group.

In summary, the following terms are therefore applied to the following Baptist groups throughout this thesis.

- The Baptist *movement* refers to the global community of churches who call themselves “Baptist” and share some common doctrinal distinctives.
- A Baptist *denomination* refers to a group of Baptist churches who are united by some form of organisational structure, constitution and confession of faith so that the participating churches can act together, irrespective of whether these groups label themselves as associations, fellowships or even “anti-denominational.”

It needs to be emphasised again that the above definitions are given at the outset to allow for the discussion on Baptist denominationalism to be pursued. These definitions reflect the current context within which Christianity finds itself. A later section comments on whether denominational groupings within Christianity are Biblically justified or not.

2.1.1.2 Definitions with regard to constitutions, confession and creeds

Throughout this thesis, reference will be made to creeds, confessions and church constitutions. Some initial discussion and definitions also need to be given to these terms to be able to pursue this research. A later section will deal specifically with the Baptist “anti-creedal” distinctive, and provide more detailed theological evaluation.

It is common to use the terms *confessions of faith* and *creeds* interchangeably (see for example Carroll, 1923:23-34 and Wright, 1988:153). The word *creed* is derived from Latin and simply means “I believe” (Demarest, 1988:179). The word *confession* is derived directly from scripture and refers to either a belief in the Lord Jesus Christ (see, for example, Matt. 10:32) or an acknowledgement of sin (see for example, 1 John 1:9; Torrance, 1982:224-225). To confess Christ includes both a *trust* in Christ and an *affirmation* of Who He is. In other words, the confession of Christ includes essential doctrine concerning Christ (du Plooy, 1982:211-212). Historically, both creeds and confessions have been statements of Christian belief. Both creeds and confessions were formulated to refute error, and were “conditioned by the heresies they refuted” (Wright, 1988:154). Creeds were therefore typically also used for confessional purposes (Demarest, 1988:180), and confessions contained the essential creedal affirmations.

Some general differences can be noted, however, between these two terms. Firstly, the early creeds tended to focus on one particular error or a group of errors, while

confessions were more balanced and dealt with a much broader range of Christian truth (Wright, 1988:154).

Secondly, the early creeds that dealt with Trinitarian formulations and Christology are viewed as absolutely essential to Christian belief and salvation (Demarest, 1988:179), whereas confessions were typically generated by divided or dividing churches (Wright, 1988:154), and included denominational distinctives (such as church government and the practice of the ordinances) that are not considered as absolutely essential for salvation. It is therefore natural that the early creeds tended to be perceived as having greater authority, and being less liable for revision. It is for this reason that some Baptists have tended to differentiate between creeds and confessions. Estep (1987:600), for example, draws a distinction between “creedalism” and “confessionalism.” He defines creeds as documents that are “authoritative and often viewed as final, unalterable... they have been considered as infallible” (Estep, 1987:600). This will be discussed and evaluated in a later section.

However, for the purposes of this thesis, the following general definitions or meanings apply. A *creed* is a statement of belief formulated by a group of churches that deals with a particular doctrine that is considered essential to biblical Christianity, and is therefore viewed as authoritative (Demarest, 1988:179). It is therefore *less likely* to be altered by subsequent church groups.

A *confession* is a statement of belief formulated by a group of churches that deals with a broad range of Biblical truth, and includes issues such as church polity and the practice of ordinances which are not considered as being essential to salvation. Some sections of confessions would therefore tend to be more easily revised by later church groups than creeds.

Adopting the above definitions, it is still apparent that a creed can be used to a limited extent as a basic confession of Christian belief, and that denominational confessions of faith will contain creedal elements.

A *constitution* typically sets out the rules which govern how a church or denominational body functions. A constitution reflects the biblical principle that God is orderly, and His church should be run in an orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:33, 40; 1 Tim. 3:15). A constitution will therefore have a practical orientation, but still reflect the general principles of God's word. In this sense, a church constitution can also be considered as a type of confession of faith, as it embodies biblical principles and reflects God's orderly nature. However, there are some notable differences between a constitution and a confession of faith. A confession of faith deals with a broad range of doctrinal issues and attempts to base all of its statements explicitly on scripture (either by direct application or by logical inference from a biblical principle). A constitution, however, contains some elements that are not based directly on scripture but rather sanctified common sense. For example, a constitution sets out what proportion of the church membership will constitute a quorum at meetings, and what percentage of the voting membership is needed to elect an elder to office. These proportions and percentages are not based on any direct Scriptural command or principle. They are pragmatically selected. Parts of a constitution are therefore liable to change during the life of a church or denomination depending on circumstances.

For the purposes of this thesis, a *constitution* can therefore be defined as a document which sets out the rules and principles under which a church or denomination functions. It is based on the general principles of God's word, but also contains many practical rules which are not derived directly from scripture.

2.1.1.3 Introductory reflections with regard to denominations within Christianity

It should be noted that the definitions given in the previous section regarding a "denomination" are not strictly theologically motivated, but rather reflect the current situation of multiple denominations within Christianity. Some comment and theological

reflection is required, therefore, on the current state of affairs regarding denominational groups within Christianity.

The New Testament does not contain any evidence of multiple denominations as they exist today. The New Testament speaks of the universal church as a single entity (see, for example, Gal. 1:13; Eph. 1:22-23, 4:4; Hendriksen, 1968:32, 50), and at the same time speaks of local congregations, also called churches (see Gal. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:2; du Plooy, 1982:90, 93). Baptist confessions have acknowledged this fact together with the other confessional standards (see the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, chapter 26, paragraph 1 [Lumpkin, 1969:276] and The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, paragraphs 1 and 4 [Williamson, 1964:187-189]).

The New Testament also clearly shows evidence of local churches in fellowship with each other and acting together in various ministries (see 2 Cor. 8 and 9; Waldron, 1995:7-8; Renihan, 1997 331 and du Plooy, 1982:241, 246-248). du Plooy (1982:184) also reminds us that this fellowship between churches did not have any geographical boundaries. The churches that were established by God's providence enjoyed fellowship and co-operated. This "essential unity" of the people of God is further commented on in a later section that deals with the theological basis for fellowship between churches.

When factionalism developed within the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul dealt with it decisively (see 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-8, 25-26; MacArthur, 1984:69-70), arguing for the essential unity of believers in Christ. In other words, because Christ is not divided, the church ought not to be divided into factions, but to strive for unity (Eph. 4:3). When differences in doctrine developed, the apostles also dealt with these, providing the correct understanding and application of the truth (see, for example, 1 Cor. 8:1-13). The current denominational divisions are therefore not found in the New Testament.

However, after the passing away of the apostles with their unique authority over the universal church (Waldron, 1989:315, 320; Dagg, 1858:130-131), there remains no earthly person or structure to authoritatively and infallibly resolve the differences in interpretation of scripture that can develop between believers or churches. From a Baptist perspective, the claims of the Pope or other church “authorities” are unbiblical, as is shown later in the discussion on Acts 15. This means that the only mechanism to resolve differences of interpretation across the denominations is dialogue and debate on the correct meaning and understanding of scripture.

This does not mean, however, that the current denominationalism has necessarily destroyed the essential spiritual and doctrinal unity that the Christian church enjoys. As argued below from John 17, all true believers (and churches) are united to Christ and adhere to the essential truths of the gospel. If any person or group deviates from these essential gospel truths, they can no longer be considered as Christian. Believers from different denominations holding to the essential truths of Christianity ought therefore to acknowledge each other as brothers and sisters in Christ (see Nettles, 2001:12). They are spiritually united to one Lord, and therefore are in reality united to each other. Their differences do not relate to the essential truths of the faith, but to secondary issues such as church polity. The existence of denominations, therefore, although undesirable from a strictly biblical perspective, has not destroyed the essential spiritual unity that Christians do enjoy in Christ.

It can therefore be concluded that the existence of denominations is not desirable from a biblical perspective. However, it is a current reality. This thesis is based on this current reality, and explores how Baptists should practise denominationalism amongst themselves. This does not imply that Baptists must not strive for doctrinal unity amongst all true churches and other denominations. However, the evaluation of John 17 below emphasises that unity is always based on truth, and the way to heal the rift between the denominations is to strive for doctrinal unity based on the Word of God.

2.1.2 Historical development of Baptist denominational structures

This section gives a brief overview of the origins and historical development of Baptist denominational structures in England and America. This overview is brief and general, mainly to provide a context for the following section which lists and defines the main types of denominational structures Baptists have used. In this historical overview, the intention is not necessarily to differentiate decisively and exactly between the different structures, simply because these specific denominational forms matured and developed over time and became more defined (McBeth, 1987:95). In other words, some of the initial structures may exhibit mixed characteristics, which later developed to what may now be more exactly labelled. Wamble (1957:553), for example, notes that English Baptists initially preferred the name “general meetings” for their denominational structures, while the term “association” only became popular after 1689. This section therefore reviews the development of inter-church co-operation amongst Baptists, and notes whether they tended more towards what would later be defined as a specific structure.

The historical overview below has a particular focus on the *relationships* between Baptist churches. A few points need to be made with regard to the development of Baptist churches in their own right.

Firstly, the influence of the Anabaptist movement in the formation of the Baptist churches must be noted. The sixteenth century Anabaptists have generally been portrayed in a negative light by both their opponents and historians in general (Hudson-Reed, 1989:3). Verduin (1964:21, 63, 95, 132, 160, 189, 221, 243) notes some of the abusive labels applied to them, including “rebels,” “heretics” and “communists”. The earlier Baptists tended to downplay or even deny any links to the Anabaptist movement (Hudson-Reed, 1989:202). Some modern Baptists hold to a similar position. Waldron (1989:288) for example, categorically denies any significant link between Particular Baptists and the Anabaptists.

There is a growing consensus, however, that this portrayal of the Anabaptists has been at the very least a partial misrepresentation. Some of the reasons for this misrepresentation include “partisan Protestant polemics,” a failure to differentiate between minority groups within Anabaptism that fell into isolated excesses, and the previously scant resources that led to limited historical investigation (Hudson-Reed, 1989:3-5). Historians such as Harold S Bender (1897-1962) have played a significant role in revising the historical interpretation of the movement (Hudson-Reed, 1989:5).

While acknowledging that it is difficult to define exactly how influence is to be traced (Hudson-Reed 1989:208), there are notable resemblances between Anabaptists and Baptists that persuasively suggest that the former movement did significantly influence the latter. Some of these resemblances include believer’s baptism, general church polity, liberty of conscience and the relationship of the church to the state (Hudson-Reed 1989:6, 9, 10, 211). This does not mean, however, that the Baptists did not have other influences, such as the Puritan separatists (Waldron, 1989:289), or that there were also significant differences between the two movements. Also, the debate is complicated by the fact that Particular and General Baptists appear to have had differing formative influences (Hudson-Reed, 1989:218).

What is certain, however, is that the Anabaptists laid the foundation for liberty of conscience and religious toleration in society that many subsequent Christian groups (but primarily the Baptists) reinforced. The Anabaptists were the pioneers of freedom of conscience (Hudson-Reed, 1989:231). For this reason, recent Baptist leaders freely acknowledge their links back to the Anabaptists (see Patterson, 2001:66-67; Mitchell, 2001:220).

Secondly, it is simply a matter of historical fact that the Anabaptists attracted persecution from the Roman Catholic Church, and then subsequently the Reformers (Verduin, 1964:38-39). Their principles of religious liberty and regenerate church membership in particular aroused suspicion and persecution. It is these principles that the Baptists took up, which also resulted in their persecution in both England and

America by Protestant groups (Vedder, 1907:220-221, 287-289). This partly explains two very important features of the Baptist movement. In the first instance, it explains why the Baptists did not join the existing state churches. Although they acknowledged many to be believers in these churches, they believed that adherence to their Biblical principles was more important than outward, organisational unity at the expense of truth (Anderson, 1989:5). The persecution they suffered also reinforced their determination to stand for convictions that were unpopular and regarded with suspicion. Conversely, being non-conformists, they viewed the state churches with suspicion (Goen, 1985:59). In particular, the Baptist insistence on the separation of church and state, believers' baptism and regenerate church membership was not supported by the state churches (Patterson, 2001:67; Verduin, 1991:17). They therefore did not join the state churches in order to bear testimony to these principles. It should be noted that the term "state church" is used in this research as the church that enjoys official recognition by the state, often called the established church (Sceats, 1988:659-660). Generally speaking, two associated practices were problematic for the non-conformists. The first was the reliance of the state church to use the power of the state to enforce doctrine, which conflicted with religious liberty (Sceats, 1988:659-660). The other practice was the tendency by some state churches to view the "church" as the society of people in a particular geographic location, which conflicted with regenerate church membership (Verduin, 1964:17).

In the second instance, it explains the Baptist attitudes towards rigid confessions. Baptists saw in the scriptures evidence of believer's baptism, separation of church and state and religious liberty based on soul competency. They were persecuted for these convictions partly because they contradicted the established churches' beliefs as stated in their confessions. In other words, the Baptists wanted the right to disagree with the existing confessions on the basis of the word of God. From their perspective, while they were also strongly confessional at times (as shown in a later section), these confessions should never be seen as so fixed or infallible that they would hinder further reformation of the church based on scripture.

2.1.2.1 English origins and development

It is only from the early 1600s that historical evidence can be found for Baptist churches existing with unbroken succession until today. Certainly, from 1641, Baptist churches existed with the same essential doctrine and features as can be found presently (Vedder, 1907:201, 205). John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, Henry Jacob and John Spilsbury were some of the early General and Particular Baptists forerunners in England (Estep, 1987:608). It should be noted, however, that Vedder (1907:ix - x) divides his book into two sections, differentiating between Baptist *principles* (which can be traced back through various groups to antiquity) and Baptist *churches*.

Baptist connectional organisations began in England, Ireland and Wales. Informal co-operation between churches can be traced back to 1626 in London, where five Baptist churches joined and established communications with the Mennonites in Amsterdam (Shurden, 1980:161). In 1644, seven Particular Baptist churches co-operated to issue the First London Confession of Faith (Wamble, 1957:553). A much larger grouping of about 30 churches joined to produce a confession in 1651 (Shurden, 1980:161).

In 1650, three churches in South Wales formed what may be called the first Baptist association. They attended to matters that included the scarcity of Baptist ministers and unity amongst the churches (Shurden, 1980:162). Two years later, in 1652, the Abingdon Association came into existence in England, and dealt with matters that included carrying out the work of God, financial assistance and mutual advice and counselling (Shurden, 1980:162).

In the two decades from 1650, associationalism increased amongst the Baptists, and meetings were regularly held between churches. Some of the theological justification for these groupings was also articulated, the most notable example being the Abingdon Association (Shurden, 1980:161-162, 165). Their motivation for inter-church co-operation included the relationship between the universal and the local church and

the Headship of Christ over all churches (Shurden, 1980:162, 164). However, there was a consistent acknowledgement that the churches remained autonomous (Alison, 1906:14; Shurden, 1980:165).

By 1654, the General Baptists had formed a nationwide assembly (called the General Assembly), with the aim of promoting the gospel (McBeth, 1987:96). This centralised structure was based on the New Model Army, where counties were organised into associations, which in turn sent two representatives to interact with the centralised Parliament. There is evidence that the General Assembly, together with the associations, exercised some degree of authority over the local churches (McBeth, 1987:96).

A matter of some relevance occurred in the 1690s. The deity of Christ was questioned amongst the General Baptists. Charges against one of the main perpetrators were laid at the General Assembly, but they consistently refused to deal with the theological compromise. This led to a split of the General Assembly in 1693. In 1731 these two groups re-united (Whitley, 1923:194), but without addressing the doctrinal issue. According to McBeth (1987:157), “the General Baptists chose denominational unity at the expense of doctrinal agreement”. This doctrinal compromise was a symptom of the decline of the General Baptists in England (McBeth, 1987:154-155). As a result, many of the General Baptist churches drifted into Unitarianism.

In 1770, under the influence of Dan Taylor (a convert of the Wesleyan Revival who came to Baptist convictions), a group split away from the General Assembly due to the doctrinal compromise, and the New Connection was formed (McBeth, 1987:161; Vedder, 1907:246-247). The two groups, however, did still co-operate to a limited extent, each group hoping to woo the other back (McBeth, 1987:164). This episode in the history of the General Baptists does show that prior to the nineteenth century, their allegiance to historic Baptist beliefs was relatively weak. They felt free to deviate from over a hundred years of Baptist testimony to the deity of Christ. However, this

comment must be restricted to the General Baptists. The Particular Baptists did not follow the General Baptists into Unitarianism to any significant degree (McBeth, 1987:156).

Another very important event was the establishment of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 amongst the Particular Baptists (Stanley, 1992:13-14, 21). Under the leadership and influence of Carey and Fuller, the Society, initially comprising fourteen individuals, had the aim of promoting foreign missions (Whitley, 1923:245-251; Vedder, 1907:249-250). It was established under the auspices of the Northamptonshire Association, and has been correctly labelled as the child of this Association (Stanley, 1992:14).

In 1797 (two years after the establishment of the London Missionary Society), a relatively rare union took place between Baptists and Congregationalists in Bedfordshire. These two groups shared the label of being non-conformists, and also had a similar church polity, namely congregational government. Their aim of the union was to promote evangelism and church planting. Both groups also felt that they did not sacrifice any vital doctrines, as their aim was “union and not uniformity” (Brown, 1946:19). They succeeded in planting a number of churches (Brown, 1946:51), but also experienced hindrances in the form of Hyper-Calvinistic tendencies leading to Antinomianism (Brown, 1946:62).

In the nineteenth century, the Baptists flourished in England, and denominational life strengthened and expanded. Various societies were formed to serve a variety of ministries. The Particular Baptists formed a national body called the Baptist Union in 1813 (Whitley, 1923:244), and in 1891 the General Baptists of the New Connection united with them (McBeth, 1987:289-290). The original constitution had a doctrinal standard that was Trinitarian, and included the doctrine of election and the final perseverance of the saints (McBeth, 1987:292). The Baptist Union slowly gained momentum, and started absorbing smaller societies and funds (McBeth, 1987:293). In 1891, the General Baptists were affiliated with the Baptist Union, and the “strict

Calvinism” of the Baptist Union was softened (McBeth, 1987:293). It was during this period that the “Down Grade” controversy took place (Payne, 1964:7), where CH Spurgeon withdrew from the Union due to doctrinal compromise. At the time, the Union tolerated “progressive views” on the doctrine of scripture, the atonement and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Spurgeon believed that such compromise on fundamental doctrines demanded separation (Wills, 1999:74; Murray, 1973:139-150).

In 1905, the Baptist World Alliance was formed in London (Whitley, 1923:348, 351). McBeth (1987:795) notes that it brought together Baptists from opposing countries after the Second World War, and so provided a forum for reconciliation. Some of its other work also included war relief work, promoting religious freedom, and gathering statistics on European Baptists (McBeth, 1987:795).

2.1.2.2 American origins and development

Shurden (1980:171) notes that Baptists were numerically very weak in America prior to the Great Awakening. By 1660, only four Baptist churches existed. Roger Williams and John Clarke were some of the early leaders, establishing churches in Providence and Rhode Island (Vedder, 1907:289-294).

Associationalism developed very slowly, mainly due to the stress on local church independence, the lack of numerical strength, geographical isolation (Straton, 1941:132) and some degree of theological diversity (Shurden, 1980:170-171). Therefore, during the first one hundred years of the Baptist movement in America, only two associations were established. However, by 1780 there were thirteen (Shurden, 1980:171).

Due to geographical isolation, many of the early associations had very small numbers. For example, the Philadelphia Association (formed around 1707) started with five churches, the Charleston Association in 1751 had four, and the Sandy Creek Association in 1758 had three churches (Shurden, 1980:171).

Alison (1906:27) records that the first Baptist Council, strictly speaking, was established in 1712 under the Philadelphia Association. After a dispute arose in one of the member Baptist churches, instead of resorting to the association, the church called a Council meeting from the neighbouring churches to deal with the controversy (Alison, 1906:27-28). In the same year, however, when another controversy arose in a member church, the association established a Committee to deal with the problem (Alison, 1906:29). While other Councils were subsequently called by various Baptist churches in America, they were “relatively few,” as the associations tended to perform most of the functions of a Council (Alison, 1906:81).

The eighteenth century saw the Baptist movement surge from around 24 churches in 1700, to become the largest denomination in America by 1800, with some 979 churches consisting 67 500 members, organised in 42 associations (McBeth, 1987:200). Between 1780 and 1814 in particular, the growth was rapid, so that by the time of the Triennial Convention (1814), there were one hundred and twenty five associations (Shurden, 1980:171). The main contributing factor was the revivals of the 1730s and 1740s. During this period, numerous Baptist associations, funds, colleges and societies came into existence.

It was also during this time that the associations (and the Philadelphia Association in particular) grappled with the issue of their power and authority relative to the local church. They concluded that local churches were autonomous, and had complete power and authority from Christ to perform their functions. The associations existed to assist the churches, and not *vice versa*. They performed several functions, the main ones being monitoring doctrine, giving advice on Baptist practices, and finally serving as a “clearing house” for personal matters, such as helping churches find pastors (McBeth, 1987:243-245). The associations also concluded that their power resided in their ability to withdraw fellowship from churches defecting in doctrine or practice.

The early Baptists did not see local church autonomy and forming associations as contradictory. While they believed that each local church had the necessary authority and power to elect their own leadership, this did not preclude them from seeking advice and guidance from like-minded churches in an association. As is shown later, they always believed that the advice they received from the association was just that, advice. Both the local churches and the association accepted that the role of the association was to give advice and guide, and that this advice was not binding on the church in question.

The first national organisation of the Baptists in America was the General Missionary Convention formed in 1814 (McBeth, 1987:344). It was also called the Triennial Convention because it met every three years. It consisted of Baptists from the North and South, and although called a convention, it was in effect a Society (McBeth, 1987:344). While its main aim was foreign missions, this expanded to other areas such as home missions and theological education (McBeth, 1987:352). McBeth (1987:347-348) notes that this body highlighted the differences in denominational approaches between the North and South. The Northerners preferred a Society approach, which consisted of interested individuals who contributed financially to the main aim of the Society. *Societies therefore had no official connection to the churches.* In contrast, the Southerners favoured an association or convention approach, which is based on local church membership through messengers or delegates. The Triennial Convention therefore exhibited characteristics of both a convention and society at various stages of its development. For example, in 1826 the Triennial Convention shed its other functions and returned to have a single focus on foreign missions. As indicated in the following sections, Societies tended to have a single focus (McBeth, 1987:357).

In 1845, a significant event took place in Baptist denominationalism in America. The Southern Baptists split from the Triennial Convention and formed the Southern Baptist Convention. The factors that contributed to this split were “disagreements over

method of organisation, problems in home mission work, and the slavery controversy” (McBeth, 1987:381).

The main focus of the Southern Baptist Convention was initially foreign and home missions, but expanded in 1891 to establish a Sunday School Board, and in 1859, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was established (McBeth, 1987:432, 444-445). They deliberately adopted a convention (as opposed to a society) model for their denomination (McBeth, 1987:390-391). This was mainly due to their conviction that, as noted above, local churches should be represented in a denominational structure as opposed to a Society which essentially represented individuals. The biblical evaluation of the associational versus the societal models is dealt with in a later section.

Three significant issues related to the Southern Baptist Convention need to be noted, as they have relevance to denominational life.

The first issue dealt with Landmarkism and the impact it had on the Southern Baptist Convention. This movement started in the late nineteenth century with three early leaders, namely, JR Graves, AC Cooper and JM Pendleton (McBeth 1987:448). The name “Landmarkism” originated from the title Graves gave to Pendleton’s essay on the issue of non-Baptist preachers (Wamble, 1964:429). The Landmark teachings relate essentially to the doctrine of the church. In essence, the system teaches that:

- i. Baptist churches are the only true churches in the world, with an unbroken historical succession from the apostles to present day.
- ii. The true church is local and visible. They deny the existence of the “invisible” or “universal” church. Baptist structures such as conventions or associations should therefore not perform functions (such as missions, preaching, and practising the ordinances) that were under the mandate of the local church.
- iii. They practised closed communion and rejected pulpit affiliation with non-Baptists.

- iv. Only churches have authority to pursue ministry. They therefore opposed mission boards as they believed they had no warrant to appoint or direct the work of missionaries (McBeth, 1987:452-453).

The Landmarkers therefore split from the Southern Baptist Convention, and formed bodies such as the Baptist Missionary Association in 1899 and the American Baptist Association (McBeth, 1987:458-459, Patterson, 1975:53). The challenge of this movement is briefly discussed later in this chapter.

The second “event” refers to a twenty five year movement towards conservative theology. The proponents of the movement labelled it as a Southern Baptist “Reformation” (Mohler, 2005), while opponents labelled it as a “Fundamentalist takeover” (Robinson *et al.*, 2006:4) or as being “control oriented” (DeWeese, s.a.b). This movement included removing liberal leaders and teachers, and adopting a new Statement of Faith in 2000 that included inerrancy (Robinson *et al.*, 2006:12-15).

The third significant event (which can also be seen as part of the above mentioned reformational movement) was the withdrawal of the Southern Baptist Convention from the Baptist World Alliance in 2004. At the time, the Southern Baptist Convention was the largest Protestant denomination in America (with some 16 million members), which resulted in the Baptist World Alliance losing about a third of its members. The reasons cited by the Southern Baptist Convention include a theological drift towards liberalism, tolerance of homosexuality, support for women clergy and anti-American pronouncements in the Baptist World Alliance (Cooperman, 2004:2; Hinkle, 2004:30). Hinkle quotes Patterson (President of the South Western Baptist Theological Seminary) as saying that “what you are allied with, you are giving tacit – at least – agreement to” (Hinkle, 2004:30). The Southern Baptist Convention no longer wanted to be allied with the Baptist World Alliance nor financially support it. The Baptist World Alliance, on the other hand, believed they were a conservative, evangelical movement and that the Southern Baptist Convention was guilty of schism.

The above mentioned events are not evaluated in this section, nor is a judgement expressed on the correctness of either party in areas of conflict. The aim of this thesis is to evaluate Baptist denominationalism in South Africa, and this overview of global Baptist denominational issues merely provides some historical context. Most of the issues that are raised in this historical review, however, are evaluated *in principle* in the following chapter where the Baptist distinctives are evaluated individually. At this stage, it needs to be noted that issues that potentially affect the authority of scripture (such as inerrancy), moral issues (such as homosexuality) and issues that affect local church autonomy, have been major concerns for Baptists in denominational settings outside of South Africa.

2.1.3 Predominant Baptist denominational structures

The aim of this section is to describe the Baptist denominational structures that have been historically dominant. Their main characteristics are noted. The intention is not to evaluate these at this stage, but rather to note and describe them. Once the relevant Baptist distinctives are evaluated in the following chapter, it will be possible to generally evaluate these structures in the light of the distinctives and biblical principles.

As Baptist denominationalism matured, distinct structures developed: these are described and their main characteristics noted in this section. As noted earlier, however, some of the earlier denominational models did not fit neatly in the following categories, as some hybrid models were used from time to time. However, the list below certainly contains the dominant structures that have been used. Table 1 below provides a useful guide and overview of the four main structures that have dominated Baptist denominationalism (Bennet,1980:178).

Table 1: Classification of the main Baptist denominational structures

	Membership based on doctrine	Membership based on programme support
Singular purpose	Council	Society
Plural purpose	Association	Convention

From Table 1 it can be seen that generally speaking, councils and societies had a singular, dominant purpose, while conventions and associations performed a number of denominational purposes. The table also indicates that societies and conventions were based more on programme support than doctrinal support. However, this does not mean that societies and conventions had no doctrinal standards.

It should also be noted that associations have also been known to start societies. For example, the well-known Baptist Missionary Society was established under the Northamptonshire Association (Stanley, 1992:14). The matter is further complicated by the fact that Baptist Missionary Society, in turn, gave birth to the first Baptist Union. The Society was concerned about the lack of unity amongst the Particular Baptists, which was hindering the work of the Society. In 1813, a Union of Particular Baptist churches was established in London (Stanley, 1992:29).

2.1.3.1 Baptist council

A Baptist Council can be defined as a specific body that is called by a local church for a particular purpose, such as to consider a particular doctrine or practice, and give its advice to the local church who called the council (Alison, 1906:9). This definition, although accurate, must not be seen as rigid. For example, a group of believers who have not yet established a church could call a council for advice on whether to establish a church, or the composition of a council could include others who do not represent local churches (Alison, 1906:9). The council is advisory only, and predominantly consists of representatives of those churches that were requested to

form a council. Generally, it would have been an elder who represented the local church in a council (Alison, 1906:27, 33, 34), although any member of a local church could represent that church at a council (Alison, 1906:18).

It should be noted, however, that although the advice of councils is advisory only, Baptists tended to treat it as more than just sound advice. It came from a group of godly men who had carefully considered an issue, and not a group of irresponsible men (Alison, 1906:44). However, the advice of a council never carried ecclesiastical authority in Baptist thinking.

A Baptist council should in no way be compared to the early councils such as Nicaea, which carried judicial authority (Alison, 1906:10, 42ff). Once the objectives of a Baptist council have been reached, the council usually disbands. However, there have been exceptions to this rule. For example, Alison (1906:97) notes there have very occasionally been permanent councils.

Historically, councils have dealt with issues such as ordination of ministers (Moore, 2001:17; Alison, 1906:62-64), restoring peace in a local church, matters of discipline, and the promotion of denominational activities (Alison, 1906:58ff). Councils were not used very frequently, as in many instances associations tended to do the work of councils (Alison, 1906:36, 81).

Baptist councils arose to deal with specific issues that arose amongst local churches in fellowship. Alison (1906:42) insists that councils did not arise from the “impulse of the denomination to organise itself for corporate expression”. He also notes that councils are not essential to the existence of the church nor to ministry.

While almost all of the early Baptist confessions carefully safeguarded the independency of the local church by noting that the decisions of councils and assemblies are advisory only, the Orthodox Creed of 1678 is an exception. It was

compiled by English General Baptists, and Article XXXIX states that councils or Assemblies, when legally convened,

...make but one church, and have lawful right, and suffrage in this general meeting, or assembly, to act in the name of Christ ; it being of divine authority, and is the best means under heaven to preserve unity, to prevent heresy, and superintendency among, or in any congregation whatsoever within its own limits, or jurisdiction. (Lumpkin, 1969:330-333).

This statement indicates that such an assembly is in fact a church, that it can act in the name of Christ, and that it has divine authority. Alison (1906:18-19) believes that this borders on Presbyterianism, and that the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is much more representative of Baptists than the Orthodox Creed of 1678. The testimony of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is examined in a subsequent section.

2.1.3.2 Baptist association

An association is typically a group of Baptist churches in a particular geographical area that establish a formal basis of co-operation. The decisions of an association are advisory, and never have authority over local churches. These associations are more permanent than councils, and because they perform similar functions to councils (as noted above), were often used in the place of councils (Alison, 1906:81-95). In other words, where an established association exists, the need for a council is greatly diminished, although councils have been called by churches within an association (Alison, 1906:82).

Associations typically adopted a confession of faith that established the basis of the association, and churches deviating from the confession could be removed from membership (Handy, 1987:591). As shown in a later section, this is still consistent with liberty of conscience and the autonomy of the local church.

Importantly, an association is made up of participating churches, with “messengers” or “delegates” attending the association’s meetings. Associations can pursue numerous denominational goals, whereas societies tend to focus on a single aim (McBeth, 1987:348-349). The advantages of associations (and national conventions) over societies is that they were accountable to local churches, built denominational identity and loyalty, and could pursue a more balanced array of causes (McBeth, 1987:348-349).

2.1.3.3 Baptist convention or union

A convention or union (typically at a national level) can consist of various associations, forming a national body of Baptists. On occasion, local congregations have also been allowed direct participation. These conventions or unions never have authority over the local churches or associations, and are purely co-operative and advisory (Draper, 2001:53; Carroll, 1913:23-34).

As with the associations, conventions and unions also have a confession of faith to which members must generally subscribe (Handy, 1987:591). Conventions or unions are therefore essentially based on local church participation through delegates, coming either directly from local churches or from associations of local churches. It is also important to note that historically both associations and conventions have been autonomous bodies in their own right (Hobbs & Mullins, 1978:107). This view is examined in the light of biblical and Baptist principles in a later section.

Conventions often set up boards, which acts as an executive committee for the convention. The board members in turn are often divided into committees, which are in effect sub-groups that have particular portfolios, such as finance or education (Straton, 1941:134).

Baptists have also on occasions set up unions with other denominational churches. For example, in 1797, Baptists and Congregations set up a union in Bedfordshire (Brown, 1946:15).

2.1.3.4 Baptist Society

Baptist societies are autonomous and voluntary bodies, and are comprised of individuals who contribute financially to the Society. These societies have historically been established by conventions, unions (Handy, 1987:595) and even local churches.

Importantly, societies consist of a group of individuals who contribute financially to the society, and do not necessarily have any accountability to any local church (Marring and Hudson, 1965:126, McBeth, 1987:348). Some conventions initially favoured societies for this reason, as it seemed to safeguard the autonomy of the local churches in the best possible way (Baker, 1974:104).

Societies also tended to be focused on one specific aim, whereas associations could pursue a variety of denominational goals. Societies therefore tended to be less bureaucratic and simpler to manage than associations or conventions (McBeth, 1987:348).

A later section evaluates the biblical foundations of local church autonomy and co-operation, and in doing so, evaluates the consistency of societies in relation to scripture and Baptist distinctives.

2.1.3.5 Baptist Ministers' Meetings

Baptist ministers' meetings are much more informal, although a few have had basic constitutions with by-laws. They can either be regular or infrequent, and are used to discuss items of mutual concern to the pastors of the churches. Typically, these are

independent meetings and have no organic relations to local churches, but are only for the spiritual benefit of the pastors (Hiscox, 1983:341). These types of meetings will therefore not be pursued further.

2.2 THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS FOR PURSUING BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM

This section sets out the motivation for Baptist denominationalism. As noted in the first chapter, the strong insistence on local church autonomy and liberty of conscience may seem to be a significant challenge to Baptist denominationalism. However, despite this, Baptists have practised various forms of denominationalism as listed in the previous section. This section sets out the motivation for doing so.

Two categories of texts that Baptists have used to justify inter-church co-operation are discussed and analysed. The first category deals with examples of co-operation amongst local churches in the New Testament. The second category focuses on the theological basis for this co-operation related to the nature of the universal church. It should be noted that this section is mainly concerned with the Biblical justification for inter-church co-operation, and not the *organisational form* of that co-operation. The following chapter shows that the particular organisational forms that Baptists have used were primarily developed out of consideration for their distinctives.

2.2.1 Examples of local church co-operation in the New Testament

2.2.1.1 Understanding the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15

One of the main justifications for the Presbyterian form of church government is derived from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Reymond (1998:901) believes this passage proves that the churches were not independent and autonomous, but rather were “mutually submissive, dependent and accountable”. Presbyterianism has worked this principle of “connectionalism” into three levels of “court jurisdiction” (Reymond, 1998:901), which form the structure of the denomination. In the Presbyterian system, the decisions of synods and presbyteries are therefore not merely advisory but authoritative (Reymond, 1998:901-902). However, their powers are limited by the rights of local churches. In effect then, the synods exercise *general* oversight over the churches (Ferguson, 1988:145). Each local church still retains a *relative* autonomy (Berkhof, 1988:589).

Du Plooy (1982:236-239) also sees Acts 15 as the root of the Presbyterian system of church government. He sees Acts 15 as evidence that elders in one church can collectively serve other churches, and that the Jerusalem Council was a transition where the apostles faded in terms of their significance and were replaced by the elders who have a permanent, ongoing role in the New Testament. Importantly, these elders also have ministry to the universal church, even though they are bound to a local church (du Plooy, 1982:239). Some of the evidence cited by du Plooy is the fact that in Acts 15, the apostles seem to be overshadowed by James and the elders, and after this Council Peter and the other original apostles no longer feature in the book of Acts (du Plooy, 1982:229).

Baptists have not seen the Jerusalem Council in the same light as the Presbyterians. Baptists have consistently insisted that Acts 15 represents the actions of the Jerusalem church alone. They also insist, as shown later, that the Jerusalem church was historically unique due to the presence of the apostles, and this accounts for the decree that was issued.

Alison (1906:10-12), for example, rejects the idea that any form of Council was established in Acts 15. He notes that it was primarily the Jerusalem church that met to consider the matter brought before them, and that Paul and Barnabas were allowed to participate in it. In other words, a separate body comprising members from different churches was not formed. It was a local church that was deliberating and acting in Acts 15. Alison also questioned the status of the decree issued by the church, and believed it was advisory only.

Hiscox (1893:315) agrees that the meeting was not a Council nor a Synod but a church meeting. As a slight variation, Renihan (1997:142-143) quotes Knollys (a seventeenth century Baptist), who believed that the Jerusalem Council represented the collective effort of individual congregations in Jerusalem, each under their own apostle, but that were still considered as a single church in Jerusalem.

Three biblical considerations will shed light on how to interpret Acts 15. These are the uniqueness of the apostolic office, the circumstantial evidence of the Jerusalem Council and the explicit evidence from Acts 15.

(i) The uniqueness of the apostolic office and authority

The uniqueness of the apostolic office and their authority over the universal church is critical in this debate. With regard to the uniqueness of the office, a comparison of 1 Corinthians 1:9, 15:5-9 and Acts 1:21-22 shows that an essential qualification for an apostle was the ability to be an eye witness of the resurrection of Christ (MacArthur, 1984:403; Walls, 1982:59-60). It is for this reason that Paul notes his apostleship was

as one born out of due time, as he saw the resurrected Christ after the other apostles. He was therefore the last of the apostles (1 Cor.15:8). Another argument for this uniqueness can be made from the fact that the Pastoral Epistles never explicitly cite the qualifications for an apostle, only those of an elder and deacon. It is clear that the apostle Paul therefore never saw the need for the church to appoint apostles. Rather, the ongoing offices of the church were limited to elders and deacons (see, for example, 1 Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9). As an aside, it is for this reason that Baptists have rejected the Roman Catholic and Episcopalian systems of government, which rely completely or partly on apostolic succession (Macleod, 1988:143-144).

With regard to apostolic authority, Matthew 16:18-19 indicates that the keys of the kingdom (a reference to power and authority, see Douglas, 1982:653) were given to Peter on the basis of his confession of Christ. However, this power and authority was not given to Peter exclusively, but as a representative of the other apostles. For example, Matthew 18:18 gives the same authority to all the apostles (Hendriksen, 1973:647). This power and authority must be restricted to the apostolic office and writings in the first instance, as it assumes infallibility. The Lord Jesus promised that the authority given to the apostles would result in their decisions being ratified in heaven, so that whatever was bound on earth would also be bound in heaven. In other words, what the apostles restricted or allowed on earth, God would restrict or allow in heaven. God would never bind Himself to enacting something that was unrighteous or unjust (Gen. 18:23-25). With the handing over of the keys of the kingdom to the apostles, there was a corresponding endowment of infallibility in certain areas. An example of this apostolic infallibility can be seen in the apostolic writings. Second Peter 3:2 establishes the closest possible relationship between the authority of the apostolic writings and the prophecies of the Old Testament scripture. Both were infallible and carried the authority of Christ.

As an aside, it needs to be noted that some authors extend the keys of the kingdom directly to the church without *any qualification* (see for example du Plooy, 1982:48-49). Du Plooy explicitly states that the keys are given to the apostles and then to the

local church. This is partly based on his view that the local church elders *replaced* the apostles in terms of the government of the church as it developed and progressed (du Plooy, 1982:229-230). While it is true that after the apostolic era, local churches are ruled by elders (Heb. 13:17), this does not imply that all the apostolic authority is also carried over to the office of elder. This position must therefore be challenged on the basis that the apostolic office, as noted above, is a distinct, unique office. In Ephesians 4:11, it is explicitly listed as a distinct office to that of pastor. The considerations noted above base this distinction on the unique qualifications and authority that the apostles were given which cannot be taken over by any other. Even du Plooy (1982:173) notes that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). The office of elder is not included in this foundation. In other words, there are some aspects of the apostolic office that are unique to that office which could not be transferred to another office. It is therefore best to see the apostolic office as unique and foundational to the church (Waldron, 1989:315).

The point that needs to be made is that a local church only enjoys the power and authority of the kingdom as its judgements and decisions are in harmony with the apostolic writings. In other words, the keys of the kingdom (the divine power and authority) reside in the apostolic office and writings. The church wields the scripture as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), and as long as it is making judgements in harmony with God's word, it does indeed wield the keys of the kingdom. *But this is a derived authority, and does not reside directly and immediately in the local church or in a group of local churches.* History has shown that many true local churches have erred in their judgements and decisions at times through a misinterpretation of God's word. These misinformed judgements are not ratified in heaven, because they are not in harmony with God's word.

The church at Jerusalem was therefore historically unique as it was the home church of the twelve apostles, and was a significant reason why it was tasked with making a judgement on the vital question of the relationship between the gentile believers and

the Mosaic Law. Marshall (1980:260) draws attention to the apostolic nature of the Council:

The authority of the apostolic council was regarded as binding on the churches outside of Jerusalem.

In a similar vein, Cheung (1993:143) describes the decree as an “apostolic” decree. Wiarda (2003:139), in discussing the views of another author, also points to the apostolic authority of the Council:

The strength of Shelton's reading lies in his recognition of the role played by apostles at the Jerusalem Council - a factor many interpreters overlook. He is also correct, I believe, in observing how the apostles' Spirit-enabled authority stands side by side with that of the OT.

Grudem (1994:911, 926) also draws attention to the presence of the apostles at the Jerusalem church, and their unique status in the early church. It is acknowledged that the whole church at Jerusalem was involved in the deliberations and decision, including James and the other elders. This simply reflects the fact that the apostles, being part of a local church, did not “lord it over” the church and other leaders, but allowed the local church to function holistically as a body.

(ii) The circumstantial evidence of the Jerusalem Council

The events immediately prior to the Jerusalem Council need to be noted. In Acts 14:21-27, many local churches were being established by Paul and Barnabas. Acts 14:23 indicates that local elders were appointed in the churches, including Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Galatia), so that these churches effectively had a functioning leadership and church government. It was at the church at Antioch (Syria) that the dispute over circumcision arose.

Two simple points need to be made. Firstly, Paul and Barnabas did not gather the elders of the local churches to form any sort of a council or meeting to discuss the

matter, even though these churches were geographically much closer to Antioch (Syria) than Jerusalem. If indeed the Holy Spirit was moving the church to the Presbyterian form of church government to take over from the apostles, this would have been a more logical way of doing it. This is not entirely conclusive, as it may be argued that the newly elected elders in the churches in Galatia would not have had the experience or grounding to deal with the issue responsibly. However, it is a point that needs some reflection, especially as many Presbyterians would argue that these newly formed churches would still have been given the keys of the kingdom of God, and so would have been guided to the correct decision by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Paul and Barnabas did not summon the elders from these local churches to join him at Jerusalem in a general meeting of elders. Rather, as discussed below, Acts 15:6 indicates that it was the elders and apostles of the *Jerusalem church* who met to consider the issue. In other words, as noted earlier, if the Holy Spirit was moving the church to the Presbyterian system of church government, it would have made much more sense to gather elders from all the local churches.

(iii) The explicit evidence of Acts 15:1-29

The language of Acts 15:1-29 implies that it was the Jerusalem church, and especially their apostles and elders, who met to consider the issue. In Acts 15:2, the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem to the “apostles and elders.” This can only refer to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Acts 15:4 indicates that the church at Jerusalem and the “apostles and elders” *received* the delegation. This again can only refer to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Now, importantly, Acts 15:6 indicates that the “apostles and elders” came together to consider the matter. The most natural and consistent interpretation is that the “apostles and elders” in Acts 15:6 refers to the same group as the previous two references of “apostles and elders”, namely, those of the Jerusalem church. The point is that not even the delegation from Antioch was directly involved in the final decision (Waldron, 1995:5). It was the decision of the Jerusalem church alone. This is

confirmed by the decree issued in Acts 15:22-29. Acts 15:22 refers again to the apostles and elders *of the Jerusalem church* sending the delegation back with the decree. Acts 15:23 differentiates between those who wrote the letter and the delegation that was being sent back. In Acts 15:24, the authors of the letter acknowledge that those who were causing the dispute came from among *themselves*. This most definitely refers to the Jerusalem church, and explicitly excludes Paul and Barnabas as the authors of the letter. Acts 16:4 confirms this interpretation. The decree was determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (see also Waldron, 1995:5). Cheung (1993:142) observes:

The conflict created by Jerusalem is now totally resolved by Jerusalem.

The decree itself is from the Jerusalem church alone. Baptists would therefore take issue with du Plooy (1982:155) when he states that Acts 15 represents an example of *churches* making a *collective* decision on a matter of doctrine. This conclusion does not fit the explicit assertions of the text.

The views of Knollys, who believed that the Jerusalem Council represented the collective effort of individual congregations in Jerusalem, each under their own apostle (although still considered as a single church), are speculative. The church of Jerusalem in Acts 15 is consistently spoken of in the singular (see du Plooy's relevant discussion [1962:83-88, 92] on the views of Bannerman that local congregations together were also called a church). Whatever smaller groups gathered from time to time, the church in Jerusalem was considered a single local church.

The direct evidence of the Jerusalem Council therefore does not show any evidence of the beginnings of a Presbyterian system of government or a synod type of arrangement where the elders of a number of churches gather to issue a decree that binds the participating churches.

The views of Dagg and Waldron thus most accurately reflect the evidence from Acts 15. Their views are set out here as an appropriate summary. Firstly, the Jerusalem

church was historically unique, in that it was the spiritual home of the twelve apostles, who had authority over the universal church (Waldron, 1989:315, 320; Dagg, 1858:130-131).

Although in Acts 15 it was the *church* at Jerusalem that acted, it was a church that was historically and authoritatively unique due to the presence of the apostles. The decree that was issued was not merely advisory, therefore, as it carried the authority of the apostles (who had authority over the universal church, according to Waldron, 1989:315) and was inspired by the Holy Spirit (Dagg, 1858:131).

This however, does mean that Baptists have considered the Jerusalem Council irrelevant to the relationship between local churches. They have acknowledged the principle of interdependence of local churches from Acts 15. Churches cannot and should not function in isolation from other churches. Importantly, however, Baptists have not seen Acts 15 as providing either the principles or a model for the organisational structure of their denomination.

A final point needs to be made with regard to Presbyterianism and its justification from Acts 15. This research attributes ecclesiastical authority to the Presbyterian collective structures. The reasoning of Reymond will be used to substantiate this. Firstly, Reymond (1998:901) argues that the decree that was sent out from the Jerusalem Council was to be viewed as “church law”. It was therefore an authoritative decree binding on all the churches. Secondly, Reymond (1998:901-903) maintains that the Presbyterian system of church government is then derived from the council that was formed in Acts 15. Other Reformed theologians take a similar view (du Plooy, 1962:238-239). In other words, Presbyterianism must necessarily attribute ecclesiastical authority to the decisions of its collective structures, as they are modelled on the events in Acts 15. These decisions are binding on their local churches as they carry the force of church law. From a Baptist perspective, then, Presbyterianism must necessarily attribute ecclesiastical authority (over the individual local churches) to its collective structures. Similarly, from a Baptist perspective,

consistency requires that such a collective structure must represent a higher authority structure than that of the local church, contrary to the claims of some Presbyterians such as Berkhof (1939:589-590). Berkhof's reasoning is inconsistent in this regard. For example, he claims that the collective structures exercise the same authority as that of the local church, but on a broader scale (Berkhof, 1939:590). However, the decree issued by the Council in Acts 15, upon which the Presbyterian collective church structures are based, carried the force of church law. Church law, by definition, must be applicable to the entire church. Similar authority is not attributed to the consistory or local church session. Reymond (1998:903) is more consistent in this regard, attributing to each level of structure its "own intrinsic authority peculiar to itself". This research then, admittedly from a Baptist perspective, attributes ecclesiastical authority to the Presbyterian collective structures and views these collective structures as higher authorities than the individual local church. This is a critical differentiating factor between Baptist denominational structures and the Presbyterian form of church government.

2.2.1.2 Selected passages

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (chapter 26, paragraph 14) uses a number of texts to encourage inter-church communion. It cites Romans 16:1-3, where the church at Rome is urged to help Phoebe (doing some form of ministry for the church at Cenchreae) in her labours (Lumpkin, 1969:288). In other words, it seemed natural for Paul that churches would support and assist one another in their respective ministries.

Another text cited by the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (chapter 26, paragraph 14) is 3 John 1-8 (Lumpkin, 1969:288). In this passage John commends Gaius for showing hospitality to members of another church in their labours, so that they could *work together* for the truth. John naturally assumed that believers from different churches would be working together for the truth. It should be noted that inter-church

co-operation is never justified by the New Testament authors. It is rather assumed, encouraged and expected.

Second Corinthians 8:18-24 (especially verse 19), is an explicit example of both local church co-operation and co-action, in that a number of churches elected an individual to represent them in a particular matter (Waldron, 1995:7-8; Renihan, 1997:331; du Plooy, 1982:273). This is a striking example of the spirit of the New Testament churches, where united action and close co-operation was seen as a natural consequence of the unity they enjoyed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Du Plooy (1982:266-269) reminds us that in 1 Corinthians 16:1, Paul gave orders to the churches regarding the collection. This is a strong command, and does not allow much room for the churches to refuse. In other words, inter-church fellowship and co-operation in meeting the needs of a particular church was a holy obligation, not forced but expected (du Plooy, 1982:269). Also, Paul was organising the local church contributions (du Plooy, 1982:254). In other words, collaborative efforts between churches do require some organisation. Based on this evidence, du Plooy's conclusion that church autonomy that has no regard for fellowship with other churches is sinful must be supported (du Plooy, 1982:183). As noted below, the early Baptists agreed with this sentiment, stating that communion "ought" to be held between churches when providence allowed them to. It was their "duty" to do so.

2.2.2 Theological bases for inter-church co-operation

The previous section has provided some of the evidence Baptists have cited for the interdependence of local churches, their co-operation and their co-action. This section provides some of the theological bases for this interdependence, which is derived mainly from the universal church.

2.2.2.1 Great commission

The implications of the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:19-20 has provided strong motivation for Baptists to pursue some form of denominationalism. The task of global missions and discipleship is certainly larger than any local church. Baptists have argued that *independent* local churches *acting separately* would not be able to provide the resources required for such an undertaking.

Baptists have cited activities such as foreign missions, theological education, large scale publishing and benevolence as motivation to form denominational bodies (Wills, 1999:67; Hiscox, 1893:312-343; Handy 1987:597; Norman 1997:170). The argument put forward is that the resources required to establish a theological institution, for example, are too onerous for an individual church. Only a group of local churches *acting together* can combine sufficient resources to establish a training institution. The same would apply to foreign missions. In this sense, then, the Great Commission assumes the interdependence of local churches and requires their co-action if it is to be fulfilled. The Southern Baptist Convention, for example, was established with the express purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission (Davis, 2001:119).

2.2.2.2 Spiritual unity

Alison (1906:12) bases the motivation of inter-church co-operation and the establishment of Baptist Councils on the idea of Christian fellowship and unity. He believes the same obligation that is placed on individual believers in union with Christ to establish churches for fellowship is also placed on churches to have fellowship with each other.

Other Baptists have adopted a similar approach. McBeth (1995:36-37) notes that the Abingdon Association, established in London in 1652, justified their inter-church co-operation on the unity they enjoyed under the Headship of Christ. This Association

believed that local churches ought to care for one another as they were all part of the body of Christ. The Somerset Confession of Faith of 1656 (article XXVII) also insists that it is the “duty” of congregations to be in communion with each other (Lumpkin, 1969:211). Vedder (1907:32) notes that although local churches are independent in terms of internal administration, all believers in all churches still belong to “one body of Christ”. He therefore concludes that churches “are bound” to give council and help each other (Vedder, 1907:32). du Plooy (1982:74-78) agrees with this sentiment, noting that the picture of the body of Christ applied to the universal church assumes inter-church co-operation and fellowship.

The union of Baptists and Congregationalists in 1797 in Bedfordshire, justified their co-operation on the grounds of their spiritual unity. They were brothers who belonged to the same Father (Brown, 1946:23). They also believed it was their duty to work together for the gospel, as the scriptures indicated that it was *good* and *pleasant* for brothers to dwell together in unity (Brown, 1946:24).

Similarly, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (chapter 26, paragraph 14) indicates that where churches are providentially located to enjoy “communion,” they “ought” to do so (Lumpkin, 1969:288). Waldron argues that the word “communion” was significant to the authors of the 1689 Confession, and implied formal association (Waldron, 1995:3). The early Baptists therefore saw inter-church relations as a divine imperative that is derived from their common union to Christ their Head. Waldron (1995:7) notes that the reason why there is no explicit reference to inter-church associations in the New Testament is because they were already “formally and legally associated through Christ and the apostles”. Again, du Plooy (1982:162-166, 170-173) agrees with this reasoning, noting that the catholicity and apostolicity of the church assumes its essential unity, which then requires inter-church fellowship.

However, it must not be concluded on the strength of the Scriptural evidence mentioned above that Baptists have therefore advocated that this unity requires an institutional structure in every instance. John 17:20-23 is one of the passages that

articulates most clearly the unity that the Lord Jesus Christ desired for believers. The implications of John 17:20-23 on Baptist denominationalism has been debated amongst Baptists in South Africa, and requires some consideration. For example, in 2000, a debate on the nature of the unity spoken of in John 17 took place within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Kevin Roy (2000:105-112) argued that the unity Christ prayed for must be visible, and that only a “united church” can bear credible witness to this unity. Alternatively, a church divided by “enmity, prejudice and strife into warring factions” gives the world legitimate grounds to criticise the church. In terms of the implications for the church, Roy believes that churches should not have criteria for membership that are “more exclusive than those used by God” (Roy, 2000:105-112).

However, some of the arguments used by Roy lack consistency. For example, while Roy correctly believes that “genuine unity can only be on the basis of sound doctrine,” (Roy, 2000:109) and that “association with apostate Christianity is sinful” (Roy, 2000:110), some of his other assertions are puzzling and contradictory. He goes on to argue that the response of Christ, the Old Testament prophets and the apostles, while denouncing evil, did not separate from the community of God’s people even when it was riddled with error (Roy, 2000:110). Under the section entitled *Association with Apostate Christians is Sinful*, he argues that the Christians should not separate from the “community in which the evil is found” (Roy, 2000:110). One wonders how one can be part of a community but not associate with members of the community who are evil? This lacks consistency.

He further argues against separating from a corrupt church, noting that God used Roman Catholics from within the Roman Catholic Church and loyal ministers from within the “corrupt and moribund” state Church of England to achieve works of reformation and revival (Roy, 2000:111). One is left to wonder what Roy’s view of the Reformation is, and how this can be consistent with his earlier statement that association with apostate Christianity is sinful. There is also a noticeable lack of dealing with texts where Christ and the apostle Paul commanded separation. These

texts include 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 2 John 9-11, Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 6:3-5. The general tenor of these texts clearly indicates that for serious moral and doctrinal deviations from Biblical norms, a process must be followed that results finally in separation if there is no repentance from the erring party (Waldron, 1989:319).

Martin Holdt (2000:113-117), in contrast, argues that the unity the Lord prayed for was spiritual and theological (Holdt, 2000:113), and not necessarily institutional. In other words, all believers, due to their union with Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit, do experience this unity in reality. Holdt (2000:115) quotes Carson who notes that this spiritual unity is, however, observable as believers all adhere to the apostolic gospel (Carson, 1991:568). Holdt argues that those for whom Christ is praying in John 17, are those who are truly regenerated and sanctified through faith in Christ. He insists that fitting ecclesiastical organisations (such as state churches that include the regenerate and unregenerate) into John 17:20-23 is “biblically illegitimate” (Holdt, 2000:115).

In evaluating the perspectives of Roy and Holdt, a few points need to be made with regard to understanding the unity envisaged by Christ in John 17. Firstly, the subjects of Christ’s prayer are limited to those who believe, and have been called out of the world, into a relationship with Christ and the Father (John 17:9, 10, 20, 21). Christ prays that these people will be one and experience a unity similar to that of the Godhead (Carson, 1991:551, 568). This makes Roy’s application that believers should stay in corrupt, state churches (where many of the members could be unbelievers) problematic, as this is definitely not the unity the Lord Jesus had in mind. Christ is not praying for people who merely attend church, but for those who have experienced the reality of regeneration and union with Himself. As Carson (1991:568) notes, this union alludes to the union language of John 15 (the vine metaphor), where believers are said to be united to Christ and dependent on Him as a branch is united and dependent on the vine. Hendriksen (1954:364) is equally emphatic:

The unity for which Jesus is praying is not merely outward. He guards against this common misinterpretation. He asks that the oneness of all believers resemble that which exists eternally between the Father and the Son. In both cases the unity is of a definitely spiritual nature.

Secondly, the unity experienced by the Godhead is a unity in reality, not merely in outward appearance. This is the type of unity that Christ prays that believers will enjoy. Again, Roy's application to institutional unity (especially using examples of the Roman Catholic Church and a corrupt state church) is inadmissible (see Carson, 1991:568). Second Corinthians 6:14-15 is clear that there is no fellowship whatsoever between light and darkness, believers and unbelievers. The unity Christ is praying for cannot be a fallible, organisational unity. It must in the first instance be a spiritual reality.

Thirdly, one wonders how a visible, organisational "unity" portrayed by a corrupt, state church convinces the world that Christianity is true? The opposite is the case. Evidence of hypocrisy in the community of God turns the world away from true religion and causes God's name to be blasphemed (Rom. 2:21-24). Baptists, for example, have always strived for the purity of the church and the exercise of Biblical separation so that Christ's reputation might be vindicated in the world.

The unity that Christ prays for is therefore best seen as spiritual and real, as opposed to institutional and outwardly visible (Hobbs & Mullins, 1978:25). It is, however, visibly manifested as the world sees true Christians from different denominations and churches sharing the common adherence to the apostolic gospel (Carson, 1991:568) and bearing the common fruit of holiness of life. *This is the visible evidence that shows the world that they follow the same Lord.* It must be noted at this point that there is a close connection between spiritual unity and doctrinal unity. The two cannot be separated. In John 17, the Lord Jesus Christ constantly qualifies those for whom He is praying. They are those who have kept His word (John 17:6), those who received and believed His words (John 17:8), and those who are set apart by God's

truth (John 17:17). The group Christ is praying for has therefore received and believed a body of truth which primarily relates to Himself. Carson (1991:568) calls this the apostolic gospel. Hendriksen (1954:354) reminds us that those who have experienced personal conversion to Christ have, in doing so, accepted “certain basic truths concerning God as revealed in Christ”. When Christ prays for future believers, He again qualifies this group as those who will believe in Him through the apostolic word (John 17:20). The spiritual unity that Christ prayed for and that all believers actually experience is not divorced from an acceptance and adherence to a body of truth. du Plooy (1982:210-211) calls this the apostolic dogma and confession that binds the church together.

This unity, however, although spiritual, must have a bearing on the interdependence of churches. It would seem natural that true churches would have a desire to fellowship and co-operate to further the work of Christ. It would also mean, as Roy does remind us, that slandering other believers because they belong to other denominational groups is inconsistent with the spiritual unity all believers enjoy with each other (Roy, 2000:106).

In other words, the real, spiritual unity enjoyed by believers makes it natural for churches to support and care for each other. It is therefore strongly militates against a rigid isolationist or independent spirit. It even motivates believers to enjoy fellowship across denominational lines, and even co-action where there is enough doctrinal agreement. But it must be emphasised that this is all within the boundaries where true spiritual unity does in fact exist. In other words, spiritual unity exists where the apostolic gospel is embraced, the fundamentals of the Christian faith are believed, and there is clear evidence of regeneration.

Another point needs to be made regarding outward, visible unity and church co-operation from a Baptist perspective. It needs to be remembered that Baptists maintained a distinct identity in a society that was already permeated by churches and denominations. The point, although obvious, needs some reflection, as it is

fundamental to the discussion. Many of the early Baptists acknowledged other churches and denominations to be essentially Christian and to contain true believers (Nettles, 2001:10). Yet they did not join these churches. They saw the need to maintain a distinctive Baptist witness. They considered Baptist distinctives, such as believer's baptism and the nature of the church, of sufficient importance to maintain a degree of separation from the other denominations and churches. In this regard, Baptists especially saw the danger of some of the Reformer's views of the church, which tended to view the geographical community as the church (Verdun, 1964:17). According to Baptists, paedobaptism reinforced the view that the church was now established through physical descent. Baptists emphasised the fact that membership of the church was entirely spiritual, and restricted to those who were born again. Believer's baptism and membership in the church were therefore only given to those who gave evidence of saving faith (Verdun, 1964:17-19). For Baptists, the very well-being and nature of the church hinged on maintaining a strong witness to regenerate church membership.

Another very significant issue for the Baptists was the separation of church and state (Verdun, 1964:36-38). They believed that the Reformer's view of the civil magistrate (see, for example, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXII, Article 3, in Williamson, 1964:244) posed a major threat to religious liberty (Waldron, 1989:293-294). It should be noted that even many Presbyterian bodies subsequently modified this statement (Williamson, 1964:245-246).

In other words, Baptists believed that their *distinctive witness to biblical truth took precedence over institutional, outward unity with other denominations*. This consideration is equally valid for General and Particular Baptists. It does also need to be remembered that some of these doctrinal distinctives, such as the administration of the ordinances and church government, although important, are not fundamental issues of the faith. They do, however, also have a significant impact on the life and functioning of a church.

2.2.3 The challenge of Independent Baptists and Landmarkism

2.2.3.1 Independent Baptists

Independent Baptists have challenged the notion of denominational bodies on the basis that they compromise the independency of the local church (Warner, s.a.). They also believe that Baptist denominational bodies tend to produce theological compromise (Blackwell, 2002:3, 99) as the body seeks the lowest common theological denominator to achieve outward unity amongst autonomous churches that stress their independence.

Only two points need be made at this stage as a response to this challenge. Firstly, it has been argued above that there is scriptural justification for co-operation and co-action amongst local churches to pursue the Great Commission, and also as an expression of the spiritual union that unites all believers and churches to Christ. It has been argued further that the essential unity that exists amongst all believers would encourage some form of mutual care and co-operation amongst local churches. As noted before, the apostle Paul assumed that churches would be interacting and even acting together.

Secondly, many of the Independent Baptist churches (such as in South Africa) have in fact formed fellowships and associations, based on a constitution and confession of faith. Some of their aims include missions and theological education. This in itself indicates that when Baptist churches pursue the Great Commission, they are left with no alternative but to co-operate and consolidate resources. Admittedly, the Independent grouping in South Africa calls itself a “fellowship,” and the co-operation amongst churches is “informal” (Blackwell, 2002:8). However, in terms of the definition adopted in this thesis, due to the existence of a constitution and confession of faith, it is essentially a denominational body. The particular way in which they structure this body and co-operate is discussed and evaluated in relevant later

chapter. It should be noted that many independent Baptist Groupings in America have also formed loose associations, such as the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, the Conservative Baptist Association and the Bible Baptist Fellowship (Blackwell, 2002:98).

The Independent Baptists do not challenge the notion of denominational bodies or structures *as defined in this thesis*. The Fellowship of Baptist Churches in South Africa is therefore evaluated as a denominational body in terms of the definitions adopted in this research.

2.2.3.2 Landmarkism

As noted earlier, the Landmark teachings relate essentially to the doctrine of the church. In essence, the system teaches that:

- i. Baptist churches are the only true churches in the world, with an unbroken historical succession from the apostles to present day.
- ii. The true church is local and visible. They initially denied the existence of the “invisible” or “universal” church. Baptist structures such as conventions or associations should therefore not perform functions (such as missions, preaching, and practising the ordinances) that were under the mandate of the local church.
- iii. They practised closed communion and rejected pulpit affiliation with non-Baptists.
- iv. Only churches have authority to pursue ministry. Landmarkers therefore opposed mission boards as they believed they had no warrant to appoint or direct the work of missionaries (McBeth, 1987:452-453).

The contention of unbroken succession of Baptist churches and closed communion is not relevant to this research, and will not be discussed further. It has already been noted that there is only evidence of unbroken Baptist churches from the early 1600s, although medieval groups such as the Waldensians, Albigensians and later the

Anabaptists (Verduin, 1964:44, Verduin, 1976:38-39), practised basic Baptist principles. Also, the dominant emphasis of the Landmark movement to prove the exclusivity of the *Baptist* churches above the other Protestant churches (Tull, 1960:1-3), is not of concern here. However, the issues related to the local church and denominational structures are relevant.

Landmarkism emphasised the primacy of the local church in all matters (Patterson, 1975:50-51). It claimed to be consistent with the objective and plain teaching of the New Testament (Wamble, 1964:430). It advocated, for example, that local churches and not Boards should send out missionaries (McBeth, 1987:458). Graves, the father of the movement (McBeth, 1987:447), argued that local churches, no matter how big or small, should have direct representation in associations and conventions (Patterson, 1975:53).

The only point that needs to be made at this stage to counter this challenge is that the Landmark movement, when it separated from the Southern Baptist Convention, still formed associations and conventions based on a confession of faith (Patterson, 1975:53). Their practices therefore still fall within the definition of denominationalism adopted in this research. In other words, they do not challenge denominationalism *per se*, but only particular types of denominationalism, and their claims can be assessed by their consistency with historic Baptist distinctives and identity. In particular, their view of the primacy of the local church in kingdom work is evaluated in the following chapter.

2.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter starts with a basic definition of denominationalism to allow the discussion and research to proceed. In summary, any group of Baptist churches that band together under a constitution and confession of faith are defined as a *denomination*, and the particular institutional form they adopt is a *denominational*

structure. This chapter then gives a brief history of Baptist denominationalism in England and America, showing that Baptists have always practised some form of denominationalism. Baptist churches have acknowledged their interdependence and reliance on other churches for support and assistance.

The rationale for this interaction amongst Baptist churches is reviewed, and consists mainly of examples of churches in the New Testament acting together to pursue gospel work. The theological basis of this interaction is noted, and is essentially the obligation of pursuing the great commission and the spiritual unity that exists amongst all believers due to their union to Christ, the Head of the Church.

The dominant Baptist denominational structures that historically developed are noted and described briefly. These structures are Baptist councils, associations, societies and conventions.

Lastly, the challenge to Baptist denominationalism raised by Independent Baptists and the Landmark movement is reviewed, and it is noted that even these groups tended to form associations or fellowships in line with the definition of denominationalism in this thesis. Their main challenge therefore relates to particular forms of denominationalism, and not denominationalism (as defined in this research) *per se*.

Two main conclusions can be drawn at this stage. Firstly, Baptists have practised some form of denominationalism from the outset. It can never be argued that the concept is foreign to what it means to be Baptist, nor that it is inconsistent with local church autonomy. It may be argued that some *forms* of denominationalism are inconsistent with Baptist principles (as argued in the following chapter), but not that denominationalism (as defined and applied in this research) in itself is un-Baptist.

Secondly, there are legitimate, well argued scriptural grounds for pursuing co-operation amongst local churches. Conversely, it is unbiblical for local churches not to

be interested in co-operating and sharing mutual concerns in order to build Christ's kingdom. Importantly, co-operation amongst local churches requires some form of organisation, and the following chapter pursues how this organisation should function in relation to the local church.

CHAPTER 3

FOUNDATIONS FOR BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM: BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

The previous chapter sets out the theological grounds for inter-church co-operation amongst Baptists, and the various structures that have historically been used to facilitate this co-operation. Baptists have generally agreed that specific forms of denominational structures are not found in the New Testament (White, 1946:48; Maring & Hudson, 1965:7-8). The example of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is discussed in the previous chapter. Baptists have rather developed their structures out of consideration for their main doctrinal distinctives, such as the primacy of scripture, local church autonomy and liberty of conscience. In other words, Baptist distinctives are the fundamental shapers of the particular form of denominationalism Baptists have practised.

This chapter therefore reviews and critiques Baptist distinctives from a denominational perspective. Both historical and theological considerations are discussed. The objective of the chapter is to review Baptist distinctives and note their implications for denominationalism. In doing so, the impact of one distinctive on other distinctives is also discussed. This provides a critical foundation for the model that is developed in the following chapter and that is used to compare the denominational practices of the three Baptist groups in South Africa.

It needs to be noted that the primary emphasis will be on establishing the early Baptist view and justification of the distinctives. Maring and Hudson (1965:8-9) remind us that due to the great diversity found within *modern* Baptists, their mind on a particular matter is difficult to ascertain. However, “a review of their *original principles* will shed light upon their doctrine of the church and their views of church polity” (Maring & Hudson, 1965:9, emphasis mine).

To this end, one of the major sources for this evaluation will be the early Baptist confessions of faith and practice. The advantage of focusing on the confessions is threefold. In the first instance, confessions tended to be the work of a number of churches, which reduces the risk of getting just an individual Baptist's view. Confessions invariably represented a wider group. In the second instance, confessions by their very nature tend to be carefully considered and well-articulated statements of a group's position, which reduces the risk of focusing on views that were expressed hurriedly or "in the heat of battle." In the third instance, confessions are primary sources, and reflect the original intent and understanding of the authors.

Two types of questions need to be answered for each distinctive. Firstly, why did it become a Baptist distinctive? What was the intent behind the distinctive? Secondly, what exactly is the distinctive? What is a correct understanding of its nature? The answers to these two sets of questions allow the implications of each distinctive to inter-church co-operation to be drawn out. Obviously, the way a Baptist denomination functions must be in harmony with the intent and nature of the Baptist distinctives.

Finally, this chapter is not meant to be exhaustive in terms of noting all the different nuances that have existed of a particular Baptist distinctive. Rather, it is to establish the common, generally-accepted early Baptist understanding of a particular distinctive so that its import for denominationalism can be explored.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

There is abundant literature available on Baptist distinctives. It is important to understand that Baptists have freely acknowledged that other groups also share some of their distinctives (Anderson, 1989:5; Norman, 2001:184-185). They do claim, however, to hold to these distinctive more consistently, and the particular mix of these distinctives *in combination*, give rise to what it means to be a Baptist (Norman,

2001:185). For example, most of protestant Christianity professes to hold to the supreme authority of the word of God. Baptists consistently list this as a distinctive, however, not because they are entirely unique in holding to this truth, but because they believe they hold it more consistently, and also because it is fundamental to what they are.

Many different authors have listed distinctives and categorised them, some with slight differences, as the following sample demonstrates. Norman (1997) lists the following early Particular Baptists distinctives under a threefold classification:

- A view of Authority
 - Religious Authority
 - Primacy of scripture
- A view of the church
 - Regenerate church membership
 - Believers Baptism
 - Congregational government
- A view of Freedom
 - Soul competency
 - Religious liberty

Davis (1986) lists the following distinctives:

- Soul competency and freedom of conscience
- Authority of scripture
- Priesthood of all believers
- Regenerate church membership and believers baptism

Carrol (1913:9-34) provides a more comprehensive and detailed listing:

- The New Testament is the law of Christianity
- Individuality: Soul competency and personal responsibility and faith
- Freedom of conscience: Civil and religious liberty

- Salvation must precede the two ordinances (Baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper)
- Doctrine of church
 - Separation of church and state
 - Autonomous churches
 - Church is a pure democracy: Congregationalism
 - Local church is supreme court in Christ's kingdom
 - Two ordinances only: baptism (by immersion) and Lord's Supper

Hobbs and Mullins (1978:41-49) note the following:

- Religious liberty
- Soul competency
- The word of God is the criterion of all belief
- Church democracy
- Priesthood of all believers

Torbet (1950:20-32) lists the following distinctives:

- The Bible as the norm for faith and practice
- Church composed of baptized believers
- Priesthood of believers
- Autonomy of the local congregation
- Religious liberty
- Separation of church and state

The approach by Norman (1997), categorising Baptist distinctives into the three categories of authority, the church and liberty, will be adopted, as it ably encapsulates the Baptist distinctives common in the above list.

The approach in this chapter is firstly to give an historical review of each distinctive, noting the early Baptist testimony to its intent and nature. Secondly, each distinctive is evaluated theologically, and thirdly, the implications for denominationalism are

extracted. In terms of the historical review, a simplified approach is adopted due to the abundance of literature available, and to prevent this section from expanding beyond the purposes of this thesis. Extracts from the early Baptist confessions of faith and writings are used to represent early Baptist views on each distinctive. The confessions provide carefully formulated statements which represented significant Baptist groups.

3.2 SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

3.2.1 Introductory comment

A criticism that may be levelled against the approach of this section is that it does not list a distinctive such as the “Lordship of Christ” or “Christ’s authority,” but rather starts with the authority of scripture. This could be interpreted as exalting scripture above the authority of Christ. For example, Robinson *et al* (2006:15) state that when the Southern Baptist Convention included inerrancy in its statement of faith, it “elevated the Bible to a position above Christ himself”. Further in their book, they believe that:

For a Baptist, any document that elevates anything - even the Bible - above Jesus should be a matter of deep concern (Robinson *et al.*, 2006:66).

Other authors could also be cited who hold to similar sentiments (see for example Estep, 1987:613 and Tupper, 2002:413). Their objections seek to create a dichotomy between the authority of Christ and the authority of scripture. In other words, according to them, it is possible to over-estimate the scriptures, and so depreciate Christ’s authority. Specifically, they wish to establish a dichotomy between Christ the Living Word and the written word of scripture (Robinson *et al.*, 2006:66).

This objection has significant theological and practical problems, however. Three points need to be noted. Firstly, from a theological point of view, it fails to take into account scripture's testimony of the relationship between the spoken (or written) word of God and God Himself. A few texts need to be considered.

In Isaiah 66:2-4, God looks with favour on those who are humble and who tremble at His word. This is clearly a reference to God's spoken word (through the prophet Isaiah) and subsequently recorded in scripture. The implication of this verse is that *God sees the response of people to His word as a reflection of their response to Him*. Those who tremble at His word are those who tremble at God Himself. Alexander (1992:459-460) notes that to tremble at God's word means an eager and fearful "haste to execute His will". To obey scripture is to obey God. The conclusion is obvious, but needs to be made in the light of the above-mentioned objections. This conclusion is supported by passages such as Deuteronomy 18:19. God executes judgement against those who do not hear the *words* of God spoken through the Prophet. In other words, to disobey God's words is to disobey God Himself. To rebel against God's word brings judgement, because it is rebellion against God Himself (Num. 20:24). The absurdity of someone who claims to reverence and obey God but disobeys or neglects His word, is obvious. The way in which we love and obey Christ is to obey His word (John 14:15, 21).

To differentiate between Christ's authority and scripture's authority cannot be theologically justified. Scripture's authority is derived from the fact that it is the word of Christ. The Somerset Confession (Article XVIII), for example, attributes scripture to the Prophetic office of Christ (Wamble, 1994:144 and Lumpkin, 1969:207). To come under the authority of scripture is to come under Christ's authority. The way in which a church or group expresses its submission to Christ's will is to come under the authority of His word (Vedder, 1907:414). There is therefore no inconsistency for Baptists to exalt the scriptures above all other authorities. In doing so, they are exalting Christ above all other authorities. It should be noted that Christ attributes full, divine authority to the *written* word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). In other words, the human

instrumentality did not detract in the least from its divine authority (Geisler & Nix 1986:35; Dagg, 1990:22).

From a practical point of view, the alleged bibliolatry is also problematic. The question that naturally arises is how a Baptist body today can submit to Christ's authority without submitting to scripture's authority? Christ's will cannot be known apart from scripture. The only alternative is to look to the "believer's personal experience with Christ" as their source of authority (Robinson *et al.*, 2006:66). However, if it is possible for believers to elevate Christ's written word above Christ Himself, it must be equally possible to elevate the "believer's experience" above Christ Himself. Proponents of this view therefore fall prey to their own reasoning. The fact is that, due to the absence of the incarnate Christ, the only way in which believers today can subject themselves to Christ's authority is through His objective, infallible word. If this source of authority is discounted or depreciated, the church has nothing left but human experience on which to base its authority. It has then lost its exclusive claim to divine truth through the written word of God.

Thirdly, most Baptist commentators do not list the Lordship of Christ as a Baptist distinctive, mainly because this is such a basic *Christian* distinctive, that it does not separate Baptists from other denominations. For these three reasons, therefore, the focus on the primacy of scripture in this section is a reflection of how Baptists have in fact exalted Christ's supremacy.

3.2.2 The authority of scripture

One of the most fundamental Baptist distinctives has been the authority of scripture governing all matters of faith and practice. Its importance in Baptist thought and theology cannot be underestimated. The authority of scripture takes precedence over tradition, confessions of faith, and any ecclesiastical decisions. Scripture is the final and absolute authority for Baptists (Draper, 2001:53).

The aim of this section is to review and reflect on the early Baptist view of the nature and attributes of scripture. This demonstrates their theological basis for the supreme authority of scripture.

3.2.2.1 Historical review

Not all of the early Baptist confessions contain statements on scripture. For example, John Smyth's *A short confession of Faith* (1610) contains no statement on scripture (Lumpkin, 1969:97-102). The English Baptist *Standard Confession* (1660) contains a very brief statement on scripture (Article XXIII), indicating that it is the rule by which believers are to be regulated, that it is sufficient to make one wise to salvation, and to equip believers for every good work (Lumpkin, 1969:230). This confession also quotes extensively from scripture for the proof and authority of its assertions. In other words, it uses scripture in an authoritative way, with no appeal to previous church tradition. Moody (1994:11) reminds us that during the seventeenth century, Baptists simply assumed that the Bible was revelation from God, and did not feel the need to defend it.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith has an entire chapter devoted to the necessity, identity, sufficiency, authority, authentication, finality, clarity, inspiration, interpretation and primacy of scripture (Waldron, 1989:28-29; Lumpkin, 1969:235-239). This Baptist Confession of Faith is considered as one of the most popular and influential amongst early Baptists (Torbet, 1950:32). It was the basis for the very popular Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742. It is not necessary to do a detailed analysis of this chapter of the confession in this research. However, the following points need to be noted.

Firstly, the Confession (Chapter 1, Paragraph 1) opens with the following statement:

The holy scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience (Lumpkin, 1969:235).

The Baptist authors of the confession saw the scriptures as the only infallible source of divine revelation for salvation, faith and obedience. They acknowledged that creation does provide some revelation of God's attributes, but that this general revelation is not sufficient for salvation (Lumpkin, 1969:235-240). This clearly implies that human understanding or church tradition, although not without value (see the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 5; Lumpkin, 1969:236), is not certain and infallible. Consequently, no human traditions are to be added to this word (Chapter 1, paragraph 6; Lumpkin, 1969:237).

Secondly, the authority of scriptures resides in the fact that it is the word of God (Chapter 1, paragraph 4; Lumpkin, 1969:236). This indicates their belief that scripture contains an objective, certain revelation of God. This authority is also independent of the testimony of man or the church (Chapter 1, paragraph 4; Lumpkin, 1969:236). This clearly establishes the primacy of scripture above all human writings, human experiences or church traditions.

However, it needs to be pointed out that this statement occurs in a *confession of faith*. In other words, the authors did not see any contradiction between the authority of scripture and the articulation of Biblical truths in a confession of faith for denominational and ecclesiastical purposes. The confession could never be the final authority of the church, yet the very fact that they produced a confession indicates that they felt it was necessary to articulate what they believed the scriptures taught.

Thirdly, the confession indicates that scripture is the supreme judge in all matters of religious controversy, and that the decrees of Councils and doctrines of men are subservient to it (Chapter 1, paragraph 10; Lumpkin, 1969:237-238). This point is expanded upon in a later section.

Fourthly, although the Confession was written in a time before the inerrancy controversy, it is clear that the authors had complete confidence in the detailed truths of the scripture. In other words, the divine authority of scripture extended to all its

parts. The Confession uses scripture extensively to prove its assertions, subscribing to historic and geographic details, and the literal creation account (see Chapter 4 on Creation and Chapter 6 on the Fall of Man into Sin; Lumpkin, 1969:247-248). It further argues that the self-authenticating nature of scripture is based on its “incomparable excellencies and *entire perfections*” (Chapter 1, paragraph 5; Lumpkin, 1969:236; emphasis mine). In other words, the authors of the 1689 Confession understood divine inspiration to mean that the final written product bore the divine attribute of perfection. Such statements are not compatible with a view that there are even incidental errors in scripture.

The 1833 New Hampshire Confession of faith, Article 1, although less detailed, states:

We believe [that] the Holy Bible was written by men inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true centre of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried (Lumpkin, 1969:360).

This is entirely consistent with the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The authority of scripture is derived from the fact that God authored it. It is the word of God. Scripture is also truth without any mixture of error. In other words, its authority extends to all its parts and statements.

Dagg (1990:19-42) deals briefly with the attributes and authority of scripture. He notes that the Bible is the “perfect source of religious knowledge, and the infallible standard of religious truth” (Dagg, 1990:21). Even though human instrumentality was used to write the scriptures,

...the perfection attributed to it demonstrates that it had not suffered by the instrumentality which he had chosen to employ (Dagg, 1990:22).

He also notes that Christ referred to the Hebrew scriptures as the word of God. That which was spoken by the prophets is also that which was spoken by God (Dagg, 1990:22). His conclusion is therefore that:

...what was spoken and written by inspiration, came with as high authority as if it had proceeded from God without the use of human instrumentality (Dagg, 1990:22).

The reason for the Baptist distinctive of the authority of scripture is clear in the confessional statements and doctrinal writings. The theological reasoning is as follows. Christ alone is Head of the church (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 4; Lumpkin, 1969:285) so that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. The concept of Headship primarily speaks of Christ's *rule* and *authority* in the church (Grudem, 1991:425-468; Hendriksen, 1962:77). However, Christ exercises His authority through His word (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 5; Lumpkin, 1969:285; Draper, 2001:54). In other words, the way in which the church obeys Christ and demonstrates its subservience to Him is to obey what He prescribes "in His word" (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 5; Lumpkin, 1969:285). This is noted in the preceding section, but repeated here for emphasis. The only infallible source of Christ's will is the Holy scriptures. The Lordship of Christ, His authority, and the authority of scripture therefore stand together.

The general, early Baptist view of the scriptures was that it is the very word of God, most excellent and entirely perfect. It is an objective, clear and sufficient revelation. The authority of scripture resides in the fact that it is God's word, and therefore to separate God's authority from scripture's authority would have been absurd for these early Baptists. Scripture is therefore supreme over all doctrinal statements and confessions of faith.

3.2.2.2 Theological reflection

The doctrine of scripture has become increasingly complex in recent debates, with issues such as degrees of inspiration and inerrancy coming to the fore. In the current theological climate, scholars, while claiming to uphold the inspiration of scripture, will nevertheless allow for scientific, geographic or historical errors in scripture. They claim that the scriptures can still be authoritative while having some degree of error. This means that this section must briefly deal with the issue of the authority of scripture as it relates to the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. Failure to do this will reduce the relevance of this section.

Wamble (1994:154-155) insists that the early Baptist confessions of faith limited scriptures authority to “religious matters” and doctrinal statements. He therefore believes it was modern, fundamentalist and Landmarkian confessions which departed from the historic position and incorrectly insisted that scripture was authoritative “in all areas, including history and science”. He sums up:

The scriptures Authority and infallibility relate to its supremacy as a rule for religious faith and practice. The official records of Baptists, prior to the twentieth century, do not claim that the scripture’s authority is dependent on its historical accuracy or that it pertains to non-religious areas” (Wamble, 1994:155).

In a similar vein, Estep (1987:612-613) intimated that the Southern Baptist Convention was in danger of bibliolatry because of its stand on the inerrancy issue. He further criticises the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith for following the Westminster Confession of Faith and placing the doctrine of scripture in the first chapter and the doctrine of God in the second chapter. He believes this was a step in the direction of bibliolatry (Estep, 1987:613). DeWeese (s.a.a), the Executive Director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, indicates that exalting Biblical inerrancy works against the Lordship of Christ.

As another example, “complete inerrancy,” “conditional inerrancy” and “limited inerrancy” have been identified as three views within “American evangelicalism,” of which Baptists form a significant part (Railey, 2001:57,127,175). Complete inerrancy corresponds to the view that the scriptures are wholly true and without error in all that they speak to in the original manuscripts. The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy articulates this view with a number of qualifications. This is not to say that those holding to complete inerrancy believe that every discrepancy or apparent contradiction can be satisfactorily resolved at the present time. Rather it is an expression of complete confidence that when all the facts are truly known, no errors or contradictions will be found in the original autographs.

Conditional inerrancy admits minor discrepancies or errors in the originals, such as in the reporting of geographical or historical details. However, it is believed that these do not detract from the authority of the scriptures (Railey, 2001:126-140). Limited inerrancy goes beyond this and admits that there are more significant mistakes in the originals, and that it is important to differentiate between different kinds of inspiration (Railey, 2001:174-192).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully motivate for the doctrine of inerrancy. This would require an extended and lengthy section on inerrancy alone, which would deviate from the intent of the thesis. Inerrancy is admittedly a complex topic. The Chicago Statement notes a number of qualifications and issues with regard to the doctrine, which include:

- The limitations of human language (Article IV)
- The mystery of the mode of divine inspiration (Article VII)
- The absence of the autographs (Article X)
- Standards of truth and error and modern technical precision (Article XIII)
- The interpretation of scripture (hermeneutics) which takes into account literary forms and devices (Article XVIII) (Geisler, 1980:494-497)

This section does two things. Firstly, it sets out some of the biblical arguments for inerrancy. This is done to show that inerrancy does impact on the authority of scripture. Secondly, this section raises critical questions regarding an errancy position. This is done to show that the issue of inerrancy is not irrelevant for Baptist groups today, and that errancy views are highly problematic for Baptists wanting to defend the authority of scripture.

Before the critical questions with regard to inerrancy are raised, three introductory points need to be made in response to the above criticisms and allegations of bibliolatry. Firstly, the fact that the first chapter of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith deals with scripture in the first instance reflects the fact that without scripture, the knowledge of God would be impossible (Reymond, 1998:55). It therefore sets out the nature, authority and interpretation of scripture to lay the foundation for the doctrines that follow. Respected theologians such as Wayne Grudem and Reymond follow a similar order in their Systematic Theologies (Grudem, 1994; Reymond, 1998).

Secondly, while Baptists have universally asserted the authority of scripture, some have admittedly weakened the objective authority of scripture by using Christian experience. Mullins (1860-1928), for example, arguably one of the most influential Baptist theologians in the Southern Baptist Convention (Mohler, 1999:1; Moore & Thornbury, 1999:44), has been criticised for emphasising Christian experience as the starting point of religious knowledge and also for separating scientific knowledge from religious knowledge (Mohler, 1999:9-10). Mullins, however, still insisted on scripture being supernatural revelation, and the factual and historic basis of Christian doctrines (Mullins, 1908:26). For example, Mullins contended that the scriptures were both historical revelation and the “sheet-anchor of Christian experience and of Christian theology” (Mullins, 1908:30). He has therefore been criticised for inconsistency (Moore and Thornbury, 1999:44), as both moderates and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention claim continuity with Mullins (Moore & Thornbury, 1999:46).

Thirdly, Wamble's assessment of the historic Baptist confessions is extremely simplistic. Apart from failing to account for the fact that the confessions were drafted before the controversy of inerrancy, he does not even grapple with the fact that the confessions ascribe the attributes of "entire perfection" and "truth without error" to the scriptures (as noted in the previous section). Nor does he account for the fact that the 1689 Confession of Faith assumed a literal interpretation of the creation account.

The issues related to inerrancy can now be dealt with.

(i) Biblical and theological arguments for inerrancy

In order to deal with the issue of inerrancy, the inspiration and sufficiency of scripture needs to be correctly understood, as it is foundational to the debate on inerrancy.

Second Timothy 3:15 teaches that all scripture is inspired by God. The English term "inspiration" comes from a Latin term which means being breathed upon, and is used in the sense of being under divine influence (Geisler & Nix, 1986:34-35). The Greek word, however, properly denotes "breathed out" or "God-breathed" (Warfield, 1948:133). Since *writings are breathed out*, this phrase should be taken as a metaphor for God speaking the very words of scripture (Grudem, 1984:74).

An important consideration is the grammatical relationship between "inspired" and "scripture." In the Greek, "inspired" is an adjective, but could either be an attributive adjective (i.e. "All inspired scripture is...") or a predicate adjective (i.e. "All scripture is inspired..."). There are good reasons for favouring the latter translation, the main one being that the same construction in other verses such as 1 Corinthians 11:30, 1 Timothy 4:4, Hebrews 4:12-13 and 2 Corinthians 10:10 are translated naturally as two co-ordinate predicate adjectives (Reymond, 1998:34; Geisler & Nix, 1986:35; Feinberg, 1980:279).

Timothy would have understood 2 Timothy 3:15 to refer to the entire Old Testament canon (Geisler & Nix, 1986:35). There is no suggestion that only parts of the Old Testament are inspired, nor is any distinction made between those aspects which are doctrinal or salvific, and those that are historical or incidental (Feinberg, 1980:280). All of the scriptures bear the same divine quality.

Second Timothy 3:16 therefore teaches that all scripture is breathed out by God i.e. it is the very word of God. Whatever human instrumentality may have been used to produce the scriptures, this verse emphasises the divine author and character of the final written product. Matthew 4:4 is a close parallel, where the Lord Jesus refers to the scriptures as “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Geisler & Nix, 1986:35).

These points are confirmed by numerous assertions and considerations from the rest of scripture. For example, whatever scripture says, God says and *vice versa* (compare Matt. 19:4-5 with Gen. 2:24; Rom. 9:17 with Ex. 9:16; Warfield, 1948:299-300). Another example is the fact that God claims to have spoken His own words through the prophets, which latter generations had access to through the scriptures (Ezra 9:11; Jer. 29:19).

Matthew 4:1-11 reveals Christ’s view of the authority of scripture. The significance of the temptation of Christ by Satan, the arch-adversary of God, must not be overlooked. Christ is at his weakest, humanly speaking, having been deprived of food for forty days. The craft and subtlety of Satan are at their strongest. Satan devotes his personal attention to this particular encounter. God’s entire plan of redemption is at stake.

The straightforward reliance of the Lord Jesus on the scriptures is striking. His expression “it is written...”, demonstrates a fundamental assumption that the scriptures are completely accurate, authoritative and able to guide Him into all truth and divinely approved behaviour (Young, 1972:47). If the scriptures say something, it

is true and authoritative. This authority is attributed to the *written* form of God's revelation (Wenham, 1980:15). This means that the human author did not detract in any measure from the divine character of the scriptures. It must also not be missed that these quotes come from the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 8:3; 6:16; 6:13), which has been most severely criticised in terms of the Graf-Welhausen theory (Young, 1952:15).

Other expressions in scripture demonstrate its authority. For example, in John 10:34-35, the Lord Jesus quotes a seemingly "insignificant" Psalm and states that "the scripture cannot be broken," a term indicating its absolute authority and integrity (Geisler, 1986:51; Bahnsen, 1980:163-164).

Second Timothy 3:15-16 is also the classic text used to express the sufficiency of scripture. As was previously noted, these verses teach that all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for correction and reproof, able to equip the believer for every good work.

The sufficiency of scripture relates to the primary purpose of scripture, which is to equip the *man of God* for every *good work*. This primary purpose of scripture must be seen as redemptive. It is acknowledged that the scriptures are not a textbook for science, computer studies or history (Waldron, 1989:43).

Waldron (1989:43) notes that while we must restrict the sufficiency of scripture to the main purpose of redemption, it must also not be artificially reduced to only "spiritual" matters. Scripture is sufficient for "God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life," including the whole ethical and religious sphere of life. This ethical and religious sphere is a starting point for every other endeavour, such as science and business (Waldron, 1989:43). Scripture, therefore, while not providing the technical detail of business practice (for example), is yet sufficient to guide people on how to practise business in a manner that honours God. Although many groups with divergent doctrinal views appeal to the sufficiency of Scripture (*i.e.* in itself it does not

necessarily resolve differences), this appeal is nevertheless essential as it restricts the debate to the scriptures.

The preceding discussion on the doctrine of scripture is foundational for a discussion on inerrancy. For example, Feinberg (1980:277-280) believes that a correct understanding of inspiration is absolutely critical for the doctrine of inerrancy. Similarly, he believes that to divorce the authority of scripture from the inerrancy of scripture is “the height of epistemological nonsense and confusion” (Feinberg, 1980:285).

The issue of inerrancy can now be briefly addressed. Matthew 5:18 indicates that not the least stroke of the pen of the law will fail to be fulfilled. There is disagreement among scholars regarding the specific time of fulfillment, an issue that is beyond the scope of this thesis to delineate and resolve. Nonetheless, a few points need to be emphasised.

Firstly, the phrase “least stroke of a pen” refers to the minute elements of the Hebrew alphabet (Feinberg, 1980:284). Arguing from the lesser to the greater, if these minute elements of the written word are completely accurate, the words of scripture must bear the same accuracy. Hubbard’s suggestion that this expression is merely hyperbole must bear the burden of proof (Feinberg, 1980:284). Certainly, the original Jewish audience would have interpreted these words as an expression of the complete authority of the scripture down to the last detail.

Secondly, the “Law” most likely refers to the Pentateuch (Geisler, 1986:70), but it could also refer to the entire Old Testament (Hendriksen, 1973:288, 291). At the very least, then, the view of the Lord was that the first five books of Moses were accurate down to the smallest detail. It is noteworthy that these five books of the Bible have been largely ridiculed by many modern scholars as containing from historical and geographic errors to myths drawn from other religious sources (Young, 1952:15).

These views are in stark contrast to the confidence that the Lord Jesus placed in the Pentateuch.

The other authors of the New Testament reveal a similar confidence in the entire Old Testament canon. For example, arguments of New Testament authors are based on the accuracy of the very words, forms and tenses in the Old Testament. Events, places and individuals are treated as an accurate reflection of what actually happened (Gal. 3:16, Heb. 7:4-10, John 10:34-35; Feinberg, 1980:286). Scripture in its entirety, including all the details as they relate to science, history and geography, is true and accurate.

The term inerrancy can therefore be defined as the belief that the scripture is “wholly true and without error” in all that it speaks to (Geisler & Nix, 1986:52), whether doctrine, geography, science or history.

Another very important point needs to be made in this evaluation. The Scriptural considerations noted above, although brief, provide substantive evidence that the scriptures are a written product that bears the divine quality of perfection. The fact that later revelation in scripture never corrects earlier revelation places the burden of proof on those contending for errors in scripture. The following questions pose significant problems for the errancy position, and therefore for Baptists who want to uphold their main distinctive of the authority of scripture.

(ii) Critical questions for the errancy position

There are then a number of critical questions that are raised by an errancy position that require Baptists to evaluate the doctrine and come to some conclusion in their confessions of faith. It should be noted that these questions assume a concept of truth that is consistent with reality. Some argue that the concept of inerrancy is unfounded, as the Bible adopts a concept of truth based on the intent of the author. In other words, as long as the intent of the author is achieved, the truth has been

spoken, irrespective whether the actual words of the author are factual or not (Geisler, 1999:741). The scriptures, however, claim to describe a *real* God interacting with *real* people who *actually* lived on earth at a particular point in human history. Therefore, the concept of truth presented in scripture is consistently that of correspondence with reality or the actual state of affairs (see Ex. 20:16; Gen. 42:16; Deut. 18:22; Geisler, 1999:741-742). It is on this basis that the questions are raised.

The first critical issue relates to the need to authoritatively identify the errors in scripture and determine how far they extend. It needs to be emphasised that the Bible does not do this. Christ never corrected one theological, historical or geographic statement of the Old Testament. Neither Paul nor the other inspired writers of scripture point out any errors of any kind in the Old Testament scripture. The presence of errors in the original autographs would require some external “sieve” that can be applied to the scriptures to determine what the errors are and how far they extend. Practically speaking, such a sieve would be more authoritative than scripture, as it is used to assess the trustworthiness of scripture (MacArthur, 1992:32). Yet, such a sieve would have to be man-made, fallible, subjective and subject to constant revision (see discussion by Poythress, 1975:100).

The question for Baptists, then, would be how to assert the primacy and authority of scripture when a man-made sieve needs to be applied to determine what scriptures are erroneous and how far the errors extend. Would it not mean, at the end of the day, that man’s assessment and evaluation of scripture is authoritative (Payne, 1980:84)? This is a fundamental point in the debate. The early Baptists believed that the Bible could stand on its own because of its “entire perfections” which contributed to its self-authentication (see the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 5). Baptists who allow for errors in scripture would need to show how an errant scripture could be self-authenticating and authoritative, standing above all human pronouncements on it.

The second critical question for Baptists is how they can convincingly speak of an infallible and authoritative scripture but admit it has errors? Even on the surface of it, this is problematic. The Chicago Statement of Faith (Article XI), signed and endorsed by a number of leading evangelicals (not just Baptists), insist that while it is possible to distinguish between infallibility and inerrancy, they cannot be separated (Geisler, 1980:496). It seems unconvincing to speak of the scriptures as being “authoritative,” “completely trustworthy” or “infallible” on the one hand, and admit on the other that it contains errors (Feinberg, 1980:285; Archer, 1980:81).

Luke 2:2 provides an interesting point of discussion to illustrate the issue. [It is acknowledged that there are alternate translations of Luke 2:2, and some scholars believe the reference to Quirinius was not in the original (Bruce, 1982:1004; Carson, Moo & Morris, 1992:54). Luke 2:2 can still, however, be used as an example of a historical detail. In this discussion, therefore, it is assumed that the original text did refer to Quirinius.] Luke states that the census requiring Joseph to travel to Bethlehem first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria (Luke 2:2). There is no obvious theological truth associated with this historical detail. Luke is making a purely historical assertion about the actual state of affairs in the Roman world at the time. *He could easily have chosen to omit it.* If Quirinius was not actually the governor of Syria at the time, it is difficult to see how Luke was an “infallible” author, as he then made a statement that was simply incorrect. The fact that he deliberately included an incidental historical detail means that he wanted his readers to know this detail to show that he had indeed made an orderly account of the life of Christ (Luke 1:1-4). In other words, Luke’s credibility would have been undermined if this incidental, historical fact was incorrect, as the only reason for the statement was to establish his credibility and root the gospel in actual history. This means that the whole gospel, including the spiritual truths, could be called into question if this incidental, historical fact is incorrect. This shows that limiting the sufficiency of scripture to the main aim of scripture (redemptive truth) must never be taken to mean that the historical or geographic assertions are unimportant or unrelated to that redemptive truth.

Even more problematic for an errancy position is the fact that 2 Timothy 3:16 indicates that *all* scripture is breathed out by God. In other words, the statement by Luke noted above is breathed out by God. The question is how God can remain truthful and speak something that is false and contrary to fact? The fact that Luke 2:2 is in scripture is an indication that the divine author wanted it to be in the sacred record (even though it was not directly related to any spiritual truth) and that it was in fact correct.

It also needs to be emphasised that theological truths are often rooted in real history and observable facts. If the historical or observable facts of the scriptures can be wrong, would it not cast doubt on the associated theological truths (Geisler & Nix, 1986:59), and hence detract from its authority?

The third critical question for Baptists is how to understand a mode of inspiration that selectively allows an author of scripture to make mistakes with historical or geographic details, yet is completely accurate with regard to spiritual truth? Although, as noted above, the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy acknowledges that the exact nature of the mode of inspiration remains a mystery, some helpful insights have still been derived. Warfield (1948:83) defines one of the main modes of inspiration as a “concurative operation,” whereby the writers of scripture consciously wrote in their own styles and with their own vocabulary, yet at the same time God so influenced them by His Spirit that what they produced was the very word of God. The biblical picture is of a ship driven or carried along by the wind (2 Peter 1:21). Lewis (1980:249) notes that the concurative operation of inspiration needs to be seen as a special category of God’s providential ruling of all events. In this regard, scripture teaches that God so directs history and human actions that, although man makes choices based on his will, yet everything works out as God has planned and purposed (see for example Is. 14:24-27; 46:8-11; Acts 4:27-28). God’s providence extends even to what many would consider as small, insignificant events (Matt. 10:29). In other words, Lewis points out that God’s providence extends even to which words, facts and events were chosen to be written down by the inspired writers. Baptists, in allowing for errors in

the original autographs, would therefore have to explain how God's providence somehow did not extend to the historical and geographic details of scripture, yet extends to the hairs on a person's head or the survival of birds.

These critical questions show that the nature of inspiration and inerrancy has implications for the authority of scripture, and therefore should be considered and grappled with by modern Baptists in their confessions.

3.2.2.3 Implications for denominationalism

Scripture is the very word of God and voice of Christ. It therefore carries His divine authority. Christ is also the Head of the church. The church's mission, mandate and very existence are therefore to carry out the will of Christ. However, the way in which Christ makes His will known is through His word. The early Baptists therefore saw the authority of scripture as an essential element of the Headship of Christ over the church. Practically speaking, to come under the authority of scripture is to come under Christ's authority. The significance of the authority of scripture therefore cannot be underestimated in Baptist thought.

This section has shown that the scriptures are the most certain, infallible, sufficient, and clear revelation of the will of Christ. The duty and mission of the church is to accept and study the scriptures, and so understand Christ's will for them. In doing so, they will experience Christ's gracious rule over them, and Christ will be head of the church in word and deed.

This means that the doctrine of scripture is of paramount importance for any Baptist group. Baptists need to understand current trends in the doctrine of scripture, and assess their implications for biblical authority. Theological novelties that undermine the inspiration and objective authority of scripture must be vigorously refuted. If Baptists remain silent or tacitly accept doctrines that undermine the authority of scripture, they erode their only source of infallible truth. A vigorous defence of the

authority and inspiration is most certainly not anti-Baptist, nor does it amount to bibliolatry. It rather defends and maintains the authority and primacy of scripture. In so doing, the authority of Christ over the church is established.

In particular, the controversy concerning inerrancy is a reality in the current theological climate. It has been the source of much debate and friction in denominations and churches. The discussion above shows that this debate is not irrelevant to the nature of inspiration and the authority of scripture, but rather central to it. The main point that is being made is that Baptist groups need to grapple with the doctrine of scripture in their confessions. They need to refute theological novelties that undermine the authority of scripture. This does not amount to bibliolatry, but rather is essential to establish and maintain Christ's authoritative rule in the church.

3.2.3 The primacy of scripture above all creeds

This section is integrally related to the previous section. Baptists asserted the primacy of scripture above all human creeds on the basis of its authority (Dagg, 1990:40). It is the word of God, and must therefore stand above all human creeds and doctrinal formulations.

Chapter Two makes some introductory remarks and definitions regarding creeds and confessions. It acknowledges that while there is an overlap between creeds and confessions, some differences do exist. Creeds have tended to be focussed on a single, essential doctrinal issue or group of issues, and therefore also tended to be viewed as authoritative and much less likely to be reviewed by subsequent groups. There is therefore some justification to define creeds as documents that are "authoritative and often viewed as final, unalterable... they have been considered as infallible" (Estep 187:600). Anti-creedalism, according to this definition, has been an important Baptist principle. However, this distinctive can easily be misunderstood or misrepresented in the modern context. This section discusses the issue of creedalism amongst Baptists, and draws a distinction with confessionalism.

3.2.3.1 Historical review

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 1, paragraph 10) is one of the earliest confessions that deals explicitly with the issue of decrees of Councils:

The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved (Lumpkin, 1969:238).

Any creeds or council decrees can never be viewed as carrying the authority of scripture, and are always subject to Biblical authority. The Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742), based on the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, retained exactly the same wording (Lumpkin, 1969:348-349). The New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833) is one of the first Baptist confessions that mentions the word “creed,” (Article I) and simply states that the scriptures are the supreme standard by which creeds must be judged (Lumpkin, 1969:360-361).

Clearly, for Baptists, as a matter of principle, scripture is supreme, and no other document must ever be elevated to the status of scripture. This would mean in practice that Baptists should never make an appeal *solely* to a confession of faith or decision of a council to defend a doctrine or practice. Creeds and confessions do play an important role during religious controversy, as they provide a statement of how previous generations of Christians understood the scriptures on a particular issue. Nevertheless, creeds and confessions are not infallible, and therefore cannot be the final authority.

However, it is crucial to note that within the first hundred years of the existence of the Baptist movement, numerous confessions of faith were formulated by both General

and Particular Baptists. Since these early Baptist beginnings, numerous other confessions have been produced. Lumpkin (1969:7-9) for example, lists over thirty significant Baptist confessions. It is therefore a myth to believe that the early Baptists frowned on written statements of faith.

The early Baptists saw no inconsistency between insisting on the primacy of scripture above all creeds and yet drawing up confessions of faith. The point they made was that these confessions were never to be elevated to the authority of scripture. What is also extremely important to note is that the early Baptists used these confessions of Faith as a basis for fellowship. Membership in many associations was based on subscribing to the confession (Wills, 2005:21).

It should also be noted that the early Baptists did not develop these confessions as a mere “token” for the group. Their confessions often started or ended with a sincere declaration that they believe and uphold the doctrinal statements contained therein. For example, the introduction to the Standard Confession of 1660 states (original wording retained):

Set forth by many of us, who are (falsely) called Ana-Baptists, to inform all Men (in these days of scandal and reproach) of our innocent Belief and Practise; for which we are not only resolved to suffer Persecution, to the loss of our Goods, but also Life itself, rather than to decline the same.

Subscribed to by certain Elders, Deacons, and Brethren, met at London, in the first month (called March, 1660) in the behalf of themselves, and many others unto whom they belong, in London, and in several Counties of this Nation, who are of the same Faith with us.

After the Way which men call Heresie, so Worship we the God of our Fathers; Believing all things which are written in the Law, and in the Prophets, Acts 24:4 (Lumpkin, 1969:220).

There is clearly a sincerity of spirit in upholding the confession, and even being willing to be persecuted for their beliefs as set out therein. This sincerity of spirit is further

demonstrated by the common, early Baptist practice of adopting a church covenant. A church covenant is a solemn pledge by the individual members to walk together in godliness. Although DeWeese (2005:5-7) rightly associates a church covenant with practical Christian living and differentiates it from a church's doctrinal standards as set out in a confession of faith, this differentiation must not be seen as rigid. For example, as acknowledged by DeWeese (2005:7), the church covenants also contained doctrine. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that when believers pledged themselves to one another in a local church context, it was a local church that had doctrinal beliefs. In other words, the pledge to walk in a godly manner in that local church also implicitly contained a pledge to walk in the doctrinal standards of the church. This is why many of the church covenants included a pledge to walk in all of Christ's commands (DeWeese, 2005:20). A survey of the Gospels shows that Christ not only commanded a righteous life but also righteous belief. Adherence to right doctrine cannot therefore be divorced from the concept of the early Baptist church covenant.

3.2.3.2 Theological reflection

The above historical review needs some careful reflection in the light of recent statements about Baptists or even by recent Baptists. It has become popular to portray Baptists as "anti-creedal," but then to draw unwarranted conclusions. A number of questions and issues need to be addressed.

- (i) Was anti-creedalism really such a strong distinctive amongst early Baptists?

A significant point that needs to be made is that the confessional testimony of the Baptists noted above is not significantly different to that of the other denominations at the time of writing the confession. For example, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is very close to the corresponding Westminster statement (see Williamson, 1964:20). In other words, the early Baptists did not see their view of creeds and the decisions of Councils as significantly different from many of the other denominations. It must

therefore be concluded that their “anti-creedal” views were not in fact a significantly strong *distinctive*. This also raises the question whether the term “anti-creedal” is an appropriate term to be used to describe this Baptist distinctive. While this term has been retained and used in this thesis, this section contextualises it.

One of the main reasons for the development of the Baptist movement as a denominationally distinct movement was to further the reformation and develop churches based solely on scripture (Leuck, 1876:ii). One of the weapons for a work of reformation is the word of God (Adams, 1876:47-48), and the great aim was the “exaltation of the Word of God above tradition” (Adams, 1876:Lecture IV). In other words, the work of the Baptist was to subject every teaching, action and thought to the scriptures.

The early Baptist movement believed that some of the assertions in the confessions of the prevailing denominations were not Scriptural, but rather based on traditions. For example, Adams (1876:54-58) notes that Dr Woods, a defender of paedobaptism, acknowledges that the New Testament did not contain any express precept for baptising infants, but rather defended the doctrine on “unwritten tradition”. The early Baptist “anti-creedalism” was therefore mostly a reaction to a perceived defence of the current confessions without adequate reflection on the scripture, the final authority. They would have wanted the denominations to rather re-examine their confessions in the light of scripture. In other words, Baptist “anti-creedalism” can perhaps better be described as a greater willingness to challenge and review existing confessional statements than as an altogether different theological understanding of the authority of creeds. They acknowledged that the other denominations, in principle at least, accepted the authority of scripture above all human creedal formulations and confessions. They therefore retained some of the language and statements of these other denominational groups.

(ii) Is it possible for Baptists to have no creed?

Nettles (2001:8-9) quotes several Baptist authors who insist that no creed would ever be handed to an individual Baptist to dictate their theological position. According to them, there is no such thing as a “Baptist position,” as Baptists have no creeds. Nettles (2001:9), however, shows the absurdity of this position. Firstly, he shows that the very same authors insist that those who join Baptist Churches must submit to “Baptist beliefs”. How can there then be no such thing as a Baptist position?

Secondly, he argues convincingly that Baptists historically have distinguished themselves from other denominations by what they believed. How else could Baptists have maintained a distinct identity? The fact of the matter is that Baptists have always had a “creed,” namely their doctrinal beliefs and distinctives such as believers baptism, separation of church and state, and religious liberty to name a few. Those wishing to become members of Baptist churches had to subscribe to Baptist beliefs. Admittedly, these “creeds” did not always take written form, but they still existed and were used in governing church practice (Waldron, 1989:12-13). For Baptists not to have a creed would mean that they did not believe anything.

The words of Carroll (1923:23-34) need to be noted:

There never was a man in the world without a creed. What is a creed? A creed is what you believe. What is a confession? It is a declaration of what you believe. That declaration may be oral or it may be committed to writing, but the creed is there either expressed or implied.

Whitley (1923:4) is entirely in agreement:

Baptists therefore are recognised by careful enquirers as a body with clear doctrines, which are earnestly propagated.

The early Baptists certainly developed and used confessions of faith and doctrinal statements to express what they believed (Draper 2001:54). These confessions

where never elevated above the authority of scripture (Norman 2001:182, Estep 1987:602-606; Waldron, 1989:12-13), but they certainly existed and gave expression to Baptist belief and practice. Nettles quotes Spurgeon (a later Baptist pastor and evangelist) as saying that he was not ashamed to put in writing “in the plainest language” what he believed, and that creeds cannot separate people from God if the creeds reflect scripture (Nettles 2001:16). Norman (2001:182) notes that Baptists have avoided a “creedalism” that exalts “man-made interpretations” above scripture, but still acknowledges that Baptists have used doctrinal statements and confessions. Because Christians, including Baptists, believe something, all Christians must have a creed.

It is therefore clear that the definition one attaches to the word “creed” is of the utmost significance in this debate. Baptists have been both creedal, in that they believed in Baptists doctrines, and anti-creedal, in that they never exalted a man-made document above the authority of scripture, nor saw it as infallible.

Estep (1987:600) therefore draws a distinction between “creedalism” and “confessionalism” in order to clarify this Baptist distinctive. As noted in the previous section, creeds are defined as documents that are “authoritative and often viewed as final, unalterable...they have been considered as infallible” (Estep 187:600). On the basis of this definition, Estep concludes that Baptists ought rather to be described as “confessional” than “creedal.” Holcomb, Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, also notes that creeds, due to the fact that they carried the force of law, have often been used as instruments of coercion by state churches (Holcomb, s.a.).

Estep believes confessions are the consensus of a particular Baptist group at a point in history. They are considered *incomplete*, serve a particular purpose, and are used as a *guide* to interpreting scripture. Estep (1987:602-603) therefore believes that the confessions themselves do not have authority over the conscience.

This conclusion of Estep can be accepted with some reservations. The first reservation as noted above is that Baptists did not significantly differ from other protestant denominations in their doctrinal formulations on the authority of scripture versus that of a creed. Most denominations agreed that scripture is the final authority. The differences lay more in the practical use of confessions. The Baptists professed to be more open to challenge and change confessional statements than others.

The second reservation is a point of clarification with regard to confessions and the conscience. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 21, paragraph 2) indicates that:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word, or not contained in it (Lumpkin, 1969:275).

The word of God alone can and does bind the conscience. Statements in confessions, however, *which accurately reflect scripture*, must therefore also be binding on the conscience. Baptists emphasise that there is always an obligation on the church to demonstrate that the statements in their confessions are Scriptural. Baptists would therefore prefer to, as a matter of procedure, direct someone to the truths of scripture, *and then show that their confessions accurately reflect this truth*, rather than direct someone to their confessions in the first instance.

The third reservation is dealt with below.

(iii) Anti-creedalism in a post modern context

The strong anti-creedalism statements of some modern Baptist authors have already been shown to be unwarranted. Baptists have always had a creed, whether written down or not. Also, the early Baptists were not very distinct in their doctrinal statements on the authority of scripture versus the authority of creeds and the

decisions of councils. All the Protestant denominations agreed that scripture is always the supreme authority.

Some of the statements of modern Baptists are also inappropriate and problematic in a post-modern context. For example, Graves (2000:16) states:

Historically, Baptists have been anticreedal people, shunning restrictive creeds in favor of confessions of faith that state the particular views of a specific group of believers in a precise point of time.

As another example, Estep (1987:602), now quoted in full, notes the following with regard to Baptist confessions:

Baptists approve and circulate confessions of faith with the following understanding, namely:

(1) That they constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add anything to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

(2) That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.

(3) That any group of Baptists, large or small, have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they think it advisable to do so.

(4) That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.

(5) That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life.

These statements can easily be entirely misconstrued in a post-modern context. Coetzee (2010:1, 5, 8) reminds us that one of the assertions of post-modernism is that there is no absolute truth. Rather, each generation has to discover its own truth, and re-interpret historic documents in the light of the current community. Deconstructionism, which denies that writing can convey absolute truth, but rather takes the meaning of words out of the text and puts it in the hands of the reader, is the basis of post-modernism. It believes that the meaning of the text is always and only determined by the reader, and truth is therefore relative to the interpretative community or individual (Carson, 1996:73).

Some of the statements of Baptists noted above can be construed to fall neatly into the post-modern mindset. For example, the post-modernist would agree entirely that confessions are only the views of a particular group at that time, and that each group must be free to re-interpret the scriptures in their own context.

Some points of clarification therefore have to be made with regard to Baptist “anti-creedal” statements so that they are not labelled as post-modernism. It may very well be that some of the recent Baptists quoted above are in fact post-modern in their beliefs. However, it has been shown here that the early Baptist confessions did not seek to make any significantly different theological statement from the existing confessional statements on the authority of creeds. Also, the early Baptist confessions re-iterated the essential and fundamental truths of the gospel and Christianity. They certainly did not re-interpret the triune nature of God, the nature of the atonement, the gospel, the deity and humanity of Christ and the necessity of repentance and faith for salvation.

The early Baptists based many of their doctrinal statements on the existing confessions because they believed that they accurately reflected divine truth. Coetzee (2010:13) and du Plooy (1982:210-211) remind us that Christianity is, at the end of the day, confessional. It has been given a body of *unchanging* truth that must be preserved, confessed and defended (see 1 Tim. 2:5-7; Carson, Moo & Morris, 1992:376-377). Waldron (1989:9) notes that the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith was purposefully formulated largely on the Westminster Confession to show that Baptists had not departed from essential apostolic doctrine and were not seeking to introduce novelties. Rather, they wanted to show:

...the continuity of faith which existed between the Particular Baptists and their other reformed brethren in Great Britain (Waldron, 1989:9).

It is therefore clear that while Baptists did insist on the primacy of scripture above all creeds (and can therefore be said to be anti-creedal), they did not mean by this that the essential foundations of the gospel were open to re-interpretation and re-formulation in every age. The image of the history dogma moving along “organic lines” and being in the main a process of “continuous growth” proposed by Berkhof (1937:22), is therefore sound.

This means that the role of creeds and confessions in the life of the church needs to be correctly understood. Are they merely man-made documents and man-made interpretations of scripture? To the extent that creeds and confessions reflect biblical truth they are of divine authority. Frame (1987:77-85) reminds us that all theology is an application of the word of God to life. Confessions and creeds are therefore a secondary description and reproclamation of scripture to meet human need. They are the application of scripture to particular issues that bring out the meaning of scripture. Creeds and confessions can therefore to be said to contain truth that has divine authority, but *only to the extent that they are a faithful interpretation and application of scripture*. Only scripture is divinely inspired, however, and as a document is completely authoritative as it stands. Creeds and confessions have a *derived* authority based on the extent to which they reflect the truth of scripture.

The *practical* problem, however, is that there is no person or church that is an infallible interpreter of scripture which can be used to determine which parts of the confessions or creeds do in fact correctly reflect scripture. In this sense, confessions and creeds are man-made formulations (not being divinely inspired as the scriptures), and their trustworthiness must be verified in relation to scripture.

It is therefore correct for Baptist (and other denominational groups) to distinguish between the authority of confessions and the authority of scripture. This is an important principle. But it would be totally inappropriate for Baptists to understand this to mean that foundational Christian doctrines are also open for re-interpretation. Three points need to be made. Firstly, the doctrines that underpin the primacy of scripture (such as the clarity and sufficiency of scripture) indicate that the essential salvific message of the scripture is clear and can be understood by anyone applying themselves with diligence to understanding scripture (Waldron, 1989:43-50).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit has an ongoing role and ministry in helping believers to understand the scriptures. The church has not been left to its own devices and resources. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 5, (Lumpkin, 1969:236) speaks of the internal testimony of the Spirit bearing witness by and with the scriptures in our hearts.

Thirdly, post-modernism fundamentally questions the authority and inspiration of the scriptures, not just the creeds and confessions based on the scripture. Post-modernism believes that the scriptures themselves are merely man-made formulations or experiences of the divine, but not the objective, authoritative word of God (Muller, 2002:24-25). This is completely opposite to the Baptist principle of anti-creedalism, which firmly acknowledges the supreme authority of scripture as a deposit of objective, infallible, eternal truth.

The Baptist doctrine of the primacy of scripture and its related “anti-creedalism” must therefore be carefully framed to avoid any identification with post-modernism. Baptists have historically been very clear that the scriptures are divinely inspired and completely authoritative. While creeds and confessions are man-made interpretations and applications of the scriptures, they are also authoritative to the extent that they reflect scripture. While Baptists have therefore believed that *some elements* of the other denominational confessions were and are erroneous, they have equally agreed with and embraced the essential, foundational truths contained in these confessions. In fact, they have re-iterated these unchanging truths in their own confessions. They have therefore upheld the essential doctrines of Christianity, without which they would in fact cease to be Christian. The words of Nicole (2002:24) are pertinent:

Now all man-made statements are subject to revision and correction, but it appears prima facie impossible that a view that flatly contradicts the Nicene Creed or even the Westminster Standards should turn out to be right, and that these revered creeds, tested as they were through centuries of Christian thinking, should be wrong.

Confessions must therefore remain relevant and be revised from time to time. This does not mean that essential truths of Christianity must be changed. Rather, confessions must be updated to meet the needs of the church in the culture and environment it finds itself in. Confessions should therefore be updated to include contemporary issues as they arise, such as sexuality, abortion and evolution to name a few.

(iv) Doctrines that re-enforce the primacy of scripture

It needs to be pointed out that the primacy of scripture is underpinned by the sufficiency and clarity of scripture. Regarding the sufficiency of scripture, Waldron (1989:43) notes that while we must restrict the sufficiency of scripture to the main purpose of redemption, it must also not be artificially reduced to only “spiritual” matters. Scripture is sufficient for “God’s glory, man’s salvation, faith and life”

(Waldron, 1989:43), including the whole ethical and religious sphere of life. This ethical and religious sphere is a starting point for every other endeavour, such as science and business (Waldron, 1989:43). Scripture, therefore, while not providing the technical detail of business practice (for example), is yet sufficient to guide people on how to practise business in a manner that honours God.

Another important consideration is that scripture alone is sufficient. Neither the traditions of people nor extra revelation is needed (Waldron, 1989:44). This means that people have access to God through the scriptures without the necessity of a particular church or denomination. This fact, together with the doctrine of the clarity of scripture, further reinforces the concept of soul competency and liberty of conscience. Each person can interpret the scriptures for themselves and discover the truth about God and salvation. If the individual believer was totally dependent on a particular group for interpreting the scriptures, then he or she would have to submit to that group even against conscience, as exclusion from the group would necessarily and practically result in depravation of spiritual light from God's word.

It should also be noted, however, that the doctrine of the clarity of scripture does not remove the necessity of teachers in the church to help believers better understand scripture. Baptists have always understood one of the main functions of an elder is to teach God's people (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 11), and also acknowledged a gift of teaching separate from an elder (The Short Confession of 1610, Article 24).

The main point that is being made is that if the scriptures were not sufficient and clear, their primacy would be undermined. It would mean that scripture would need to be supplemented with something other than divine revelation (such as church tradition), or that believers would be reliant on an infallible interpreter (apart from the Holy Spirit) to clarify scripture. If either of these conditions existed, we could not speak of the primacy of scripture.

3.2.3.3 Implications for denominationalism

The primacy of scripture above creeds and confessions is a necessary corollary to Christ's Headship and scripture's authority. Christ is the Head of the church, and therefore the church is under His sole authority. The primacy of scripture ensures that no man-made doctrinal formulation was ever elevated to the same status of scripture and so nullify Christ's authority in His word.

Scripture must be used as the final judge of all issues. However, the primacy of scripture and resultant "anti-creedalism" certainly did not mean that Baptists did not hold to doctrinal truth, nor that they did not express these doctrines in writing in confessions of faith. They most certainly did so. They, however, did not elevate their confessions to the same authority as scripture, and would never use their confessions solely to defend their practices or doctrines.

Four points need to be made at this stage. The first is that it is entirely appropriate and consistent with what it means to be Baptist to establish a church or denominational body on a statement of faith. It is not anti-Baptist for a group to articulate clearly what they believe the Bible teaches on issues of importance. In this sense, Baptists must be "creedal" in order to be faithful to their historic position and indeed to be Christian. The early Baptists have strongly held to a body of doctrine, and have not been afraid to express these doctrines in writing.

Secondly, the Baptist principle of "anti-creedalism" has been overstated by some modern Baptist authors. The above discussion shows that the early Baptist confessions did not vary significantly on the issue of the authority of creeds from the other denominational confessions of the time. They were in substantial agreement. All the main denominations insisted that the scriptures were primarily and above all, pronouncements of Councils and creeds. This means that it is inconsistent for modern Baptists to, in the name of anti-creedalism, to deride other Baptists groups

who strongly hold to doctrine as a basis of unity, and for this doctrine to be expressed in confessions of faith.

Thirdly, it is impossible for Baptists to have no creed. They would then cease to believe anything and could not be Christian in the biblical sense of the word. The church has been given a deposit of unchanging, eternal truth, and it must confess this truth to the world. The early Baptist confessions embraced and asserted these fundamental truths. It is entirely consistent for Baptist groups to therefore formulate confessions and base their unity on these confessions.

Fourthly, the statements of some modern Baptist on anti-creedalism are unguarded and can easily be confused with post-modern beliefs. While Baptists do maintain that confessions are only interpretations of scripture, and therefore liable to revision, this does not mean that Baptists feel that the essential truths of the gospel can be changed from generation to generation. Statements regarding revision and updating rather refer to making confessions relevant for current generations, while still remaining faithful to the fundamental, unchanging truth of apostolic doctrine.

3.2.4 The interpretation of scripture

This section deals with the Baptist hermeneutics. It is not a Baptist distinctive as such. However, it is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, it completes this part of the thesis dealing with Scriptural authority. It shows how Baptists have understood the scriptures should be interpreted. Secondly, it is a necessary foundation for the Baptists distinctives that follow, as Baptists have derived their distinctives from scripture using their particular hermeneutical approach. Because the interpretation of scripture is not essentially a Baptist distinctive, this section will deviate from the standard structure adopted for the other distinctives. It briefly discusses three of the main hermeneutical principles Baptists have used, and notes only a few direct implications for denominationalism where relevant.

An extensive treatment of hermeneutics is beyond the scope of this section. Only key issues relating to the Baptist approach to scripture is briefly considered. These are a literal hermeneutic, the regulative principle and the role of the New Testament.

3.2.4.1 A literal hermeneutic

A literal hermeneutic is deceptively difficult to define. Substantial debate has taken place in dispensational and Baptist circles as to its meaning. Stallard (1997) deals in detail with a literal interpretation and its meaning. He notes the three possibilities that Poythress gives for a definition of a literal interpretation of the text. The first is “first thought” meaning, which tends to compromise the context. The second is a flat interpretation, where the passage is taken as literally as possible, only allowing obvious figures of speech. However, this approach can overlook certain poetic overtones or the figurative character of a section of material (Stallard, 1997:16-17). Stallard follows Poythress by settling for the third approach which equates literal interpretation with the classic grammatical-historical interpretation (Stallard, 1997:17). Mickelsen, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at the (Baptist) Bethel Theological Seminary, defines the literal meaning as:

...the usual or customary sense conveyed by words or expressions
(Mickelsen, 1963:179).

This is in agreement with Stallard, as the grammatical-historical method aims to determine the original author’s meaning in its customary, historical and grammatical context.

Baptists have generally favoured this “straightforward reading of the text,” taking into account the grammar and historical context. They would argue that when this method is adopted, the interpretation of scripture will be faithful to the intent of the Holy Spirit, and therefore accurately reveal the mind of Christ for the church.

Wamble (1994:151-152) challenges this notion, and believes that a literal interpretation is a more recent Fundamentalist claim, and it is not faithful to the historic Baptist confessions of faith. He cites two sources of evidence for this. The first is from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Chapter 1, paragraph 9 of this confession deals with the interpretation of scripture:

The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly (Lumpkin, 1969:237).

Wamble (1994:151) points out that this confession advocates “logical interpretation, not literal”. According to him, interpretation should therefore be according to the “analogy of faith” or one’s doctrinal system (Wamble, 1994:151).

His second evidence is from an early Baptist sermon which states (original wording retained):

All texts are to be understood literally, except they make against some other scriptures, or except the very coherence and dependence of the scriptures shows it otherwise, or it makes against the Analogy of Faith (Wamble, 1994:151).

Wamble therefore criticises the Southern Baptist slogan “the Bible means what it says and says what it means” as literalistic and simplistic. He contends it is not faithful to scripture or to the historic Baptist position. He also criticises, for example, the contention that the creation account must therefore be interpreted literally (Wamble, 1994:152).

Wamble is correct in recognising that a simplistic slogan cannot capture the complexities of an interpretive methodology. He is also correct in his assertion that the early Baptist confessions, such as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, do endorse an interpretative methodology of comparing scripture with scripture (termed

the analogy of faith). They certainly used clearer scriptures to interpret more obscure scriptures. However, his seemingly sharp distinction between this methodology and a literal interpretation must be challenged, as it is clear that Wamble is pushing an anti-fundamentalist agenda. Three points need to be noted.

Firstly, the 1689 Confession of Faith, while advocating the analogy of faith as an interpretative method, nevertheless advocates a literal interpretation of the creation account as found in Genesis 1-3. For example, Chapter 4, paragraph 1 of the confession asserts a literal interpretation of the number of days of creation (Lumpkin, 1969:247-248). Chapter 6, paragraph 1 advocates a literal interpretation of the fall of Adam of Eve (Lumpkin, 1969:251), even noting the role of Satan and the serpent. In other words, the authors of the 1689 Confession of Faith did not see the application of the “analogy of faith” as ruling out a literal interpretation of scripture, but rather enhancing and clarifying it. Wamble’s one-sided assertion regarding of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith’s interpretive methodology is not in fact consistent with the confessions actual method of interpretation.

Secondly, Wamble’s quotation from the Baptist sermon (noted above) does in fact endorse a literal interpretation of scripture, as it states that “all texts are to be understood literally”. However, it recognizes that a literal interpretation cannot be understood simplistically, and that the analogy of faith is an important element of any interpretive methodology.

Thirdly, Wamble’s conclusions betray a bias, as they are inconsistent with his own methodology. For example, he contends (correctly) that where a particular *scripture* is obscure, a responsible interpreter must go to other *parts of scripture* that are clearer. On this basis he criticises a literal interpretation of the creation account. One is left to wonder what *scripture* he found that clearly imposed a non-literal interpretation on the creation account? One is also left to wonder what part of Genesis 1-3 is obscure? The Old Testament and New Testament uniformly accept the account in Genesis 1-3 as literal events (see for example 2 Cor. 11:3; Matt. 19:4-6). Wamble’s conclusions

about the non-literal nature of the creation account are therefore shaped by something other than the analogy of faith. It is hard not to suspect that he is more influenced by an extra-biblical evolutionary theory than by a faithful application of the analogy of faith. A faithful application of the analogy of faith in fact endorses and supports a literal interpretation of the Genesis account.

It must therefore be concluded that the early Baptists did in fact endorse a literal interpretation of scripture. However, their interpretative methodology was not naïvely simplistic, but nuanced and sophisticated. A literal interpretation of scripture must certainly include the analogy of faith, where genuinely obscure passages are interpreted in the light of clearer passages. It must be concluded that an overall Baptist interpretive methodology can still best be described as the classic grammatical-historical interpretation noted above.

3.2.4.2 *The regulative principle*

Based on a strong view of the sufficiency of scripture, the regulative principle insists that there must be a positive warrant from scripture for any practice in the church. Baptists have generally held to the regulative principle. Two sorts of evidence can be cited. Firstly, Baptist writers defend Baptist distinctives on the basis that they must be *proven from scripture* (Mullins, 1908:26, 238). In other words, Baptists have always laboured to demonstrate that what they believe and practise has a clear warrant from scripture. For example, believer's baptism is defended on the basis that it is warranted from scripture (Adams, 1879:56; Mullins, 1908:107; Taylor, s.a.:7). Baptists have also criticised opposing doctrines on the basis that they cannot be found in scripture (Adams, 1876:54-56).

Reymond (1998:869-870) notes that the regulative principle requires either an express statement from scripture or something that is deduced from scripture "by good and necessary consequence". He then uses this deduction to defend infant baptism. Baptists would generally agree with Reymond's view of using good and

necessary deduction. For example, The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 22) follows the Westminster Confession very closely on the regulative principle (Waldron, 1989:267). This indicates the Baptist authors of the confession were in close agreement with their Presbyterian brethren on this issue. Also, Chapter 1, paragraph 6 of the 1689 Baptist Confession again follows the Westminster Confession very closely in admitting that, while the scriptures are sufficient,

... there are circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (Lumpkin, 1969:236).

In other words, the interpretation and application of scripture includes using the light of nature and sanctified prudence. This would include making logical deductions from the principles of scripture. Obviously, Baptists would disagree with Reymond's *application* of the principle to infant baptism. However, as the aim of this thesis is not to defend Baptist doctrine, this argument need not be taken further.

The second type of evidence comes from direct statements from confessions. For example, Chapter 22 paragraph 1 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith states:

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy scriptures (Lumpkin, 1969:278).

In other words, it is not acceptable to defend a view based on the fact that it is not *forbidden* in scripture. Baptists have acknowledged, however, that the implementation of the regulative is complex. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 22, paragraph 6) does allow the following:

...there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are

to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (Lumpkin, 1969:279).

The point is that, from a Baptist perspective, Christ's will is correctly discerned when the scriptures are approached in accordance with the regulative principle. This principle guards the church from the doctrines of men that cannot be positively substantiated from the scriptures.

The implication for denominationalism is that Baptists must have a positive warrant from scripture for all doctrine and practice (Adams, 1876:161). It is not sufficient to justify practices out of expediency. Baptists, for example, have rejected Episcopalianism on the basis that expediency is not a sufficient justification for a practice (Adams, 1876:113-118).

3.2.4.3 The priority of the New Testament

Baptists have always accepted the Old Testament and the New Testament as the very word of God, and profitable for correction, instruction and rebuke, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16). However, the way in which the Old Testament and New Testament relate to each other is important, and has a significant bearing on Baptist ecclesiology and distinctives.

Baptists have consistently insisted that the church must be regulated by the New Testament. For example, Carroll (1913:23-34) states:

We believe that the church, with all that pertains to it, is strictly a New Testament institution. We do not deny that there was an Old Testament ecclesia, but do deny its identity with the New Testament ecclesia.

Norman (2001:184) agrees that Baptist churches are always “shaped and directed by the New Testament”. He notes that Baptists aim to establish “primitive” churches that are based as closely as possible on the New Testament.

Waldron (1989:312-313), in his exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, outlines the logic of the Confession in this regard. The church as an *institution* began only at Pentecost (see also Vedder, 1907:14). The future tense of Christ’s words in Matthew 16:18 that He *will* build His church can be given their full, natural force (Waldron, 1989:313). This is consistent with the fact that the New Testament apostles and prophets are the *foundation* of the church (Eph. 2:20). God adds to the church through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which after Pentecost is normative for all believers at conversion (1Cor. 12:13; Grudem, 1994:767). The church is therefore the body of Christ, and was first formed at Pentecost. It is the final, earthly representation of the true “people of God” (Waldron, 1989:312). Israel was therefore a *type* of the church, foreshadowing the New Testament reality (Waldron, 1989:313).

It is not within the scope of this section to delve into the debate between Baptists and paedobaptists on covenant theology and its implications. Waldron (1989:312-314), and Grudem (1994:853-863) to a lesser extent, give an outline of the Reformed Baptist perspective on the points of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament as it relates to the church.

It needs to be noted that Baptists do not consider the Old Testament less authoritative than the New Testament. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 1, paragraph 4) for example, retained the wording of the Westminster Confession and asserts that all sixty six books of the Bible

...are given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life (Lumpkin, 1969:235-236)

Baptists regularly preach and teach from the Old Testament just as they do from the New Testament. Baptists do assert, however, that the church, being a New

Testament institution, must be governed by the New Testament. As noted above, Baptists insist on some discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Most Christian denominations also acknowledge some degree of discontinuity. For example, the Old Testament dietary laws are no longer directly applicable to the New Testament church, although spiritual lessons can still be derived from the Old Testament laws. In doing this, they acknowledge that the New Testament must establish whether the Old Testament laws are directly applicable to the church or not (see, for example, Heb. 8:13; 10:1, 8-10).

For the purposes of this section, the point that needs to be made is that Baptists look solely to the New Testament to establish church polity. Vedder (1907:7) notes that Baptists do not need to trace their history “to remote antiquity,” as their theory of the church is derived from the New Testament, and nothing else. This approach has had a major influence on Baptist theology, particularly in the area of believer’s baptism and regenerate church membership.

The implication for Baptist denominationalism is that if the doctrine of the church is derived from the New Testament, then the principles for fellowship between churches and denominational structures must also be established from the New Testament (Adams, 1876:148). The New Testament, for example, establishes the priesthood of all believers, as opposed to the distinct priestly office of select individuals in the Old Testament (Adams, 1876:111-126). Mullins (1908:23) also reminds us that Baptists have held to the belief that the New Testament gives the *final form* of ecclesiastical organisation, while the Episcopalian system is based on the belief that the ecclesiastical organisation developed over time from New Testament beginnings. The two systems end up in very different places. The following section on the local church therefore looks to the New Testament alone for the principles on how to structure the church.

3.3 THE LOCAL CHURCH

Not all the Baptist distinctives that relate to the local church are discussed individually, only those that have a bearing on denominationalism. For example, the doctrine of believer's baptism is not discussed under its own section, as any implications it may have for denominationalism are covered under the topic of regenerate church membership. Rather, focus is given to the main distinctives that have a significant impact on denominationalism.

3.3.1 Regenerate church membership

3.3.1.1 Historical review

Regenerate church membership was one of the issues that the Baptists believed the Reformers did not correctly address (Adams, 1876:148-150; Verduin, 1964:33, 37). They believed that a state church that was composed of people living in an area (some of them regenerate and others not) was a contradiction, and inconsistent with the New Testament. Rather, local churches ought only to be composed of professing believers (Vedder, 1907:25), who maintain a credible profession of faith (Vedder, 1907:25, 410). Evidence for this position cited by the early Baptists are two-fold. Firstly, there is direct evidence from scripture. For example, passages such as Acts 2:41, 47 indicate that those who *received* the word and who were *saved* were added to the church (Adams, 1879:149). Baptists argue that only those who have exercised personal faith in Christ were baptized, and only baptized believers were added to the church (Waldron, 1989:318; Vedder, 1907:25).

It may be argued that the church in Corinth seems to pose a problem for this Baptist understanding of the church. This church showed evidence of factionalism, carnality and serious moral sin (MacArthur, 1984:vii-viii). A few factors need to be taken into

account when assessing this church, however. In the first instance, Paul notes that there had been a conversion experience and visible repentance from their former way of life (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Whatever the remaining sin in the church was, Paul indicates in this passage that the Corinthian believers had previously been involved in all the immorality around them, but now they had been cleansed and sanctified. In other words, there was visible evidence of repentance and conversion from their former way of life, although they were far from perfect. In the second instance, Paul clearly advocated church discipline against those professing believers who contradicted their profession (1 Cor. 5:9-12). The principle of church discipline and biblical separation that Paul taught had the intent of keeping the church pure (MacArthur, 1984:ix). In other words, Baptists see the principle of regenerate church membership being upheld even in the Corinthian church.

The second strand of evidence comes from the nature of the universal church. Baptists agree with many other denominational groups that the universal church “consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ” (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 1; see also Waldron, 1989:312-313; Maring & Hudson, 1965:9). Landmarkism, which initially rejected the concept of the universal church (Leonard, 1994:174; McBeth, 1987:450-451), must be considered as a minority view which did not gain widespread acceptance amongst Baptists. Their position on the universal church was also diluted in 1963 when they modified their statement of faith to acknowledge the existence of the universal church (Patterson, 1975:55).

Thornbury (1971:157) notes that:

The universal church concept was universally believed among Baptists prior to the Landmark movement of the nineteenth century and overwhelmingly since then.

From a Baptist perspective then, the universal church only consists of those who are truly regenerated and united to Christ. It follows logically that the local church should reflect the universal church as far as is humanly possible (Waldron, 1989:314; Adams, 1876:81-82; Maring & Hudson, 1965:10, 105). Baptists acknowledge that, from a human point of view, actual regeneration is a spiritual condition not subject to human scrutiny. However, it is equally true that regeneration is accompanied by fruit, which is visible (Matt. 7:15-20; The Standard Confession, 1660:Article XIV; Lumpkin, 1969:227). Baptists have therefore insisted that only those professing faith in Christ and who have a credible testimony should be allowed into the church (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 2, 6; The Standard Confession, 1660:Article XI; Lumpkin, 1969:225). This credible profession of faith consists of adherence to the fundamentals of the faith (the apostolic gospel), a life of evangelical obedience, and the absence of damming heresies or “unholiness of conversation” (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 2; Lumpkin, 1969:284). Baptists also acknowledge that some people, initially giving the appearance of regeneration, may in fact prove to be otherwise at a later stage (1 John 2:19; Grudem, 1994:853ff). These people should then be removed from fellowship. This, however, should not prevent churches from exercising due diligence in the matter.

Baptists have practically expressed this commitment to regenerate church membership in two ways. Firstly, up to the nineteenth century, many Baptist churches practised church covenanting. A church covenant typically set out the privileges and duties of church membership (DeWeese, 2005:7). A survey of the church covenants shows the seriousness with which the Baptists took church membership, expecting from each member a walk and profession that was consistent with regeneration. Secondly, Baptists exercised church discipline and separation from heretics (Vedder, 1907:239) and those whose profession is contradicted by a disorderly walk (Standard Confession, 1660: Article XVII; A Short Confession of Faith, 1610, article 33 and 34; Vedder, 1907:236; Maring & Hudson, 1965:10-11; Lumpkin, 1969:102-113). Wills (2000:5), notes that in the nineteenth century, Southern Baptists in America “exercised church discipline on a remarkable scale”. Churches in the southern states

exercised some form of discipline against three to four percent of their membership every year (Wills, 2000:5).

Importantly, these Baptists did not see church discipline to be in conflict with liberty of conscience (Wills, 2000:11). Just as individual believers had the right to serve God as they saw fit, the local church also had the right and obligation to do what they believed God requires of them. Church discipline is one of these obligations. The church is not to coerce or persecute, but rather discipline erring members in order to persuade them to return to Scriptural norms (Wills, 2000:11).

Regenerate church membership has always gone hand-in-hand with believer's baptism (Wills, 1999:63). Baptism was a public profession of faith, and an outward sign of an inward reality, namely regeneration (Vedder, 1907:25; 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 29, paragraph 1; Lumpkin, 1969:291). Only those who were therefore baptized as believers were eligible for membership in Baptist churches (Adams, 1876:150-151). Some Baptist churches have practised open membership, where believers who were baptized (or rather "sprinkled" from a Baptist perspective) as infants, were allowed to become members of Baptist churches. The merits of this position need not be debated in this thesis. However, the principle of regenerate church membership is still not violated, as only those paedobaptist believers who have a credible testimony would be eligible for membership in a Baptist church. It is the belief of Baptists therefore that the practice of paedobaptism tends to undermine regenerate church membership, although they do not charge all paedobaptists with holding to baptismal regeneration.

This type of reasoning is also evident, for example, in the history of the Baptist Missionary Society. Andrew Fuller, one of the central figures, kept the Society along denominational lines. Although he did associate to an extent with the evangelical Anglicans when they established the Church Missionary Society in 1799, he nevertheless warned against the "religious establishment" or the state church. He saw

paedobaptism as one of the main causes of the unconverted being found in church membership (Stanley, 1992:21-22).

The twin distinctives of believer's baptism and regenerate church membership were universally accepted by Baptists, and abundantly testified to in the early confessions of faith. Indeed, the Baptist movement has derived its name from the importance of believer's baptism.

The above review has focused on the local church and the standards that have been applied by the early Baptists. A denominational organisation is not a local church. A subsequent section deals with the primacy of the local church, and shows that Baptists have always insisted that local churches are autonomous, and must not be confused with a denominational structure. The question then remains as to how the principle of regenerate church membership was applied in a denominational setting. This question, amongst others, is explored in the following section.

3.3.1.2 Theological reflection

This section reflects only on those aspects of regenerate church membership that are relevant for denominationalism. Believer's baptism and Reformed covenant theology, which is often used to support paedobaptism, will therefore not be dealt with.

Two issues need to be addressed here. The first has to do with standards of membership in Baptist churches, and the second with separation. Both of these are related closely to regenerate church membership. This section focuses on standards of membership and separation in the local church in order to then show their relevance for a denominational group.

Firstly, as noted above, a credible profession for Baptists included both sound doctrine and godly living (Maring & Hudson, 1965:10; DeWeese, 2005:7). Sound doctrine and godly living are biblical standards that go hand-in-hand, as doctrine

ought always to affect practice. For example, Timothy was to take heed both to his personal life and to doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16).

The second issue deals with separation. Baptists have always exercised degrees of separation. For example, many of the early Baptists acknowledged other churches and denominations to be essentially Christian and to contain true believers (Nettles 2001:10, Maring & Hudson, 1965:9). Why did they not join these churches and denominations and seek to influence them? The answer is that they saw the need to maintain a distinctive Baptist witness. They saw Baptist distinctives, such as believer's baptism and the nature of the church, of sufficient importance to maintain a degree of separation from the other denominations and churches. In other words, they believed that their distinctive witness to biblical truth took precedence over visible, outward unity with other denominations.

Two points need to be noted in this regard. Firstly, Baptists were no different to the other denominational groups. The Presbyterians, Anglicans and Congregationals all maintained a degree of separation from each other to give expression to their doctrinal distinctives. In other words, maintaining a degree of separation was not unique to Baptists, and not primarily due to their distinctives.

Secondly, Baptists, as shown before, did acknowledge the unity of the universal church. However, they believed their distinctive witness to their principles was important for the health and reformation of the universal church (Adams, 1876:5). In other words, they were not trying to be non-conformist for the sake of it. Their desire was for the further reformation of the church and the glory of Christ. This the reason why, for example, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 26, paragraph 14) encourages local churches to pray for "all the churches of Christ" (Lumpkin, 1969:288). Baptists also did occasionally unite with churches of like mind across denominational lines when opportunity presented itself. The historical review in the previous chapter, for example, noted the co-operation of Baptists and Congregationals in evangelism and church planting.

The early Baptists also exercised more formal separation from doctrinal error and moral sin in the form of church discipline (Vedder, 1907:236). They justified this practice from scripture. For example, 1 Corinthians 5:2-11 advocates church discipline and separation from professing believers who persist in moral sin (MacArthur, 1984:125). Second Thessalonians 3:6 teaches the same principle. Both these passages are used by the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 26, paragraph 12) when advocating church discipline (Lumpkin, 1969:288).

In 2 John 10, believers are commanded not to encourage or have fellowship with false teachers (Marshall, 1978:74). This verse therefore advocates separation on doctrinal grounds. Those who depart from “orthodox” doctrine (Marshall, 1978:72-73) are not to have influence in the church or be in fellowship with believers. However, comparing Romans 14:1-23 with 2 John 10, it is clear there needs to be a differentiation between secondary issues and fundamental doctrines. Romans 14:1-23 deals with the scruples of the weak in matters of “food” and “days” in a context that did not threaten on the gospel (Murray, 1965:172-174). Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16-17 also deal with issues of “food” and “days.” However, here the apostle Paul has an entirely different tone. In these two epistles, matters of food and days were used to pervert the gospel (Murray, 1965:173). The apostle Paul therefore reacts strongly to the false teachers.

Murray (1965:173-174) also points out that the weakness spoken of in Romans 14 did not even seem to relate to food offered to idols as contemplated in 1 Corinthians 8, but were more of a generic nature. Romans 14, therefore, deals with matters of lesser importance or indifference that do not threaten the gospel in any way. In such circumstances, Paul requires an attitude of love and toleration (Rom. 14:1, 3). The point here is that the tolerance spoken of in Romans 14 must never be advocated for serious doctrinal matters that threaten the gospel. The early Baptists did not tolerate heresy or moral sin, but rather separated from those who persisted in them.

The early Baptists applied these same principles to their denominational organisations, such as associations. The logic is important. Regenerate church membership was partly derived from the fact that the local church must reflect the universal church. Co-operation amongst churches, however, has been justified by the early Baptists partly on the basis of the unity that exists amongst believers because they are all part of the universal church. In other words, a group of local churches ought also to be reflective of the universal church in terms of the essential doctrinal and moral standards found in scripture.

The early Baptists, although they acknowledged their denominational structures were not churches, nevertheless adopted similar standards for fellowship. For example, associations often disfellowshipped believers, pastors or churches for moral sin or doctrinal deviation, which was inconsistent with a Christian profession (Handy, 1987:591; Shurden, 1986:109-110, 114).

It is also worth noting that the Baptist commitment to regenerate church membership is an expression of their commitment to the new birth and the vital work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the individual believer (DeWeese, 2005:5).

3.3.1.3 Implications for denominationalism

The principle of regenerate church membership reflects the principle of 2 Corinthians 6:14, where believers are called to be holy, and not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This is based on the fact that it is impossible for light to have communion with darkness, and for believers to have any part with unbelievers. This is certainly true of the universal church, consisting of only regenerate believers, and therefore ought to be reflected in local churches as far as humanly possible.

The early Baptists understood the principle of regenerate church membership to mean that only believers with a credible profession of faith were to be accepted as members of local churches. Baptists believed that a credible profession of faith

consisted of adherence to the fundamentals of the faith (the gospel), a life of obedience, and the absence of damming heresies or “unholiness of conversation” (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 2; Lumpkin, 1969:284). Conversely, those living in moral sin or holding to serious doctrinal error were to be excluded through church discipline and separation.

The implications for Baptist denominationalism now need to be noted. Baptist denominational structures had the sole purpose of allowing local churches to co-operate together to pursue ministry that they could not achieve individually. This will be discussed more fully in a subsequent section. However, for now it needs to be emphasised that the denominational structures are meant to facilitate co-operation amongst *biblical* local churches. It would be entirely inconsistent for Baptist denominational groups, under the pretence of either liberty or local church autonomy, to allow member churches in their ranks that deviated doctrinally or morally from biblical norms. Churches that do not adhere to the fundamentals of the faith, or persist in tolerating gross sin amongst their membership (without initiating disciplinary procedures), should have no place in a Baptist denomination, as there would be a question as to whether they were even true churches. These conclusions are particularly relevant for the modern debate and practices in some Baptist denominational circles, where churches tolerating gross sins or serious doctrinal error are still allowed into fellowship under the excuse of local church autonomy and liberty. This section refutes this practice strongly, as it is inconsistent with the Baptist principle of regenerate church membership.

3.3.2 The significance of the local church

This section builds on the discussion from Chapter Two regarding the interdependence of local churches. In summary, this previous evaluation shows that local churches in the New Testament did co-operate together to achieve specific goals. This interdependence is based on the spiritual unity that churches enjoy.

However, this interdependence must never overshadow the significance of the local church in Baptist theology.

It is therefore needful at this point to reflect on the significance of the local church in Baptist thought. This section is closely related to the section that follows on the autonomy of the local church. It emphasises the fact that the early Baptists saw local churches as the primary vehicles God uses to build His kingdom.

3.3.2.1 Historical review

A few relevant assertions from the Baptist confessions regarding the significance of the local church are drawn together in this section so that their collective witness can establish the importance of this distinctive from a Baptist perspective.

John Smyth's confession (Article 13) notes:

...the church of Christ has power delegated to themselves of announcing the word, administering the sacraments, appointing ministers, disclaiming them, and also excommunicating; but the last appeal is to the brethren of body of the church (Lumpkin, 1969:100-101).

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 26, paragraph 7) states:

To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his word, he hath given all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he hath instituted for them to observe; with commands and rules for the due and right exerting, and executing of that power (Lumpkin, 1969:285).

Carroll (1913:23-34), referring to the local church, says:

Each congregation is a complete temple in itself, and has final jurisdiction over all its affairs.

This democracy receives and dismisses its members, chooses or deposes its own officers, and manages its own affairs.

It is the supreme court in Christ's kingdom. All cases of discipline come before it, and its decisions are final and irreversible by any human power apart from itself.

The centrality of the local church in Baptist denominationalism can also be seen in the history of the Baptist Missionary Society established under the Northamptonshire Association. As the Baptist Missionary Society gained momentum in its first ten years of existence, it gained prominence in the eyes of society. However, there was an insistence by some of the leaders that the main funding must come from local churches. According to Stanley (1992:28), this was a traditional nonconformist conviction that “all Christian work must be firmly based in the gathered congregation of Christ's people”. This expresses the notion that all Christian ministries should be closely associated with the local church.

Baptists therefore regarded the local church as the only organised body instituted directly by Christ to pursue kingdom work. It has His explicit sanction, and has been given all power and authority to carry out Christ's will in the world. The authority and warrant of a denominational structure and its relationship to the local church is discussed below in order to understand how it can be used in a manner that does not undermine the primacy of the local church.

The testimony in this research to the primacy of the local church in pursuing ministry to build Christ's kingdom is fundamental to this thesis, and has a significant impact on the denominational framework that is developed in the following chapter.

3.3.2.2 Theological reflection

The review made already shows that Baptists see the local church as the primary organisation to pursue ministry. It has been endowed with all necessary authority and gifts to pursue the work of building the kingdom.

The discussion on the significance of the local church does raise the question, however, of the role of denominational structures in relation to the local church, and whether denominational structures have a divine sanction to exist and pursue ministry. It should be noted that the previous chapter has already shown the biblical justification for inter-church co-operation. This section focuses more closely on the role of the structure that facilitates this inter-church co-operation.

Hiscox (1893:315, 335) dogmatically claims that Councils “are of human, not divine origin”. Similarly, he claims that associations are voluntary, and therefore of “human, not of divine authority”. According to him, only churches are divinely instituted, and hence neither councils nor associations can ever have authority over the churches. Councils and associations are voluntary, and churches can choose whether to participate in them, remain separate from them, or withdraw from them for any reason that seems appropriate to them. They therefore have no divine authority or sanction. The local church, in contrast, has been ordained by Christ, and individual believers are not ordinarily free to remain separate from churches.

The next major section will focus more closely on the authority of a Baptist denominational structure. This section is more concerned with the legitimacy of the structure to pursue ministry, and deals with some of the assertions of Hiscox noted above.

In order to determine the early Baptist view on this issue, however, some careful reflection is required on the early confessions of faith. In this debate, it is important to differentiate between divine sanction and authority. Two points need to be noted.

The first point, as noted previously, is that the confessions indicate that where providence allows it, churches *ought* to have communion. In other words, it is their *duty* to do so (Somerset Confession of Faith of 1656, article XXVII; Lumpkin, 1969:214; Vedder, 1907:32; Brown, 1946:23-24; 1689 Confession of Faith Chapter 26, paragraph 14; Lumpkin, 1969:288). The theological basis for this statement is the spiritual unity that all believers enjoy in Christ, and the common headship of Christ. This means that churches co-operating together must enjoy the sanction of Christ. This must also mean that the structure that facilitates this co-operation must have divine sanction. One of the aims of this research is to establish what such a structure should look like from a Baptist perspective.

A crucial point needs to be made. The denominational structure has divine sanction as long as it performs the function of facilitating local church action, and does not develop a life of its own and pursues ministries independently from the local church. This means that any Baptist denominational body that does not directly allow local church representation and action is inconsistent with Baptist principles. Stated negatively, any Baptist denominational body that claims to consist only of individuals and does not allow local churches to *control it*, is not consistent with Baptist principles, especially that of the primacy of the local church. Rather, the legitimacy of the denominational body to engage in ministry is derived directly from its role in facilitating local churches to act collectively. The further implication of this, however, is that these ministries are then directly responsible to those local churches. The denominational body does not have any divine sanction in and of itself to carry out these ministries independently of local churches.

This conclusion is consistent with the biblical evidence regarding theological education, missionary endeavour and works of charity. It is popular today to locate these ministries in denominational bodies or independent bodies that have little relation and accountability to the local church. This is unbiblical and inconsistent with Baptist principles. The following, brief overview of the biblical evidence for theological

education, missionary endeavour and works of charity is simply to show that these ministries have strong ties to the local church in scripture. It must be emphasised that the overview that follows is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of these ministries, but merely to show their strong ties to the local church.

(i) Theological education

The explicit command to train up men to be teachers is found in 2 Timothy 2:2. It is given by Paul to Timothy, who was ministering at the church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:19; MacArthur, 1995:xiv). Timothy most likely functioned as a pastor and an apostolic representative (Reymond, 2000:253) at Ephesus. This fact, together with Paul's insistence that *elders* should be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9), indicates that theological education should always have close ties with the local church.

(ii) Missionary endeavour

The missionary endeavours of the apostle Paul are strongly associated with the local church. It is important to note that the first significant missionary thrust came through the instruction of the Holy Spirit to the local church at Antioch (Acts 13:1; Reymond, 2000:116). The Holy Spirit chose to appoint Paul and Barnabas through the local church. Significantly, the church laid hands on Paul and Barnabas as an act of commissioning (Marshall, 1980:216). Paul therefore felt a certain accountability to this local church, and reported back all that happened on his missionary journey (Acts 14:27-28). Reymond (2000:126) notes that through the labours of the apostle Paul, the church at Antioch became a "mother church". In other words, the first major missionary thrust initiated by the Holy Spirit was through a local church, with continuing accountability to that local church. Again, this provides a clear pattern of local church accountability in missionary endeavour.

Maring and Hudson (1965:117) claim that certain ministries such as missionary endeavour and theological education cannot be the direct responsibility of local

churches (seemingly even in an association). They believe that as these ministries require specialists, they are best located in state or national conventions. This statement must be challenged from a Baptist perspective. The discussion above shows that theological education and missionary endeavour in the New Testament had strong links directly to local churches. While it is acknowledged that specialist knowledge may be required, there is no justification for divorcing these ministries from the local churches so that they are not directly accountable to local churches collectively.

(iii) Works of Charity

With regard to works of charity, it is significant that instances of these cited by scripture also have a strong local church accountability. For example, 2 Corinthians 8:1-24 reveals local churches contributing to the needs of the saints, and sending messengers with the gifts to ensure they were used for the intended purposes. Again, the emphasis on local church accountability is noteworthy even when they were co-operating. However, this joint ministry of the collection does raise an important issue. 2 Corinthians 8:18 indicates that one individual was chosen by the churches to represent them (Waldron, 1995:8; du Plooy, 1982:273). This means that this individual was responsible to the churches jointly. It also implies that there must have been a close working relationship between the churches.

This section therefore argues that ministries such as missionary endeavour and the training of leaders must have strong links with and be accountable to the local church. The example of the collection, however, gives an example where individuals were accountable to local churches collectively. In other words, biblically speaking, it is acceptable for certain ministries to be accountable to local churches collectively. This in turn requires some form of organisational structure to facilitate the co-operation.

3.3.2.3 Implications for denominationalism

Baptists have regarded the local church as the only body instituted directly by Christ to pursue ministry. It has His explicit sanction, and has been given all power and authority to carry out Christ's will in the world. The Baptist doctrine of the local church was therefore emphasised to ensure that it remained central in all kingdom work. The local church was never to be replaced or sidelined by another institution. The New Testament pictures the local church at the heart of all Christian ministries, including theological education, missionary endeavour and works of charity.

In light of the primacy of the local church in Baptist thought and the biblical witness to local church accountability for theological education, missionary endeavour and major works of charity, Baptist denominationalism needs to strongly advocate church based ministries. In other words, models which remove theological education or missionary endeavour from the local church into a broader denominational body with little *accountability to local churches, is inconsistent with Baptist principles*. It needs to be remembered that the whole thrust of the Baptist movement was to return to the "primitive" church as found in the New Testament. In particular, bodies such as Societies, which are composed of interested and contributing *individuals* who are not accountable to any local churches, must be seriously questioned (Maring & Hudson, 1965:123). These factors are taken into account in the following chapter when the framework for Baptist denominationalism is developed.

It therefore needs to be insisted that Baptist denominational bodies exist to better enable local churches to pursue Christian ministry. Local Baptist churches do not exist to support a denominational body to do ministry as if the denominational body is the primary vehicle for this work. However, if a denominational body truly represents local churches, it is acceptable for some ministries to be accountable to these churches collectively. In other words, Baptists can locate certain ministries at a denominational level as long as that structure represents local churches, and that these ministries remain accountable in some way to the local churches.

Another implication is critical to note. The commonly held notion by some Baptists that the denominational structure is independent of the participating local churches is equally problematic and inconsistent with Baptist principles. For example, Hiscox notes that associations themselves are independent bodies, and “not subject to the authority or control of the churches” (Hiscox, 1893:336). This makes little sense. The whole point of the denominational body was to allow *local churches to interact*, not to create a body that was independent from the local church. As argued above, according to Baptist principles, such a denominational body as envisaged by Hiscox would have no Scriptural sanction to act in any way. The authority of a Baptist denominational body to pursue ministry is derived from the fact that it facilitates local church interaction. It therefore cannot be a body that is independent of the local churches, but must in fact, by definition, be firmly in the control of the participating local churches.

3.3.3 Local church autonomy

Local church autonomy has been *the* distinctive that has affected Baptist denominationalism most significantly. This section therefore probes this distinctive in greater detail than previous sections.

It has already been shown in Chapter Two that Baptists have rejected the interpretation that Acts 15 provides evidence of a denominational structure imposing its authority on local churches. Chapter Two also shows, however, that there is solid justification for the interdependence of local churches, and that such inter-church relations should be pursued when providence allows it. This discussion is not repeated here.

This section therefore builds on Chapter Two, and evaluates and clarifies the Baptist distinctive of the autonomy of the local church.

3.3.3.1 Historical review

(i) The theological basis for local church autonomy

It is important to note how Baptists have historically derived local church autonomy from the scriptures. Local church autonomy has been proved by Baptist from three strands of biblical evidence. The first is direct evidence from the New Testament, the second the nature of local church leadership, and the third is congregational church government.

Firstly, Baptists have maintained that the New Testament depicts churches that act autonomously. For example, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation imply that each of them were responsible for their own members and church discipline (Waldron, 1989:319). There is no appeal to an individual, group of individuals or group of churches exercising either authority or oversight over the seven churches collectively (Dagg, 1990:83). In Acts 20:32, the elders of the church of Ephesus were commended to God and the word of His grace, implying they were responsible for themselves as a church. First Peter 5:1-4 indicates that the elders of a local church are shepherds under Christ and must give a direct account to Him. They were therefore to be faithful overseers of those entrusted to them, and not to lord it over the flock. There is no hint of a higher authority or structure to whom the local church elders would be accountable. Dagg (1990:83) also notes that the Corinthian church excommunicated an individual by its own act without any reference to a higher authority.

Secondly, Baptists have consistently held to a simple, two-fold office of elder and deacon in the local church (see the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, paragraph 8; Vedder, 1907:31; Lumpkin, 1969:285). However, the way this has been implemented has varied. Grudem notes that various models have existed, such as a plurality of elders, or a single pastor with a board of deacons, or even elders and deacons combined into one governing structure (Grudem, 1994:928-933). It is not

necessary to delve into these models for the current discussion. However, what is relevant for the autonomy of the local church is how this leadership relates to Christ.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 26, paragraph 8) asserts that the designation of elder and bishop refers to the same office (Lumpkin, 1969:285; see also Vedder, 1907:30-31). Elders are those who must give an account directly to Christ (Chapter 26, paragraph 10; Lumpkin, 1969:289). In other words, for Baptists, there is no office “higher” than that of the local church elder. Even if a plurality of elders exists at a local church, they do not collectively constitute a higher office. Elders are not accountable to a higher office of bishop, nor to a higher body of elders from other churches exercising authority or oversight over them. The implication is that the church with its local leadership is therefore autonomous and not under the authority of any other body, but must give an account directly to its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. It needs to be noted that many Baptist churches hold to a plurality of elders in a local church, based on passages such as Acts 14:23, Acts 20:17, Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:5, Hebrews 13:17 (Waldron, 1989:321; Grudem, 1994:929). These elders collectively form an eldership (called a “board” by Grudem), which collectively shepherds and oversees the local church. Importantly, this eldership does not exert authority over *other* churches, but only over their own local church (Grudem, 1994:932-933).

As an aside, it is on the basis of the Baptist understanding of two-fold office of elder and deacon in the local church that they have rejected the Episcopalian and Roman Catholic forms of church government. Baptists have pointed to texts such as Acts 20:17-28, 1 Peter 5:1-2 and Titus 1:5-7 which amply demonstrate the terms elder, overseer and pastor refer to the same office (Waldron, 1989:321; Grudem, 1994:929).

Thirdly, congregational church government has been the standard practice of Baptist churches. Congregationalism is a system of church government where the congregation has power to rule the church, sometimes called self-rule (Renihan, 1997:129). Some Baptists argue that if a church is ruled by the gathered

congregation, it is practically impossible for the entire membership of each participating church to sit on a denominational body to represent the church. Hence pure congregational government has also been a stumbling block for some Baptists, as the local churches cannot be directly represented in a denominational body.

Carroll describes congregationalism as a majority rule or a pure democracy, where all the members are equal citizens. The church as a body therefore “receives and dismisses its members, chooses or deposes its own officers, and manages its own affairs” (Carroll, 1913:23-26).

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith also endorses a congregational type system of government. The congregation itself chooses its own officers (Chapter 26, paragraph 9), and it is to the gathered, local church (not just the leadership) that Christ gives all necessary power and authority to carry out worship and discipline (Chapter 26, paragraph 7; Lumpkin, 1969:285). The theological reflection below evaluates this position in the light of texts such as Hebrews 13:17, which ascribe a rule to an elder.

Baptists provide three strands of support for congregationalism. In the first instance, the seven of Acts 6 were chosen by the church (Acts 6:3). The debate on whether these were the first deacons or served as a prototype for the diaconal office is irrelevant for the purposes of this discussion. The fact is that the entire congregation was involved in the selection of these men (Vedder, 1907:29).

In the second instance, Baptists have pointed to 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, where the entire church was responsible for church discipline. Verse four implies that the power and authority of Christ in the act of discipline resides with the gathered church and not just its officers (Waldron, 1989:232). In this regard, it is important to note that the early Baptists did not regard congregational church government as a mechanical process of church members voting to merely exercise a democratic right. The church came together as a body cognisant of the authority of Christ and relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is easily demonstrated by noting the references to

the Holy Spirit in Chapter 26 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Lumpkin, 1969:284-286). It is through the ministry of the Spirit that believers are called, gathered in a church, and then urged to walk in obedience to scripture.

In the third instance, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith cites Acts 14:23 where the word “appoint” is used regarding the election of elders. The authors of the Confession presumably believed the word implied they were elected by a showing of hands. However, Berkhof (1939:589) rightly concludes that this line of argument is speculative, as the word may have lost this original meaning by the time the New Testament was written.

There is some debate as to whether some earlier Baptist groups lent more towards the independency view of John Owen than to pure congregationalism (Renihan, 1997:132). Owen’s independency form of government differs slightly from congregationalism in that he advocates that the elders are to deliberate amongst themselves and make decisions, and bring these decisions to the church. The church should ordinarily give their consent (Renihan, 1997:132; Goold, 1968:Chapters 7 & 8). Renihan (1997), after doing a thorough investigation of the ecclesiastical practices of the Particular Baptists, notes that there is little evidence that elders in early Baptist churches made decisions and brought them to the church. Rather, the elders would seek permission from the church, and the church was also free to raise and consider matters (Renihan, 1997:174). In other words, the pure independency of Owen is also ruled out. Renihan (1997:174) therefore concludes that the early Particular Baptists practiced a modified Independency, where the elders exercised a measure of authority only, but always subject to congregational consent.

(ii) Local church autonomy and the authority of denominational structures

Although the autonomy of the local church has been one of the most ardently defended Baptist principles, some of the shorter confessions do not contain a statement on local church autonomy (such as the Standard Confession of 1660, the

New Hampshire Confession of 1742, and the Liberty Association Articles of Faith of 1824).

John Smyth's Short Confession is one of the first confessions to hint at local church autonomy. In article thirteen of this confession, Smyth indicates that the church has delegated power to fulfil its functions, and that it is the final court of appeal (Lumpkin, 1969:101).

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (and the subsequent Philadelphia Confession) deals explicitly with the issue of the local church in relation to a group of churches. Due to the important nature of this section, paragraph 15 of Chapter 26 needs to be quoted in its entirety:

In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order; it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together, do, by their messengers, meet to consider, and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers (Lumpkin, 1969:285).

The Confession is clear that a group of churches, meeting through their messengers, is advisory only. Its decisions and directives do not carry the authority of a church decree. These meetings therefore have no jurisdiction over local churches or individuals for that matter. The local churches remain autonomous, and may or may not choose to heed the advice of the meeting. Hiscox (1893:318-319) concurs that

Councils are only advisory, and that they have no ecclesiastical authority over local churches.

It must be noted again that Chapter Two evaluates the claim that Acts 15 represents some sort of Council or group of churches exerting authority over individual local churches.

The early Baptists, as noted previously, did recognise that the structure had power to withdraw fellowship from a deviant church simply due to the nature of an organisation which has to set conditions of membership. This is a critical point for Baptists, and needs to be emphasised. A Baptist group (as has been argued), *must* insist on doctrinal standards for the denominational group. This is not an act of a denominational body exercising ecclesiastical authority over the local churches, but rather an act derived from the fact that the group is voluntary and that it must set the doctrinal standards for the group. Those who disagree with the doctrinal standards are free to leave the group if they so choose. This restriction of ecclesiastical authority from a denominational body is one of the crucial points that separate Baptist denominations from Episcopalian and Presbyterian denominations.

(iii) Representation of local Baptist churches in denominational bodies

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (paragraph 15 of Chapter 26) stipulates that those who meet together are designated as *messengers* of the churches. This implies that they have no delegated authority to represent the church or make decisions on behalf of the churches. It is noteworthy that the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith uses the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 as its proof text. This indicates that they saw the principle of churches sending messengers in Acts 15.

Carroll (1913:23-34) notes that the church is a “local congregation” and not an “organised denomination”. He goes on to state:

Each congregation is a complete temple in itself, and has final jurisdiction over all its affairs.

However, Carroll (1913:23-34), following the basic Landmark view, has such a strong sense of church autonomy that he believed that it was impossible for there to be a federal body of Baptists:

But a Baptist church cannot project or merge its sovereignty into a general body of any kind, nor delegate its powers. There is not and cannot be a Baptist federal body.

According to Carroll, therefore, Conventions or Unions are therefore composed of *individuals*, and not churches. Hiscox (1893:318-319) concurs, and provides details by describing three types of meetings. *Councils* are composed of delegates or messengers appointed by the churches of which they are members. *Committees of reference* are composed of individuals who have been asked to give advice. Regarding these individuals, there is no action from their local churches to appoint them in any way. Lastly, a Baptist “*Presbytery*” is a “company of ministers personally invited to assist in ordination, or to advise in any church matter” (Hiscox, 1893:319).

Hiscox (1893:320) is also adamant that messengers of a Council are not representatives of the church, and cannot act for the churches:

A Baptist church cannot be represented in any other body (Hiscox, 1893:320).

Similarly, Hiscox (1893:333) believes that associations are composed of individuals, not churches. He (1893:334) recognises that this position poses a problem, as how can churches then be received into membership or dismissed from membership in an association? He solves the problem by asserting that when the messengers are received into *membership*, their respective churches are received into *fellowship* and *co-operation* (Hiscox, 1893:334). Many Baptists, such as Mullins and Hobbs

(1978:107-108) agree with these sentiments. It should also be noted that the Southern Baptist Convention also endorsed this view. In 1898, the Southern Baptist Convention was sued by Hayden because it refused to allocate a seat to him. His contention was that the Southern Baptist Convention was made up of churches. However, the Southern Baptist Convention voted that it consisted of persons chosen by churches, associations and societies, and when these persons were convened, “they, and not the churches, are the Convention” (Mcbeth, 1987:458-459).

The denominational structures that Baptists have chosen to use have therefore been selected primarily out of concern for local church autonomy. They favour structures that do not impose their authority on local churches nor seek to represent local churches.

Hiscox (1893:336) also notes that these associations themselves are independent bodies, and “not subject to the authority or control of the churches any more than the churches are subject to its authority and control”.

Alison (1906:52) notes that the early Baptists were not all in agreement with the above-mentioned views. A number of Baptists, while acknowledging that a church cannot be represented *in certain instances*, have allowed their churches to be represented where the delegates have “limited and strictly defined powers”. Alison, for example, believes that the Hiscox’s position has confused delegation of powers with the “absolute surrender of all rights of the individual church” (Alison, 1906:51). He cites two examples. Firstly, the Boston church in 1801 acknowledged that the *churches* were convened at the Council meeting. Secondly, in 1819 the Worcester Baptist Association adopted a constitution which allowed churches to delegate part of their powers to individuals (Alison, 1906:52). In this instance, Councils therefore did properly represent churches, and were not composed merely of individuals.

3.3.3.2 Theological reflection

This review has demonstrated that the dominant, early Baptist view was that associations and councils are composed of individuals, and that churches cannot be represented by any individual or small group. Delegates are merely messengers of the churches.

This seems to pose some problems for Baptist denominationalism, as earlier sections show that according to scripture and other Baptist distinctives, local churches are the main organised bodies that should pursue ministry. If associations and Conventions represent individuals only, it limits the role of local churches, and potentially removes ministry from their control.

This section reflects on and examines the issue of the elder's rule and authority in the church, as this holds the key to resolving some of the inconsistencies in Baptist thought. As shown above, local church autonomy, and the insistence by some Baptists that local churches cannot be represented by individuals, is largely based on the congregational system of church government. If it can be shown that a modified form of congregationalism is more consistent with scripture, then this opens the possibility for Baptist churches to be represented *in areas* for denominational purposes.

The debate on the rule of elders as described in Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Timothy 5:17 has important implications for Baptist congregationalism. A "rule" implies authority (Grudem, 1994:915). This is confirmed by the fact that in Hebrews 13:17, believers are instructed to *obey* those who *rule* over them. There can be little doubt that this refers to elders in the church (Grudem, 1994:915). Also, the fact that the New Testament warns elders not to abuse their authority (1 Pet. 5:2-5) implies that they did exercise some authority (Grudem, 1994:915). The conclusion drawn by Grudem that this passage rules out *pure* congregationalism is hard to resist (Grudem,

1994:915, 934). Using the concept of elders *ruling* their own households (1 Tim. 3:5), a modified congregationalism can be argued for Baptist churches.

An analogy can be drawn here using the Christian family. As in a Christian family, the headship of the husband does not negate a loving, consulting leadership, so in the church the rule of the elder must be seen in the context of love and service. Elders can provide a humble, godly leadership, guiding and directing the church in wise decisions, with the church generally accepting and submitting to them unless they believe there is a clear misunderstanding of the word of God. At the end of the day, however, the elders can only lead with the consent of the church, and therefore the general system of congregationalism is warranted, as noted in the previous section. Also, it has already been shown that Christ's authority resides with the local church, and not just its leadership.

Renihan's (1997:174) conclusion that the early Particular Baptists practised a modified Independency, is therefore relevant. The elders exercised a *measure* of authority in conjunction with congregational consent. There is thus a delicate balance between the congregational principle found in scripture and the rule of elders.

This line of argument has a direct bearing on whether churches can be represented, and provides a possible avenue for solving a problem Baptists have with their denominational practices. If it is true that Baptists churches cannot be represented in any sense by an individual or selected group of individuals, then the logical conclusion is that Baptist denominations are a group of individuals who do not represent the local churches in any real way. As noted earlier, Baptists have generally advocated that associations themselves are independent bodies, and "not subject to the authority or control of the churches any more than the churches are subject to its authority and control" (Hiscox, 1893:336). This type of reasoning is confusing, inconsistent and problematic for Baptists. Two points need to be made.

Firstly, as noted earlier, Baptist denominationalism is motivated from examples of *churches* co-operating in the New Testament. The above discussion, however, shows that many Baptists have contended that an association or Council is an independent body essentially comprised of individuals. It is difficult to see how such an association then fits the biblical examples of local churches acting together.

Secondly, Baptists have developed their denominational structures to preserve the autonomy of the local church, as it is the *primary body that Christ has established to pursue the building of His kingdom*. It needs to be noted that structures that do not represent local churches and are not subject to their control effectively sideline local churches. These structures therefore pursue essential gospel work (such as theological education and missionary endeavour), independently of the local church. This means that although the intention of some of these structures was to preserve local church autonomy, they have in fact effectively sidelined the local church from essential gospel work. A clear inconsistency is thus evident.

The following conclusions from the above discussion are therefore proposed to biblically resolve the inconsistencies in Baptist thought regarding the nature of their denominational structures. Baptist churches are indeed autonomous, and not subject to the authority of any denominational organisation. They participate on a voluntary basis in a denominational structure. However, this does not mean that they cannot be properly represented in a denominational body. A modified form of congregationalism best fits this model, based on the fact that passages such as Hebrews 13:17 ascribe a *rule*, and hence some authority at least, to elders. Baptist denominational structures can therefore truly represent churches through their elders.

A last point needs to be made in relation to the term “autonomy” used in this section. Chapter Two has already given the motivation and evidence that in scripture churches interacted and co-operated with each other to pursue kingdom work. Autonomy must therefore not be interpreted to mean isolationist. However, this section confirms that local churches are indeed autonomous in the sense that

denominational structures must not seek to exercise control over the local church. Local churches are accountable directly to Christ.

3.3.3.3 Implications for denominationalism

Baptists have consistently asserted the primacy of the local church. They find no evidence for a denominational structure that exerts authority over the local church. As noted in the previous section, local churches have Christ's explicit sanction and have been given all power and authority to fulfil Christ's mandate.

Local churches have also been given all authority and power to regulate their own affairs. They are therefore not subject to the authority of any denominational structure, but are directly under the authority of Christ. Local churches are, however, also interdependent, and can voluntarily associate together to pursue kingdom work that requires resources that a single church is not able to muster.

The implications of autonomous local churches for denominationalism are complex. This section therefore draws on findings from a number of the previous sections. The following summarised implications are noted.

Firstly, Baptist denominational structures are voluntary, and do not have ecclesiastical authority over the individual churches. A group of Baptist churches needs to set the limits and conditions of membership not because it is an authoritative, ecclesiastical structure ordained by God to make decrees, but given the nature of an organisation that needs to reflect biblical standards. This conclusion has two important consequences that must differentiate Baptist denominations from Episcopalian and Presbyterian systems. It will firstly affect the *manner and approach* of the denominational structure. Its recommendations on matters such as pastoral candidates and disputes in local churches will be advisory only. Secondly, the *areas of jurisdiction* of the Baptist denominational body will be limited to those areas which relate to the common ministries and goals of the denomination. The denominational

body will not seek to regulate the practices of the individual local churches. Also, and very importantly, because no local church has authority over another local church, the local churches acting collectively in the denominational body do not have ecclesiastical authority over the individual local churches. It would be illogical to argue that local churches can “pool” their respective authorities and give to the denominational body a different *type* of authority that the churches do not possess individually. This is an inconsistency in the reasoning of Berkhof (1939:592), who speaks of an “accumulation” of power in the Assemblies.

Secondly, local churches can be represented by elders in a limited sense (contrary to some historical Baptist practices and thought). This allows denominational bodies to properly be a fellowship of churches, and not just of the individuals who represent them. It has been shown above that elders do exercise a degree of rule and authority in the church. A polity of modified congregationalism for Baptists is therefore more appropriate and biblical, as it allows churches to be represented by their elders to a *limited degree*. This representation can still largely be reconciled with the general principles of congregationalism through the church issuing mandates to the elders on a particular issue before a decision, or by the church ratifying a decision already taken.

The conclusions of this section therefore challenge some historic Baptist strongholds. Firstly, the office of elder in scripture does exercise a rule in the local church, which rules out “pure congregationalism.” Secondly, Baptist churches can therefore be truly represented in a denominational structure to a limited degree. Baptist denominational structures must not be seen to be comprised of individuals, but local churches. The action of the denominational structure is the co-action of the local churches, not of individuals who belong to the churches.

3.4 LIBERTY

The general principle of liberty is extremely important when considering Baptist denominationalism. It is vital to have a correct understanding of the doctrines related to liberty, as they have a fundamental influence on how a Baptist denomination functions. This section therefore also forms a foundation for the discussion on Baptist identity in the next chapter.

A good case can be made for religious liberty to be the outstanding Baptist distinctive and contribution to modern civilization (Mullins, 1908:50; Vedder, 1907:415). This section focuses on three aspects of liberty, namely liberty of conscience, religious liberty and Christian liberty in order to understand the issue of liberty more comprehensively. This is critical to the framework for consistent Baptist denominationalism, as some Baptist groups use liberty as a justification for tolerating deviations from Scriptural norms.

3.4.1 Soul competency and liberty of conscience

3.4.1.1 Historical review

Many Baptists see soul competency as one of the basic principles from which many of the Baptist principles flow (Mullins, 1908:53). It is therefore extremely important to Baptist thought and doctrine.

Carroll (1913:12-18) describes soul competency as the fact that every person must give an account of themselves to God, and people are solely responsible for their decisions and actions before God.

Adams (1876:88) describes soul competency as “personal accountability” before God. No human authority should therefore “come between the conscience and its Maker” (Adams, 1876:90). Mullins (1908:106) states that every person has the right to read the scriptures for themselves, “untrammelled by human tradition”. Liberty of conscience therefore exists where men and women are free from persecution and coercion in matters of religious belief. In other words, liberty of conscience is seen as a right granted by society (including the state) to every person.

According to Carroll (1913:15-20), liberty of conscience flows from the concept of soul competency. He believed that neither government, nor parents, nor church may place a “restraint or constraint” upon the conscience of people. In this regard, it is clear that Carroll, in full agreement with the definition above, saw liberty of conscience as a right granted *by society* not to interfere with the conscience of people through persecution or coercion.

Regarding liberty of conscience, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 21, paragraph 2) says:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also (Lumpkin, 1969:276).

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is therefore clear that the conscience must be free to obey God, and is not to come under bondage to the doctrines and commandments of men.

The foundation of soul competency is the “natural liberty and power of acting upon choice” that God has given to all men (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 9,

paragraph 1; Lumpkin, 1969:257). Even though people, after the fall, are fallen creatures, they still retain this basic liberty. Nor does God's Sovereign decree of all events negate people's liberty. Chapter 3, paragraph 1 of the 1689 Confession of Faith stresses God's sovereign decree of all events, and yet indicates that the liberty of second causes, including a person's will, is not violated (Lumpkin, 1969:245).

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith refers to Romans 14:10b-12 as a key verse. It states that each person shall appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of himself or herself to God. The reasoning is as follows, and is a useful summary of the relationship between soul competency and liberty of conscience. Every person has a responsibility to walk before God (termed "soul competency") and to give an account of himself to Him. Because the issue involves the most fundamental and ultimate relationship (between God and man) and results in an ultimate destiny (heaven or hell), each person should be given the freedom by society to exercise this responsibility according to his or her conscience (termed "liberty of conscience").

The other early Baptist confessions therefore endorse and uphold liberty of conscience, indicating that people are to be free to follow their consciences in matters of religion (see, for example, The Standard Confession of 1660, article XXIV; Lumpkin, 1969:231). This position is substantially the same as that of the early General Baptists leaders.

At the same time, however, these Baptists practised church discipline and upheld Christian standards of holiness (Robinson, 1927:149-150) in their churches. This is critical to note, as it acts as a caution to those who use liberty of conscience to justify the toleration of sin in the church. This is explored in the following section.

3.4.1.2 Theological reflection

A matter of some importance is how the early Baptist applied this doctrine of soul competency and liberty of conscience in an ecclesiastical context. It is simply a matter of fact that the early Baptists, while contending strenuously for liberty of conscience, nevertheless insisted that in the church, certain doctrinal and moral standards were to be maintained. Someone joining a Baptist church had to hold to Baptist doctrine, and those sinning came under church discipline (Wills, 2000:5). They saw no contradiction between liberty of conscience and upholding moral or doctrinal standards in the church (Wills, 2000:11). The very authors of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith also saw no contradiction between asserting liberty of conscience on the one hand, and producing a confession of faith to be used in a church or denominational setting on the other. The question that arises is, on what basis they could do this? The answer is two-fold. Firstly, Baptist churches practised church discipline and separation for erring believers, not *persecution* (Wills, 2000:11). A person excommunicated from the church is free to join another group according to the dictates of their conscience. Their liberty of conscience is not necessarily undermined during the process of church discipline.

Secondly, the church is a voluntary organisation, and no-one should be coerced to join. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 26, paragraph 6) asserts that churches should comprise those who “*willingly consent to walk together*” (Lumpkin, 1969:285). However, when an individual professes to follow Christ and chooses to join a church, they come under the authority of scripture *as understood by that church*. Liberty of conscience is thus still maintained, as the individual has freely chosen to join the group.

The view of Roger (2003:83), that Baptists should “set aside our own definition of baptism in deference to the principle of freedom of conscience” is thus confused. It could be argued that believer’s baptism should be set aside on the basis of other principles, such as fundamental versus secondary issues. However, the principle of

freedom of conscience is not the correct basis to motivate this. Freedom of conscience must always be allowed, and is in fact upheld when membership in a church or denomination is voluntary. Therefore, in a denominational context, insisting on believer's baptism as a standard of membership, does not violate freedom of conscience in the least, as membership is voluntary.

3.4.1.3 Implications for Baptist denominationalism

Baptists insisted that liberty of conscience must be given to each person so that they can be accountable and walk before God according to their conscience. People must not be constrained by the dictates of the state or coercion in religious belief. This distinctive was therefore set as a reminder to the state not to interfere with people's conscience before God.

As mentioned, soul competency refers to the responsibility or accountability each person has before God. People are responsible for their own souls. Liberty of conscience refers to the right that must be given to each person *by society* to exercise this basic accountability and responsibility before God

There are a number of implications that are critical for Baptist denominationalism. Firstly, the doctrinal standards that pertain to the denomination must be explicitly based on scripture. Any confession of faith must demonstrate its fidelity to scripture. For a denomination or church to desire believers to subscribe to their beliefs simply because they say their beliefs are true, or because it is their tradition, usurps Christ's right to be Lord of the conscience.

Secondly, just as Scriptural standards in a local church do not violate liberty of conscience, so doctrinal standards in a denominational context do not compromise liberty of conscience in the local church. The principles are exactly the same. A denomination is a voluntary group. No church is coerced into joining it. A deviating church is removed from fellowship and membership, not persecuted. In both the local

church and the denomination, liberty of conscience is maintained for the individual believer and the church. *It has to be insisted that maintaining doctrinal and moral standards (as defined by the denomination), does not impact on the liberty of the participating churches as long as membership to that body is voluntary.* To believe otherwise is to fundamentally misunderstand the concept of liberty of conscience in an ecclesiastical context. As long as the denomination is voluntary and persecution is not the punishment for dissent, liberty of conscience is maintained (Waldron, 1989:14-15).

3.4.2 Religious liberty

The issue of religious liberty, a fundamental Baptist principle, is closely related to liberty of conscience and many of the essential features have already been covered in the previous section. In many ways, religious liberty is the application of liberty of conscience by the state.

3.4.2.1 Historical review

It must be emphasised that historically, the early Baptists were fervent defenders of religious liberty, and perhaps this was their greatest contribution (Mullins, 1908:50; Vedder, 1907:415). Verduin (1964) and Vedder (1969:221-222, 230) show how the Anabaptists (and later the Baptists), were denied religious liberty by the various state churches (both Roman Catholic and Protestant). It is the Baptists who most consistently maintained and practised religious liberty throughout their history.

The views of the early Baptists were unanimous regarding religious liberty and the state. Their views are captured accurately by the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, and for the sake of brevity, the main focus of this section will be on the witness of this Confession.

Chapter 24 of the Confession (Lumpkin, 1969:281-282) contains three paragraphs that deal with the civil magistrate. The first paragraph declares the divine ordination of government, but limits its function to the use of the sword for the defence of good and the punishment of evil. This paragraph must be seen in the light of the exclusion of the corresponding third paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith upon which much of the 1689 Confession is based. The Baptists who drafted the 1689 Confession generally used the wording of the Westminster Confession when they were in full agreement with it. However, in dealing with the issue of the civil magistrate, they deliberately excluded the paragraph of the Westminster Confession, which stated that the civil magistrate had authority to “suppress heresies” and ensure that the truth of God was “kept pure” (Waldron, 1989:29-293). This obvious omission indicates that the “evil” the Baptists had in mind in paragraph 1 of Chapter 24 related to maintaining civil peace and justice, and not religious truth or doctrine.

Most of the Baptists were not “anti-government,” however. The second paragraph of Chapter 24 allows for Christians to accept the office of the civil magistrate. The early Particular Baptists therefore strongly distanced themselves from the Anabaptist prohibition in this regard (Waldron, 1989:288-289). However, there are always exceptions to some of the general views expressed above. For example, some of the confessions maintained the Anabaptist distinctive of not allowing Christians to hold civil office (see, for example, 1610 Confession, Article 35; Lumpkin, 1969:112-113).

The third paragraph expresses the Christian’s general duty to be subject to the civil magistrate and to pray for them. All three paragraphs are phrased in a positive light, most likely to again counteract any association with the Anabaptist’s reputation of being “anti-government.”

This position is essentially the same as that held by the early General Baptists. The role of the king was limited to earthly causes. He was to deal with only civil transgressions such as theft, murder and adultery in terms of Romans 13. This formed their basis for religious liberty, which was to be extended to heretics, Jews

and Turks without distinction (Robinson, 1927:149-150). Many of the early Baptist confessions have a specific section to religious liberty or the civil magistrate, and uphold the general position of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (see The Standard Confession of 1660, Article XXIV, Article XXV; New Hampshire Confession of Faith, Article 16; Lumpkin, 1969:360-366).

3.4.2.2 Theological reflection

Romans 13:1-7 states that human governments are ordained by God and are His servants. Every person is therefore to be subject to them. However, this subservience is not unqualified. The state is the servant of God, and the scriptures delineate its sphere of authority and function, namely to promote “good” and punish “evil.” However, “good” and “evil” in this context must be qualified to mean maintaining general law and order and ensuring justice for all (Waldron, 1989:286). The main reason for this conclusion is that the instrument the state has been given to punish “evil” is a sword. While the church persuades, the state coerces with a sword (Brackney & Burke, 1990:24; Verduin, 1964:22). In other words, a sword is not an instrument to mould the conscience of people (Waldron, 1989:294), but to punish external acts of evil against others.

From a Baptist perspective, the governing principle in the matter is that the state must “preserve civil justice and peace and protect men from violence to their bodies and property” (Waldron, 1989:294). Therefore, the state must not only allow full liberty of conscience for each individual, but also allow general religious liberty for all people in terms of outward religious acts, communication, association and institutions, *as long as they do not jeopardise civil peace and justice*. Of course, “civil peace” and “justice” are terms that need to be carefully defined. From this Christian perspective, the church and state are therefore both servants under God, and must allow each other to operate in their respective spheres, with the word of God governing the relationship between the two.

The issue is further complicated, however, with the rise of the “secular” state, which will not allow the Christian Bible to determine the relationship between church and state, as this is said to unduly prejudice people of other religions. For example, a secular state may have a very different view on evangelism from the church. Some countries that profess to uphold religious liberty argue that the act evangelism (especially Christian evangelism), is a “public nuisance” because it could potentially be “emotionally scarring” to the individual. They could therefore restrict it. Christian groups believe that such restrictions inherently restrict religious liberty (Bates, 1945:303) and therefore liberty of conscience. However, these issues are not further dealt with in this section as they focus on the role of the state, and have little direct bearing on denominationalism.

3.4.2.3 Implications for Baptist denominationalism

Baptists contended strenuously for religious liberty so that they could establish churches in accordance with their understanding of scripture without persecution from the state.

Religious liberty is the right that the state and society must grant to all individuals to follow the dictates of their conscience. Religious groups are not to be coerced or persecuted. However, the state does need to enforce general law and order. The general rule is that the state must allow all acts of religion as long as civil peace and justice is not compromised.

Two implications for denominationalism need to be noted. Firstly, membership in any denominational structure or church must be voluntary. People or churches must not be coerced in any way to join a particular group, and those who dissent and withdraw from the group are not to be threatened with physical force or persecution.

Secondly, the early Baptists argued for religious liberty in order to have the freedom to *maintain their distinctive witness to scripture without persecution or harassment*

from the state (Adams, 1982:95, Nettles, 2001:9). The early Baptists did not join the other Christian denominations, but took the opportunity to establish their own churches and denominations. Importantly, they did not see this witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as threatening religious liberty. Membership in Baptist churches and associations was voluntary, and people could withdraw at any stage (Meredith, 2001:148). This means that maintaining New Testament faith and practice was a major objective of the early Baptists, and the concept of “liberty” did not detract from this objective. In fact, Baptists used their religious liberty to establish churches that insisted on and upheld doctrinal and moral standards.

3.4.3 Christian Liberty

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith has the most comprehensive statement on Christian liberty of all the early Baptist confessions, and this section therefore does a brief exposition of it, noting the theological reasoning. On the issue of Christian liberty, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is generally representative of early Baptist teaching on the subject.

3.4.3.1 Historical review

Chapter 21 of the 1689 Confession deals with the composition of Christian liberty, and its perversion (Waldron, 1989:254-255). Paragraph 1 describes Christian liberty mainly in terms of its spiritual dimensions, such as freedom from the guilt of sin, freedom from God’s wrath, freedom from the curse of the law and freedom from bondage to Satan and sin. Both Old Testament and New Testament believers enjoyed this freedom, although the New Testament believer’s enjoyment thereof is “enlarged” and “fuller.”

The third paragraph of Chapter 21 deals with the perversion of Christian liberty. Christian liberty is perverted when it is used to justify the practice of sin. The whole

objective of Christian liberty (as described in paragraph 1), is to free believers from the guilt and dominion of sin, not to allow them to freely indulge in sin. Believers are called to a life of holiness and obedience, although this will never be perfect in this life (see Chapter 13, paragraph 2). This understanding of Christian liberty is therefore entirely consistent with the Confessions testimony to church discipline against those who hold to serious “error” or “unholiness of conversation” (Chapter 26, paragraph 2, 5, 6 and 7; Vedder, 1907:236). The objective of church discipline is to rescue a professing believer from sin.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith uses Galatians 5:13-14 as a key proof text. It teaches that Christians have been called to liberty. However, this liberty should not be used as an opportunity to indulge the sinful nature, but rather to serve one another in love. Importantly, this love fulfils the *law* of God.

The first and most obvious point is that unbelievers do not enjoy the liberty spoken of in the text. It is a liberty purchased by Christ (Gal. 5:1), and only those united to Christ enjoy the benefits thereof.

The context indicates that this Christian liberty consists of a freedom from servile bondage to the law (Gal. 5:1), and by implication, the legalistic teachings of people on the law (see Gal. 4:17). A careful study of Galatians 5:13-14 therefore shows that Christian liberty is not without limits. It has clear boundaries. True liberty never leads to the indulgence of the sinful nature, nor the servile bondage to legalistic teachings, but rather to serving one other in love.

3.4.3.2 Theological reflection

The role of the state with reference to liberty of conscience and religious liberty has been outlined in the previous section. The role of the church can now be outlined with respect to Christian liberty. As noted above, Christian liberty does not consist in freedom to indulge sin or believe any doctrine. Consequently, Christ has mandated

the church to exercise discipline against professing believers who deviate significantly from the faith or who practise open sin. The church is therefore tasked to defend the faith (1 Tim. 6:20) and uphold Christ's moral values (Gal. 5:19-21). This does not conflict with Christian liberty, but rather protects Christian liberty, as sin and error lead people into spiritual bondage. The early Baptists were in full agreement with this (Maring & Hudson, 1965:10).

However, there are areas of legitimate concern regarding the actions of a church. For example, Colossians 2:11-23 is an extended appeal to believers not to let themselves become subject to the doctrines of men. Some of these doctrines concern eating, drinking and religious festivals (Col. 2:16, 20-22). A professing church teaching false doctrine can therefore bring true believers into a certain degree of bondage, as Christian liberty can be adversely impacted by false teaching. A tremendous responsibility therefore rests on a church to strive for purity of doctrine, so that believers can fully enjoy and realise their spiritual liberty. Doctrinal truths must therefore be shown to be faithful to scripture.

Also, churches need to differentiate between fundamental, essential doctrine on which it must insist and secondary issues where differing views can be accommodated in Christian love. Romans 14:1-4 is an example of such secondary issues, and has been discussed in a previous section. In other words, a church insisting that secondary issues are in fact issues of fundamental importance, or churches insisting on complete uniformity on all issues, can lead Christians into spiritual bondage.

It has to be admitted that the differentiation between fundamental and secondary issues can be difficult, and that some churches can make mistakes. However, this cannot be used as an excuse by the church to shrink from its task of defining what it believes are fundamental issues, and insisting on them. It must do so with humility and dependence on Christ. *But it must do so.* In the church's endeavour to defend the faith, Christian liberty is still essentially maintained even if mistakes are made in

differentiating essential from secondary doctrine, as churches are voluntary organisations and those in disagreement are free to leave and join with others of like mind.

The same principle holds true for a Baptist denomination. It cannot in the name of Christian liberty tolerate significant doctrinal error or moral sin in its midst. It would then cease to be Baptist, and Christian, for that matter.

3.4.3.3 Implications for Baptist denominationalism

Christian liberty consists in freedom from the guilt of sin, freedom from God's wrath, freedom from the curse of the law and freedom from bondage to Satan and sin. However, Christian freedom is not the freedom to indulge in sin, as sin brings bondage.

Two implications for denominationalism need to be noted. Firstly, Christian liberty is entirely consistent with church discipline and maintaining biblical standards. Doctrinal and moral sin brings about bondage. Church discipline is a means of drawing an erring Christian back into the liberty of Christ. Maintaining doctrinal and moral standards is not in conflict with Christian liberty, but essential to it.

Secondly, there is a need for a church or denomination to differentiate between primary and secondary issues. This again establishes the need for a church or denomination to have a confessional basis to set out clearly what these essential doctrines are. Also, some doctrines may not be considered essential for salvation, but essential for denominational unity and peace. For example, Baptist denominations have historically insisted on believer's baptism, although they have maintained that this doctrine is not essential to salvation.

However, it is very important for a denomination not to insist on secondary issues that the Bible clearly delineates as matters of indifference. It is not the intent of this thesis

to establish what these primary and secondary issues are, but rather to note that consistent denominationalism requires this to be done.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter reviews Baptists distinctives under the categories of authority, the church, and liberty. Each distinctive is explored to understand it correctly, and then implications for Baptist denominationalism are drawn. This list of implications is used in the following chapter to develop a framework for consistent denominationalism. It is not necessary here to repeat all the implications for denominationalism. Rather, a few main conclusions that challenge some popular, modern Baptist sentiments in the context of denominationalism are noted.

Firstly, the authority of scripture is paramount to any Baptist church or group. Any doctrinal controversy that potentially challenges this authority is of concern to Baptists. It is therefore entirely consistent for Baptists to express the inspiration, authority and sufficiency of scripture in the clearest terms. In addition, the relatively recent controversy of inerrancy is not irrelevant to the authority of scripture, and it is not bibliolatry for Baptists to take a position on it in their confessions. Although it is not the focus of this thesis, it is also argued that errancy views do negatively impact on the authority of scripture.

Secondly, Baptists have always had a creed. Some modern notions of the Baptist principle of “anti-creedalism” have been overstated. Baptists have been “anti-creedal” in the sense that scripture is the final and infallible authority, taking precedence over all creeds and confessions. Baptists have historically been confessional, however, stating clearly what they believed the scriptures taught, and using these confessions as a basis of fellowship. They did not see this as conflicting with the primacy of scripture. This means that it is biblical and consistent for any Baptist church or group

of churches to adopt a confession of faith and use the confession as a basis of fellowship.

Thirdly, the principle of regenerate church membership must impact on the standards that are applied to membership in a denominational group. It is entirely appropriate and biblical for Baptist groups to have clear doctrinal or moral standards that are consistent with scripture and a Christian testimony.

Fourthly, the more traditional views that Baptist denominational structures consist of individuals and are independent of the local churches are inconsistent with other Baptist principles and with scripture. A biblical understanding of the rule of elders and a modified congregationalism presents a consistent basis upon which Baptist denominational groups can consist of, and be under the control of, local churches represented by their elders. This is also consistent with the Baptist testimony to the primacy of the local church. A denominational body consisting of individuals not directly accountable to the participating local churches can sideline the local churches. Denominational bodies must facilitate and enhance local church ministry, not replace local churches.

Fifthly, while local churches in scripture are autonomous, this does not mean that they are entirely independent of other churches. Rather, the autonomy of local churches means that there is no organisational structure presented in scripture that exercises authority over the participating churches. The binding force for denominational groups is a voluntary spirit of co-operation to further the kingdom of Christ.

Sixthly, a biblical understanding of liberty of conscience and religious liberty is entirely consistent with a church or group of churches insisting on doctrinal and moral standards, and expressing these standards clearly in a confession of faith. Liberty of conscience is upheld by the fact that participation is voluntary, and churches or individuals are free to participate or withdraw, without fear of persecution. Christian

liberty, however, does warn that doctrinal and moral standards must differentiate between primary and secondary issues, and allow liberty where scripture does.

CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK FOR BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM

The rigorous debate around Baptist identity is reviewed and a resolution is proposed in this chapter. This provides some guidance for the development of a framework for Baptist denominationalism. It is critical that Baptist distinctives are harmonised and understood so that a Baptist denomination remains faithful to the identity and spirit of the Baptists.

This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings from previous chapters that crystallises into a framework of principles for the evaluation in the subsequent chapters.

4.1 BAPTIST IDENTITY

Baptist identity has been the subject of much debate. The intent of this debate is to find a Baptist distinctive that functions as a core value and is able to explain and interpret the other Baptist distinctives (Norman, 1997:34; Shurden, 1998:322). Some of the more popular formulations are noted in this section.

The importance of the issue of Baptist identity and its impact on Baptist denominationalism needs to be emphasised. As noted in Chapter One, different views of Baptist identity in a denominational body can result in completely different approaches to theological or practical challenges. The relatively recent withdrawal of the Southern Baptist Convention from the Baptist World Alliance and resultant controversy can be traced back to differing views of Baptist identity. As noted earlier,

the one group saw Baptist identity rooted primarily in liberty of conscience and freedom of individual churches to interpret scripture for themselves. They therefore accused the Southern Baptist Convention leadership of being un-Baptist in withdrawing on doctrinal grounds. The other group saw Baptist identity primarily rooted in the supremacy of scripture (see Estep, 1987:600, Mohler, 2003:4-5), and therefore argued that they were being consistently Baptist by seeking doctrinal orthodoxy (Norman, 2001:182; Wills, 2005:18). What needs to be noted is the significant influence that Baptist identity can and does have in interpreting the other Baptist distinctives. In other words, elevating a particular distinctive to be the basis for Baptist identity means that all the other distinctives (and what it essentially means to be Baptist), will be interpreted in the light of this core distinctive.

Each of the attempts noted below to establish a single Baptist distinctive as the basis for Baptist identity will not be evaluated individually in any detail, although some comments are made where appropriate. Rather, the proposals are evaluated collectively to show that the attempt to elevate a single distinctive is flawed.

4.1.1 Review of recent attempts to formulate a Baptist identity

4.1.1.1 EY Mullins: Soul competency

Mullins (1908:53) believed that the central and unique Baptist contribution is soul competency. From this unique identity, he derives other Baptist principles such as church democracy and the priesthood of all believers (Mullins, 1908:54-57). However, he is clear that soul competency does not mean that believers are free to believe anything. Rather, the criterion for truth is the word of God as interpreted through Christ without reference to human tradition (Mullins, 1908:166). Also, soul competency does not mean total moral freedom to do anything one wishes. The law of God is still binding on believers (Mullins, 1908:213). The Baptist historian McBeth

essentially holds to a similar position, stating that soul competency undergirds all the other doctrines of the Christian faith (Graves, 2000:13).

All that needs to be noted here is that although soul competency is touted as the core distinctive, it is immediately qualified by other biblical principles, such as the authority of the word of God, and the doctrinal and moral standards derived from it. In other words, soul competency can never stand on its own as the core value for Baptists, but is always complemented by other Baptist distinctives.

4.1.1.2 WB Shurden: *Freedom, liberty and individualism*

Shurden (1998:323-324) has argued for *freedom* and *individualism* as core components of Baptist identity. DeWeese (s.a.a) also lists liberty as the dominant emphasis and thrust of Baptists. Wills (2005:25) and Shurden (1998:332-324) note that a number of other Baptist theologians have had similar views.

Shurden, however, qualifies his view of freedom by insisting on establishing polarities in order to fully establish Baptist identity. For example, liberty needs to be complemented by loyalty, and freedom with responsibility (Shurden, 1998:324). This point is discussed later in this chapter, as it also shows that a single distinctive can never capture what it means to be Baptist. It must always be complemented by other distinctives.

4.1.1.3 W Rauschenbusch: *Experimental religion*

According to Rauschenbusch, experimental religion is the essence of what it means to be a Baptist. He believes that the “entire system is based on the new birth” (Hudson, 1984:23). He contended that Baptists have rebelled against dogmatism and ritualism, as they yearn for vital religion. Rauschenbusch further believes that union

among Baptists could not be based on creed, but that there could be a movement towards union based on experimental religion (Hudson, 1984:23-24).

These notions can be seriously challenged from scripture. Although Christianity is indeed based on the new birth (John 3:5), and religion must be experiential, the previous chapter has shown that Christianity is also creedal. It affirms the absolute truths revealed in scripture. To be without a creed is to cease to be Christian. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and truth by definition has content. Christian experience must always be tested and verified by gospel truths revealed in the word of God.

4.1.1.4 WT Whitley: The church

According to Whitley (1923:4), the “root idea” of Baptists is the doctrine of the church. He believes there are three principles that are key to the doctrine of the church for Baptists. These are firstly that it consists “wholly of people who have pledged themselves to Christ Jesus”; secondly, that they live the life the Christ desires, and thirdly, that they “win and train more disciples for His service” (Whitley, 1923:4). Baptist identity is therefore, according to Whitley, crystallised into the distinctive of regenerate church membership as evidenced by active discipleship.

It again needs to be noted that the root idea of the church is explained in terms of other Baptist distinctives. For example, Whitley describes the church as those who live the life that Christ desires. In other words, the church adheres to New Testament faith and practice, and submits to the authority of the scripture. Once again, the distinctive that is said to be the root idea is qualified and amplified with other Baptist distinctives.

4.1.1.5 WH Brackney: *Believer's baptism by immersion*

Brackney (1986:78-80) argues that “believer’s baptism by immersion was the functional essence of historic Baptist identity”. Believer’s baptism captures the principles of a voluntary personal relationship with Christ and a return to primitive New Testament Christianity. Beyond this core identity, Brackney (1986:81) believes that Baptists are “hopelessly fragmented”.

It is correct to identify believer’s baptism by immersion as the dominant practice of the early and modern Baptists. However, it is inaccurate to describe the *early* Baptists as hopelessly fragmented. It misses the point that the early Baptists, in order to be Christian, all subscribed to the fundamental truths of the faith. The early Baptists also adhered to other distinctives, such as liberty of conscience. Although modern Baptists may indeed be hopelessly fragmented, it may be as a result of moving away from historic Baptist distinctives and identity. In other words, it is methodologically unsound to use the current diversity amongst Baptists to conclude that they have always been so diverse. Many modern groups or churches may only bear the name “Baptist” for historic reasons. If they have so departed from historic Baptist distinctives, then it could well be argued that they should no longer be seen as Baptist.

4.1.1.6 GA Wills: *New Testament faith and practice*

Wills (2005:21-22) argues that Baptist identity before the twentieth century was rooted in faith and practice. He observes that membership to an association was based on doctrinal agreement. Other groups, such as Seventh Day Baptists, Mennonites and Brethren were not considered Baptists on the basis of their doctrinal differences (Wills, 2005:22). He notes that even those churches that did not financially support the Boards were still considered “Baptist” and allowed in membership with the associations. In other words, Baptist identity was not rooted in support for

programmes, but in similar doctrine and practice. Mohler holds a similar position (Mohler, 2003:4-5).

The previous chapter has shown that New Testament faith and practice was indeed a central aim of the Baptist movement. This cannot be denied without doing violence to the spirit of the early Baptists. The position of Wills must therefore be supported. The only point that needs to be made here, however, is that the term “faith and practice” hardly provides an identity for Baptists to distinguish them from the other denominations. All the other denominations also believed their faith and practice was also entirely consistent with the New Testament. It is rather *what* the Baptists believed New Testament faith and practice to be that distinguished them. For example, they understood New Testament faith and practice to include the final authority of scripture, regenerate church membership, believer’s baptism and religious liberty. In other words, distinctive Baptist faith and practice can be summarised simply by the distinctives that are described and discussed in the previous chapter. New Testament “faith and practice” does not elevate a single distinctive above the others as a core value.

4.1.2 Discussion on Baptist identity and resolution

The quest to find a single principle or core value that explains what it means to be Baptist is questionable. Shurden (1998:322-323) notes that many who initially start off with a single theme usually end up with a group of principles that characterise Baptists. In other words, the Baptist distinctive that is touted as the basis for Baptist identity in practice becomes a door leading to the other main Baptist distinctives (Shurden, 1998:323). The discussion above has proven this point.

Baptist identity is therefore best formulated as a group of distinctives that are mutually complementary, and together give Baptists their unique character. These distinctives are noted in the previous chapter, and the theological basis for these distinctives is noted.

The complementary nature of Baptist distinctives (which militates against a single principle to explain Baptists), can be further understood by considering a number of questions. For example, to those who see Baptist identity rooted in freedom, one simply needs to ask the question what the early Baptists wanted to accomplish with this freedom. The answer is that they wanted freedom to establish churches based on their understanding of scripture so that they could please Christ, both in their doctrinal beliefs and practices (Wills, 2005:21-23). Early Baptist churches therefore still exercised church discipline and insisted on doctrinal standards for church membership. In other words, their distinctive of “freedom” (religious liberty and liberty of conscience) did not detract from insisting on doctrinal standards, but rather facilitated it. Liberty, to the exclusion of New Testament faith and practice, cannot therefore be used to characterise Baptists.

In a similar vein, Baptist identity rooted in maintaining New Testament faith and practice resulted in the *doctrines* of religious liberty and liberty of conscience being recovered. Again, their adherence to doctrinal standards led them to insist on religious liberty for both doctrinal and practical reasons. It is for this reason that Shurden (1998:324) insists on establishing polarities in order to fully establish Baptist identity:

Not one but several polarities are necessary if one is to understand properly the Baptist identity: faith and freedom, freedom and responsibility, liberty and loyalty, the sovereignty of God and human freedom, independence and interdependence, and the individual and community.

It needs to be noted that Shurden’s polarities equate generally to Baptist distinctives. In other words, Baptist identity can only be established by a group of related distinctives.

It can therefore be concluded that Baptist denominationalism must satisfy each of the relevant Baptist distinctives as discussed in the previous chapter. A view of Baptist

denominationalism that is based on a single theme or principle that is used to interpret the other distinctives will distort what it means to be Baptist. In other words, the framework that is used to assess Baptist denominationalism in South Africa must satisfy each of the Baptist distinctives as discussed and evaluated in the previous chapter.

A second conclusion, however, is also warranted. The recent quest to establish a Baptist identity does point to the fact that in a Baptist denominational setting, a confession of faith in itself may not be enough to ensure that the group has a common understanding of their values. The confession may include all the Baptist distinctives as listed in the previous chapter, but because some of the distinctives are in apparent tension, the group needs a common understanding of how these tensions are to be accommodated and resolved in the practicalities of denominational life. Ideally therefore, a Baptist group, in addition to a confession, should also demonstrate how some of the distinctives apply to the current social and theological context. This will give guidance on how to resolve some of the seemingly competing distinctives, and further sharpen the unity and identity of the group.

4.2 A FRAMEWORK FOR BAPTIST DENOMINATIONALISM

This section takes the previous discussion and conclusions on Baptist distinctives and identity and integrates them into a framework for Baptist denominationalism. This framework, in order to be Baptist, must satisfy each of the Baptist distinctives in their own right, but also merge them so that apparent tensions can be reconciled into consistent denominationalism.

This section does not attempt to develop denominational Baptist polity down to the minutest detail. It rather develops key principles that together provide a framework for consistent Baptist denominationalism. Each principle is explained and justified in terms of the relevant distinctives, and draws on the findings of previous chapters and

sections. This section therefore is in essence a summary of the previous chapters. The principles are not listed necessarily in order of importance.

It also needs to be noted that this framework is developed to evaluate Baptist groups in South Africa, where currently religious liberty is upheld, and no-one is coerced to either join a Baptist group or persecuted if they withdraw. 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.

4.2.1 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.

4.2.1.1 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. A confession sets out the doctrinal standards of the group so that the member churches can make an informed choice whether to participate or not. *This thesis therefore insists that any Baptist denominational group has to be strongly confessional.* It is acknowledged that, as the denominational group progresses, new theological challenges will arise that could not be dealt with in the original confession. However, a meaningful, substantial confession can lay the foundation for considerable unity within the group to address new challenges as they arise.

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. A group's faithfulness to the revealed will of Christ in scripture can therefore be assessed by their articulated doctrinal standards.

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. The confession should contain enough theological distinctives to ensure that the group is sufficiently unified to pursue theological education. For example, it would be virtually impossible for an institution to train pastors without taking a position on Calvinism versus Arminianism and the charismatic gifts (Waldron, 1989:17). History has shown that these are types of issues that can divide

denominations or cause their programmes not to be supported. A position on these should therefore be articulated in the confession of faith. Failure to do so can result in churches within the denominational structure not supporting its own theological institutions. If there are doctrinal issues where diversity will be allowed, these should be clearly stated.

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

4.2.1.2 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. This thesis also shows 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 this thesis, it is 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. This thesis therefore argues that those Baptists who believe that the doctrine of inerrancy is tantamount to bibliolatry are mistaken.

This principle reflects the strong testimony of the early Baptists to the importance of upholding the absolute authority and integrity of scripture. Without this foundation, Baptists (and all Christians for that matter), have no other foundation for knowing Christ's will. It therefore protects the authority and Lordship of Christ over the denominational group.

4.2.1.3 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.

4.2.1.4 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.

4.2.2 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. The previous chapters show 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. Confessions of faith have historically tended to focus purely on doctrinal formulations. Some applications of these theological principles can express how the group understands the practical outworking and implications of these doctrines. These applications of doctrines can be included in the confession of faith of the group, or be articulated in another document. By way of example, doctrinal beliefs could be applied to more contemporary issues such as homosexuality, evolution, family values, and ecumenism.

In doing so, not only will the identity of the group be sharpened, but the relevance of the confessional and doctrinal statements (as noted above) will be facilitated.

4.2.3 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. Maintaining *fundamental* doctrinal standards ensures that the principle of regenerate church membership is upheld in the participating churches, as those deviating from the fundamentals of the faith are not giving credible evidence of regeneration.

The view of Wills (2005:21-23) is particularly apt and is quoted in full:

The motto for Baptist identity came from Amos 3:3: “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” Since Baptist identity was rooted in believing and practicing the same things, Baptist churches held that members who introduced false doctrine divided the denomination and relinquished any valid claim to be a Baptist. Baptist churches expelled them from membership as schismatics and errorists. Texas leader BA Copass summed up the Baptist position: “To withdraw fellowship from one who differs in matters of faith is not an attempt to stifle freedom, but only getting rid of one who does not belong to that body. Why should the body tolerate in its fellowship one who is teaching heresy? Such a thing would be moral suicide.”

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.

4.2.3.1 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).

As noted previously, the early Baptists in particular were careful to promote sincerity and truthfulness in such matters. Their confessions often start or end with a sincere declaration that they believe and uphold the doctrinal statements contained therein. A Baptist denominational body should introduce procedures to ensure that members meaningfully subscribe to the doctrinal standards on an ongoing basis.

4.2.3.2 Gracious but firm separation

It has already been demonstrated 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.

4.2.4 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. This thesis shows that there are biblical examples of ministry accountability to a group of churches.

One of the main conclusions of this research is 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.

4.2.4.1 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.

4.2.4.2 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.

4.2.4.3 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.

4.3 REFLECTION

A crucial milestone has been reached in this research. 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 5

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.

5.1 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 research 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.

5.1.1 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.

5.1.1.1 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).

5.1.1.2 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.

5.1.1.3 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.

5.1.2 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.

5.2 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.

5.2.1 Strength of the confessional basis

5.2.1.1 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, 1933b: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.

5.2.1.2 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 2. 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 2: 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.

5.2.1.3 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.

5.2.1.4 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.

5.2.2 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.

5.2.3 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.

5.2.3.1 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.

5.2.3.2 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.

5.2.4 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.

5.2.4.1 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).

5.2.4.2 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 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 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.

5.2.4.3 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.

5.3 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 6

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.

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

6.1.1 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, 2010**b**).

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, 2010**a**).

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, 2006**b**: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, 2006**b**: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).

6.1.2 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.

6.2 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.

6.2.1 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]).

6.2.1.1 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.

6.2.1.2 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.

6.2.1.3 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.

6.2.1.4 *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.

6.2.2 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.

6.2.3 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.

6.2.3.1 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.

6.2.3.2 *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.

6.2.4 Local church participation

6.2.4.1 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.

6.2.4.2 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.

6.2.4.3 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.

6.3 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 7: EVALUATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF BAPTIST CHURCHES OF SA

7.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

7.1.1 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).

7.1.2 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).

7.2 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.

7.2.1 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).

7.2.1.1 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 research, 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.

7.2.1.2 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, 1991b: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, 1991b: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.

7.2.1.3 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, 1991a: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.

7.2.1.4 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.

7.2.2 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 research.

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).

7.2.3 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.

7.2.3.1 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.

7.2.3.2 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.

7.2.4 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 research. 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.

7.2.4.1 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.

7.2.4.2 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.

7.2.4.3 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.

7.3 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 3 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 3: Key findings of the comparative evaluation

	BUSA	SOLA 5	FBCSA
1. Strongly confessional			
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
2. Some application of principles	Weak	Strong	Strong
3. Meaningful adherence to doctrinal standards			
3.1 Procedures to ensure regular compliance	Weak	Strong	Strong
3.2 Gracious but firm separation	Moderate	Strong	Strong

	BUSA	SOLA 5	FBCSA
4. Local church participation			
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 thesis 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 research 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 research 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 research 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 co-operate 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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