

**A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE PRINCIPLE OF LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE AND THE
DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA FROM
1930 TO 2005**

by
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The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Theological Seminary.

DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

C A Aucamp

6 February 2008

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SUMMARY

Baptists are well known for two principles, namely the primacy of the Scriptures, and liberty of conscience. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) has historically also sought to uphold these two principles. These two principles, however, can superficially appear to be in conflict with one another. The need to promote doctrinal orthodoxy by defining a doctrine of Scripture could be construed as limiting the liberty of conscience of the individual churches in the BUSA to interpret the Scriptures for themselves.

This thesis examines two questions. Firstly, what is the nature of the Baptist principle “liberty of conscience” or “religious liberty,” and how is the principle meant to be understood in the context of the churches’ ongoing mandate to “defend the faith?” Secondly, how, if at all, has the principle of liberty of conscience impacted on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA?

The research shows that the principle of liberty of conscience was first introduced and advocated in a context of religious persecution from the State. The early Baptists saw the principle of “liberty of conscience” as an opportunity to freely practice their religious convictions and even separate from those who held contrary beliefs.

The historical survey of the BUSA indicates that numerous attempts to define and clarify a doctrine of Scripture have been resisted based on the objection that liberty of conscience will be compromised. This has had a negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture. Significant minority groups have developed that hold to views that undermine the authority of the Scriptures, and so impact on the primacy of Scripture in the BUSA.

The view of liberty of conscience in the BUSA is found to be at variance with the theological and historic understanding of the principle. This thesis therefore provides a corrective framework within which the BUSA can achieve clarity and stability on the doctrine of Scripture without negatively impacting on the liberty of conscience of the individual churches.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) consists of over six hundred and fifty churches, fellowships and extensions in the Southern Africa region (the vast majority of churches are from South Africa, but other countries include Zimbabwe and Zambia). The 1877 Constitution of the Baptist Union included a Declaration of Principle, which states that the basis of the Union is the unique and absolute authority of Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It also states that each of the churches has liberty to interpret Christ's laws for themselves (South African Baptist Handbook 1989:5). This declaration highlights two cherished Baptist principles, namely the primacy of the Scriptures, and liberty of conscience.

Baptists have generally been characterized as upholding the supremacy of the authority of Scripture in all matters of life and faith (Hudson-Reed 1983:357). The Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) has historically also sought to uphold this tradition. A 1986 survey of the BUSA (a sample of pastors, ministerial students at the Baptist Theological College and lay people) showed that the overwhelming majority of members believed the doctrine of Scripture to be of "primary importance" (Miller 1987:167). This statement reflects that the belief that the doctrine of Scripture is absolutely essential to the spiritual health of the BUSA.

The BUSA has, however, had to grapple with the doctrine of Scripture, and the issue of inerrancy in particular. The concept of inerrancy has been comprehensively developed and articulated by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (completed in October 1978). In brief, the term "inerrancy" refers to the fact that Scripture is "wholly true and without error" in all that it speaks to (Geisler and Nix 1986:52).

A number of controversies have erupted in the BUSA over the doctrine of Scripture. Some of the most prominent controversies were the Doke / Ennals controversy in the

late 1920's and early 1930's (Miller 1987:52-55) and the Barnard controversy in the 1950's (Miller 1987:60-62). Both of these controversies involved prominent members of the BUSA holding differing views on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. For example, Barnard was dismissed as the first full-time principal of the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa in 1954 for holding to "Barthian" teaching in relation to Scripture (Miller 1987:62). This indicates that the BUSA has historically rejected any view where the Bible only becomes authoritative in a spiritual encounter (Frame 1986:222-225). The Bible has an inherent, objective authority irrespective of any human response to it.

In response to the earlier controversy in the 1920's, the Union adopted a "Statement of Belief" in 1924 to give some guidance and stability to the Union. The first point of the Statement concerned the doctrine 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." (South African Baptist Handbook 1924:27).

However, this statement was still insufficient, in that it was not binding on the churches, nor did it clarify exactly what was meant by "fully inspired." This resulted in continued uncertainty, and was partly responsible for the controversy in the 1950's with Barnard (Miller 1987:57).

It must not be concluded, however, that the BUSA was unconcerned about the lack of clarity on the doctrine of Scripture. In 1957 the BUSA Executive sought to make the acceptance of the 1924 Statement and "verbal inspiration" a requirement for ministerial recognition. The phrase "verbal inspiration" indicates a belief that the words (and presumably *all* the words) of the original autographs of Scripture are inspired by God, and not just the general thoughts that the words convey. However, after receiving numerous objections (which are dealt with below) and a legal opinion that such a policy could not be adopted except by *unanimous* consent, the proposal was not upheld (Miller 1987:68). The following year, in order to at least exercise some control, the Executive of the BUSA 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"

(their words) in the area of the doctrine of Scripture (Miller 1987:69). From the context of this remark, “theological liberalism” refers to a view of Scripture that questions its full, verbal inspiration, and so detracts from its authority.

There is evidence to suggest that the intention of the Executive was not entirely realised. A 1986 survey of the BUSA showed that while the majority of members still held to an “inerrancy” view of Scripture, there were notable minority groups that held to neo-orthodox and other “errancy” views (Miller 1987:96,102). For example, 8% of the respondents held to a “Barthian” view of Scripture i.e. that the “Bible *becomes* the word of God when it speaks to me.” Twenty percent of the sample believed that Scripture contained “errors in factual, historical, scientific or geographic data.” A further 6% believed that “latter revelation may correct or contradict earlier revelation” and that in the case of a perceived discrepancy, what Christ said must be taken in preference to what the Apostle Paul said (Miller 1987:167).

Individual pastors of the BUSA perceived such views to be “liberal” (as defined earlier), and hence proposals have been made to the annual Assemblies to clarify and define the doctrinal statement on Scripture. These attempts, however, have not been successful (for reasons mentioned below). For example, in 1986 a proposal was made for the BUSA to adopt a statement endorsing the term “inerrancy of Scripture,” which was rejected (Miller 1987:83). Again in 1997 a detailed definition of the sufficiency of Scripture (referring to the Scriptures being able to equip believers completely for a life of faith and godliness) was proposed but rejected (De Kiewiet 2004:4).

One of the main Baptist Principles that has hindered updating the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA is the second principle noted above, namely that of “liberty of conscience” (Miller 1987:68,152). For example, during the 1957 attempt by the Executive to introduce stricter standards to be applied to ministerial applications, it was objected that it violated “the Baptist Principle of Freedom of Conscience or individual liberty” (Miller 1987:68). Again, in the 1986 survey of the Union, sixteen percent of the respondents believed that requiring a particular view of Scripture would restrict the liberty of the churches in the Union to interpret Scripture for themselves (Miller 1987:101). The main issue therefore was that some members of

the Union were concerned that the proposed doctrinal formulations will restrict their liberty to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, and so violate one of the basic founding principles of the Union.

1.2 Problem

The main issue investigated in this thesis is the apparently conflicting principles in the BUSA, namely the need to promote doctrinal orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of Scripture and yet uphold liberty of conscience.

Firstly, what is the nature of the Baptist principle “liberty of conscience” or “religious liberty?” What are its theological and historical foundations, and how is the principle meant to be understood in the context of the churches’ ongoing mandate to “defend the faith” relevantly in each generation?

Secondly, how, if at all, has the principle of liberty of conscience impacted on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA? What are the attitudes in the BUSA regarding “liberty of conscience,” the doctrine of Scripture, their respective priorities and the need to promote orthodoxy?

1.3 Objectives

The research aims to discover:

- A theological and historical understanding of the principle of liberty of conscience, and how it relates to the churches’ ongoing mandate to “defend the faith”;
- Provide a theological basis for a doctrine of Scripture against which the historical developments on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA can be evaluated;
- Provide an evaluation and analysis of the relationship between liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture and the effects it has had (if any) in the BUSA.

- Clarify how an understanding of the precise nature of this relationship is relevant to promoting the long-term spiritual and organizational health of the BUSA.

1.4 Purpose

In 1986, 93% of the BUSA respondents to the questionnaire indicated that the doctrine of Scripture was of fundamental importance (Miller 1987:97). In other words, the doctrine of Scripture is absolutely essential to the spiritual health of the BUSA. Miller (1987:152) quotes R.G. Mathie as saying that to hold to a liberal view of Scripture will result in theological decline for the Union and the individual churches.

Historical examples can be given to support Mathie's sentiments. For example, the rise of negative higher criticism in Germany, led to a resultant depreciation of Scripture, and further theological slide into liberalism in all areas of faith and practice (Payne 1980:85-90). Detzler (1985:330-332) records instances of revival in Germany arising from a return to the authority and inerrancy of Scriptures after the devastation caused by higher criticism. Although it has been argued that this "slippery slope" reasoning does not always apply (Andrew 2002:9), the many examples from history cannot be ignored.

The importance of the doctrine of Scripture for the health of the BUSA cannot therefore be overstated. The research presented above has clearly identified the tension caused within the BUSA by two competing Baptist principles, namely liberty of conscience and the primacy of Scripture. The 1986 survey showed that notable minority groups held to neo-orthodox and "errant" views of Scripture, contrary to the historical intention of the BUSA.

This research seeks to understand the nature of the principle of liberty of conscience theologically as well as historically understood by Baptists. It clarifies the relationship between liberty of conscience and other biblical imperatives such as promoting orthodoxy. Finally it provides a theological basis for a doctrine of Scripture in order to

assess the impact, if any, that liberty of conscience has had on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA.

The research therefore has two main benefits for the long-term health of the BUSA. Firstly, the impact of religious liberty on the doctrine of Scripture (if any) provides the BUSA with an assessment of the “current state of affairs,” and highlights any areas of concern. Secondly, an understanding of the relationship between liberty of conscience and other biblical imperatives such as promoting orthodoxy on the doctrine of Scripture provides a theological framework within which the BUSA can address any concerns without violating either of these crucial Baptist principles.

1.5 Design and Methodology

There are three essential research areas.

Firstly, a theological basis for a doctrine of Scripture and an understanding of liberty of conscience is developed. This includes key concepts such as the inspiration, authority and inerrancy of Scripture. The Biblical notion of liberty, and liberty of conscience in particular, is compared with other biblical imperatives such as the need to defend the faith and uphold sound doctrine. In so doing, a biblical understanding of religious liberty and its relationship to other biblical imperatives is developed. The main sources for the development of the theological basis are Scripture and theological writings. This theological basis forms the framework for the evaluation and analysis of the relationship between the two principles in the BUSA. It should be noted that this theological basis, while being substantive and thorough, is not exhaustive. Its aim is to articulate, clarify and to a limited extent defend a position of Scripture for the purposes of the research, and not to “prove” a doctrine of Scripture in an attempt to satisfy the widely divergent positions on the subject.

Secondly, a literature review of the writings, practices and statements of faith of early Baptists is used to determine the nature of “liberty of conscience” and its relationship to other Baptist principles. This gives a clear indication of the original intent of the principle and how Baptists generally applied it in political and ecclesiastical matters.

In the first instance, the sixteenth century Anabaptists are investigated. Although there are ongoing debates on the exact nature of the historical influences and links between the Anabaptists and the Baptists (Hudson-Reed 1990: 196-198), there is no dispute that the Anabaptists laid the foundation of religious liberty that was subsequently enjoyed by many groups, including Baptists (Hudson-Reed 1990:86ff, 211). In the second instance, the theological and scriptural justification for liberty of conscience by the early Baptist movements in England and America is investigated.

Thirdly, the interaction between the principle of liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA is determined from a literature review of previous research and surveys, and from the official BUSA documentation of meetings and assemblies. The aim of the research is to identify and quantify differing positions on the doctrine of Scripture, and to identify how liberty of conscience is understood and applied in the BUSA. Levels of satisfaction regarding the state within the Union on the doctrine of scripture, and how the two competing principles ought to be prioritized are determined.

1.6 Hypothesis

The research shows that the understanding and application of the principle of “liberty of conscience” in the BUSA is to some degree at variance with its theological foundations and historic roots, and has therefore had an unnecessary, negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture. The research therefore provides a “corrective framework” within which the BUSA can promote its long-term spiritual health by relevantly maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy on the doctrine of Scripture without violating the principle of liberty of conscience.

More specifically, the research shows that the principle of liberty of conscience was first introduced and advocated in a context of religious persecution from the *State* (see Adams 1982:91). Baptists themselves have often formulated and adopted doctrinal statements amongst themselves, showing that in ecclesiastical matters the biblical mandate to “defend the faith” and promote doctrinal orthodoxy in response to controversy takes precedence over and is not in conflict with the principle of liberty of

conscience. A clear example of this is the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. While including a chapter on “Religious Liberty and liberty of conscience,” it nevertheless is a detailed confession of faith (see Waldron 1989:ch 21). Also, the theological and scriptural justification for religious liberty and its relationship to other biblical imperatives shows that it does not reduce or remove the need to “defend the faith” and promote doctrinal orthodoxy.

It is also clear that the early Baptists saw the principle of “liberty of conscience” as an opportunity to freely practice their religious convictions and even separate from those who held contrary beliefs (Adams 1982:95). The principle of liberty of conscience should therefore not be a hindrance to clarifying and updating the doctrine of Scripture in response to the controversy of the 1900’s in the BUSA.

Concerning the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA, the research shows that there has been a negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture in the sense that significant minority groups have developed that hold to views that undermine the authority of the Scriptures, and so impact on the primacy of Scripture in the BUSA. This in turn will have a negative effect on the long-term health of the BUSA, as explained earlier.

CHAPTER 2: THEOLOGICAL AND SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS

A theological basis for a doctrine of Scripture and an understanding of liberty of conscience is developed in this chapter. This theological basis forms the framework for the evaluation and analysis of the relationship between the two principles in the BUSA. As mentioned in chapter one of this study, this theological basis, while being substantive and thorough, is not exhaustive. Its aim is to articulate, clarify and to a limited extent defend a position of Scripture and liberty of conscience for the purposes of the research, and not to “prove” a doctrine in an attempt to satisfy the widely divergent positions on the subject. This chapter is further restricted by focusing on liberty of conscience from a Baptist perspective, and in particular with the perspective as found in the BUSA.

In terms of a general structure, most sections of this chapter begin with an exposition of a verse or passage from Scripture that appropriately crystallises the particular doctrine, and then proceeds to a theological discussion. This sequence is deliberate, as Scripture must be allowed to speak for itself in the first instance.

2.1 Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

Theological discussions on religious liberty are often complicated and confused by a lack of precision. Terms are either used interchangeably or given differing meanings. The terms and definitions proposed by de Albornoz (1963:ch 2) are adopted in this thesis, as they provide clearly defined terminology for distinguishing between concepts that facilitates the complex debates raised by religious liberty.

Accordingly, “liberty of conscience” means “pure religious liberty,” which is a “supreme value,” and denotes man’s essential relations with God (de Albornoz 1963:22). Liberty of conscience is therefore a social (or external) religious freedom that allows individuals to determine their faith freely (an activity in the inner being or soul of man, called “soul competency”).

General religious liberty coupled with “basic human rights” such as right of expression, right of association and right of corporate freedom give rise to “liberty of religious expression,” “liberty of religious association,” and “corporate and institutional religious freedom” (de Albornoz 1963:23-25).

These distinctions allow “pure religious liberty” (or liberty of conscience) to be seen as a supreme right that must be unlimited and unrestricted, while yet allowing for other religious liberties such as freedom of expression and association to be limited to some extent by the state to protect society from abuse (de Albornoz 1963:25). These terms and concepts were adopted in an attempt to reconcile those who saw all aspects of religious liberty as a fundamental right that should be unrestricted, and those who believed that there are necessary restrictions on some aspects of religious liberty.

2.1.1 Liberty of conscience and soul competency

2.1.1.1 Exposition

Romans 14:10b-12 states that each person shall appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of himself or herself to God. These verses highlight a number of points that are essential for the discussion at hand.

Firstly, the passage introduces the concept of the final judgement (Murray 1965:184), which will result in God assigning each person to either heaven or hell (Matt 25:31-46). Heaven is represented as an “eternal kingdom” prepared for God’s people, and hell as “everlasting fire.” These concepts of everlasting bliss or eternal torment stress the overwhelming, ultimate significance of the judgement seat of Christ, and therefore the ultimate significance of every person giving an account of themselves. Passages such as Mark 8:34-37 confirm the ultimate value of the soul, and the absolute depravation of loosing a soul eternally to the extent that no earthly gains could ever compensate for it.

Secondly, Romans 14:10b-12 indicates a strong individualism i.e. that every person will give an account of himself or herself to God. Whatever corporate or communal themes are also reflected in Scripture, yet in the final judgement each person will stand by themselves before their Maker.

Thirdly, at this final judgement, every person will give an account of themselves and all their deeds (2 Cor 5:10) to God. No aspect of their lives is exempt. The passage also emphasises that this account will be rendered *to God*, and not to people (Murray 1965:185).

Fourthly, and most importantly, those who judge believers (in the context of Romans 14:10b-12) usurp the authority that belongs to God alone and “put themselves in the place of God” (Dunn 1988:809). Those who do this will themselves come before the judgement seat of Christ. This indicates the serious nature of people trying to interfere in the relationship between God and people.

Romans 14:10b-12 therefore teaches that every person has a responsibility to walk before God (termed “soul competency”) and to give an account of them self 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”).

2.1.1.2 Theological discussion

From the above exposition it follows that no social or political considerations, however weighty, could be motivated as reasons to interfere with the conscience of others in terms of their relationship with God. Full liberty of conscience (as defined by de Albornoz) should therefore be extended to each person “without intrusion” (Norman 2001:186) as a “natural, inviolable right” (Bates 1945:297).

However, as discussed below, liberty of conscience is outwardly expressed in man’s social relationships. These social relationships, to differing degrees, also fall under

the jurisdiction of the state, and hence the relationship of the state to the outward expression of liberty of conscience needs to be examined.

2.1.2 The state and religious liberty

2.1.2.1 Exposition

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 (Murray 1965:151) and ensuring justice for all (Dunn 1988:771; Waldron 1989:286). The main reason for this conclusion is that the instrument the state has been given to punish “evil” is a sword. A sword is not an instrument to mould the conscience of people (Waldron 1989:294) but to punish external acts of evil against others.

2.1.2.2 Theological discussion

The complexities surrounding religious liberty and the involvement of the state cannot be underestimated. As defined previously, liberty of conscience (or “pure religious liberty”) must be viewed as a supreme value, and left completely alone by the state. The difficulty and complexity enters when this liberty of conscience (essentially an internal activity) is expressed practically in society through religious actions, communication, associations and institutions. These external religious acts obviously have an effect on society, a sphere in which the state also has God-given responsibilities. This interaction therefore raises the important issue of where the authority of the state ends as it relates to these outward expressions such as “liberty of religious expression,” “liberty of religious association,” and “corporate and institutional religious freedom.”

Two important issues shape the debate. Firstly, there is a very real and fundamental relationship between liberty of conscience and its outward expression in society. From a biblical perspective, religious convictions ought to influence all of a person's life and activities, including expressing one's faith to others and meeting with those of like mind. Liberty of conscience and religious liberty are therefore so closely related that they "stand or fall together" (Arnold 1978:17). Any restrictions on these outward religious activities will necessarily impact on a person's liberty of conscience.

Secondly, the state needs to exercise its function in a world tainted by sin, where rights and liberties are often perversely abused to the harm of society. The state therefore has to impose limits on outward religious acts to provide some protection against abuse, which could obviously deprive others of their liberties.

From a Christian (and particularly 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 allow not only 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 issues are 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 would unduly prejudice people of other religions. For example, a secular state may have a very different view on evangelism from Scripture. Some countries that profess to uphold religious liberty argue that religious evangelism (especially Christian evangelism) is a "public nuisance" because it could potentially be "emotionally scarring" to the individual. They therefore tend to restrict it. Christian groups believe that such restrictions inherently restrict religious liberty (Bates 1945:303) and therefore liberty of conscience. However, as mentioned before, these

issues are not further dealt with in this chapter as the focus is limited to a Christian (and in particular a Baptist) perspective on religious liberty.

2.1.3 Christian liberty

The preceding discussion has focussed on liberty of conscience and religious liberty. As defined earlier, these two terms relate to the *external* liberties granted to all people by society and by the state in particular. These liberties do not primarily have reference to the internal, psychological experience of liberty. A person may enjoy liberty of conscience and also live in a country granting religious liberties, but not enjoy an internal sense of liberty due to various reasons, the main one being that they can still be bound by personal sin.

The present section therefore discusses the liberty that a Christian enjoys. Accordingly, “Christian liberty” relates primarily, but not exclusively, to the *spiritual* and *internal* experience of that liberty purchased by Christ. It is therefore different to liberty of conscience and religious liberty, these latter two being external liberties granted by the state. The most obvious implication is that believers can enjoy Christian liberty even in countries where liberty of conscience and religious liberties are denied. The former is the experience and possession of the believer through union with Christ (as noted later in this section), and cannot be “granted” by society or the state. Throughout the present and following sections, therefore, the reader needs to distinguish carefully between the terms “liberty of conscience” and “Christian liberty.”

2.1.3.1 Exposition

Galatians 5:13-14 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 more systematic study of Christian liberty shows that it consists amongst other things in freedom from the law as a means of salvation, from the doctrines of people, and from the guilt and dominion of sin (Rom 3:19-26; 1 Cor 7:23; Col 1:13).

A careful study of Galatians 5:13-14 therefore leads to the seemingly paradoxical view that Christian liberty is not without limits. It has clear boundaries. True liberty never leads to the indulgence of the sinful nature, but rather to serving one other in love.

2.1.3.2 Theological discussion

As noted above, Christian liberty is not unrestricted. The Bible indicates that sin and error lead to bondage (John 8:32-34). Therefore, true Christian *liberty*, by definition, should never lead to spiritual *bondage*. It must never be seen as freedom to indulge in sin or to believe any doctrine.

This has important implications for the church. The role of the state with reference to liberty of conscience and religious liberty has been outlined previously. 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 practice 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.

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, although spiritual and internal, can nevertheless be impacted by external influences. 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. Also, churches would need to differentiate between fundamental, essential doctrine which it must insist on, and secondary issues where differing views can be accommodated in Christian love (see Rom 14:1-4 for an example of secondary issues). But the church cannot shrink from its task of teaching doctrine because some professing believers may hold to other views. In the churches' endeavour to defend the faith, Christian liberty is still essentially maintained, as it is a spiritual possession of every true believer.

A problem of some importance is whether the church violates the principle of liberty of conscience and general religious liberties in pursuing this mandate of defending the faith. The solution is found in considering the nature of the church. Firstly, from a societal point of view, the church is a "voluntary" organisation (Psa 110:3). None are forced to join the church. Secondly, the discipline that the church has been mandated to impose does not consist of imprisonment, coercion or physical punishment, but rather separation (Matt 18:15-20). People excommunicated from the church would still have liberty of conscience to worship as they believed appropriate and to associate with those of like mind.

These considerations are particularly important when it is realised that the church as an organisation must define doctrine through the interpretation of Scripture, which is a potentially fallible process. In an age of unparalleled theological speculation and enquiry, many errors of different kinds are formulated and propagated in many circles. The church needs to respond to these by continuously defining true doctrine to remain relevant. The church must of course exercise every care in this endeavour, and seek to be as faithful to Scripture as possible. Yet it cannot shrink from its mandate to defend the faith against error because the process of defining orthodoxy

is potentially fallible, and because some professing Christians may disagree. In this whole endeavour of defending the faith, Christian liberty and liberty of conscience are still upheld for the reasons given above.

2.1.4 Conclusions

A number of important conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the state should see liberty of conscience as an ultimate value and extend it to every person without restriction. Liberty of conscience, however, finds expression in outward religious acts, which impact on society. As the state has a God-given responsibility over society, certain restrictions may be placed on these external acts. These restrictions should relate primarily to maintaining civil obedience and justice. Anything beyond these restrictions would impact negatively on liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

Secondly, the church has a responsibility to defend the faith relevantly and exercise biblical discipline. In doing so, Christian liberty is protected, because true spiritual liberty is undermined by sin and error. A clear differentiation between essential doctrines and secondary issues further protects believers from the doctrines of men, and allows differences of belief on issues not essential to the Christian faith. Also, liberty of conscience is maintained as the church pursues its mandate, mainly because the church is a voluntary organisation, and its discipline is in the form of separation, not physical punishment or imprisonment.

2.2 The doctrine of Scripture

The doctrine of Scripture can be developed in a logical way. Many systematic theologies start with the inspiration of Scripture (determining what Scripture is), and then discuss the other attributes of Scripture, such as its authority, infallibility and sufficiency. This deductive approach does have merit. For example, if the Scriptures are the very word of God, they must be completely authoritative and infallible by definition. However, it would also be expected that the Scripture testifies to its own attributes, and hence these could be developed inductively. The most satisfying approach is an informal combination of both deduction and induction, called

abduction or retrodution (Feinberg 1980:269-273). A similar approach is adopted in this section.

2.2.1 The inspiration of Scripture

2.2.1.1. Exposition

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 and 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 in the sentence, 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 and Nix 1986:35; Feinberg 1980:279).

Lastly, *all* Scripture is inspired by God. Timothy would have understood this to refer to the entire Old Testament canon (Geisler and 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 and 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 Exod 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).

2.2.1.2 Theological discussion

Numerous challenges have been made against this understanding of Scripture, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with all of them. Only two prominent challenges are mentioned. The first challenge relates to the human authors. The Bible was clearly written by different people, each employing their own styles and largely their own selection of words. It is argued that this human element reduces the Scriptures merely to human words and ideas about God, or at the very most, that the word of God is to be found somewhere in the Scriptures. The implication is that the Scriptures are a mixture of the divine truth and human perceptions.

Scripture, however, depicts the process of inspiration as that of human instruments being borne along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). This introduces the concept of organic inspiration or confluence (Warfield 1948:83), a process through which the authors' faculties were so overseen by the Holy Spirit that what they produced was both their own literary work as well as the very word of God. A Reformed or Calvinistic view of the sovereignty and providence of God is able to reconcile these two perspectives. As a general principle it teaches that while man operates as a free, responsible, moral agent in God's universe, he nevertheless establishes God purposes in all that he does, irrespective of whether he is even conscious of God or not (Acts 4:27-29, Isa 46:8-14; Isa 10:5-7; Waldron 1989:37-38). Inspiration is therefore a specific instance of God's sovereign and providential rule over His creation (Lewis 1980:249).

The second challenge relates to language itself. It is asserted that because all words are relational (i.e. words can only refer to other words), the meaning of a word can only be found in a sentence, in its structural location in the entire language, and most importantly therefore also *only* in the mind of the writer (Carson 1996:72-74). Hence it is concluded that, as a literary work, one can never completely understand the original intent of the author of Scripture. Scripture can therefore never convey literal truth about God, and so the whole idea of divine, verbal communication is misinformed.

Those who hold to this view, however, do not practically believe this to be true about language, as they write books and expect the readers to understand their intent (Carson 1996:103). Also, it goes against the grain of everyday experiences of people. Generally, people communicate on religious, political and other truths, and sense that they can understand one another and convey literal truth, even with the presence of cultural barriers (Reymond 1998: 17).

Whatever the limitations of language may be, a more biblical perspective must understand language in relation to God's original intent in creating man. Man was created to have fellowship with God, and one of the means of communication between God and man is through language. Language therefore needs to be seen as something inherent to man, something man is endowed with, that it is capable of conveying truth between God and man (Reymond 1998:20-21).

Scripture is therefore both the very word of God and the word of man. It is all inspired by God, and is able to convey literal truth. There is no hint in Scripture that only some parts or categories of truth are inspired.

2.2.2 The authority of Scripture

2.2.2.1 Exposition

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. He 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 from 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).

2.2.2.2 Theological discussion

As noted above, the authority of Scripture can also be derived deductively from its inspiration. Scripture, being the very word of God, is by definition completely authoritative. If all of Scripture is inspired, then all of Scripture is authoritative, irrespective of the diverse human authors of Scripture. Any notion therefore, of differentiating between the authority of what the various authors of Scripture wrote, or

differentiating between the authority of what the authors of Scripture wrote and Christ's words fundamentally undermines the inspiration, authority and primacy of Scripture.

2.2.3 The infallibility of Scripture

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy defines the infallibility of Scripture as "being true and reliable in all matters it addresses" (Article XI), indicating that the Scriptures are a sure and safe guide in all matters. The infallibility of Scripture is therefore very closely related to inerrancy. Reymond (1998:70), for example, sees infallibility as essentially the same as inerrancy. Logically, if the Scriptures contain no errors, they must be infallible. For the sake of brevity, therefore, the main focus of the discussion is on inerrancy, and the infallibility of Scripture will not be dealt with extensively or in isolation from the preceding discussion.

It is acknowledged that some authors, while affirming infallibility, yet deny inerrancy. This differentiation, is however, somewhat artificial, as "infallibility" has been limited to the main theological or salvific intent of Scripture, and does not include all that Scriptures touches on (Waldron 1989:50-51). This particular view of infallibility therefore corresponds directly to the "limited inerrancy" views as discussed later. The discussion on inerrancy will therefore adequately deal with the issues surrounding the infallibility of Scripture.

2.2.4 The sufficiency of Scripture

2.2.4.1 Exposition

Second Timothy 3:15-16 is 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 (to name a few disciplines; Waldron 1989:43).

2.2.4.2 Theological discussion

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 practice 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 (an attribute not treated in this thesis), further reinforces the concept of soul competency and liberty of conscience, as 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 deprivation of spiritual light from God’s word.

2.2.5 The inerrancy of Scripture

The discussion on inerrancy has been left to last on purpose. The preceding discussion on the doctrine of Scripture is foundational. 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 result is that some of the challenges or objections already dealt with have also been raised in the debate about inerrancy. These will only be briefly referred to when necessary in the following discussion.

The previous discussion on the doctrine of Scripture has highlighted the fact that all Scripture is God-breathed. It is therefore the very word of God, even though it was written by different people in their own literary styles. Scripture is able to convey literal truth, and there is no hint in Scripture that only some parts or categories of truth are inspired. All of Scripture is therefore completely authoritative irrespective of the diverse human authors. Scripture is also sufficient, able to equip the man of God for every good work. While this sufficiency must be limited to the main redemptive purpose of Scripture, it must not be artificially reduced, as its ethical and moral truths extend to all of life.

The recent, intense debate in most denominations around the world on the doctrine of Scripture, has however, largely focussed on inerrancy. The debates in the BUSA have had a similar focus. For this reason, this section on inerrancy is given a greater degree of emphases than previous sections.

While many theologians today will profess belief in Scripture in general terms such as inspiration, authority and sufficiency, there is disagreement on the exact nature of this inspiration and authority, especially as it relates to the details of Scripture. This section therefore addresses this outstanding issue of the inerrancy of Scripture, and completes the discussion on the doctrine of Scripture for the purposes of this thesis.

2.2.5.1 Exposition

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, a “jot or tittle” refers to the minute elements of the Hebrew letters (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 and Nix 1986:52), whether doctrine, geography, science or history.

2.2.5.2 Theological discussion

The doctrine of inerrancy needs to be carefully qualified. It is limited to the original autographs (Geisler 1986:43), and takes into account irregularities of grammar and spelling, commonly observed descriptions of nature, rounding of numbers and a lack of modern day technical or scientific precision. Such approximations and “vagueness” in the language of Scripture, however, far from detracting from its value, is essential for effective communication (Frame 1987:ch 7).

The objections raised to either the term or concept of inerrancy are numerous. These have been the subject of extensive debates, which have led to the rather abundant literature on the topic. It is not the intent of this thesis to deal with or even mention all of them.

What seems clear is that there is still no consensus, and an impasse has been reached between those for and against inerrancy. Recent attempts have been made to bridge the divide. Various considerations have been raised that claim to render the debate on inerrancy as irrelevant. Some of these considerations are briefly mentioned and commented on.

The first, main issue that needs to be mentioned is the attempt to group differing views of “inerrancy” into the category of “evangelical.” For example, “complete inerrancy,” “conditional inerrancy” and “limited inerrancy” have been identified as three views within “American evangelicalism” (Railey 2001:57,127,175). Complete inerrancy corresponds to the view articulated in this thesis, that the Scriptures are wholly true and without error in all that they speak to. 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 Scriptures.

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).

The main point of grouping the three views of inerrancy under the label “evangelical” is that “complete inerrancy” must be seen as just one view amongst a few acceptable views. Allegedly, those who therefore contend for complete inerrancy are misinformed and being unnecessarily divisive.

In response it needs to be remembered that the term “evangelical” is a much-abused label, and that its definition can be adjusted to suit a particular author’s objectives. In addition, any view that admits errors in the originals has a number of difficulties to overcome. Firstly, to classify a view, which admits *errors* in the original autographs under a label of some type of *inerrancy*, is the equivalent of saying that the presence of corners “can’t affect a circle” (Montgomery 1967: 222). Such views need to be classified under the more accurate label of *errancy*, and so remove the risk that through convenient labelling a view is made to seem less problematic than it really is.

Secondly, the presence of errors of any kind in the original autographs 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 1967:100).

Thirdly, it is difficult to see how errors in the original autographs, however insignificant, do not detract from the authority of the Scripture. It is 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). Theological truths are often rooted in real history and observable facts. If the historical or observable facts of the Scriptures can be wrong, it must cast doubt on the associated theological truths (Geisler 1986:59), and hence detract from its authority. It has often been pointed out that if the Scriptures are untrustworthy in

those aspects that can be humanly verified, it is simply not credible to ask people to trust the Scriptures on those spiritual matters that cannot be humanly verified.

The second main issue to deal with is the contention that modern evangelicals are too conditioned by philosophical frameworks that were foreign to the authors of Scripture. This has led to an overestimation of the importance of a Scripture that is factually correct. The very concept of inerrancy is therefore foreign to Scripture and has been unnecessarily imposed as a standard of orthodoxy (Perry 2001:¶9-10). For example, it is contended that inerrancy is based on a wrong, modern concept of truth, namely that of a complete correspondence with reality. Rather, it is proposed that a statement can be true as long as it achieves the intention of the author (called an “intentionality” theory of truth). This means that factually incorrect statements can be said to be “true” as long as they achieve the intended aim of the author (Geisler 2002:328).

Clearly, philosophical frameworks can and do affect our understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Philosophical assumptions can certainly introduce biases that unduly influence the modern interpreter of Scripture. However, it is not only those who defend complete inerrancy that are in danger of such influences. Those who dispute complete inerrancy are also operating under their own philosophical frameworks. There is still an obligation therefore for those on *both* sides of the debate to demonstrate that their assumptions and conclusions most accurately reflect Scripture. To continue with the example on the concept of truth, the Scriptures claim to describe a *real* God interacting with *real* people who *actually* lived on earth at a particular point in history. Therefore, the concept of truth presented in Scripture is consistently that of correspondence with reality or the “actual state of affairs” (see Exod 20:16; Gen 42:16; Deut 18:22; Geisler 2002:332). The intentionality theory of truth therefore appears to be at odds with Scripture, primarily due to its philosophical assumptions that are foreign to Scripture.

The third main objection is that the concept of inerrancy is out of line with historical reformed theology, and that notable Reformers such as Luther and Calvin did not hold to the form of “detailed” inerrancy that some modern evangelicals hold to (Perry 2001:¶21). Many writers on both sides of the inerrancy debate have analysed the

writing of some of the Reformers (and John Calvin in particular), and both sides have concluded that their position is supported (Nicole 1982:427)!

Any consideration on this issue needs to acknowledge the limited value of the point, as Reformers such as Calvin were not writing at the time of the current debate on inerrancy. It may well be, for example, that many of Calvin's statements would have been more guarded had they been written within the current theological climate. In any event, it has also been well argued, for example, that the concept of "limited inerrancy" does not fit well into the overall framework of Calvin's theology and life work (Nicole 1982:428). His writings and commentaries reveal a complete trust in the authority and precise language of Scripture.

The last main objection to be considered relates to the original autographs. For instance, it has been argued that because these documents no longer exist, the debate on their inerrancy or otherwise is senseless, as at the end of the day it makes no practical difference for the church. However, this is misleading. Through the process of textual criticism, scholars estimate that we can be sure of what the originals said for about 99% of the Scriptures (Grudem 1994:96, Weil 2002: ¶41). Those who hold to complete inerrancy will therefore trust these Scriptures absolutely. Those who deny inerrancy are never in such a position, as they believe even the original autographs can contain error (Bahnsen 1980:184). There will therefore be a marked, practical difference between those who hold to complete inerrancy and those who don't.

Similarly, it is argued that due to the complex process of composition over time (especially of the Old Testament manuscripts) it is impossible to identify which manuscripts are the original ones even if we had access to them (Weil 2002:¶4). In discussing this issue as it relates to the Old Testament, it is helpful to distinguish between the "original autograph" and the "original edition" (Weil 2002: ¶4-8). Deuteronomy 34 is a case in point, where it is clear that Moses most likely was not the author. Instead, the chapter is the work of an editor or team of editors (Hill and Walton 1991:578). There is no logical or theological reason why what the editor(s) wrote could also not have been inspired by God. From a textual criticism point of view, this original edition should be considered as the inspired original (Weil

2002:¶38-39). This solution still insists that the vast majority of the book was by a single author (Moses in the case of Deuteronomy), and that minor editorial activity brought the book to its present, completed form relatively early (Hill and Walton 1991:578).

In the final analysis, if the Scriptures are not entirely trustworthy in all that they speak to, then there is no sure way to distinguish between what is true in Scripture and what is not. With such a conclusion, even the gospel is at stake (Montgomery 1967:223).

2.2.6 Conclusion

This section on the doctrine of Scripture has defended the view that the original autographs are the very word of God. They are completely inspired by God and authoritative. This inspiration and authority extends to the very words and smallest details of Scripture, so that the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant in all that they speak to, including matters of science, history and geography. Scripture therefore cannot contradict itself and is doctrinally consistent.

This framework is used in the subsequent chapters in evaluating the views of the early Baptists and the BUSA.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL SURVEY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AMONGST EARLY BAPTIST MOVEMENTS

This chapter provides a historical survey of how religious liberty was understood and applied by early Baptist movements, especially as it related to defending the faith and promoting orthodoxy. A number of issues need to be clarified at the outset in order to give context to this chapter.

Firstly, the chapter heading has referred to “religious liberty” in general and not the previously, precisely defined term of “liberty of conscience.” This is deliberate, as it must be appreciated that early Anabaptist and Baptist statements and practices may not reflect more recently developed theological precision. The historical survey will therefore consider the concept of “religious liberty” in general so that all its dimensions can be discerned. However, in commenting and analysing the early Baptist statements and practice, the framework from chapter two will be used to ensure the necessary precision to address the aims of this thesis.

Secondly, it must also be appreciated that there is diversity in any movement, both in terms of theological understanding and practice. This chapter aims to provide the “majority view,” noting only relevant, significant exceptions to that view.

Thirdly, these early pre-Baptist and Baptist movements were not grappling with precisely the same theological issues of the present day. Their statements and practice must be seen in the context of the theological issues pertaining to their day. The doctrine of Scripture and the issue of inerrancy were not the main issues of controversy during this period. This chapter will therefore examine how religious liberty was understood and applied in the more general context of defending the faith and promoting orthodoxy. It is assumed that these principles can be applied in the modern context of the debate on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA, which will be developed in chapter four. This chapter will therefore investigate the *principles* that the early pre-Baptists and Baptists applied in the context of religious liberty and

promoting orthodoxy. Where the early Baptist understanding of religious liberty does relate to the doctrine of Scripture, this will of course receive the necessary attention.

3.1 The Anabaptists and religious liberty

The focus of this section is to evaluate the Anabaptist understanding and application of the principle of religious liberty. However, before this is done, two issues need to be addressed. Firstly, the relevance of the Anabaptists and their links to Baptists needs to be briefly demonstrated, as there is still some controversy on the historical influence of the Anabaptists on subsequent Christian movements.

Secondly, a brief historical overview of the Anabaptist movement is given to provide a general context for the survey of their understanding and application of religious liberty.

3.1.1 Why start with the Anabaptists?

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.” Earlier Baptists in particular have tended to downplay or even deny any links to this earlier movement (Hudson-Reed 1989:202). 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 with 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 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 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 for example Patterson 2001:66-67; Mitchell 2001:220). There is therefore adequate justification for starting this historical survey with the Anabaptists, and only then moving to the Particular and General Baptists.

This positive appraisal of the Anabaptists must not be seen to suggest that they were completely orthodox in all areas of doctrine. Some leaders tended towards semi-Pelagianism in largely rejecting the doctrine of original sin and the bondage of the will. Also, although they did teach salvation through faith in Christ, some tended to emphasise works to the extent that the exclusive role of faith was clouded. The result was that there was not always a correct differentiation between justification and sanctification, which was one of the key issues of the Reformation (Needham 2004:264).

3.1.2 Historical overview of the movement

A very short overview of Anabaptist history is necessary to give background to the subsequent discussion on religious liberty. This historical overview is by no means comprehensive.

Anabaptism is believed to have started in Switzerland in the sixteenth century, and then to have developed concurrently with the Reformation (Kuiper 1951:204, Bender 1970:5). The founders included Conrad Grebel (1498 – 1526) and Felix Manz (1498 – 1527). These two men initially came under the influence of Zwingli, but subsequently differed with him on the issue of the role of the City Council and the church. In general, they felt the Reformers were not going far enough. They started a small group of “re-baptised” believers in 1525, which soon attracted persecution (Hudson-Reed 1989:16-17). From Switzerland, Anabaptism moved rapidly to Austria, Bohemia, Southern Germany and the Netherlands (Kuiper 1951:205-206). It needs to be noted that “multiple-origin” theories of Anabaptism have, however, also been proposed (Loewen 1988:18). The best solution to the problem of the origin of Anabaptism seems to be that although it started in Switzerland, the influences that helped shape Anabaptism were already in existence amongst groups such as the Waldenses, and this explains the rapid expansion of Anabaptism (Vedder 1969:130-131).

Anabaptism essentially believed in religious liberty, the separation of church and state, personal faith, “re-baptism,” non-resistance, separation from the world and forbidding believers to hold office in government (Loewen 1988:19). It was in Schleitheim, Switzerland, in 1527 that the oldest Anabaptist confessional statement was drawn up, which reflects some of these beliefs.

Only two prominent events are noted as they have relevance to the discussion. The first concerns the “kingdom of Münster.” In 1533 Jan Matthys, believing that the return of Christ was immanent, set up an “Anabaptist kingdom” in Münster, Germany. He proclaimed himself a prophet, and many followers streamed to the city. An army of Catholics and Lutherans subsequently besieged the city, and the “revolutionaries” were finally defeated and massacred in 1535 (Kuiper 1951:207-208). This event, although isolated, stigmatised Anabaptism and “did untold damage to their credibility” (Hudson-Reed 1989:89). This is perhaps the single greatest reason why Anabaptism has had a negative image, and why subsequent Baptists wanted to deny any association or links with Anabaptism.

The second prominent development that partially restored some credibility to the Anabaptist movement was the leadership of Menno Simmons (1496-1561) in Holland in the second half of the sixteenth century. Under his leadership “a moderate group of Anabaptists flourished” (Kuiper 1951:208), which became known as the Mennonites. Importantly, Menno wrote books and letters that articulated Dutch Anabaptist belief.

3.1.3 The Anabaptist understanding and application of religious liberty

As noted before, earlier Christian movements were not grappling with precisely the same theological issues of our day. Their statements and practice must be seen in the context of the theological issues pertaining to their day. This is particularly relevant when evaluating Anabaptist understanding and practice. The immediate issues may be far removed from the specific topic of liberty of conscience impacting on the doctrine of Scripture, yet principles can be discerned that can be applied in the modern context.

3.1.3.1 The writings of early Anabaptist leaders

In 1524 Conrad Grebel wrote to Thomas Müntzer concerning church practice. He expressed the view that a church should not be formed with “command or compulsion,” but by following the word of God and prayer. Scripture was sufficient to instruct and govern all types of men. Those believers that would not follow the rule of the word of God were to be admonished and then excommunicated. Grebel expressly taught that excommunication was the only form of discipline for the church, as those disciplined “should not be killed” but left alone (Bender 1970:6-7).

Felix Manz held similar views. In his petition to the Zurich Council in 1524, he requested that those of other faiths be left undisturbed, and specifically that those holding to other beliefs (such as on baptism) should not be suppressed with force. Rather, if the word of God would be allowed to “speak of itself freely and singly,” no

one would be able to withstand it (Bender 1970:8). Although not directly stated, the simple reliance on the authority and veracity of the word of God is apparent.

Hans Denk, described by Bender (1970:9) as one of the gentlest and most attractive figures of the Reformation period, gives greater insight into the theological understanding of religious liberty and liberty of conscience in Anabaptist thought. He believed that in matters of faith “everything should be voluntary and uncompelled” (Bender 1970:10). The very nature and essence of faith was that it could not be forced upon a person, but rather had to be a voluntary act. This view of faith was fundamental to the Anabaptist justification for religious liberty. However, it must be cautioned that Denk did not have a high regard for Scripture, but rather favoured the “inner word” of the Spirit as the basis for Christianity (Needham 2004:287).

Kilian Aurbacher elaborates further on the grounds of religious liberty. In a letter dated 1534, he believed that it is never correct to compel people in matters of faith, as every person would bear their own guilt before God when He came to judge (Bender 1970:10-11). This is a clear belief of the doctrine of “soul competency” upon which liberty of conscience and religious liberty rests.

Some significant points need to be noted. Firstly, there is a clear, simple confidence in and reliance on God’s word. It is the rule upon which the church is to be established, and it is completely sufficient for the task. Secondly, religious liberty prevails when there is no threat of physical force or coercion from the church or state, and church membership is voluntary. Thirdly, this religious liberty was not violated when the church “declared” the word of God and excommunicated those who did not follow the rule of the word. The clear conclusion to be drawn from these statements is that the essence of religious liberty is the absence of the threat of physical force in matters of faith. Religious liberty can therefore exist even when the church insists on biblical standards and exercises church discipline.

As already noted, many of the Anabaptist leaders tended towards a “more optimistic stance on human nature,” and largely rejected the Augustinian belief in the bondage of the will (Needham 2004:265). They believed that a negative view of human nature would undermine a serious pursuit of holiness. Whether doctrinally correct or not, this

optimistic view of human freedom would no doubt have reinforced their beliefs on religious liberty.

3.1.3.2 *The Schleitheim Confession (1527)*

The most striking and obvious observation that needs to be made is the fact that the Swiss Anabaptists saw the need for a Confession, although brief. It articulated their beliefs on baptism, excommunication, the breaking of bread, separation from the world, pastors, the sword, and the taking oaths (Needham 2004:303-310). While it must be acknowledged that as a movement they had no formal creeds (Vedder 1969:191), the Schleitheim Confession nevertheless shows that they did not consider a written articulation of belief inconsistent with either religious liberty, Christian liberty or the supremacy of Scripture. Also, Vedder (1969:191) makes the point that the lack of formal creeds was not necessarily a strength, as it most likely contributed to divisions amongst the congregations.

The pastoral covering letter of the Confession gives some justification for the Confession. It was to protect the true children of God from “false brethren” among them who had turned aside from “the faith” in the way they exercised their “*freedom* of the Spirit of Christ”. According to the letter, these false brethren thought that “love and faith may permit and do everything.” (Needham 2004:303-304). The Confession was therefore produced to warn and protect believers. This indicates a view of Christian freedom that is in harmony with the framework developed in chapter two. Clearly, the Swiss Anabaptists did not believe that Christians could believe or practice anything they pleased under the pretense of freedom. Biblical Christian freedom is bound by the truth and moral purity. They therefore produced a Confession to formally express what they believed Scripture taught on various issues.

A second observation that needs to be made is that the Confession addressed issues that were currently relevant for the movement. They were controversial issues, issues for which the Anabaptists were being persecuted. There was seemingly no reluctance on their part to produce a *written* doctrinal statement to guide and protect

believers against current error. The conclusion that must be drawn is that they saw no inconsistency in calling for religious liberty and liberty of conscience on the one hand, and defining and defending truth on the other. A question of some importance is the theological basis for maintaining both.

The answer, although not directly given in the covering letter, is certainly hinted at in the Confession. In the second article, dealing with church discipline and excommunication, their application is clearly restricted to “all those who have *given themselves* to the Lord, to walk in His commandments.” This implies the voluntary nature of the church. Also, in the sixth article, concerning the use of the sword, it is restricted to the use of civil magistrates for the punishment of evil and protection of those doing good. The implication to be drawn is that the state is not to employ the sword to correct religious error. In other words, the state should exercise the sword in civil matters only and grant religious liberty for matters of faith. The church may only employ excommunication as a form of discipline for professing believers who deviate from truth and righteousness. Needham (2004:266) makes the point that while the Anabaptists stood for religious liberty and tolerance in society, within the church they exercised excommunication, even to the point of extreme intolerance at times. The point is, however, that they saw no inconsistency between liberty of conscience and the church articulating truth and disciplining those who deviated from it.

The Confession is not an elaborate and detailed articulation of Anabaptist belief as the later Protestant confessions tended to be. Rather, it is a simple yet heartfelt expression of their belief on church practice and piety. It certainly assumes religious liberty, Christian liberty and the voluntary nature of the church.

A final comment needs to be made on the question of the lack of any statement on the doctrine of God, Christ or salvation in the Confession. According to Needham (2004:264) the answer lies in the fact that the Anabaptists tended to be more interested in ethics and church life than theology. It is perhaps more accurate to say that they were more interested in ethics and church life than developing a *comprehensive* theology, as ethics and church life are also based on theology. Nevertheless, this lack of a comprehensive theology must be seen a weakness in the

movement, as theology and church practice are inextricably linked and both are important for biblical Christianity.

3.1.3.2 *The writings of Menno Simmons*

The writings of Menno Simmons are treated separately due to the stature of this Anabaptist leader, and the significant contribution his extensive writings and teaching made to the credibility of the Anabaptist movement. His most influential writing is *The Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, written in 1540, which “became to the Mennonite the equivalent of Calvin’s *Institutes*” (Needham 2004:281). It included the themes of the doctrine of God and of Christ, which the Schleithem Confession lacked.

Menno argued for religious liberty from three main perspectives. Firstly, he understood faith to be a gift from God. From this understanding, he concluded that faith could not be forced, and that the state should therefore not use force to compel faith. Rather, he frequently pleaded for tolerance and religious liberty (Bender 1970:16-17). Secondly, he argued from the example of Christ. He often challenged his opponents to show where Christ either taught the use of the sword or practiced it (Hudson-Reed 1989:89). Thirdly, he justified religious liberty from the fact that Christians are called to love others, even their enemies. This is incompatible with the use of the sword to compel faith (Bender 1970:15).

While upholding religious liberty, he nevertheless believed in upholding orthodoxy and church discipline. For example, he believed that when a person joined the church they were to accept the “group discipline” *according to the New Testament*. He also severely criticised the state churches for their beliefs and practices, although he acknowledged that they could include many genuine believers (Bender 1970:15). It has to be noted, however, that legitimate criticism can be raised against Menno and many of his followers for “excessive strictness” at times. They would exercise discipline for issues that had no Scriptural precedent, such as details of shaving, dress codes and the like (Vedder 1969:191-192). Nevertheless, it is clear that Menno did not consider maintaining Christian standards to be in conflict with liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

It also needs to be emphasised that the practice of Menno (and indeed the Anabaptists in general) was based on doctrine. For example, their distinctives of believer's baptism, active discipleship and separation of church and state were doctrinally based. The fact that they did not join the "state" church showed that they practiced separation on the basis of doctrine as well as practice. As noted before, doctrine and practice are vitally linked.

For the sake of completeness, some comments specifically on the doctrine of Scripture in the writings of Menno need to be made. He showed a simple trust in an authoritative and sufficient Scripture. He firmly rejected the claim that some were receiving private revelations, as it would imply that the teaching of Christ and His apostles was "imperfect." He desired nothing but the word of God, lest he be deceived (Needham 2004:281).

He also clearly believed that the word of God taught literal truth about God, as he expressed abhorrence at the thought of teaching a "single word or letter" concerning God contrary to the "plain testimony of the word of God" (Hudson-Reed 1989:241).

Although he held to strong views on the sufficiency, authority and finality of Scripture, he nevertheless introduced a dichotomy between the Old Testament and the New Testament (Needham 2004:283).

3.1.4 Conclusions

Bender (1970:19-20) summarises the grounds for religious liberty given by the Anabaptists. These include the teaching and example of Christ, the voluntary nature of church membership, insisting that Christianity was active discipleship and not just a passive acceptance of a theological position, the need to love others, and the fact that faith was a gift from God.

The following conclusions can be drawn concerning the Anabaptist understanding of liberty of conscience (and Christian liberty) and the need to maintain orthodoxy and godly standards of living.

Firstly, the Anabaptists saw religious liberty primarily as a liberty granted by the state. They consistently called for the state to tolerate other faiths and religious views. Yet they certainly exercised church discipline amongst professing Christians who did not maintain Christian standards. Even though they could be criticised about what those standards were, nevertheless they did not see any contradiction between religious liberty and insisting on Christian standards (either in terms of practice or doctrine, as they are vitally linked and cannot be separated).

Secondly, they did not see Christian liberty and liberty of conscience amongst profession believers as a licence to believe and practice anything. Rather the Scriptures provided the boundaries within which believers were to live. Although the Anabaptists emphasised ethics and church practice, these were based on doctrine, and hence separation from those with different practices can also be viewed as doctrinal separation.

3.2 Early Baptists

An important consideration in this section is determining the boundaries of the term “early.” No clear-cut historical boundary separates “early” from “modern” Baptists. For the purposes of this research, “early” from a Baptist development point of view is taken from the first emergence of Baptist churches in the late 1500s to the late 1600s. This survey will therefore cover the first hundred years of the Baptist movement, and importantly capture theological perspectives of the first Baptist Confessions in the 1600s. These Baptists Confessions give evidence of a maturing movement and also provides enough material to analyse Baptist thought on the issues relevant to this thesis. Although the precise chronological delineation between early and modern Baptists may be argued, there should be little argument that the Baptists in the period from the late 1500’s to the late 1600’s can be regarded as “early” from our perspective.

The following very short historical overview of the early Baptist movement is given purely to provide some context to the debate that follows. It also provides a broad historical framework within which some of the important events, personalities, churches and confessions discussed in this section can be located.

3.2.1. Historical overview

This section focuses on early Baptist history in England and America. The significance of the initial establishment and growth of the Baptist movement in these two nations 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. 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.

3.2.1.1 The Baptists in England

Although there are some claims that Baptist churches can be traced back to as early as 1522, these claims are based on tradition. It is only from the early 1600's that historical evidence can be found of 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 1969:201, 205).

John Smyth is credited with being the earliest Baptist founder. After leaving the Church of England, he joined the Separatists in Gainsborough, close to another Separatist group in Scrooby. Under persecution of James I, both groups fled to Holland, the former going to Amsterdam and the latter settling in Leyden (Vedder 1969:202-204). Smyth became acquainted with Arminian theology and Mennonite church practice, and soon, together with Helwys, issued a Confession of Faith in 1610 (Robinson 1938:71). This confession was inspired by the Mennonite confession drawn up by de Ries and Gerrits in 1580 (Estep 1987:602).

Around 1612 persecution became less in England, and Helwys returned and formed the first Anabaptist church on English soil. This church grouping gave rise a few decades later to the General Baptist Churches, so named because of their Arminian theology. By 1626 there were five such churches, and by 1644 this increased to 47 (Vedder 1969:204).

The origin of the Particular Baptist churches was different. In 1616 Henry Jacob gathered a group of Separatists from the Church of England. Lathrop took over the leadership after Jacob left for Virginia. According to Estep (1987:608) this group subsequently experienced a few “peaceful” divisions. John Spilsbury became a pastor of one of the groups, which became the first Particular Baptist church. By 1644 there were 7 Particular Baptist churches, and these united to produce a Confession of Faith of some 50 articles (Estep 1987:608). It was the first Baptist Confession to proclaim liberty of conscience and religious liberty, and was very controversial at the time (Vedder 1969:212). This Confession was modelled on an earlier Confession developed by the Separatists in Amsterdam in 1596 (Estep 1987:602).

From 1640, under the Long Parliament, the Baptists enjoyed a time of peace and rapidly increased. In the 1640’s and 1660’s the Presbyterians and the Church of England persecuted the Baptists (Vedder 1969:221-222, 230). It was only in the 1680’s under the Prince of Orange that the Baptists were “tolerated.” During this period, the Particular and General Baptists issued numerous Confessions of Faith (Estep 1987:605-606).

3.2.1.2 In the Colonies

An overview of the early Baptist movement in America must start with the life of Roger Williams. Although much of his early history is obscure, it is believed that he embraced Puritan and separatist principles before leaving England. He landed in Boston in 1631, where he became the minister of the church of Salem. He was soon banished for his beliefs on religious liberty, and eventually settled in what is now

known as Providence, and established a settlement (Vedder 1969:289-290). The basis of this settlement was that of religious liberty, which Vedder (1969: 290) describes as the first government “whose corner-stone was absolute religious liberty.”

Subsequent to this, Williams came to convictions about baptism, was himself baptised, and then baptised ten others and established the first Baptist church in America (Vedder 1969:291).

John Clarke was another founder of one of the earliest Baptist churches in America. He left England to escape persecution, and landed in Boston in 1637. He helped established a colony in 1638 which was to become Rhode Island, also based on the principle of religious liberty. He also became the teaching elder of a church established in that same year (Vedder 1969: 293-294). It seems that Clarke gradually came to Baptist convictions, as by 1648 a Baptist church can positively be identified. While in jail in Boston in 1651, he wrote out his testimony, “which can be considered as a brief and incomplete confession of faith” (Estep 1987:610).

The existing government based on Puritan principles reacted against Baptists, and history records much opposition and persecution of those who did not practice infant baptism and join the state church. However, a steady stream of immigrants who were Baptists (or believers sympathetic to Baptist principles) flowed to the New World. Baptist churches grew, which further attracted persecution (Veder 1969:299). By 1680, however, the serious persecution was over. It was the principles and convictions of these early Baptists that would eventually have such a significant contribution to the establishment of religious liberty in the America constitution.

Another significant event was the formation of a Baptist church in Philadelphia in the 1680s, which would eventually lead to an Association of Baptist churches (called the Philadelphian Association). In 1742 they adopted a Calvinistic Confession of Faith, which became a turning point in American Baptist history, as the previously Arminian dominance was replaced by a Calvinistic flavour (Kuiper 1951:332).

3.2.2 Baptist Practice

It is impossible to review all the detailed aspects of Baptist practice in regard to maintaining both liberty of conscience and doctrinal orthodoxy. This section is therefore limited to an overall review of some of the main, consistent Baptist practices in both England and America.

3.2.2.1 A distinctive Baptist witness

The first observation concerns the development of a distinct Baptist identity in a society 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). Why did they not join these churches and denominations and seek to influence them? The obvious 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.* This consideration is equally valid for General and Particular Baptists, and has remained true from the earliest Baptist church to the present day. 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.

The early Baptists argued for religious liberty in order to have the freedom to maintain this distinctive witness without persecution or harassment (Adams 1982:95, Nettles 2001:9). In practice, this distinctive witness meant that only those who professed Baptist doctrine and practice could join a local church. Importantly, they did not see this witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as threatening religious liberty, liberty of conscience or Christian liberty in society or in the church.

Membership in Baptist churches and associations was voluntary, and people could withdraw at any stage (Meredith 2001:148).

A number of important conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the early Baptists believed doctrine was important. Certainly, important enough to maintain a distinctive witness at the expense of a corporate Christian witness with the other denominations. This doctrine extended not only to issues fundamental to the faith but also secondary issues such as the administration of the ordinances and church government.

Secondly, the early Baptists did not see this distinctive witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as in any way violating liberty of conscience, religious liberty and Christian liberty. They certainly made no apologies for the fact that those who wanted to join a Baptist church must submit to Baptist doctrine and practice.

A significant conclusion that can be drawn is that any assertion that formulating doctrine on fundamental or secondary issues violates the principle of liberty of conscience is at variance with the understanding and practice of early Baptist churches.

3.2.2.2 Confessions of Faith

The second observation concerns Baptist Confessions of Faith. The next section analyses in some detail three key chapters of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. This is done to gain insight into Baptist belief specifically around the doctrine of Scripture, liberty of conscience and religious liberty. It is appropriate, however, at this point to reflect on the formulation and use of Confessions in terms of their objectives within early Baptist church polity.

It is a matter of historical fact that within the first fifty years of the existence of the Baptist movement, numerous Confessions of Faith were formulated. As mentioned earlier in the historical overview, both General and Particular Baptists produced these confessions.

It has become popular to portray Baptists as “anti-creedal.” 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, and that 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.” Secondly, he argues convincingly that Baptists historically have distinguished themselves from other denominations by what they believe. 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 distinctives such as believers baptism, separation of church and state and religious liberty to name a few. Those wishing to become members had to subscribe to these beliefs. Admittedly, these “creeds” did not always take written form, but they still existed and were used in governing church practice. For Baptists not to have a creed would mean that they would have no separate identity.

Many cults profess to believe the Bible, and only the Bible. Any earnest religious enquirer would want to know, however, what a particular group believed the Bible taught. It is certainly not “anti-Baptist” for a Baptist church to hand an inquirer a statement of what they believed the Bible taught. It would simply be putting in writing what already existed in reality. The early Baptists certainly developed and used Confessions of Faith and doctrinal statements to express what they believed (Draper 2001:54). These Confessions were never elevated above the authority of Scripture (Norman 2001:182, Estep 1987:602-606), 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. Furthermore, Ascol (1990: ¶8) notes that the word creed comes from a Latin word that simply means “I believe.” As all Christians, including Baptists, believe something, all Christians must have a “creed.”

In the above discussion, the word “creed” has been used loosely, primarily to reflect the way the word is used in current debates. Estep (1987:600), however, draws a distinction between “creedalism” and “confessionism.” In this more precise use of the terms, 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 rightly believes that Baptists ought rather to be described as “Confessional.” 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. The Confessions themselves do not have authority over the conscience (Estep 1987:602-603).

In the current debate, therefore, it can be acknowledged that Baptists have indeed not been creedal. However, any view that the early Baptists were not confessional is simply uninformed. Estep (1987:601-608) notes numerous Confessions produced in the seventeenth century by Baptists, both General and Particular. Baptists have therefore historically not been ashamed to clarify and articulate their beliefs in written form.

3.2.3 The witness of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

The Baptist Confessions of Faith provide a rich source of Baptist understanding and theological justification for religious liberty and liberty of conscience. They generally are a body of well-articulated, carefully considered statements, and therefore must be the primary source of information that shapes our understanding of early Baptist belief.

This section comprises an analysis of relevant chapters of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The 1689 Confession is certainly one of the more substantial and comprehensive Protestant confessions of faith. It consists of thirty-two chapters, covering absolutely fundamental doctrine (topics such as the nature of God, Scripture and salvation) to lesser (though still important) issues such as the administration of the ordinances and church government.

No other Baptists Confessions will be analysed in this section. The main reason for selecting the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is due to its popularity and large influence amongst Baptists. Although it can be rightly argued that because it is Calvinistic it only represents Particular Baptists, yet on Liberty of Conscience and the Civil Magistrate, the Calvinistic influence is much less distinctive. In terms of these two doctrines, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith represents general early Baptist belief that adequately represents both Particular and General Baptists. Evidence will be presented in the analysis to show that the early General Baptist leaders held to substantially the same position as the 1689 Confession on the issues of religious liberty and liberty of conscience.

The main aim of this chapter is to examine how the early Baptists understood religious liberty and liberty of conscience. However, as the fourth chapter of this thesis will deal with the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA, and since the 1689 Confession of Faith has a well-articulated chapter on the doctrine of Scripture, this aspect will also be briefly analysed. This is done for sake of completeness. However, it also demonstrates the degree and depth of doctrinal precision on the subject of the Scriptures that the early Baptists were comfortable to articulate while at the same time articulating their belief of liberty of conscience and Christian liberty. The obvious conclusion is that these early Baptists saw no conflict between clarifying and articulating a detailed doctrine of Scripture on the one hand, while still insisting on liberty of conscience on the other. This conclusion is extremely significant for the analysis of the interaction between these two areas in the BUSA. Appendix 1 contains the relevant chapters of the 1689 Confession of Faith for ease of reference.

3.2.3.1 Of the Holy Scriptures (Chapter 1 of the 1689 Confession of Faith)

Chapter one of the Confession consists of ten paragraphs, each dealing with a particular aspect of the doctrine of Scripture. As mentioned earlier, the seventeenth century Baptists were not being confronted with the same debate on Scripture as today. For example, there is no precise statement on the doctrine of inerrancy in the Confession, and Waldron (1989:51-52) acknowledges that the Confession could be updated on this point. Nevertheless, the following analysis of the Confession shows

that the articulation of the doctrine of Scripture is entirely consistent with the “complete inerrancy” discussed in chapter two. Some of the statements on Scripture contained in the Confession simply cannot be harmonised with the “conditional” or “limited inerrancy” views.

The opening statement of the Confession describes the Holy Scripture as the only “sufficient, certain and infallible” rule of all saving knowledge (paragraph one). The Holy Scripture is identified as the sixty-six books of the Bible (paragraph two), with the Apocrypha being specifically excluded (paragraph three).

Paragraph four is most instructive on the early Baptist view of the Scripture’s authority. It describes the Scriptures as authoritative, and basis of this authority rests “wholly” on God Himself, as He is the author thereof. Paragraph four therefore concludes that the Holy Scripture “is the Word of God.” The authority of Scripture therefore rests squarely on its inspiration. God is the author, and therefore the Scripture are authoritative.

If it is argued that the advocates of “conditional” or “limited inerrancy” also give assent to the above statements, the fifth paragraph dealing with the “authentication” of this authority certainly excludes such views (Waldron 1989:29). It indicates that the Scripture evidences itself to be the word of God by the “consent of all the parts,” by “incomparable excellencies,” and by its “*entire perfections*.” Any impartial reader must conclude that the authors of the Confession believed that the Scripture contained no contradictions and was entirely perfect. If there were imperfections and contradictions, the entire logic of paragraph five would be overturned. This paragraph cannot therefore be reconciled with “conditional” or “limited inerrancy” views. It is for this reason that paragraph eight limits the “immediate inspiration” of the Scripture to the original Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament. This further indicates that the early Baptists, in differentiating between the originals and other copies or translations, saw a unique, divine quality in the originals that were not necessarily to be found in other copies or translations.

Waldron (1989:51) also notes another line of evidence in the Confession of Faith. The way the authors used Scripture as proof texts shows their high regard for

Scripture and their commitment to its complete, literal veracity, even down to details. For example, in chapter four, “a view of creation and Genesis 1-3 is assumed which today is everywhere associated with the strictest view of biblical inerrancy” (Waldron 1989:51).

The point of the above assertions is not to try and “prove” that the authors of the Confession held to “inerrancy.” It rather demonstrates that they understood that the authority of the Scriptures rests on the fact that God is the author (in other words, it is inspired). One of the evidences of the divine inspiration of the sixty-six books of the Bible is that they display divine perfection. The authority and “entire perfections” of the Scriptures therefore go together. The point being made is that the authors of the Confession could not conceive of *an authoritative Scripture that was riddled with obvious errors and contradictions.*

Paragraphs nine and ten rule out any possibility of an “external sieve” through which the veracity of any portion of Scripture can be determined. Scripture is the only infallible rule in interpreting Scripture (paragraph nine), and Scripture is also the supreme or ultimate judge on all matters of religion (paragraph ten). It cannot be argued that this can be harmonised with a view that differentiates between that which is “religious” in Scripture and that which is classified as “historical,” “geographic” or “scientific.” As indicated before, the Baptists who drafted the Confession assumed the literal veracity of the historic and geographic details of Scripture, and certainly assumed the complete veracity of Scripture on the details of creation. In other words, their view of Scripture as the final judge on “all matters of religion” included Scripture being accurate and true on all the historical and geographic details that were intertwined with God’s revelation.

The early Baptists therefore had the highest regard for Scripture. Scripture is completely sufficient, certain, infallible and authoritative because it is the very word of God. It bears the marks of divinity by being entirely perfect, incomparably excellent and without any contradictions.

This view is entirely consistent with the framework developed in chapter two of this thesis. Although, as noted before, the Confession of Faith was not formulated in

today's theological climate, it nevertheless sets out a doctrine of Scripture entirely consistent with the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, making it the unique and inerrant word of God.

3.2.3.2 Of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience (Chapter 21 of the 1689 Confession of Faith)

At the outset it needs to be noted that the early Baptists saw no contradiction in formulating a detailed Confession of faith (including a detailed doctrine of Scripture that spoke to many contemporary errors) and in that very same Confession insisting on Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. In their minds at least, the former did not inherently threaten the latter.

Chapter twenty-one of the Confession contains three paragraphs that deal with the composition of Christian liberty, liberty of conscience, and the perversion of Christian liberty (Waldron 1989:254-255).

Paragraph one 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 second paragraph describes liberty of conscience. "God alone is Lord of the conscience," and it is therefore free from the commandments of people that in any way contradict or are not contained in God's word. Those requiring blind, absolute obedience or an implicit faith destroy liberty of conscience. Although this paragraph is generally stated in the negative, its positive assumption is that people's conscience is most certainly bound by God and His word. People are not "free" to believe anything they wish. This must be one of the main reasons why these early Baptists believed that producing a Confession that clearly articulated biblical doctrines did not threaten liberty of conscience in the least, but rather was consistent with it. This statement on liberty of conscience also needs to be seen in the context of their belief that churches

comprise those who “*willingly* consent to walk together” (chapter 26 paragraph 6). In other words, Christians would have the freedom to assess a particular church’s belief and practice before voluntarily joining it, or they would have the freedom to leave a church or group if they felt that the doctrine or practice was inconsistent with Scripture (Waldron 1989:14-15). The voluntary nature of Christian associations therefore further protected liberty of conscience.

The third paragraph of chapter twenty-one 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 one) 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 churches exercising discipline against those who hold to serious “error” or “unholiness of conversation” (chapter 26 paragraph 2, 5, 6 and 7).

This position is substantially the same as that of the early General Baptists leaders. For example, both Smyth and his disciple Helwys express the Divine authority of God over the conscience, and that it should therefore be left alone by the earthly king. People’s religion is between “God and themselves,” and the king “cannot answer for it.” Leonard Busher and John Murton, fellow General Baptists, held to the same beliefs. At the same time, they practiced church discipline and upheld Christian standards of holiness (Robinson 1927:149-150).

3.2.3.3 Of the civil magistrate (Chapter 24 of the 1689 Confession of Faith)

Chapter twenty-four of the Confession 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 from the Westminster 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 one of chapter twenty-four related to maintaining civil peace and justice, and not religious truth or doctrine.

The second paragraph of chapter twenty-four 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.

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 counteract any association with the Anabaptist’s reputation of being “anti-government.”

This position is essentially the same as that held by the General Baptists. Both Smyth and Helwys clearly limit the role of the king to that of “earthly causes,” and to deal with only civil transgressions such as theft, murder and adultery in terms of Romans chapter thirteen. This formed their basis for religious liberty, which was to be extended to heretics, Jews and Turks without distinction (Robinson 1927:149-150).

3.2.4 Baptists in the Colonies

A survey of early Baptist belief on religious liberty would not be complete or balanced without a specific discussion on the Baptists in the Colonies. In God’s providence, the testimony of the Baptists to the principle of religious liberty was very clearly displayed in early American history leading up to the drafting of the American constitution.

This survey is restricted to the “early” Baptists in the colonies and therefore does not deal with the events in the eighteenth century and beyond. It will therefore not include the drafting of the constitution. However, this early history clearly demonstrates the

Baptist belief in religious liberty which would later impact on the drafting of the constitution.

It is no surprise that the Baptist view of religious liberty in America is virtually identical to the views of Baptists in England. Many of the early pilgrims were from England where they encountered many of the Baptist beliefs. For the sake of brevity, therefore, only a few examples will be given to show that the Baptists in the colonies held to very similar views regarding religious liberty and Christian liberty. Their view is substantially the same, and will therefore not be repeated in its entirety.

As noted earlier, the settlement in Providence was established on the basis of religious liberty under the influence of Williams. Two points need to be noted. Firstly, the basis of religious liberty for Williams was the conviction that no one should be punished by the magistrate for the “first tablet of the law,” referring to the first four of the ten commandments which relate directly to the worship of God (Vedder 1969:289). The only exemption to this principle was if religious views disturbed the public peace (Vedder 1969:290).

Secondly, Williams was instrumental in establishing the first Baptist church which was based on Baptist principles. In other words, Williams saw religious liberty as an opportunity to maintain a distinctive Baptist witness in an already “Christianised” society. Those who joined the Baptist church had to subscribe to Baptist doctrine and practice. Williams did not see this as inconsistent with religious liberty or liberty of conscience. Church membership was entirely voluntary, and no one was coerced to believe Baptist doctrine or join the church. Also, no one was persecuted for not holding to Baptist doctrine. Armitage (1890: Chapter 3, ¶10) records a newspaper article at the time which observed that Roger Williams and his Baptist followers “combine the most resolute conviction, *the most stubborn belief in their own special doctrines*, with the most admirable tolerance of the faith of other Christians.”

The same could be said for Dr John Clarke. The government of Rhode Island was established on the principle of religious liberty, where no one was to be “accounted a delinquent for doctrine” (Vedder 1969:293-294). Yet in Rhode Island a Baptist church was established which maintained a distinctive Baptist witness.

3.3 Conclusions

Despite some diversity in doctrine between the Anabaptists and the early Baptists, and even amongst Baptists themselves, a number of clear and consistent conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the early Baptists saw religious liberty primarily as a liberty granted by the state. They consistently called for the state to tolerate differing faiths and religious views. Religious liberty therefore existed when the state did not coerce its subjects on religious matters, but restricted its role to civil matters. Only where religious beliefs impacted on civil peace could the state intervene.

Secondly, the early Baptists argued for religious liberty in order to have the freedom to maintain a distinctive witness to Scripture without persecution or harassment. In other words, religious liberty would provide a social and political framework within which religious groups could enjoy liberty of conscience and practice their beliefs. The early Baptists therefore believed doctrine was important. In practice, this distinctive witness meant that only those who professed Baptist doctrine and practice could join a local Baptist church. Importantly, they did not see this witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as threatening liberty of conscience in society or in the church. This was due to the fact that people's faith was not coerced by the state, and church membership was voluntary. Church discipline consisted not of physical persecution, but separation and excommunication. Also, Christian liberty did not consist in the freedom to believe and practice anything, but was rather restricted to the word of God.

In this regard, it is important to note that the doctrines that Baptists stood for were controversial at the time. Their insistence on religious freedom and believer's baptism in particular attracted persecution and criticism from the "religious state."

Thirdly, the early Baptist movement can be described as Confessional, rather than creedal. The number of confessions that were produced within the first hundred

years of the movement is surprising. Creeds as authoritative, unalterable and infallible statements find no place in the Baptist identity. However, Confessions as a consensus of a particular Baptist group are evident. They were incomplete, served a particular purpose, and were used as guides to interpreting Scripture. The Confessions themselves did not have authority over the conscience.

CHAPTER 4: LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE AND THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE BUSA

This chapter evaluates the interaction of liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA. It starts with an analysis and evaluation of the founding principles of the BUSA and then moves on to an historical overview of liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture. The impact on the doctrine of Scripture follows in the subsequent chapter.

4.1 The basis of the BUSA

The 1877 Constitution of the Baptist Union includes a Declaration of Principle, which forms the basis of the Union. 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” (Miller 1987:51).

As noted in the first chapter, the two Baptist principles of the authority of the Scriptures and liberty of conscience are clearly revealed in this statement. Some reflection on this statement is required.

Firstly, the Lordship of Christ and His authority over all aspects of faith and practice are mediated through the Scriptures. In other words, the Scripture is the authority for the church, because it is the word of Christ. There does not appear to be any indication in this statement that Christ’s authority can in any way be separated from the Scriptures. This provides the primary reason for the Baptist emphases on the primacy and authority of the Scriptures, as without the Scriptures Christ’s will cannot be known with any degree of certainty. Any depreciation of the Scriptures must therefore impact on the knowledge and application of Christ’s will and authority for the church.

Secondly, it is obvious that the liberty given to each church to interpret Scripture was not intended to be unrestricted. The Declaration of Union was after all to establish a *Baptist* Union, and therefore only Baptist churches could join. The more detailed statement of faith of 1924 was an attempt to define more precisely what it meant to be Baptist. Also, the BUSA has since its inception exercised some degree of discipline over deviating pastors or churches, indicating that some “liberties” were deemed unacceptable to the Union.

Thirdly, and related to the second point above, the fact that a Statement of Faith was required several decades later after a few controversies indicates an initial weakness in the formation of the BUSA. There was a lack of definition and clarity on the doctrinal standards to be applied in the BUSA. The claim of any professed Christian group to follow the Scripture does not exempt it from clearly stating what it believes the Scriptures teach. As has already been demonstrated, the early Baptist movements certainly did not consider it to be fundamentally “un-Baptist” to produce statements and confessions of faith to clarify what they believed the Scriptures taught.

4.2 Historical overview of liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA

This section is structured chronologically. The major events and controversies relating to the doctrine of Scripture and liberty of conscience in the BUSA are dealt with in turn, but are obviously related to each other. This section relies heavily on the research done by G G Miller, which covers the period from 1930 to 1986. Historical details after 1986 have been researched from letters, minutes of meetings and records of Assemblies.

4.2.1 The Doke / Ennals controversy

In 1923 W H Doke (BU 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 (Miller 1987:52).

In 1924 J E Ennals (BU President in 1919 and 1933) responded by letter to the article by opposing verbal inspiration, asking for an equivalent space in the next edition to set out his arguments. The Editor turned down this request on the grounds that "modernist articles" were not accepted. 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 Song of Solomon, and differentiated between the moral standards of the Old and New Testament (Miller 1987:52-53). 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.

Letters of support for both sides were received. In particular, a letter received from W J Matthew (in support of Ennals) rejected Doke's "extreme traditional view of inspiration," and advocated that Christians had always believed in degrees of inspiration in the Scriptures and that Christ was above the letter of the Scriptures. Furthermore, Matthew contended that some within the BU were undermining liberty of conscience (most likely referring to, amongst other issues, the fact that the article of Ennals was not published in the magazine), which made continued fellowship difficult (Miller 1987:52). This controversy in part led to the Statement of Belief in 1924, which is dealt with in the following section.

A number of observations need to be made. Firstly, this controversy is symptomatic of a lack of doctrinal clarity in the BU, seemingly due to a preference for the liberty of each church to interpret the Scriptures for themselves. However, this "liberty" (at the expense of doctrinal clarity) led to controversy. It is staggering that the views of a person who was President of the BUSA (twice!) would not be published in the official BUSA magazine. It is also staggering that the views on Scripture between two Presidents could differ so radically. Clear and consistent leadership in any organisation is fundamental for the well being of that organisation.

Secondly, the doctrinal views on Scripture of Ennals and Matthew clearly undermines the authority of Christ mediated through the Scriptures, which was the basis of the Union. Matthews for example, in driving a wedge between Christ's authority and Scripture, seems to indicate that the Scriptures are inadequate to give full expression for Christ's will for the church. The view of Ennals that the words of the Apostle's (in the context of Scripture) could be fallible is equally problematic. The fact is that Christ did not physically write any of the New Testament. The apostles and other witnesses recorded all His words and deeds. If the apostles were fallible in recording Christ's words and deeds, then Christ's will cannot be known for certain. The question then remains as to where the church will find an adequate and infallible source of Christ's will?

Thirdly, the view that liberty of conscience is undermined because the views of Ennals were not given full publication and equal acceptance is problematic and at variance with the historic understanding amongst Baptists of liberty of conscience. The State exercised no physical threat against Ennals or those of like mind. Membership in the BUSA was and is voluntary. The early Baptists certainly did not understand liberty of conscience to mean that any and every doctrinal view must be accommodated and allowed full expression in a church or Christian organisation. A church or organisation could legitimately define doctrinal orthodoxy and exercise discipline on that basis. As it has been argued above, the very diverse views allowed in the BUSA on the doctrine of Scripture in the name of "liberty" in fact undermined the very basis upon which the BU was established.

4.2.2 The 1924 Statement of Belief

In order to give some guidance to the churches in the BUSA following the controversy of the previous year, the 1924 Assembly adopted an eleven-point statement, the first of which 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." (South African Baptist Handbook 1924:27).

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” (South African Baptist Handbook 1924:27).

The following points need to be made. 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 were 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 1924 Statement by the BUSA Executive in 1954 in dealing with Barnard (dealt with below). Yet the statement is limited to a phrase that had already become ambiguous in the debate.

Secondly, the general ineffectiveness of the 1924 Statement needs to be noted. Two strands of evidence can be cited. In the first instance, 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 far removed from the intent of the Statement, and yet he could still be elected to the highest office in the BUSA. In the second instance, as will be dealt with later, by 1987 a significant portion of the BUSA held to errant views of Scripture that are incompatible with “verbal inspiration.” The conclusion is that ambiguity in a doctrinal debate achieves very little.

Thirdly, this incident highlights the rather acute difficulty the BUSA 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 BUSA 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 made clear and unambiguous stands on controversial issues, even to the point 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.

4.2.3 The Barnard Controversy

In 1952 A J Banard 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” (The South African Baptist 1954:86).

Although the details are not clear, 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. In the case of Barnard, the validity of certain books of the Bible (or portions of them) were called into question. The Executive believed that the 1924 Statement and the BU required “verbal inspiration” as the acceptable view of inspiration. This was ratified by the subsequent Assembly (Miller 1987:61-62).

This incident highlights the consequences of a lack of clarity on issues fundamental to the basis of the Union. Barnard had read and accepted the 1924 Statement on Scripture (Miller 1987:61-62). He must have believed it 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 BU. The continued, subsequent debates and incidents on the doctrine of Scripture are symptoms of this problem of lack of clarity within the Union in the name of liberty of conscience.

4.2.4 Standards for Baptist Ministers

During the period 1955 to 1958, an attempt was made to include “verbal inspiration” and the 1924 Statement as a minimum requirement for ministerial candidates. As noted in the first chapter, 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). The following year, in order to at least exercise some control, the Executive of the BUSA 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” (their words) 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 such an act 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 BUSA 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 BUSA 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 BUSA was not able to achieve this due to the principle of liberty of conscience. It clearly demonstrates that unless the two principles are correctly understood and prioritised, the BUSA will never effectively progress in relevantly maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy in an ever-changing theological world.

Secondly, the claim that adopting a statement that clearly articulated a doctrine of Scripture would violate liberty of conscience was spurious and inconsistent. The first question that needs to be asked is why the BUSA could maintain some doctrines and not others. For example, why was it acceptable to maintain the doctrine congregational church government and believer's baptism even to the point of excluding churches from the Union, and yet the doctrine of Scripture could not be clarified? In what sense was the doctrine of church government or believers baptism "guided by the Spirit" that a Biblical doctrine of Scripture could not be? This is especially important, as the very basis of the BUSA was the authority of Christ mediated through the Scriptures. A relevant defence of the doctrine of Scripture to protect its effective authority for the BUSA could hardly be more important. The objection was clearly inconsistent.

The second question that needs to be asked is whether those in the BUSA making the claims of the unconstitutional nature of the action were in fact not guilty themselves of being very "un-Baptist." Their assumption was that the formulation and wording of the original constitution with its basis of the Union were inviolate, and to clarify and update them would be contrary to what it meant to be Baptist. This, however, gives a status bordering on creedalism to these documents. The Executive of the BUSA attempted to adopt a position on the doctrine of Scripture to protect the BUSA from liberalism. However, the legal opinion based on the constitution was that this could not be done except by unanimous consent. Practically speaking, due to diversity already in the BUSA, this meant that the original wording and principles of these documents could not be developed, clarified or altered. This fact ought to be extremely concerning to the BUSA, as it goes against the whole tenor of what Baptists have historically stood for (and what the BUSA claimed to stand for). It is beyond contradiction that the constitution and basis of the Union is an historic, "man-made" document. Yet this document is practically inviolate, preventing the BUSA from defending the faith relevantly in the present age. In other words, the historic formulation of the constitution is restricting the authority of the Scriptures to speak relevantly on the issue of the inspiration of Scripture. As noted before, creedalism tends to see previous formulations or statements as infallible and unchangeable. Baptists have rather been confessional, where historic statements can be modified or updated as circumstances dictate.

In any event, J N Jonsson (quoted in Miller 1987:56) noted that a doctrinal statement on Scripture (such as the 1924 Statement) would not undermine the basis of the Union. An acknowledgment of Scriptural authority does not undermine Christ's authority, but rather enhances it, as apart from the Scriptures, Christ's authority would not be known nor fully acknowledged. The legal opinion should most certainly be challenged and resolved to allow the BUSA to remain relevant on the doctrine of Scripture.

The third question that needs to be asked is the appropriateness of the claim that liberty of conscience would be undermined if "verbal inspiration" were adopted. From earlier discussions it was noted that the early Baptists believed that liberty of conscience was maintained as long as membership of a Christian group was voluntary, and there was no threat of physical coercion or persecution. In fact, the purpose for general religious liberty and liberty of conscience was so that Christian groups (and Baptists in particular) could pursue Biblical reformation and maintain Biblical standards as they interpreted them. Why does the BUSA not have the same right to define and defend a doctrine of Scripture in the light of the debates around the inspiration of Scripture? Why does an attempt to do so automatically undermine liberty of conscience?

These probing questions and discussion indicate that a certain historical and theological perspective has been lost within the BUSA. It is no longer functioning as the early Baptist movements did, namely, to defend the faith relevantly for each generation, especially on controversial issues.

4.2.5 The Assembly of 1986: Inerrancy considered

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 (General Secretary's Memorandum to Ministers and Church Secretaries, 1987:3)

M 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 BUSA 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 BUSA made little progress (if any) since 1924.

In the same Statement of Principles, a statement on religious liberty was adopted the following year:

"The Principle of Religious Liberty, namely that no individual should be coerced either by the State or by any secular, ecclesiastical or religious group in matters of faith. The right of private conscience is to be respected. For each believer this means the right to interpret the Scriptures responsibly and to act in the light of his conscience. (South African Baptist Handbook 1988:164).

Two points need to be made regarding this statement. Firstly, in its wording, this principle is in agreement with the early Baptist understanding of liberty of conscience. Religious liberty is established when there is no external coercion by the state or any other body. This has, however, always existed in the BUSA, as membership was and is voluntary and no external coercion or threat of physical punishment was applied to any who left the BUSA for whatever reasons. The statement also rightly indicates that each believer must have the freedom to interpret Scripture for themselves and to

act in accordance with it (in other words, to enjoy full liberty of conscience). This in agreement with the doctrinal foundations laid in chapter two and the survey of early Baptist movements.

Secondly, however, the *application* of this principle in the BUSA must be questioned. As noted earlier, some in the BUSA opposed any doctrinal definition of the doctrine of Scripture on the basis that it would restrict liberty of conscience. Similarly, from a survey conducted in 1987 in the BUSA, 16% of the respondents believed that any attempt to officially adopt a particular view of the inspiration of Scripture “would be a contradiction of our Baptist Principle of individual liberty of conscience” (Miller 1987:174). This is clearly inconsistent. In the very same Statement of Principles, congregational church government was adopted, which led to nine churches being excluded from the Union. Why could a particular view of church government be adopted, but not a particular view of Scripture? Why does the one and not the other violate liberty of conscience?

It could be argued that congregational church government has always been a historic Baptist principle, and “verbal inspiration” or inerrancy not. In response to this argument it needs to be pointed out that the BUSA has to defend the faith relevantly in every age. The early Baptist movements made stands and statements on issues that were *currently* controversial and relevant. It would be most “un-Baptist” to only adopt doctrinal formulations on the basis of their historicity. If the early Baptists only stood for what had *historic* precedence, they would never have championed believer’s baptism and religious liberty, as these were generally considered “new” ideas. In any event, the view that inerrancy (or at least “implicit” inerrancy) was not a historic Baptist position is open to serious challenge, as the analysis of chapter one of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith demonstrated.

4.2.6 Proposed Statement on Scripture (1990)

In 1989 a small group of Reformed Baptist Pastors within the BUSA expressed their concern at what appeared to be a “departure from the authority of Scripture.” The evidence they cited for this included the BUSA 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 BUSA. 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, who formed a new Committee to look at the issue. A slightly modified Statement was produced, but 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 (South African Baptist Handbook 1990:167).

Six years later, mainly in response to this failure to adopt a more detailed doctrine of Scripture, Lynwood Baptist Church resigned from the BUSA. In the letter of resignation, they cited numerous reasons. The main reason given was that the BUSA did not “unambiguously assert Christian fundamentals,” one of these fundamentals being the infallibility, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. Lynwood Baptist Church believed that in failing to adopt a clear statement on Scripture that would be binding on the other churches, the BUSA was failing to assert Christian fundamentals (Letter from Lynwood Baptist Church 4 February 1996). The BUSA responded that it stood strongly on the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, and that it had stated this on

more than one occasion. The BUSA therefore believed that it had not shifted from its historic position on Scripture (Letter from BUSA 11 March 1997).

The response of the BUSA that it held strongly to inerrancy needs to be questioned, as it does not reflect the realities of the historical overview given above. The BUSA has consistently *not* been able to adopt an official view on the inspiration of Scripture, and has on at least two occasions resisted adopting terms such as “verbal inspiration” or “inerrancy.” Also, as will be fully discussed later, a 1987 survey (nine years prior to this letter) showed that up to 30% of the BUSA did not in fact hold to the inerrancy of Scripture.

4.2.7 Other attempts to clarify the doctrine of Scripture

Other attempts were made to clarify the doctrine of Scripture. These were not successful for reasons other than liberty of conscience, but are included for completeness sake.

4.2.7.1 The Sufficiency of Scripture (1997)

In 1997 a detailed statement on the sufficiency of Scripture was submitted by Emmaus Baptist Church to the BUSA Executive for their consideration and formal adoption. The reason for this action was that the Pastor of Emmaus Baptist believed that the BUSA was using the principle of autonomy of the local church as an excuse to avoid dealing with issues (such as adopting a position on women ordination). Also, previously the BUSA had got a secular company (namely Tricor Marketing Group) to investigate problems in the BUSA and come up with recommendations. This was perceived to undermine the role and sufficiency of Scripture in the BUSA. It was also suggested in the letter that the BUSA was more committed to organisational unity than theological distinctives (Letter from Emmaus Baptist Church 2 September 1997).

This statement on the sufficiency of Scripture was not adopted, as the BUSA believed that this aspect of Scripture was already reflected in the 1924 Statement, and that another statement was not necessary (Letter from BUSA 28 October 1997, Letter from BUSA 2 March 1998). The BUSA also made the point that it was prepared to make unpopular decisions, and referred to the statement on congregational church government, which resulted in nine churches leaving the BUSA. In 1998, however, in response to numerous enquiries as to why the statement on the sufficiency of Scripture was rejected, the BUSA published a modified, shorter statement on the general sufficiency of Scripture, stating that the Scripture was the “final authority and completely adequate guide for both faith and practice (South African Baptist Handbook 1998:413).

4.2.7.2 Durban North Baptist Church and Inerrancy (1989-1990)

In 1989 Durban North Baptist Church wrote to the BUSA about what they perceived were disturbing trends in the organisation. One of these trends was a movement away from the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. The letter recommended that the issue of inerrancy be addressed and resolved in the near future (Letter from Durban North Baptist Church 17 January 1989). A number of meetings took place in 1989 between representatives of Durban North Baptist and the members of the BUSA Executive.

A statement on Scripture was drawn up by Durban North Baptist Church on 8 June 1989. This statement was also circulated to other Baptist Churches of like mind (Executive Minutes, Durban North Baptist Church 8 June 1989). The statement included the view that the Old and New Testament Scriptures were “fully inspired by God, inerrant and authoritative.” It also stated that the Scriptures “do not merely contain the word of God but are the word of God.” It further elaborated that inerrancy meant that “the original writings were entirely true and never false in all they affirm, whether that affirmation relates to doctrine, ethics or any other discipline.” Durban North Baptist Church also stated in the letter that they “required” all Principals and Councils of all denominational Training Colleges to ensure that all instruction was in accordance with the stated view of Scripture, and also that all teaching staff at the

Colleges give an undertaking to teach the stated view of Scripture (Letter from Durban North Baptist Church 21 June 1989).

At a Durban North Baptist Church Executive meeting held on 19 July 1989 a report back was given of a meeting with three BUSA Executive members. One of the Executive members expressed the view that while he personally held to inerrancy, the matter may be divisive. It was also believed by the members of the Executive the problem of inadequate views of Scripture was not as widespread in the BUSA as Durban North Baptist Church believed.

Durban North Baptist Church wrote to the BUSA asking the proposed statement to be tabled for resolution at the next BUSA Assembly. The BUSA Executive however proposed to defer the matter to a later Assembly as it was “new and controversial.” However, these reasons were deemed “spurious” by Durban North Baptist Church (Durban North Baptist Church, Executive meeting 27 September 1989).

This initiative by Durban North Baptist Church was subsequently merged with the process that was set up by the BUSA to formulate a detailed Statement in 1990, which resulted in the statement on Scripture going out for general consideration (as noted above). Clearly, the objective of Durban North Baptist Church to have the view of inerrancy formally adopted and used as a standard for teaching in the Colleges was not achieved.

4.2.8 Other issues relating to liberty and doctrinal diversity

A number of other issues have risen in the BUSA which further demonstrate the tension between liberty of conscience and doctrinal unity. These issues do not necessarily relate to the doctrine of Scripture, and will therefore only be treated briefly. However, as will be noted, some believed that the doctrinal diversity was partly due to an erosion of the authority of Scripture.

4.2.8.1 The Charismatic Movement

The Charismatic movement has impacted many denominations over the last few decades. In 1975 the BUSA 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 BUSA. For example, the Pastor of Springs Baptist church complained to the BUSA of “Pentecostals masquerading as Baptists,” and asked the question of how far Baptist theology can diverge but still speak of “unity within the denomination” (Letter from Springs Baptist Church 27 May 1980). The Principal of the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa 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, pastored churches, which eventually led to “tensions” and an “unpleasant situation” within the BUSA (Letter from Baptist Theological College 4 Nov 1978). Lynwood Baptist Church, in their letter of resignation, also noted their discomfort with the degree of differences accommodated in the BUSA, including churches that were “extremely Charismatic” (Letter from Lynwood Baptist Church 4 February 1996).

The letter from Emmaus Baptist Church in 1997 proposing the 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” (Letter from Emmaus Baptist Church 2 September 1997).

In 1979, the BUSA circulated a summary statement on the charismatic movement which was commended by the Baptist World Alliance, of which the BUSA is a member. The statement, while acknowledging some benefits of the Charismatic movement, nevertheless saw some dangers. In particular, it believed 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” (Baptist Union Executive Document 59-79, 22 May 1979).

4.2.8.2 Congregational Church Government

Miller (1987:78) notes that as a result of a number of churches changing 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,” it was felt that a church could no longer fellowship in the BUSA if it did not subscribe to congregational church government.

At the 1984 Assembly a resolution to exclude churches from the BUSA 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 BUSA. 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 BUSA adopted guidelines to prevent churches from deviating from Baptist principles. It therefore agreed that the BUSA 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 BUSA. In the same resolution ministerial recognition would be on the basis of acceptance of the Statement of Principles (South African Baptist Handbook 1988:165).

A number of points need to be noted in this regard. Firstly, there is no record that this position on church government was debated in its relation to the autonomy of the local church and their right to interpret Scripture for themselves. There therefore seems to be no clear or consistent pattern as to when the principle of liberty of conscience applies to doctrinal issues that are mandatory on the members of the BUSA.

Secondly, there appears to be no adequate basis as to why, for example, a particular view of church government can be insisted on, but other views can be tolerated. For example, the Pastor of Constantia Park Baptist raised the issue as to why the matter

of women ordination, which had no historical precedence in the BUSA or in early Baptist movements, (discussed below) was a matter for toleration, while congregational church government, which was based on “not much biblical evidence” was not a matter of toleration (Letter from Constantia Park Baptist 8 November 1989). To some members, there appeared to be no consistent application of Baptist principles in the BUSA.

4.2.8.3 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 BUSA (South African Baptist Handbook 1989:165). An article published in the Baptist Today highlighted the debate and diversity in the BUSA on the issue, but concluded that the debate was “not about Biblical authority,” and that the debate took place within the framework of a complete commitment to “to an authoritative and inerrant word” (Editor Baptist Today, May 1989:1-2).

Others within the BUSA were not convinced. In 1989 the Pastor of Newcastle Baptist Church wrote a letter to all members of the BUSA, and 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” (Letter from Newcastle Baptist Church 5 September 1989). Lynwood Baptist Church included women ordination as one of their reasons for resigning from the BUSA (Letter from Lynwood Baptist Church 4 February 1996). As noted before, the Pastor of Constantia Park Baptist Church expressed extreme difficulty in accepting that there had been such a dramatic shift from what he 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 BUSA 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). He concluded that the BUSA had come to a place where each church could “interpret and believe the word as they desire.” The question that remained for him was what the basis of the BUSA actually was. He further expressed the view that the BUSA was tolerating views that their Baptist forefathers would not have (Letter from Constantia Park Baptist 8 November 1989).

In 1997, the Elders of Hillcrest Baptist Church expressed concern at the position on women ordination adopted by the BUSA. They believed that the BUSA had failed to guard the “fundamentals of evangelical Baptists,” and that the BUSA 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 BUSA was “not yet liberal,” and therefore withdrawal at the time would not be appropriate (Letter from Hillcrest Baptist Church 16 February 1997).

The issue of women ordination raises an important concern. In any doctrinal debate, differences can come either from differing hermeneutical approaches, or from different views on the inspiration of Scripture. Although the BUSA concluded that the differences in this debate were purely a matter of hermeneutics, many disagreed. The point is, however, that in a climate of ambiguity on the doctrine of Scripture, where up to 30% of the BUSA holds to some form of errancy or “Barthian view,” it is difficult to see how any doctrinal debate can ever be purely hermeneutical. The element of uncertainty on the doctrine of Scripture will always raise the suspicion that more than hermeneutics are influencing people’s perspectives.

4.3 Conclusions

The research presented above warrants the following general conclusions.

Firstly, controversies have plagued the BUSA due to lack of clarity on the doctrine of Scripture. The Doke versus Ennals controversy and the Barnard incident are evidence of this. This lack of clarity has mainly been due to the view that formulating and adopting a statement on Scripture would undermine the liberty of conscience of members of the BUSA.

Secondly, the view of liberty of conscience in the BUSA is at variance with the historic understanding of the principle. The early Baptists certainly did not understand liberty of conscience to mean that any and every doctrinal view must be accommodated in a church or Christian organisation. A church or organisation could legitimately define doctrinal orthodoxy and exercise discipline on that basis. From earlier discussions it was noted that the early Baptists believed that liberty of conscience was maintained as long as membership of a Christian group was voluntary, and there was no threat of physical coercion or persecution. In fact, the purpose of general religious liberty and liberty of conscience was so that Christian groups (and Baptists in particular) could pursue Biblical reformation and maintain Biblical standards as they interpreted them. The BUSA has the same right to define and defend a doctrine of Scripture relevantly, and an attempt to do so will not automatically undermine liberty of conscience.

Thirdly, it is obvious that there is no clear application of the principle of liberty of conscience in the BUSA. It remains unclear as to why it is acceptable to adopt a particular view of church government, for example (with the result that churches withdrew from the BUSA), but not on the inspiration of Scripture. This is especially problematic when the BUSA has concluded that the doctrine of Scripture is of primary importance to the well being on the BUSA.

Fourthly, arising from above three conclusions, subtle contradictions are apparent in the BUSA that members do not seem to be explicitly conscious of. For example, the article in the Baptist Today on women ordination confidently expressed the fact that the debate was taking place within a framework of *complete* commitment to an “inerrant” word. Yet up to 30% of the BUSA did not support inerrancy. Similarly, the BUSA executive indicated that the BUSA supported inerrancy, and that it had expressed this on numerous occasions. Yet the facts contradict such statements.

The BUSA has not been able to adopt a statement on inerrancy due to opposition by members. The BUSA therefore does not accept inerrancy as an official position, and with such a high proportion not holding to inerrancy, no debate in the BUSA on doctrinal issues can be within a framework of complete commitment to inerrancy. This is supported by the observation of the Pastor of Constantia Park Baptist Church that at the 1989 Assembly, during a serious debate on Scripture, the Assembly applauded a statement that “clearly distinguished between the authority of Christ and that of Paul” (Letter from Constantia Park Baptist 8 November 1989). Such statements are certainly not within the orbit of a commitment to the authority of Scriptures for the reasons cited above.

Another contradiction arising from the ambiguity in the BUSA on the doctrine of Scripture seems to be the tendency to adopt the most “favourable” or “convenient” position depending on the circumstances. For example, in 1989 the BUSA Executive wanted to postpone the proposal on inerrancy to the Assembly because “it was new and controversial.” Yet in 1997, in defending itself, the BUSA Executive insisted that it had always strongly stood for inerrancy and had often stated this. The BUSA Executive therefore implied that inerrancy was its historic position. The obvious question is how both statements can be true at the same time? Clearly, something the BUSA had always strongly stood for and stated on numerous occasions could not also be new and controversial when proposed to an Assembly. It is very difficult to conclude anything else other than that the BUSA adopts differing positions in order to make its actions or lack of action seem more acceptable at the time. A framework of doctrinal ambiguity tends to allow all this.

The next chapter will highlight the impact that this ambiguity has had on the views of Scripture in the BUSA.

CHAPTER 5: IMPACT ON THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE BUSA

The previous chapter has shown the tensions between liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture. Numerous attempts to detail a doctrine of Scripture and formally adopt it have not been successful. The BUSA has not advanced past the formula that the Scriptures are “inspired.” The question arises as to what impact this has had on the authority of Scripture in the BUSA. This chapter sets out some of these impacts. The first section shows the results of a survey done in the BUSA in 1986, and the second section analyses the views of a BUSA Pastor.

5.1 The 1986 Survey of the BUSA

In 1986 a detailed, five-page altitudinal survey of the BUSA was undertaken by G G 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 at all between respondents.

The following figure indicates the proportions of categories of people the questionnaire was sent to.

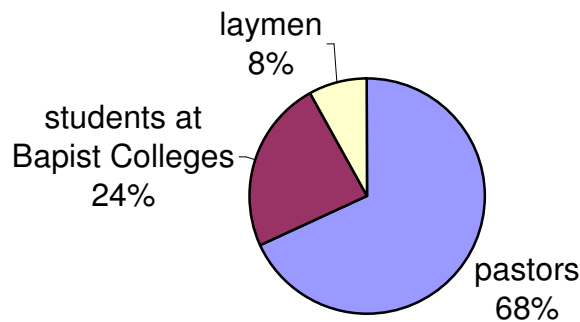


Figure 1: Recipients of the Questionnaire

The survey therefore largely represents the views of the then existing pastors or future pastors of the BUSA.

5.1.1 Views on Inspiration

Appendix 2 shows the exact wording of the questions in the questionnaire. It should be noted that respondents were not constrained to select only one option, and therefore Miller reported that while 93,3% 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:

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%

Table 1: Responses to options regarding the inspiration of Scripture

It also needs to be noted that in his main thesis, Miller reports options “c and d” as contradictory to full inspiration (Miller 1987:96). Yet in the Appendix 3, Miller indicates that “b and c” are contradictory options (Miller 1987:167). A careful reading of the questions indicates that b), c) and d) are contradictory to full inerrancy, and therefore the ranges reported by Miller of those holding to full inspiration could be incorrect. The results reported in this thesis will therefore work back from the options selected, and not purely report Millers conclusions. Furthermore, option e) (namely that inerrancy is futile due to the absence of autographs) has historically been argued by those not supporting full inerrancy. Due to the way the survey was structured and the way Miller reported the results, it is uncertain if some of those who reported they supported full inerrancy *also* selected this option.

In the reporting the results, therefore, three scenarios need to be given. The first is an “unlikely but optimistic high view” of Scripture in the BUSA, where it is assumed that those that selected contradictory options actually do hold to full inerrancy. The second scenario assumes that those that selected the contradictory options do not hold to full inerrancy. This seems most likely, as it would seem improbable that those who actually reported to holding “full inerrancy” would also select options that *explicitly* included errors in the originals. More likely, the respondents did not fully understand the concept of “full inerrancy.” The third scenario assumes that those who selected option option e) (namely that inerrancy is futile due to absence of originals) also do not in fact hold to full inerrancy. This scenario appears to be the most likely scenario, as it would seem improbable that those who fully supported inerrancy would also conclude that the absence of the originals makes the debate of

little value. It therefore represents the highest proportion of respondents that do not hold to the full inerrancy of Scripture.

Scenario 1 indicates the following results:

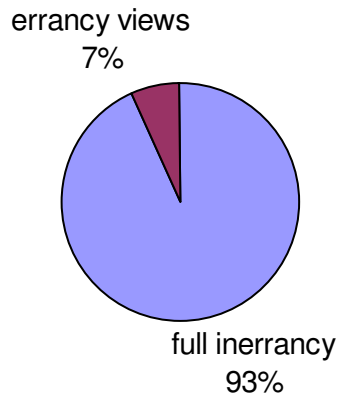


Figure 2: Scenario 1 – unlikely and optimistic view of Scripture in the BUSA

As noted earlier, this view is unlikely, as those who understood and selected “full inerrancy” would not be likely select other options that explicitly allowed for errors in the Scripture. In other words, it is more likely that the respondents did not understand the term “full inerrancy” (which was not defined in the questionnaire) than that they did not understand the questions that explicitly allowed for errors in the Scripture.

Scenario 2 indicates the following results:

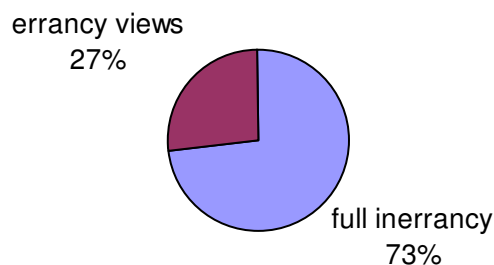


Figure 3: Scenario 2 - moderately likely scenario

Scenario 2 represents a more likely scenario, where selections of b), c) and d) give the actual percentage of errancy views. In this scenario, around 27% of the respondents do not support inerrancy.

Scenario 3 indicates the following results:

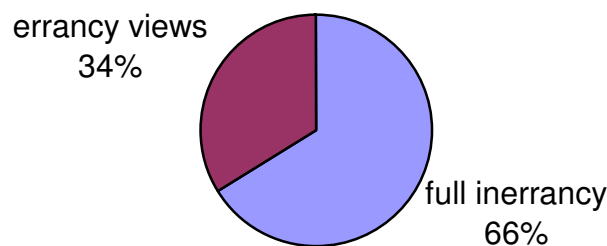


Figure 4: Scenario 3 – most likely view of Scripture

In this scenario, it is assumed that those selecting options b) c) d) and e) do not support inerrancy. In this scenario, up to 34% of the respondents held to errancy views.

Other, related questions, show the following results. Ninety one percent of respondents believed that the historical events recorded in the Scripture were true and in fact did happen. The question, however, did not specify whether it referred to *all* the historic events or only *some* of them. Seven percent believed that faith was independent of the historicity of Scripture. In other words, the spiritual message of Scripture could still be accepted without accepting its historical accuracy or veracity (Miller 1987:170). Two percent of the respondents believed that the early Genesis accounts were unreliable, and also that some of the reported miracles of Christ could have been myths (Miller 1987:170).

5.1.2 Views on importance of Scripture

Significantly, 93% of respondents believed that the doctrine of Scripture was a matter of primary importance (Miller 1987: 167). However, there clearly is no agreement in the BUSA on how to express this doctrine. For example, while 16% of the respondents believed that it would contradict the individual liberty of the churches to enforce a particular view of the inspiration of Scripture, 34% of respondents believed the 1924 Statement should be expanded to include the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. Some 17% also believed that the 1924 Statement should be revised from time to time, as theological issues required it. Fifty seven percent of the respondents believed that the 1924 Statement on Scripture was sufficient to safeguard the BUSA's view of inspiration (Miller 1987:164).

Up to 68% percent of respondents believed that theological education through "outside" institutions could undermine views on the inspiration and authority of Scripture within the BUSA. This indicates that the view of inspiration taught by the Baptist theological colleges is considered very important.

5.2 Interview with a BUSA Pastor

The 1986 survey results have the limitation of being impersonal and fragmented, in the sense that no individual's full view on Scripture can be assessed. Also, a mail questionnaire with no opportunity for interaction and clarification can introduce slight distortions, and not allow an individual to adequately express subtle variations from the limited or rigid set of options before them.

Appendix 3 shows the results of an interview with a Baptist pastor on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. This author did the interview in 2001 for an assignment for degree purposes. The assignment required an interview with someone who had a differing view of Scripture from myself.

The views expressed in this interview can therefore not be said to be representative of a particular group within the BUSA. It does, however, give an insight into the type

of divergent views (from full inerrancy) that can be found in the BUSA under the current doctrinal statements. Significantly, the pastor that was interviewed indicated that some of his views (especially on Genesis 1-11 being an allegory) were expressed at his interview for ministerial suitability within the BUSA.

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 show many differences.
- b) While there are historical or geographic errors and contradictions in the Scriptures, there are no “doctrinal” errors as such, but 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 their conscience and the limited revelation in nature, that person would be saved although he never heard about Christ i.e. 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.

It is not necessary to comment on all the views expressed in the interview, as much of the previous discussion would simply be repeated. Also, the assignment in Appendix 3 does analyse the views expressed. However, two points need to be made.

Firstly, the interview confirms that errancy views do detract from the authority of Scripture. The example of the Genesis account of creation and the fall is sufficient to illustrate the point. The pastor believed that the account was an allegory. [At this point in the argument, it may seem that views on inspiration and views on hermeneutics are being confused. Someone could argue, for example, that the two

are not related in this particular instance. However, the two views are closely related in the Genesis account. For example, the only reason why someone would adopt an allegorical approach to the first eleven chapters of Genesis is because they believed that a literal interpretation produced factual or historical *errors*. In other words, the account is said to be fictitious *because* it is believed that the details contained in it are not historically and literally true.] From this allegorical approach the Pastor concluded that a person could not know how God created the Universe. Rather, science provided the authoritative details (evolution in the opinion of the Pastor), while the Scriptural account is practically silenced. Theories in the name of science, rather than Scripture, have become the authority on the origin of the universe.

It also needs to be noted, however, that in Scripture a significant number of key doctrines are rooted in the creation account. Some examples of these include Adam's representation of the human race and its implications on original sin and redemption (1 Cor 15:20-23; Rom 5:12-21). Another example is God's justification of His sovereign actions in relation to evil and suffering are rooted in His creative acts (Job 38:1-11). Christ and Paul also firmly root teaching on marriage, divorce and sexuality in the veracity of the creation account (1 Cor 6:16-17; Mat 19:3-12). Undermining the authority of Scripture on creation must have an undermining influence on the authority of Scripture in speaking to these related issues.

Secondly, and closely related to the first point, the views expressed above clearly show how the historical and geographic details of Scripture are intertwined with doctrinal truth, so that undermining the one must undermine and diminish the other. For example, the Pastor expressed the view that while Scripture contained many historical errors, there were no doctrinal errors as such. Presumably, the Pastor forgot about the *doctrine* of creation.

5.3 Discussion of the survey results

A number of points need to be made in response to the results and views detailed in the above discussion.

Firstly, there has definitely been a negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture within the BUSA. As shown in chapter two, views which allow for errors in Scripture must impact on the veracity of Scripture as a whole, and therefore on its authority. Errors in the verifiable data of Scripture must cast doubt on the closely linked spiritual truths, which cannot be verified. The fact that in 1987 around 30% of the respondents within the BUSA held to errancy views is problematic for the BUSA if it wants to maintain the authority of Scripture as a cornerstone and the basis of the Union.

The negative impact can also be seen in the worsening trend. For example, while in the 1950's Barnard was dismissed for "Barthian views" on Scripture, in 1987 some 8% of respondents held to such views. Another example is that in 1958 the BUSA Executive wanted to ensure that "verbal inspiration" was a standard for ministerial acceptance, but in 1987 up to 30% of respondents (most of which were existing or future pastors) held to views incompatible with verbal inspiration.

Secondly, it is clear that the 1924 Statement of Belief is insufficient to protect the BUSA from unacceptable views of Scripture that will detract from its authority. The survey results conclusively show the existence of groups who hold to views that undermine biblical authority. These individuals would most likely have had to indicate their acceptance of the 1924 Statement of Belief before ordination. It is simply a historical reality that in the current debate on the doctrine of Scripture, many people with widely divergent views of Scripture can nevertheless subscribe to the view that the Scriptures are "inspired." The theological debate has progressed to such an extent that "inspiration" is hopelessly inadequate as a standard of orthodoxy. The experience in the BUSA has confirmed this.

Thirdly, the element of tension and virtual contradiction in the Baptist principles must once again be emphasised. While the overwhelming majority (93 %) believed that the doctrine of Scripture was absolutely essential to the BUSA, 16% of respondents believed that any detailed articulation of a doctrine of Scripture would undermine liberty of conscience. This means that 9% of respondents understood the doctrine of Scripture to be of primary importance to the BUSA, but believed that any detailed articulation of the doctrine would violate liberty of conscience.

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

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE BUSA

6.1 Key findings and conclusions

The key findings and conclusions from the research are summarised in this section, as they form the background for the corrective framework for action for the BUSA.

6.1.1 Theological Foundations

6.1.1.2 Liberty of Conscience, religious liberty and Christian Liberty

Liberty of conscience and religious liberty are issues that primarily need to be seen from the perspective of the state. Liberty of conscience should be seen as an ultimate value by the state and it should be extended to every person without restriction. Liberty of conscience refers to the freedom each individual should enjoy to exercise their responsibility to walk before God as their conscience dictates.

Liberty of conscience, however, finds expression in outward religious acts, which impact on society. As the state has a God-given responsibility over society, certain restrictions may be placed on these external acts. These restrictions should relate primarily to maintaining civil obedience and justice. Anything beyond these restrictions would impact negatively on liberty of conscience and religious liberty.

The church has a responsibility to defend the faith relevantly and exercise biblical discipline. In doing so, Christian liberty is protected, because true spiritual liberty is undermined by sin and error. Christian liberty can never biblically be understood as the right believers have to do or believe whatever they please.

In pursuing this mandate of defending the faith, liberty of conscience is not undermined as long as church membership is voluntary. Also, the discipline that the church has been mandated to impose is separation, not physical punishment. Each Christian church or organisation would also need to carefully differentiate between essential doctrines and secondary issues, which allow differences of belief on issues not essential to the Christian faith.

6.1.1.2 The doctrine of Scripture

This thesis has defended the view that the original autographs are the very word of God. They are completely inspired by God and authoritative. This inspiration and authority extends to the very words and smallest details of Scripture, so that the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant in all that they speak to, including matters of science, history and geography. Scripture therefore cannot contradict itself and is doctrinally consistent.

The doctrine of inerrancy needs to be carefully qualified. It is limited to the original autographs, and takes into account irregularities of grammar and spelling, commonly observed descriptions of nature, rounding of numbers and a lack of modern day technical or scientific precision. Such approximations and “vagueness” in the language of Scripture, however, far from detracting from its value, is essential for effective communication.

Numerous arguments against inerrancy are noted and considered. These include:

- a) the assertion that other views such as “limited inerrancy” and “conditional inerrancy” fall within the ambit of “evangelicalism,” and therefore any insistence on complete inerrancy is narrow and unnecessarily divisive.
- b) the contention that modern evangelicals are too conditioned by philosophical frameworks that were foreign to the authors of Scripture. This has led to an overestimation of the importance of a Scripture that is factually correct.

- c) the concept of inerrancy is out of line with historical reformed theology, as notable Reformers such as Luther and Calvin did not hold to the form of “detailed” inerrancy that some modern evangelicals hold to.
- d) the argument that because the original documents no longer exist, the debate on their inerrancy is senseless, as at the end of the day it makes no practical difference for the church.

In response, it is argued that the presence of errors of any kind in the original autographs 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.

Also, errors in the original autographs, however insignificant, do detract from the authority of the Scripture. It is 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. Theological truths are often rooted in real history and observable facts. If the historical or observable facts of the Scriptures can be wrong, it must cast doubt on the associated theological truths, and hence detract from its authority.

It is only an inerrant, infallible and sufficient Scripture that can effectively function as the completely authoritative word of God in a Christian organisation.

6.1.2 Religious Liberty amongst early Baptist Movements

The historical survey of how religious liberty was understood and applied by early Baptist movements (Anabaptists and Baptist from the late 1500’s to the late 1600’s) shows a general consistency.

The early Baptists saw religious liberty primarily as a liberty granted by the state. They consistently called for the state to tolerate other faiths and religious views. The early Baptists argued for religious liberty in order to have the freedom to maintain a

distinctive witness to Scripture without persecution or harassment. In other words, religious liberty would provide a social and political framework within which religious groups could enjoy liberty of conscience and practice their beliefs. The early Baptists believed doctrine was important. Certainly, important enough to maintain a distinctive witness at the expense of a corporate, united Christian witness with the other denominations.

In practice, this distinctive witness meant that only those who professed Baptist doctrine and practice could join a local church. Importantly, they did not see this witness and insistence on Baptist doctrine as threatening liberty of conscience in society or in the church. This was due to the fact that people's faith was not coerced by the state, and church membership was voluntary.

There was therefore no conflict in their understanding between standing for liberty of conscience in *society*, and yet defending the faith in the *church*.

6.1.3 Liberty of conscience and the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA

The basis of the BUSA is both the authority of Christ mediated through the Scriptures, and the right of each church to interpret the Scriptures for themselves. The liberty given to each church to interpret Scripture was not intended to be unrestricted. The Declaration of Union was after all to establish a *Baptist* Union, and only Baptist churches could join. This indicates that the BUSA at least saw some doctrines as distinctively Baptist and not subject to debate.

The history of the BUSA shows the real tension between the liberty of the individual churches to interpret Scripture themselves and in trying to establish some sort of doctrinal orthodoxy. The BUSA realised that low views of Scripture would undermine the basis of the Union, yet was unable to effectively define a doctrine of Scripture due to the liberty it wanted to grant all the churches.

This clearly demonstrates that unless the two principles are correctly understood and prioritised, the BU will never effectively progress in relevantly maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy in an ever-changing theological world.

The view of liberty of conscience in the BUSA is at variance with the theological and historic understanding of the principle. The early Baptists certainly did not understand liberty of conscience to mean that any and every doctrinal view must be accommodated in a church or Christian organisation. A church or organisation could legitimately define doctrinal orthodoxy and exercise discipline on that basis. In fact, the purpose for general religious liberty and liberty of conscience was so that Christian groups (and Baptists in particular) could pursue Biblical reformation and maintain Biblical standards as they interpreted them. The BUSA has the same obligation to define and defend a doctrine of Scripture relevantly.

There is also no clear application of principles regarding liberty of conscience in the BUSA. It remains unclear as to why it is acceptable to adopt a particular view of church government, for example, but not on inspiration. This is especially problematic when the BUSA has concluded that the doctrine of Scripture is of primary importance to the well being of the BUSA.

6.1.4 Impact on the doctrine of Scripture in the BUSA

There has clearly been a negative impact on the doctrine of Scripture within the BUSA. Views that allow for error in the Scripture must impact on the veracity of Scripture as a whole, and therefore its authority. The fact that in 1987 around 30% of the respondents within the BUSA held to errancy views is problematic for the BUSA if it wants to maintain the authority of Scripture as a cornerstone and the basis of the Union.

It is also clear that the 1924 Statement of Belief is insufficient to protect the BUSA from unacceptable views of Scripture that will detract from its authority. The survey results conclusively show the existence of groups who hold to views that undermine biblical authority. These individuals would most likely have had to indicate their

acceptance of the 1924 Statement of Belief before ordination. It is however simply a reality that in the current debate on the doctrine of Scripture, many with widely divergent views of Scripture will subscribe to the statement that the Scriptures are “inspired.” The experience in the BUSA has confirmed that the term “inspiration” is inadequate as a standard of orthodoxy.

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

6.2 Corrective framework

The prediction by Miller that the issue of the doctrine of Scripture and inerrancy “will continue to emerge until they are settled or clarified” (Miller 1987:141) has certainly proved true by subsequent events within the BUSA. Miller concluded that the BUSA needed to achieve *clarity, stability and orthodoxy* in order to prevent similar controversies from occurring, and prevent the “unacceptable situation” that pastors or lecturers may be called to positions on the basis of an ambiguous statement on Scripture (Miller 1987:152). Such clarity, stability and orthodoxy has not yet been achieved.

However, this thesis, in examining the relationship between the two seemingly conflicting Baptist principles, provides a framework within which the BUSA can achieve clarity and stability on the doctrine of Scripture.

6.2.1 A proper understanding of liberty of conscience

The research has shown that the BUSA can legitimately define and adopt a doctrine of Scripture without violating liberty of conscience. As long as the state continues to

uphold religious liberty in society, and membership in the BUSA is voluntary, liberty of conscience will be preserved.

The BUSA does however need to exercise caution so that *Christian* liberty is not impacted negatively. As noted earlier, Christian liberty is the spiritual heritage of every believer. However, Christian liberty can be undermined to a certain extent by a failure to differentiate between fundamental, essential doctrine which it must insist on, and secondary issues where differing views can be accommodated in Christian love. In the case of the doctrine of Scripture, however, the BUSA has already overwhelmingly agreed that it is an area of primary importance. The authority of the Scriptures is also the very basis of the BUSA, and therefore any clarity or definition that will preserve the exercising of that authority can only benefit the Union. The BUSA can therefore define and adopt a doctrine of Scripture without impacting on the liberty of conscience or the Christian liberty that each of the member churches enjoy.

6.2.2 Changes to the constitution

It was previously noted that a legal opinion was obtained on the Constitution to the effect that the BUSA could not adopt a position on Scripture unless all member churches unanimously agreed to it.

This opinion, if correct, has the practical effect of restricting the BUSA from relevantly defending doctrinal orthodoxy in the area of Scripture. In effect, the BUSA is prevented from doing what Baptists have historically stood for, namely, defending the faith relevantly for the present generation.

The legal opinion needs to be challenged and investigated. If necessary, the Constitution needs to be amended to allow the BUSA to formulate and adopt a doctrine of Scripture that it requires the member churches to uphold (as it has done with congregational church government, for example).

6.2.3 Careful formulation of a doctrine of Scripture

The BUSA needs to carefully consider the recent debates on the doctrine of Scripture and define a position on inspiration that it believes will uphold the authority of Scripture in the BUSA. This thesis has defended the view that inerrancy is both biblical and necessary to ensure that Scripture remains the authoritative basis of the BUSA. The research has clearly shown that significant minority groups holding to errancy views already existed in 1987. Such views can only undermine the authority of Christ being exercised in the BUSA through the Scriptures, and will result in the spiritual decline of the Union.

Two errors need to be avoided. The first would be the temptation to try and reconcile all the differing positions in the Union on the doctrine of Scripture. The 1986 survey clearly demonstrates that the views are too divergent for this to happen. Certainly, it will not be possible to please everyone in the BUSA.

The second error would be to try and avoid dealing with some of the contentious issues, such as inerrancy. Another ambiguous statement that does not address the current issues in the BUSA will be ineffective. Miller's warning needs to be stressed again that unless the issues are dealt with, they will always resurface in the future (Miller 1987:141).

Appendix 1: Relevant Chapters from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

CHAPTER 1. OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

1. The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience,¹ although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation.² Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church;³ and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.⁴

1. 2 Tim 3:15,16,17; Is 8:20; Luke 16:29,31; Eph 2:20. 2. Rom 1:19-21; 2:14,15; Ps 19:1-3. 3. Heb 1:1. 4. Prov 22:19-21; Rom 15:4; 2 Pet 1:19,20.

2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament, which are these:

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	1 Kings	Ecclesiastes	Obadiah
Exodus	2 Kings	Song of Solomon	Jonah
Leviticus	1 Chronicles	Isaiah	Micah
Numbers	2 Chronicles	Jeremiah	Nahum
Deuteronomy	Ezra	Lamentations	Habakkuk
Joshua	Nehemiah	Ezekiel	Zephaniah
Judges	Esther	Daniel	Haggai
Ruth	Job	Hosea	Zachariah

1 Samuel	Psalms	Joel	Malachi
2 Samuel	Proverbs	Amos	

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew	2 Corinthians	1 Timothy	2 Peter
Mark	Galatians	2 Timothy	1 John
Luke	Ephesians	Titus	2 John
John	Philippians	Philemon	3 John
Acts	Colossians	Hebrews	Jude
Romans	1 Thessalonians	James	Revelation
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians	1 Peter	

All of which are given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.⁵

5. 2 Tim 3:16.

3. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon or rule of the Scripture, and, therefore, are of no authority to the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings.⁶

6. Luke 24:27,44; Rom 3:2.

4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.⁷

7. 2 Pet 1:19-21; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 John 5:9.

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of God to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the

infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.⁸

8. John 16:13,14; 1 Cor 2:10-12; 1 John 2:20,27.

6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.⁹

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word,¹⁰ and that 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.¹¹

9. Tim 3:15-17; Gal 1:8,9. 10. John 6:45; 1 Cor 2:9-12. 11. 1 Cor 11:13,14; 14:26,40.

7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;¹² yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.¹³

12. 2 Pet 3:16. 13. Ps 19:7; 119:130.

8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old),¹⁴ and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them.¹⁵ But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have a right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read¹⁶ and search them,¹⁷ therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,¹⁸ that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in

all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.¹⁹

14. Rom 3:2. 15. Is 8:20. 16. Acts 15:15. 17. John 5:39. 18. Cor 14:6,9,11,12,24,28. 19. Col 3:16.

9. 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.²⁰

20. 2 Pet 1:20,21; Acts 15:15,16.

10. 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.²¹

21. Matt 22:29,31,32; Eph 2:20; Acts 28:23.

CHAPTER 21: OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

1. The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the rigour and curse of the law,¹ and in their being delivered from this present evil world,² bondage to Satan,³ and dominion of sin,⁴ from the evil of afflictions,⁵ the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave,⁶ and everlasting damnation:⁷ as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear,⁸ but a child-like love and willing mind.⁹

1. Gal 3:13. 2. Gal 1:4. 3. Acts 26:18. 4. Rom 8:3. 5. Rom 8:28. 6. 1 Cor 15:54-57. 7. 2 Thes 1:10. 8. Rom 8:15. 9. Luke 1:73-75; 1 John 4:18.

All which were common also to believers under the law for the substance of them;¹⁰ but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yolk of a ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was

subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.¹¹

10. Gal 3:9,14. 11. John 7:38,39; Heb 10:19-21.

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience,¹² 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.¹³ So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience;¹⁴ and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.¹⁵

12. James 4:12; Rom 14:4. 13. Acts 4:19,29; 1 Cor 7:23; Matt 15:9. 14. Col 2:20,22,23. 15. 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 1:24.

3. They who upon pretence of Christian liberty do practise any sin, or cherish any sinful lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction,¹⁶ so they wholly destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives.¹⁷

16. Rom 6:1,2. 17. Gal 5:13; 2 Pet 2:18,21.

CHAPTER 24: OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end hath armed them with the power of the sword, for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers.¹

1. Rom 13:1-4.

2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called thereunto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain justice and peace,² according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom and

commonwealth, so for that end they may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.³

2. 2 Sam 23:3; Ps 82:3,4. 3. Luke 3:14.

3. Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake;⁴ and we ought to make supplications and prayers for kings and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.⁵

4. Rom 13:5-7; 1 Pet 2:17. 5. 1 Tim 2:1,2.

Appendix 2: 1986 BUSA Questionnaire

The following list is the relevant questions from the 1986 BUSA questionnaire prepared by G G Miller (1987: Appendix 3). Questions not relevant to this discussion have not been included.

A. General

1. Tick as many of the following as you feel are closest to your personal view of the nature of Biblical inspiration and its result.

- a) The Bible, in the original documents, is, in its entirety, the inerrant Word of God. 93,3% (but 15,5% of these selected other contradictory options)

- b) The Bible contains the Word of God; because its revelation is progressive this means that later revelation may correct or contradict earlier revelation e.g. Ps 137v. 8,9; the standard by which we discern the Word of God within Scripture is the teaching of Jesus; e.g. where here is a contradiction, what He says must be accepted in preference to what the apostle Paul and others say. 6,1%

- c) The Bible becomes the Word of God when it speaks to me; it is the vehicle the Holy Spirit uses to bring God's revelation to people. 8,0%

- d) The assertions of Scripture are true and infallible in their spiritual message and teaching but may in places be in error in factual, historical, scientific and geographic details. 13,2%

- e) Since we no longer have the original manuscripts ("autographs"), it is futile to attempt to construct any doctrine which includes the inerrancy of the Scripture. 6,6%

- f) Every part of Scripture is equally inspired, but it is not necessarily of equal spiritual value (e.g. compare John 3 and Joshua 19). 61,3%

- g) Although Jesus accepted the authority of the Old Testament, this cannot have any final bearing on our attitude today because in the limitations of his humanity, He may have accommodated His knowledge and utterances to the popular but erroneous ideas of His time. 0,47%

2. Importance of Inspiration

...The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is relatively unimportant. There is far too much debate, discussion and preaching in the Christian church already. What we need is ACTION not TALK! 1,0%

...A right view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture is not like some questions, a matter of indifference or secondary importance. It is a question of PRIMARY importance and is bound to affect belief and practice in every area. 93,4% (5,6% were uncertain /unmarked)

3. Authority of Scripture

- d. Scripture is sufficient for faith and practice – no further binding and normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings. 87,7%

4. The Bible and History

- a. The historical events recorded in the Bible are true and did, in fact happen. 91 %

- b. Bible history is only accurate from about the time of King David onwards; the earlier history, especially the earlier chapters of Genesis, cannot in every part be treated as reliable history. 1,8%

c. "Faith" is independent of history – we do not have to believe that an event recorded in the Bible actually happened to be able to accept its spiritual message.

7,0%

d. Just as Jesus sometimes used "parables" to illustrate a message, so the gospel writers may sometimes have used "myths" to convey a message about Jesus e.g. the miracle stories (i.e. they may not actually have happened).

1,8%

B. Our Baptist context in Southern Africa

1. The BU Statement of Faith of 1924 states: "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."

...Is this short statement still adequate to safeguard a sound view of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures in the light of contemporary theological questions? (57,5% responded YES)

...any attempt to enforce a particular view of the inspiration and authority of the Scripture would be contradictory of our Baptist principle of individual liberty of conscience.

16,0%

...should be expanded to include references to the verbal inspiration, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture.

34,9%

...should be revised from time to time in the light of new issues and modern theological development (e.g The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy of 1973).

16,5%

...There should be no reference to the inspiration and authority of Scripture whatsoever.

1,0%

3. Scripture and Theological training

... Our theological colleges should teach the content of the Bible only. Nothing else is necessary. 0,47%

...Is the fact that many of our Baptist pastors gain their basic or advanced theological qualifications through “outside” institutions such as UNISA, London University etc. likely to undermine their view of the inspiration and authority of the Scripture? Please comment.

No comment – 20,5%

“Yes” – 32,7%

“No” – 11,3%

Possibly – depending on previous grounding – 35,5%

Appendix 3: Interview with a Baptist Pastor

SCRIPTURE AND CANON

Module 5: Interview

Andrew Aucamp (Student no. ST.0203)
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Pinetown
3610

4 September 2001

Background to the assignment

I have numerous documents that deal with the position of those who are blatantly from a different tradition on the doctrine of Scripture (such as Roman Catholic Priests, liberal pastors and professors etc). However, I know that within the Baptist Union of SA there are pastors who have made controversial statements concerning the doctrine of Scripture that are not compatible with an evangelical position. I therefore chose to interview such a pastor (who is presently in the BU, but who will remain anonymous). I realised at the outset that some of the differences would be more subtle, and that I would need to do some probing to clarify exactly what was meant by certain responses. Numerous “secondary questions” therefore had to be asked to clarify initial responses. These “secondary” questions are not necessarily all reflected here.

The interview

The interview went very well. It was a friendly and open discussion, and the responses I received appeared to be genuine and sincere (although, as you will see, cannot be reconciled with an evangelical position on the doctrine of Scripture). The interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

I took accurate notes, and wrote this assignment very soon after the interview (while it was fresh in my mind). As far as possible, I have used the exact phrases and expressions that the person I interviewed used. I therefore trust that the responses I have recorded here accurately represent his point of view.

The questions and responses

- 1. What is your understanding of inspiration?*

Response:

God used human authors (and subsequent editors) to produce a book that is the word of God. The human element came out strongly, as can be seen by the different styles, culture and vocabulary of the various writers. This means that the Bible needs to be “de-culturised” in order for it to be interpreted and understood correctly. [After some probing, I discovered that all that is meant by “de-culturising” is that the Bible needs to be interpreted in context.]

2. What is your view on inerrancy? Comment on the view that Scripture contains “harmless imperfections”.

Response:

Scripture does contain errors, and some of them are not that harmless. It does not matter whether these errors came in the originals or due to the copying process, the fact is that we have a Bible which contains errors. [I then pressed the point and asked if he believed that the originals could have contained errors.] The originals could and did contain errors, due to the strong human element in the writing of Scriptures.

These errors could be historical (e.g. in some of the genealogies and chronicles of the kings) or geographical (i.e. some of the place names). Also, when comparing the synoptic gospels, there are discrepancies. I would not say there are doctrinal errors as such, but would explain “differences” in terms of developing or progressive revelation, and the amount of light given at the time.

3. What is your view of general revelation and the role that it plays.

Response:

General revelation is very important, and reveals much about God (e.g. Ps 19 and Romans 1). I encourage my congregation to hear God in nature. [I then pressed the point and asked if anyone could be saved just with general / natural revelation]. If someone was true to their conscience and the limited revelation in nature, that person would be saved although he never heard about Christ i.e. he would be

covered by the blood of Christ and go to heaven. The main motivation for this is God's love and fairness. This, however, is second best, and the person would miss out on the blessing of having the knowledge of Christ in this life.

4. Would you say that the Bible is absolutely necessary for a saving knowledge of God?

Based on my response to the above question, I therefore have a suspicion that due to the love and fairness of God, they are not absolutely necessary. But once again I must say that it is a second best option not to have heard about Christ in this life.

5. Would you say the Bible is absolutely sufficient for salvation and sanctification?

Yes, the Bible contains everything we need for salvation and Christian living. It has many principles that need to be applied.

6. How would you approach the controversial statements by Paul concerning, for example, women being prohibited from having authority in the church? Was Paul in error?

Paul himself said that in certain instances he did not have Christ's authority. In these instances, Paul's culture would have come through, and he would not impose it on today's church. Paul was therefore not in error, but influenced by his culture. The hermeneutical principle that applies in these situations is to interpret the "isolated rulings" by the general principles (e.g. that women and men are equal).

7. What is your view on the Apocrypha?

Having read only one or two statements in the Apocrypha, I cannot comment dogmatically, but feel that they are not the same as Scripture. They would only be seen to be helpful. However, if I had to study the issue, I would look at the Apocrypha with an open mind.

8. What is your view on the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), in relation to its traditions and doctrinal position.

The Bible is the only authority for the church (not tradition), and many of the doctrines of the RCC are “wonky”. However, we are not saved by good doctrine but by Christ, and therefore many could be saved in the RCC. We can have real faith but bad doctrine.

The view at the time of the Reformation that the Pope was the anti-Christ is rubbish. Many of the Protestant doctrines were legalistic and therefore just as bad as the RC doctrines.

In our church, there is a “working” relationship with the local RCC (they donated the communion “equipment” for our services, and Roman Catholics would be invited to our prayer missions etc.) However, in the area of evangelism there would be less co-operation, as I could not guarantee what they would preach.

9. What are your general views on the process of developing the canon.

No fixed or dogmatic views. At the end of the day God has given us what we need.

10. General

[During some general discussion, and reflecting on some of the topics we had discussed, the following views were expressed by the pastor and are relevant to the assignment.]

(i) Many pastors make value judgments about the Bible. For example, no one preaches through the genealogies. This means that they do not see these parts of God’s word on the same level as others. The genealogies are not as inspired as Jn 3:16, for example. They are not as much of the word of God as other portions. The Bible needs to be seen as an ocean, where much of what is under the waves needs to be there, but is not as useful as the “waves”.

(ii) It is also important to identify the correct genre of Scripture. For example, Gen 1-11 is allegory and not history (who as ever seen a snake talking, for example). The seven days of creation are therefore not even relevant – we have no idea how God actually did it. There is much evidence for evolution. I am a creative evolutionist. At some stage a gorilla would have stopped being a gorilla and become a man with a spirit and conscience, and this could be seen as “Adam”.

(iii) 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. [As we had run out of time, I did not have enough time to explore what the pastor meant by this.]

Evaluation and response to the above position

The scope of this essay does not allow for all the issues that were mentioned to be exhaustively addressed. Six of the more critical issues have therefore been selected and will be addressed.

(i) Similar terminology is used

The first issue that needs to be emphasised is that often similar terminology is used, but with very different meanings. For example, the pastor that was interviewed believes in “inspiration” and that the Bible is “the word of God”. However, the interview also revealed that he believes that the Bible (and the originals) did contain errors, and some parts of Scripture are more “inspired” than others.

This emphasises the need for a careful formulation of the doctrine of Scripture in any confession or statement of faith. The BU presently has a very “loose” and outdated statement on Scripture, and the interview has revealed how pastors within the BU can subscribe to it but hold liberal positions.

(ii) *Errors in the originals*

The pastor that was interviewed stated categorically that there were errors in the originals, and that some of them were not that harmless, but of a more serious nature. These errors came about due to the strong human element in the writing of the Bible.

While it is agreed that the Bible is the product of both divine and human activity (termed “confluent” or “concurative” – see Warfield, 1948:83), this does not mean that there are errors in the original writings.

The Bible teaches that while God used human agents to write the Bible, He so guided them by His Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) that what was produced was the inerrant and infallible word of God.

The evidence for this is abundant.

Firstly, the Scriptures are said to be “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16), referring to the fact that they originate from God and are one of His creative acts (Warfield, 1948:133). As God cannot lie or deceive (Heb 6:18), a Bible that contained errors would be totally inconsistent with God’s nature or character.

Secondly, there can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus understood the Scriptures to be divinely inspired and completely authoritative in all its detail.

Of great significance is Matt 5:17-18:

“17 ¶ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

Of such authority and certainty was even the least stroke of the pen in the law that it could not be done away with. This shows the Lord Jesus had the highest possible regard for the smallest details of Scripture.

An overview of the teachings of the Saviour shows that he consistently treated the historical narratives in the Pentateuch as historical fact. He refers to Abel (Lk 11:51), Noah (Matt 24:37-39), Abraham (Jn 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt 10:15), Lot (Lk 17:28-32), the snake in the desert (Jn 3:14) etc (Geisler (Ed), 1980: 6).

Of particular importance is Jn 10:34-36. Note how the Lord Jesus bases His argument on a single word (“gods”) from a fairly “obscure” Psalm and says that this could not be “broken” i.e. it was completely authoritative and binding (Geisler(Ed), 1980: 163).

It can similarly be shown that the apostles often quoted and used the OT in such a manner that demonstrated that they trusted the very details (e.g. Gal 3:16).

It should be noted that the pastor that was interviewed said that it did not matter where the errors came from as the result is the same – we have a Bible with errors. This is a common argument against evangelicals who insist on an inerrant originals but allow for copying errors. Bahnsen notes the following in this regard:

- (i) The “copying” errors are very minor. In fact the agreement is truly amazing.
- (ii) Once we are sure we have a faithful and pure reproduction of the original (which we do in 99% of the Bible), we know we can trust it absolutely. The liberal is never in such a position, as he does not trust the originals. (Geisler (Ed), 1980:184)

(iii) *The necessity of Scripture: general and special revelation*

Only two points need to be made.

Firstly, all men are born dead in sin, slaves of sin and at enmity to God (Eph 2:1, Rom 8:7; Jn 8:34). Natural man therefore suppresses His knowledge of God (Rom 1:18-22), and is by nature under His wrath.

Secondly, the Bible reveals that it is impossible to be saved without calling on the name of the Lord, and that it is impossible to call on the name of the Lord without having heard of Him (Rom 10:14).

Special revelation is therefore absolutely necessary for salvation.

(iv) Paul's "claim" not to have Christ's authority in certain instances and the role of women in the church.

The pastor that was interviewed stated that Paul himself admitted that sometimes spoke on his own authority, and not on Christ's authority (1 Cor 7:12). However, this is a clear misunderstanding of what Paul was saying.

Paul, as an apostle, clearly understood that he carried the authority of Christ (1Cor 14:37, also 2 Pet 3:2, Matt 16:18-19).

In 1Cor 7:10-12, the contrast that Paul is making is between an issue that Christ had given a clear and direct commandment on (vs 10) and an issue that Paul had made a judgement on (vs 12). Paul's judgement would still be binding on the church due to his office of apostleship (see Morris, 1958:109).

On the specific issue of women in the church and the prohibition to exercise authority (1Tim 2:12), the following can be said.

The pastor that was interviewed stated that we need to interpret the isolated rulings by the general principles. While this is a valid principle in interpretation, it needs to be considered in conjunction with the fact that no author would contradict himself.

Firstly, it was Paul himself who taught spiritual equality between male and female (Gal 3:28). If this spiritual equality meant that women could exercise authority in the

church just like men, Paul would have been compromising a clear principle which he himself had established. Furthermore, he would be imposing his own “will” on a church in contradiction to the clear teaching that he had learnt from Christ. Surely Paul needs to be given more credit than this!

Secondly, Paul based his arguments of the prohibition of women to have authority on the creation order before the fall, which is independent of culture (1Tim 2:12-15).

The spiritual equality taught in Scripture therefore still allows for the men and women to have differing roles in marriage and in the church.

(v) *The genealogies in Scripture*

The genealogies in Scripture are important, as they help to establish the historical reliability of Scripture. They are therefore infallible and inspired, to exactly the same extent as Jn 3:16.

(vi) *Gen 1-11: is it an allegory*

Quite clearly, Gen 1-11 is not allegory but historical fact. The character is that of an historical account. For example genealogies with exact life spans are given (Gen 4:16ff), and exact geographic locations are given (Gen 2:14-15).

The NT authors and our Lord made many references to the characters and events in Gen 1-11, and there is no hint at all that they did not think that they were real, historical figures (e.g. see Lk 11:51 and Matt 24:37-39). While it is true that a snake did talk, so did a donkey in a clearly historical passage (see Num 22).

Gen 1-3 describes in a fair amount of detail the account of creation and the fall of man. Details relating to the activity of each day, the exact aspect of creation that was undertaken in each day etc. It therefore seems “strange” that after all this the only conclusion we can come to is “that we do not know how God did it” (the act of creation). This conclusion points more to a desire not accept what has been clearly revealed.

Although the topic of evolution cannot be treated here at length, it is important to note that God created Adam from the dust and not from a gorilla (Gen 2:7), and Eve was created directly from Adam (Gen 2:21-23). It is my opinion that the creation account does not support the theory of evolution, but in fact contradicts it in a number of important aspects.

Conclusion

This paper has described an interview with a pastor who holds to a non-evangelical view of Scripture. A brief response to some of the issues raised was then given.

This assignment was therefore valuable and helped establish the principles and doctrines outlined in the Study Guide.

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