

Baptist Union Statement of Faith

Contribution by Professor Martin Pohlmann - July 2021

A. Preamble: Why have a statement of faith (“confession of faith”) as a denomination?

Going all the way back to the NT we have some examples of “statements of faith”

Peter in Matt 16:16; “You are the Christ (Christos/Messiah/Anointed One), the Son (a Fathers equal) of the Living God”. This is enough to identify believers to start with in a pluralistic world. Compare this statement to Romans 10:9, “If you will confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead – you shall be saved.”

Paul to Timothy at Ephesus – gives another “statement of faith” within a broader frame of reference: 1 Tim 3:16 “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: “He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory”

In another context, Paul gives another statement of faith: 2 Tim 2:11-13, “Here is a trustworthy saying (confession), ‘If we died with Him we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us. If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself”.

You can sense the brevity – yet the profundity of these confessions of faith that new and mature believers alike could remember and confess.

B. Why have a statement of faith *theologically*?

People like John Stott (a paedo-Baptist) and Billy Graham (Believers Baptism) realised in the middle years of the 20th Century that a fresh heralding of the New Testament doctrines needed to be crystalized – for clearer Gospel impact. This “re-surgence” was eventually identified as “Evangelicalism”. It included Bible believing Christians from all walks of life, from different denominations, from different countries all around the world – all with a common mission as summarised in the confessions above (A).

An Evangelical denomination – like the Baptist Union of SA identifies with this fresh alignment in the world of religion, philosophy, metaphysics, Liberal theology, Neo Orthodox theology, Fundamentalistic reactions (Mainly in the USA), Liberational expressions of theology etc. The 1924 Statement of Faith adopted by the BU, identifies the Baptist Union and its Churches who adopt a similar Statement *significantly, missionally, and evangelically*.

In a world as complex and Agnostic as the one we’re living in, its unwise to tighten or narrow down a statement of faith any further. What can be done is:

- a. Bring some of the *words/wording* up to date as I’ve done below. Also add wording that identifies threats in the wider missional picture eg. Darwinian metaphysics/ Liberalism (as in denying the supernatural).
- b. Then – have a Baptist Union “family” section – like for example the BU has already done at the 2000 Krugersdorp Assembly: “Baptist union of Southern

Africa statement of Baptist Principles”. There is room *here* to address issues like the ones addressed already and continue to address them.

- c. Look at the implications of a “Statement of faith”. For example – once a statement of faith states that we believe that the Scriptures are “fully inspired of God” , this is to accept that two theological concepts like “inspiration and inerrancy” are corollaries of each other as is acceptable within Evangelical debate – but not to belabour the point as is done for example among Fundamentalism (eg. Even someone like Millard Erickson warns about using the word “inerrancy” – a negative word and primarily developed in the USA among Fundamentalists). Another example is: “We believe that God created *man* in His own image”. It would be wise to update the word ‘man’ with the word ‘*mankind*.’ This then sets the foundation for discussing gender questions and all the newer public debates going on in the LGBT and similar issues in the BU’s “family” document. Individual Churches within the Baptist Union can also adopt their own *stances* on these issues.

C. Baptist Union recent discussions and decisions on a Statement of Faith.

1689?

1924?

2017?

2021?

D. My proposed response to what I “heard” to be the Executive’s request that we “update” the 1924 document and not change it.

1. We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in their original writing as inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:12) and accept them as the supreme and final authority for faith (2 Tim. 1:13-14) and life (1 Tim. 4:16). (Reliable translations need to be used under informed guidance).
2. We believe in one God (Deut. 6:4), eternally existing in three persons found in Scripture as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God created the ‘heavens’ and the ‘earth’ as initially recorded in Scripture (Gen. 1-2).
3. We believe that Jesus Christ was conceived (Lk. 1:35; Jn. 3:16) by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and is true God (Jn. 1:1) and truly human (Heb. 2:14).
4. We believe that God created mankind in His own image (Gen. 1:27); mankind sinned and thereby incurred the penalty of death, physical and spiritual; that all human beings inherit a sinful nature (Rom. 5:12) which issues in actual transgression involving personal guilt (Ps. 51:4).
5. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, a substitutionary sacrifice (Rom. 3:25), according to the Scriptures, and that all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of this (Rom. 3:21-22).
6. We believe in the bodily historical resurrection (1 Cor. 15:17), His ascension (Ac. 1:9) into eternity and His present life as our High Priest (Heb. 8:1-2) and Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1).
7. We believe in the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church (Rev. 1:7) with cataclysmic consequences for humanity and the whole of Creation (Rev. 19:11-18).

8. We believe that all who receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are born (again) of the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God (Jn. 1:12-13) **individually and corporately members of the Church** (Eph. 2:1-22).
9. We believe in the resurrection of both **believers** and **unbelievers**, the eternal **existence** of the redeemed and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected the offer of salvation (Rev. 20:11-15).
10. We believe that the one true Church is the whole company of those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that the local Church on earth should take its character from this conception of the Church spiritual, and therefore that **conversion** and personal confession of Christ (Rom. 10:9) **become** essentials of Church membership. **As a consequence, the Church should witness to righteousness in the world** (Lk. 4:18-19).
11. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed two ordinances – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper – to be observed as acts of obedience and as personal witnesses to the cardinal facts of the Christian faith; that Baptism is the immersion of the believer in water as a confession of identification with Christ in burial and resurrection (Ac. 2:38), and that the Lord’s Supper is that partaking of bread and of **red grape juice** as symbolical of the Saviour’s broken body and shed blood, in remembrance of His sacrificial death till He **return** (1 Cor. 11:12-26).