

SHAPING THE AUSTRALIAN BAPTIST MOVEMENT

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(go to end of document for notes)

'Baptists have never known how to deal with history'. This claim by New Zealander Martin Sutherland is certainly true of Baptists in Australia. We vaguely realise that a sense of origins is important, but we have little vision for history in our theology. As Sutherland puts it, Baptists are always wanting to return to first principles, '...to reinvent ourselves in the awkward space between Gospel and evolving culture- perhaps that is what it is to be truly "Baptist"'.(2) 'Down-under' Baptists are not alone in this attitude. British theologian Paul Fiddes has recently observed:

It seems to be a mark of Baptist life to adapt to the present and constantly seek to reinvent itself, which at best can be seen as openness to the Spirit of God, and at worst, as a neglect of the lessons which the Spirit has wanted to teach the church during its history.(3)

The contemporary Australian Baptist, poised on the threshold of a new millennium, is most conscious of change. We rightly are passionate about responding creatively to our own time and place. But any reinvention of our church should not ignore our past. Even in our own brief history Australian Baptists have been 'reinvented' more than once. We must try to deal with our history: not to be controlled by it, but to hear the stories and, perhaps, to learn the lessons. We are best equipped to face the future if we know who and what has made us who we are.

But who are we? Who exactly is an Aussie Baptist? If we were asked to sit with an artist and help construct an 'Identikit' picture of an Aussie Baptist, what would we suggest? More importantly, perhaps, what would others say?

The latter is more easily answered. The media instantly select the 'Baptist' label to depict a dogmatic, 'bible-bashing' religious bigot; a narrow and straight-laced 'wowsler' who is grimly opposed to the main traditional pleasures of the typical Australian male: beer, gambling and sex. We do not recognise ourselves in this stereotype, but it persists.

What has given rise to this perception? Have we been too conservative, too narrow, too dogmatic, too zealous, too boring? Whatever the reason, we often are the church that is ridiculed and it is a curiosity to critics when someone like our urbane President Tim Costello is clearly identified as a Baptist minister!

But would our 'insider' attempts to generalise about Australian Baptists be any more accurate? A typical Aussie Baptist, we might claim, whilst informal or 'laid back' in style, is theologically and socially

conservative, evangelistic, with a deep commitment to global missions. The same conservative Aussie can be innovative, pragmatic and adaptable, but may also be insular and independent. This Baptist is likely to be generous and compassionate but ready to mock the 'tall poppies' in our church or society. Yet, as these characteristics are listed, innumerable exceptions suggest themselves and underline the hazards of trying to characterise a dynamic and diverse people. Regional variants are greater today than ever before, many are far more sophisticated than this portrait implies, some are oriented towards social justice issues whilst others are avowedly a-political.

To understand the contemporary Australian Baptist we need more than stereotypes and speculations. Social and demographic studies can be helpful.

For example, Baptists have always been a minority group: 2.10 % of the population in 1881 to 1.66% in 1996 with a peak of 2.37% in 1901. The census figures (1996) of 295,178 have to be compared with official denominational membership figures (1998) of 63,553 with 826 churches. Church membership statistics show considerable variation from the numbers identifying themselves as Baptist: between 1986 and 1991 membership rose only 4.3% but attendances grew by 16.8%. Church life surveys suggest only about half who attend Baptist churches are members. The average size of Baptist congregations is larger than all other denominations except Pentecostals and Catholics.

Our current profile largely matches the general population in age and education though 8.7% of Baptists are university educated compared with 7.7% of the general population. There are fewer Baptists earning high incomes compared with the total population and as to occupations Baptists are over represented in the areas of wholesaling, retailing and community services.(4)

This data provides a snapshot of Baptists today. But what has made us like this?

Clearly our first response is likely to be dominated by more recent forces: we may think of charismatic renewal or globalisation. But there are continuities taking us back to our beginnings in this ancient continent and, indeed, back to the earlier history of the Baptist movement. Many of these more distant forces have also shaped our life today. This attempt to identify the shaping forces must be selective and tentative: it is a personal reading of our story and needs dialogue with others for more of the truth to emerge.

Some obvious factors may be quickly cited: developments in Protestant evangelicalism generally; British Baptist traditions in all their varieties and changes; a range of successive theological movements including liberalism, Christian socialism, neo-orthodoxy and its successors; pietism, especially the Keswick holiness traditions; the missionary dynamic; from America: revivalism, millenarianism and fundamentalism; ecumenism; church growth theories; radical discipleship movements; a revival of Reformed Protestantism and the charismatic renewal movement. Some of these have been of marginal or temporary impact. Most have been derived from 'overseas' though usually adapted with an Australian pragmatism.

But if Emerson was right, that there is properly no history, only biography, then we must also emphasise the role of influential individuals. A small denomination is obviously impacted by strong and capable people, although it is important to stress that the ordinary 'little people', especially women, have contributed steadily to Baptist life and should not be lost from our historical memory.

II

By the 1830s, when Baptists began, colonial religion had established a clear pattern. On the one hand were the official chaplains, the 'moral policemen' of the colony, but on the other hand, there was emerging an alternate religious presence. Baptists became a part of this 'unofficial' evangelical movement and were welcomed as a sign of a maturing religious society in Sydney Town.⁽⁵⁾ But Baptist numbers were destined to remain small both because of their lateness in commencing and because, with some few exceptions, they refused to accept state aid which, from 1836, most denominations enjoyed.

This minority status of Baptists in Australia contains an important clue for our history. Dr David Bollen argued that Baptists, as a minority, have struggled with their identity in Australia: at times of prosperity, they adopted a confident and liberal denominational outlook; at times of pressure, they reverted to a closed sectarian stance. Often our attitudes to baptism and church membership issues reflected this tension.⁽⁶⁾ Whilst the details of Bollen's thesis may be debated, he has stated an important point: Australian Baptists have repeatedly revealed either a sectarian outlook or a more open denominationalism, at times they have tried to do both at the same time!

This is in part the legacy of the mix of British Baptists who established the first churches in the different Australian colonies. The end of the 18th century was a time of dramatic change in British Baptist churches: an outpouring of undenominational evangelical religion had caused many sober Baptist Calvinists to re-think their theology of church and mission; new fledgling organisations for mission among the 'heathen' and at home were emerging. Tensions back in England, as these new movements were developing, proved to be disastrous when shipped to Australia. Thus the early story generally is of unplanned beginnings, successive schisms (often over Calvinism or terms of membership and communion), problems of distance, lack of leadership and resources. A sense of frustration and neglect from 'home' dominates earliest memories.

The variety of Baptist traditions may be illustrated by our pioneers in Australia. In John McKaeg and John Saunders in Sydney, Henry Dowling in Tasmania and David McLaren in Adelaide we have some good representative types of colonial Baptists. These four introduce us to some of the variants of nineteenth century British Baptist life which were transplanted to the religiously unpromising soil of Australia.

John McKaeg, conducted the first Baptist service in Sydney at the Rose and Crown Inn on 24 April 1831. An eccentric and unstable Scottish preacher, whose one pastorate at Bingley, Yorkshire, had ended in disaster, McKaeg arrived in Sydney, unheralded and unknown.

McKaeg conducted the first service of believer's baptism in Woolloomooloo Bay on 12 August 1832, a source of amusement to the vulgar crowd who gathered. But a committee of various denominational traditions supported McKaeg, a site was granted by the governor, plans for the erection of a Baptist chapel were made and 50,000 bricks were purchased.

But McKaeg, with a reputation for being an alcoholic, failed spectacularly. His business of 'tobacco, snuff and cigar manufactory' collapsed. He was placed in prison for debt and tried to commit suicide.(7)

Apart from his unique moral failures, McKaeg represents one strand of the Australian Baptist story. There have been many sincere, vigorous evangelists; colourful, emotional, rough at the edges, aggressive preachers who have pioneered in difficult situations with great courage and reached people that the more sophisticated could never touch.

McKaeg's successor and the effective founder of our churches in Australia was John Saunders (1806-59) who serves as a different Baptist model: a thoughtful and educated evangelical, missionary in outlook, liberal in churchmanship and deeply involved in the social issues of his society. He came in response to a request from Baptists in Sydney who were disenchanted with McKaeg. Encouraged and commissioned, though not supported, by the Baptist Missionary Society, Saunders arrived in 1832 and became the first pastor of the Bathurst Street Church which was founded in 1836.(8)

Saunders 'reinvented' the Baptist cause, being widely honoured for his work as a temperance leader in a society almost destroyed by the excesses of alcohol. Saunders was also active in protests against the barbarities of the convict system and participated vigorously in the debates over education in the settlement.

His missionary commitment was well known and he demonstrated a deep compassion for aborigines. He was a founder member of the Aborigines' Protection Society, supported the 'German' Mission to Aborigines and engaged in courageous advocacy of justice for the aboriginal people. When public clamour was reaching fever pitch, just prior to the trials following the Myall Creek massacre late in 1838, Saunders was outspoken. Historian Henry Reynolds described Saunders' sermon as 'one of the most eloquent presentations of humanitarian doctrine' from the period. In the context of the times Saunders made a humane and courageous stand.(9)

In his church he developed an open and accepting community with membership open to all true believers, irrespective of their denomination. Whilst this reflected the dire need of Sydney for an evangelical Protestant church it was also typical of his general spirit. Not all his successors at the Bathurst Street church were as open as Saunders and a more aggressive denominationalism became common, as early as the 1850s.(10)

A different tradition was represented by the Strict and Particular Baptist Henry Dowling (1780-1869) who arrived in Hobart on 2 December 1834, the day after Saunders landed in Sydney. He represents

those who retained their more rigid Calvinism, and had strict or 'closed' views about communion and church membership.(11)

Dowling established services in Launceston and Hobart and also received government funding to act as a religious instructor to penal gangs. Despite his strict beliefs he became widely respected by all.

Others continued this tradition but these preachers stood for the remoteness and rigidity of hyper-Calvinism at a time when Australian Baptists were generally moving towards evangelical tolerance and unity. Only a few tiny Strict and Particular congregations linger on today.(12)

There were few General Baptists among the earliest Baptist leaders but one sect well represented was the Scotch Baptist. This was not simply a national description, but rather a set of beliefs, emphases and practices which differed from 'English' Baptists: leadership by a plurality of lay elders, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (commonly led by a lay leader), prayers and exhortation by 'brethren' during worship. Church decisions needed to be unanimous and not determined by a majority vote, a practice which, ironically, often led to schisms.(13)

David McLaren (1785-1850), father of the famous preacher Alexander, was manager from 1837 of the SA Colonization Company in Adelaide for George Fife Angas, a fellow-Baptist and one of the founders of the colony. McLaren, driven by an overwhelming sense of duty, was a 'Scotch' Baptist and the first Baptist preacher in Adelaide.(14) In the early years of Baptist work there were many Scotch Baptists, especially in Adelaide and Melbourne. Many joined the Churches of Christ movement when it was established in Australia.

This rich mix, of open 'English' Particular Baptists, Strict Calvinists, Scotch Baptists, a few General Baptists, to say nothing of Plymouth Brethren, all came together under the hot Australian sun. Traditional differences were gradually absorbed into a rich diversity of belief and life in one Baptist denomination expressed in state Unions and by 1926 in a national Union. But elements of all these traditions shaped the Aussie Baptist movement: the rough evangelist, the liberal evangelical, the doughty Calvinist and the grim, unsmiling but dutiful lay leader.

III

The 1850s ushered in a period of unprecedented change and growth in the Australian colonies. The most significant event was the discovery of gold in rich deposits, especially in New South Wales and Victoria. Between 1851 and 1861 the population of the colonies almost trebled to 1,151,947. The impact was especially dramatic in Victoria where the population of Melbourne went from 23,000 in 1851 to 123,000 in a decade.

Churches from this period onwards were marked not only by the transported faith and religious systems brought by the migrants but generally by a growing determination to be 'Australian' in their religious life. Sectarian rivalries were linked to the new opportunities for wealth and social advancement.

Controversies over education funding were linked with traditional disputes over the question of state aid to religious denominations. The churches influenced colonial life through sabbatarianism, revivalism, reactions to a critical rationalism and traditions of personal and family piety.

As Baptist churches grew a more educated and cultured leadership was sought though the older traditions persisted. Some general features and individuals of the period may be briefly noted.

(1) An oft-remarked feature of Australian religious life was its imitative quality. Baptist churches, for example, were just like churches back 'home' in Britain. The desire to reproduce in a strange environment the remembered security of 'home' is understandable, but certainly the reliance on the 'home' churches for preachers, educators, hymnbooks and most aspects of institutional life was remarkable. But, as Hugh Jackson shrewdly commented, 'To us the general imitativeness of colonial religion may seem to express lack of originality. But originality was not the need of this generation. Reassurance was'.(15)

But for how long was this reassuring dependence on 'home' to last? In the last decade of the century there were signs of wanting a clear Australian identity in churches. In 1888 visiting preacher Dr Alexander McLaren (son of our Scotch Baptist pioneer David) visited Melbourne to help celebrate the Jubilee of services in that colony. He urged churches to develop a 'Congregationalism redolent of the soil': the Victorian Baptist Fund and the College were the first signs of this.(16) Federation of the colonies intensified this desire. What to be an Australian church was never quite so clear.

(2) Perhaps it is in the 'bush' that Baptists imagined themselves coming closest to realising this quest to be Australian. Indeed, the term 'bush baptist' is a slang expression whose origin is lost. The Macquarie Dictionary defines it as 'a person of doubtful religious persuasion', or 'a person of vague but strong religious beliefs, not necessarily associated with a particular denomination'. (17)

Why would a tiny minority denomination be selected for the slang phrase? Stuart Piggin has noted.

A missionary with the Bush Missionary Society (formed in 1857) reported in 1871 that Spurgeon's sermons were more popular in the Australian bush than any others: they created most interest and seemed to do most good, perhaps because they were cast in an earthy style which would presumably appeal to bush folk. These sermons...were read at house meetings in bush settlements every Lord's Day morning.(18)

Were Spurgeon's sermons, and the informal groups of readers found scattered through the bush, the origins of 'bush baptist'?

Certainly, baptisms in creeks or dams always attracted local interest, as numerous stories indicate. Worship in the bush could be different. Here is a description of worship in 1849 at the Union chapel (Baptist and Congregational) at McLaren Vale (named after David):

No place of worship in all Christendom could have been more bare and unadorned. A barnlike building, the thatch the only ceiling, broad square windows to let in the light to waken sleepers, and a very shaky deal structure was the pulpit. There were two square pews with doors which were thought much of by the two families who sat at them, two benches with arms and backs occupied by the families next in honour, while ordinary folk sat on slabs of wood propped up on bricks. ...But if the place was primitive, the people were also. The drone of the singing, the waving of the peppermint gum branches to keep away the flies, the minister's little boy on the pulpit step catching flies by the dozen by that slow movement of the hand peculiar to the young colonial, the old fashioned toilets, and the dogs!! Very cheerful chat used to go on outside the door before and after the service...(19)

This description also reminds us, incidentally, of the power of worship, even in such primitive circumstances, to shape a people's faith and identity.

Then there were the bush evangelists and church planters, men like T H Jagers (d. 1919) in NSW (20); George Slade (1825-90) and F J Wilkin (1855-1940) (21) in Victoria; David Badger (1827-1890)(22) in South Australia and William Kennedy (1868-1929)(23) in Western Australia.

Well into this century, evangelists and church planters or 'home missionaries' have served in the Baptist cause. Their influence on the shape of Baptist life in regional Australia has been crucial.

(3) But Australia was destined to become one of the most urbanised populations in the modern world and it was in the cities that powerful denominational leaders, both ministers and lay people, were generally located. During the 19th century Australian Baptists produced many successful businessmen whose wealth and generosity contributed to the denomination's expansion. Some served in the colonial parliaments, in an era before party-politics as we know them had evolved. Simply to list selected names can be tiresome, but the cumulative impression is significant.

How did they shape Australian Baptists? By providing models of 'success' in the larger world and so giving status and 'respectability' to a small minority group, as well as helping in more direct ways by their generosity. They also provided business leadership in establishing and maintaining various denominational funds as well as leading in other administrative ways in church and Union.

In South Australia there was a remarkable group, including Sir Charles Goode (1827-1922), George Swan Fowler (1839-96), John Darling (1831-1905) (his son Joseph captained Australia in cricket) and James Alexander Holden (1834-87) (whose name is preserved in the Holden car).(24)

In New South Wales there was William Buckingham (1854-1928) and Sir Hugh Dixson (1841-1926), tobacco manufacturer.(25) In Queensland there was a remarkable cluster of influential and community-minded Baptist leaders who evidenced a liberality of spirit and an interest in public affairs. Four of the first twelve mayors of Brisbane, for example, were Baptists. Seven served in either the upper or lower house of the Queensland parliament during the nineteenth century.(26)

In Victoria there was, again, a group of merchants and businessmen of considerable prestige. These included C J Ham (1837-1909), who was mayor of Melbourne in 1881-2 and also in the Legislative Council (1882-1904), J M Templeton (1840-1908) who helped establish the National Mutual Life Association. William McLean (1845-1905) was a leading Baptist layman who was damaged financially in the great collapse of the 1890s but remained a key figure in all Baptist enterprises. J M Bruce was yet another very successful merchant whose son Stanley became Prime Minister of Australia.(27)

In Tasmania the key lay figures undoubtedly were William (1820-92) and Mary (1811-1903) Gibson, graziers who personally brought out students from Spurgeon's College to be pastors and built several Baptist chapels in Tasmania.(28)

(4) But the denomination was even more powerfully shaped by its leading ministers. In South Australia the old sectarian tensions among Baptists were overcome by men like Silas Mead (1834-1909) who founded the Flinders Street Church in Adelaide and was the driving force behind the formation of the SA Baptist Association and the establishment of Australian Baptist Foreign missions, with the SA society being formed in 1864. In many ways Mead was the outstanding Australian Baptist of the nineteenth century. He was one of a group of 19th century leaders who by their long pastoral service in strategic churches acquired a quasi-episcopal power in the denomination.(29)

William Whale (1842-1903), pastor at what became the Brisbane Tabernacle for eighteen years (1885-1903) was Brisbane's leading Nonconformist clergyman of the period. Whale, though a proud Spurgeon's College man, was a well known social reformer. He advocated workers' rights during the bitter labour disputes of 1890 and became president of an arbitration committee during the 1895 bootmakers' strike. His early background as a worker in a brass foundry meant that Whale retained strong links with the working class. Not too many Baptist pastors have been as successful in this.(30)

In Victoria there were many influential pastors. John Ham (d 1852) was the first pastor of Collins Street and of special interest is Ham's involvement in the contemporary debates about the aboriginal people. Baptists started the Merri Creek school for aboriginal children in 1845. Despite early encouragements the school failed, not least because of an inability to understand the aboriginal culture. His successors at Collins Street included the evangelist but disgraced James Taylor (1814-96), the outstanding scholar James Martin (1821-77) and Samuel Chapman (1831-99) who was probably the leading Baptist preacher of the colonial period. The first principal when the Victorian College was established in 1891 was W T Whitley (1861-1947).(31)

All these, and many others, helped shape the colonial church in Australia.

(5) In the earliest times of settlement the role of women was clearly limited. One way women could have an impact was as a teacher or a writer. In South Australia Matilda Jane Evans (1827-1886) combined these two roles after the death of her pastor-husband in 1863. Using the pseudonym of Maud Jeanne Franc she wrote fourteen novels, numerous poems and essays. Many of the novels first appeared as serials in Baptist papers. These stories contained much religious and temperance teaching

but also included realistic descriptions of colonial life. The power of these and similar stories to influence a church should not be underestimated.(32)

There were, of course, the pioneer women missionaries, the 'five barley loaves'. The best remembered is the redoubtable Ellen Arnold (1858-1931), the first missionary to serve with an Australian Baptist society. Her 'crusade' after return from India because of ill health was the catalyst for the recruitment of her four women colleagues. These women established Baptist mission work and their successors have created a remarkable story of mission work conducted by Australian Baptist women.(33)

Equally remarkable was the evangelistic ministry of Emily Baeyertz (1842-), a converted Jewess. Baptised in the Aberdeen Street Church, Geelong she preached to large evangelistic meetings with considerable success in Victoria and South Australia before embarking on an international ministry.(34)

Perhaps the most remarkable woman of them all was Cecilia Downing (1858-1952). Active on Baptist committees she was also interested in national and international affairs. She served, for example, as long term member of the WCTU (president, 1912-15) and of the Travellers' Aid Society but was best known to Melbourne as the president of the Housewives' Association. Historian Dr Judith Smart judges that she 'was unquestionably one of the most influential women of her time in Australia'.(35)

Our churches have continued to be shaped by many faithful women in our communities.

(6) The missionary commitment of Australian Baptists is also noteworthy. Here let me make only three points. The missionary society has been the most important unifying force among Australian Baptists; for much of our history it has been the one genuinely national task we have shared. Second, the 'reflex' impact of missions on Baptist churches is to be noted. Zeal for overseas missions leads to zeal for mission at home. Third, the Baptist contribution to interdenominational missions and agencies has been out of all proportion to our size as a denomination.

(7) There can be no doubt that Australian Baptists were deeply influenced by C H Spurgeon (1834-92).(36) Spurgeon's printed sermons were widely distributed, often becoming the sermon in many an outback gathering, as we have noted. Spurgeon in this tabloid form had a remarkable impact.

Of course many of Spurgeon's sermons were preached by others, not always with acknowledgement. Rev Milton Warn recalls a limerick:

*There was a young man named Spurgie
Who was not very keen on liturgy
But his sermons were fine,
I use them as mine,
As do most of Australia's clergy.(37)*

Baptist chapels were built as 'Tabernacles' with Greek architecture in emulation of Spurgeon's famous chapel, notably in Brisbane, Hobart, Newcastle and Launceston.

But a major source of his influence was through pastors trained in his college. By 1887 some 44 Spurgeon's men had come to Australasia, by far the largest group from any British college. In 1885 every church in Tasmania was occupied by a Spurgeon's man. The first to come was Frederick Hibberd to NSW in 1863 but the best known internationally was the distinguished preacher and essayist F W Boreham(1871-1959).

Australians did not generally follow Spurgeon's Calvinism or even his general Puritan emphasis, although many Australians supported Spurgeon in his stand against liberalism among English Baptists in the downgrade controversy.

When the NSW College was commenced in 1916 it was clearly based on the Spurgeon's College model. The tradition that the College and the NSW Union were 'Spurgeonic' flowed from a continuing dominance of people like C J Tinsley and W Cleugh Black who stressed evangelism as the key role of the pastor and the churches. Thus, the Spurgeonic tradition among Australian Baptists largely came to mean unashamed and powerful evangelistic preaching. But there can be no doubt about the influence of Spurgeon on Australian Baptists.

IV

Stuart Piggin asserts that in the period 1914-59 Baptists were in the vanguard of Australian evangelicalism, especially in NSW where they possessed a 'glorious trinity in Morling, the archetypal college principal, C J Tinsley, the archetypal pastor, and John Ridley, the archetypal evangelist'.(38)

G H Morling (1891-1974) who, for the remarkable period of forty years served the NSW College now named after him, had a mystical emphasis, drawing on a rich variety of spiritual traditions. He had a deep commitment to 'doctrinal-experimental truth' and believed this was his distinctive work in both College and church. He taught the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in both an informed and inspiring way. His balanced, non-controversial approach, coupled with an endearing other-world eccentricity, was a factor in the NSW Union experiencing a cohesive period and unparalleled growth.(39)

C J Tinsley (1876-1960) was another remarkable figure in Australian Baptist history. His great life's work was in the Stanmore Church where he was pastor for forty years and which became a vigorous centre for pastoral evangelism. He was a strong influence on evangelists such as John Ridley and Wilfred Jarvis.(40)

But whilst NSW did rapidly become the largest Baptist Union in the 20th century, Australia is more than one state! Two very different Victorians may be cited as variants from the 'archetypal' NSW Baptists: T E Ruth and J H Goble.

T E Ruth (1875-1956), small in stature and an eloquent orator, served Collins Street from 1914-22. His pastorate must rank as one of the most colourful and controversial in Australian Baptist history. He became the leading spokesman among Protestant clergy for British imperialism during the time of the Great War, defending Australian involvement in the war and leading a vigorous campaign advocating compulsory conscription. This led to a well publicised sectarian conflict with the influential Irish Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix.(41)

West of the city was J H Goble (1863-1932) who exercised a remarkable ministry in Footscray for almost 36 years. His Sunday School with 845 members was the largest in Australia. His working class loyalties were retained, and he was outspoken against unemployment, attacked jingoism and compulsory military training. He became the first President of the Baptist Union of Australia. After his death the citizens erected a life-sized statue which still stands on the Geelong Road, Footscray, a unique tribute for a Baptist pastor in our country. (42)

These, and numerous others, could be cited in order to illustrate one very simple point. It was possible to be a true Baptist without being conservative in theology and to be involved in public life in ways other than in evangelism.

In 1959 most Baptists of all persuasion supported Billy Graham's visit at a time that Stuart Piggin thinks is the closest Australia has ever come to revival. The influence of the Graham crusades, especially the first, was immense. It brought a new confidence to the churches and many outsiders entered our churches.(43)

But the Graham Crusade proved to be the end rather than the beginning of church renewal and the sixties quickly proved to be a challenge for all churches. That decade in North America and Europe was a time of sudden and unexpected religious upheaval. The Australian experience was similar although historian David Hilliard has commented about Baptists during this era:

Relatively small in number, less likely to affirm the secular world, and strongly conversionist in their religious outlook, they were more successful than other denominations in holding on to what they had.(44)

I suspect we felt the impact of the times in a more selective and regional way. In any case, we did not always manage to 'hold on'.

Five influences across the last few decades may briefly be noted.

(1) Americanisation has continued to shape much of our culture generally, not least in our churches. There has been a shift from a British Protestant culture to an American Protestant culture.(45) This was innocently expressed by a Queensland correspondent to The Australian Baptist who commented on the 1962 Baptist Hymn Book: 'It may be all right in England where the people seem to me stiff and starchy but it doesn't seem to suit our Australian character. I wonder if we should have gone to America for our

Hymn Book'.(46) Sadly, when an interdenominational Australian Hymn Book was produced, Baptists held aloof from the project.

Popular theology is now largely disseminated through American publishing houses and this is linked with American-produced music, film, radio and television. Youth programmes, theological teacher exchanges, evangelistic approaches and Christian education have all been influential.

Certainly every state was attracted to Southern Baptist models of education in the All Age Sunday School, and in co-operative budgets. We often asked for help and it has been given generously.

Continuing British influence has, however, also been important; for example, several Australian theological teachers have undertaken postgraduate study in Britain. Moreover, the European influence through migrants and through Rüsclikon has been significant with several graduates serving in theological teaching or pastorates. This latter has made us more receptive to older Anabaptist traditions.

Whilst there is much contemporary seeking after a 'dinkum' Aussie theology and practice it is probably true that much of our life remains imitative.

(2)Fundamentalism has also continued to have an impact; or perhaps it would be clearer to say, the tensions among American evangelicals have had their echoes here. Independent Baptist churches, another example of American influence, have been with us from the 1960s and are self-avowedly fundamentalist.(47)

There are examples, however, of fundamentalist influence in Union life in most states. In Queensland, for example, the present College principal has concluded in his doctoral thesis that, during the principalship of Dr Ted Gibson, the college's 'theological stance was changed from moderately conservative to aggressively fundamentalist'.(48) Clearly many supported the changes and some from other states were attracted by what the college had to offer.

The impact of conservative Bible Colleges, independent 'faith' missions and fundamentalist-type literature on our churches is significant.

Our conclusion, then, is simply that fundamentalism has shaped the identity of at least some significant parts of our Baptist community. This is to say that militant anti-liberalism, biblical inerrancy, millenarianism, anti-ecumenism, and a tendency towards separatism are part of our identity as Australian Baptists.

(3) Moves for church unity have, ironically, been especially divisive for Baptists, as they have often been for other evangelical movements. Australian Baptists have generally rejected participation in conciliar expressions of the ecumenical movement.(49)

Yet in other ways many barriers have been broken down and many Baptists evidence a 'pragmatic ecumenism' which sees them co-operating in a wide range of activities: in theological education, in exploring traditions of worship and spirituality; in evangelism and in action on social issues. This openness is at least one factor in the current renewal of the old debates about 'open' and 'closed' membership in our churches.

(4) Evangelicalism has many faces and to distinguish differing aspects of its influence is problematic.

For example, Australian Baptists, like other evangelicals, have reclaimed their heritage of commitment to social justice as being integral to our mission, and have largely given up on the tiresome debates about tensions between evangelism and social justice, although you could still easily provoke a lively discussion on this topic in many Baptist churches.

In all denominations there has been change in attitude towards social action. The old absolutist positions have been dissolving and the churches do not present a united front. So, in matters like Sunday observance and hotel trading hours, churches have increasingly hesitated to impose their viewpoints. A wider range of issues has been addressed touching more than alcohol and gambling, although the current gambling opposition has seen the churches working closely with other community groups.

Questions such as war and conscription, racial discrimination, Aboriginal rights, overseas aid, immigration policy, child abuse, public housing have all been addressed, often in concert with other denominations. Sexuality has been a source of division, with vigorous discussion on topics such as the family law and divorce, abortion, and homosexuality. Baptists have shared in a new concentration on research and preparing papers which can be placed in the public forum.

The 60s and 70s was the time when 'radical discipleship' came to be part of our vocabulary. The influence of communities like the House of the New World in Sydney, the House of Freedom in Brisbane and the House of the Gentle Bunyip in Melbourne, all essentially Baptist in foundation, was important. People like Athol Gill and John Hirt inspired a large number of Baptists with an emphasis on a Christian counter-culture. This embraced critical appraisal of economic and political life as well as denominational structures, a renewal of structured and committed community life, a praxis-model of learning and a deep commitment to practical working for social justice that could be local or extend to countries like El Salvador. A rich liturgical approach to worship and an openness to new forms of spirituality in part derived from these movements.

Thus today Baptists have some centres for spirituality, drawing on many traditions but clearly Baptist, such as the semi-monastic community at Breakwater (Geelong) where Eastern Orthodoxy has been a major influence, and Jill Manton's Wellspring Centre here in Melbourne.

Also from the radical movement came a strong push to be authentically Australian, free of any ecclesiastical imperialism, British or American, to develop a 'gum-leaf' theology, to be a 'fair dinkum' church.

On a different level, Baptists now have a large institutional network of social services in each state and Baptist World Aid, also started since the mid-century, is now an integral part of our life together. This has led to significant service in works of compassion and development.

Again, evangelicals have engaged in strong, at times bitter, debate about biblical hermeneutics. For Australian Baptists this lies behind conflicting approaches to questions like the ordination of women, and indeed the role of women in the churches generally, as well as a whole raft of ethical questions, specially those dealing with human sexuality.

With some notable exceptions, there is no strong tradition of intellectualism among Australian Protestants generally. Theological revival is often linked with genuine renewal, but Australian Baptists generally have not fostered theological scholarship. However, the leadership of College principals like G H Morling, Noel Vose and Mervyn Himbury has been deeply significant.

Some contemporary Baptists have also found a ready role in the mass media, especially on radio: Neil Adcock, Alex Kenworthy, Graham Mabury, Tim Costello, Ross Clifford and Michael Frost have been or remain popular figures. They have brought a new 'face' to Baptists for many in the community.

(5) Charismatic renewal has affected all denominations in Australia, and especially Baptists where our large degree of congregational freedom has facilitated change. This has probably been the most dramatic change in the last two decades with the impact being felt in various ways including theology, worship, patterns of church life, ministry and leadership.

The most obvious changes have come in worship and nowhere is the current diversity of our life more apparent. Charismatic style may dominate but is not the only influence. Some churches have a liturgical structure, printed prayers, follow a lectionary, use Taize prayers. There may be banners, candles, drama, modern hymns and songs, many of Australian composition. More commonly, the service will be informal, with a variety of worship leaders, choruses will be sung, often repeated several times, with the words projected on to a screen. Hands will be raised or waved, clapping, bodily movement and very loud upbeat music is also common. Occasionally the traditional range of prayers is omitted. There are, however, many churches where the new is blended with the old in a constructive and helpful way.

As far as church life goes, some churches appoint self-perpetuating elders, or at least have a 'leadership team' which controls most aspects of church life. The traditional Baptist church meeting has not always worked well but it is an important part of our heritage, emphasising the role of the whole congregation being responsible under Christ for its life together. Recovering an authentic role for Assembly in our Union life is a related challenge.

There has been confusion, too, about the role of pastors and leaders. For some, the role of the ordained pastor is uncertain. The emphasis on lay leadership, the priesthood of all believers and the use of spiritual gifts must be welcomed, but the place of an educated and denominationally accredited pastor is often reduced in a church where purely local recognition and the relevance of academic training is questioned: an old Baptist question in a new situation.

V

There is a last question. Is there a future for Australian Baptists? The day of denominationalism may be fading in Australia, though I hope it will not be replaced by an awakened sectarian spirit which seems to lie sleeping lightly in the Australian religious psyche. I think Baptists do have a future in Australia, even if we will be reinvented yet again in the process. This will include owning an authentic sense of being Australian within our multicultural and diverse society, acknowledging with deep sorrow past failures in regard to our indigenous people, and in these and other ways, continuing to embody and speak the authentic Gospel to our Australian people. Perhaps our current President Tim Costello can lead us in this challenging venture.

But, whatever happens, to know our own story is to recognise what holds us together with other Christians as well as what characterises our way of being church. How shall we face our future as we move into a new millennium? Historian Inga Clendinnen in her recent Boyer lectures gives us a clue:

I am not suggesting that we shuffle backwards into the twenty-first century. I would recommend a crabwise approach, eyes swivelling sideways, backwards, forwards, with equal intensity, because while the past is past, it is not dead. Its hand is on our shoulder. As for what has to be done-I end with the words of the great British historian E P Thompson: 'This is not a question we can ask of history. It is, this time, a question history asks of us'.(50)

Notes:

1 This paper was given at the BWA Congress in Melbourne, January 2000. For a fuller study of this theme, see the author's paper, 'Shapers of our Australian Baptist Identity', Whitley College, 1997.

2 M Sutherland, editorial, *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research*. 3, 1998, 3f.

3 P Fiddes, 'Walking Together': The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today' in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White* (eds W H Brackney, P Fiddes, J H Y Briggs), Macon Ga, Mercer University Press, 1999, p 47.

4 Details in P Hughes, *The Baptists in Australia*, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996. For the Church Life Surveys see P Kaldor et al, *Winds of Change*, Homebush West, Lancer, 1994 and P Kaldor and R Powell, *Views from the Pews*, Adelaide, Open Book, 1995.

5 See K Cable, *Religion in Colonial New South Wales*, Eastwood, BHS of NSW, 1993.

6 J D Bollen, *Australian Baptists: A Religious Minority*, London, BHS, 1975

7 For a full account of McKaeg and references for what follows see K R Manley and M Petras, *The First Australian Baptists*, Eastwood, Baptist Historical Society of NSW, 1981, pp. 38-52.

8 For Saunders, see B Dickey (ed), *The Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (hereafter ADEB), Sydney, Evangelical History Association, 1994.

9 H Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1998, p 24.

10 See K R Manley, *In the Heart of Sydney: Central Baptist Church 1836-1986*, Sydney, Central Baptist Church, 1987.

11 For Dowling see ADEB.

12 See M Chavura, 'Attitudes towards Calvinism among Baptists of New South Wales, 1831-1914', Working Papers, Series 1 (2), Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, North Ryde; and see his 'A history of Calvinism in the Baptist churches of New South Wales, 1831-1914', Ph D thesis, Macquarie University, 1994. R Humphreys and R Ward, *Religious Bodies in Australia*, Wantirna, New Melbourne Press, 3rd ed 1995, p 126 lists four Particular Baptist churches with a total membership of about fifty.

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14 For McLaren see *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (hereafter ADB) (ed D Pike), 2, 1967, 176f. and D Pike, *Paradise of Dissent*, London, Melbourne Uni Press, 1957. See Manning Clark's caustic comment that McLaren was one of the 'high minded' and preached in various chapels 'because in all he had the opportunity to praise liberty of conscience and condemn cards, dancing, theatres, drinking and fornicating.': *A History of Australia*, vol III, Melbourne, Melbourne Uni Press, 1979, p. 64.

15 H Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860-1930*, North Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987, p.47.

16 B S Brown, *Members One of Another: The Baptist Union of Victoria 1862-1962*, Melbourne, Baptist Union of Victoria, 1962, p. 77.

17 *The Macquarie Dictionary*, rev ed, 1985; S J Baker, *The Australian Language*, Milson Point, 1978, p 75.

18 S Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, word and world*, Melbourne, 1996, p 58.

19 F W Cox, *Three Quarters of a Century*, , Adelaide, 1912; cited by A C Prior. 'The Prior Family Story', p. 16 (typescript in possession of Mrs Judy Gill, Melbourne).

20 A C Prior, *Some Fell on Good Ground*, Sydney, Baptist Union of NSW, 1966, pp. 160-2.

21 For Slade and Wilkin, see B S Brown, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, Hawthorn, BHS of Victoria, 1999.

22 See ADEB.

23 See ADEB.

24 For all these see ADEB.

25 See A C Prior, *Some Fell on Good Ground*.

26 M C Williams, *Cameos of Baptist Men in Nineteenth Century Queensland*, Brisbane, Baptist Historical Society of Queensland, 1995.

27 See D M Himbury, *Centenary History of the Victorian Baptist Fund 1888-1988*, Melbourne, VBF, 1988.

28 See ADEB.

29 ADEB.

30 See ADEB. and R Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1973 p 272.

31 See ADEB.

32 See ADEB and B Wall, *Our Own Matilda*, Kent Town, SA, Wakefield Press, 1994.

33 R M Gooden, "'We Trust them to Establish the Work': Significant Roles for early Australian Baptist women in overseas mission, 1864-1913', in *This Gospel Shall be Preached* (eds M Hutchinson and G Treloar), Sydney, CSAC, 1998, 126-46.

34 See ADEB.

35 J Smart, 'A Sacred Trust: Cecilia Downing, Baptist Faith and Feminist Citizenship'. *Our Yesterdays*, 3, 1995, 21-50.

36 For the influence of Spurgeon and his graduates on Australian Baptists see M Petras, 'Charles Haddon Spurgeon: His influence upon Australia', *Our Yesterdays*, 1, 1993, 55-70; K R Manley, ' "The magic name": C H Spurgeon and the evangelical ethos of Baptists in Australia', in *Festchrift for Dr Athol Gill* (forthcoming).

37 *Victorian Baptist Witness*, July 1992, p 20.

38 S Piggin, 'The Role of Baptists in the History of Australian Evangelicalism', *Lucas: An Evangelical Historical Review*, 11, 1991, p 14.

39 For Morling, in addition to Piggin, see ADEB; E R Rogers, *George Henry Morling: The Man and His message for Today*, Forest Lodge, Greenwood Press, 1995.

40 J G Ridley, C J Tinsley of Stanmore, Sydney, Greenwood Press, nd.

41 See ADB and S Thwaites, 'Rev. T E Ruth, a city preacher in time of war and after', *Our Yesterdays*, 4, 1996, 19-46.

42 See ADB and ADEB.

43 S Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, word and world*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 154-71.

44 D Hilliard, 'The Religious Crisis of the 1960s: The Experience of the Australian Churches', *Journal of Religious History*, 21(2), 1997, 209-27.

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46 *The Australian Baptist*, 6 June, 1962.

47 See D Parker, 'Fundamentalism and Conservative Protestantism in Australia 1920-1980', University of Queensland, Ph D thesis, 1982.

48 S Nickerson, 'Baptist Theological College of Queensland 1904-1982', University of Queensland PhD thesis, 1995, p. 362.

49 For details see K R Manley, 'Australian Baptists Today' in *Australian Baptists Past and Present*, (ed M Petras), 55-7.

50 I Clendinnen, *True Stories*, Sydney, ABC, 1999, p 103.

