

**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE BAPTIST CONVENTION
OF SOUTH AFRICA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
CHURCHES IN THE TRANSVAAL:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**

BY

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SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to bring to light the actual situation as it relates to the doing of Christian education in the churches of the Baptist Convention of South Africa; to evaluate such with a view to prescribing remedial measures where they would be warranted; depending on the findings of the investigation. The exercise was prompted by among others, the condition of the teaching ministry of the Baptist Convention churches as I have come to know it over the years.

The method used in this investigative and evaluative exercise was that of personal interviews with church leaders, Christian education committee members, and congregants, and the reading of Christian education literature. A special questionnaire was designed for this purpose. What came out of this investigation was that indeed, the Baptist Convention is involved in Christian education, but that such involvement is of such a nature that it should be improved at all costs. By implication, the findings are that the standard of Christian education in the Convention churches is below what can be called, a Biblically and conventionally accepted level of doing Christian education.

By way of unpacking the findings, it should be said that on individual church level, the teaching ministry leaves much to be desired, for reasons spelt out in the thesis. The only components that seem to be doing anything at all are the Sunday school¹ and the youth ministries on a local church level, and the regional and national structures of the Baptist Convention, though not as up to standard as one would expect of an authentic Christian education.

¹ While Sunday school may refer to all ages coming for teaching on Sunday morning, in this case I have used Sunday school to refer to children only, so that unless otherwise explained, in this thesis, Sunday school refers to children coming for lessons just before the main Sunday service.

Over the years, missionaries who were in charge of Convention churches were very helpful in ensuring that Christian education was taken place. They were involved in Sunday school, membership classes, and the training of Christian workers. Of course the quality of their teaching and training was questionable to some extent, arguing from the performance of Christian workers they trained. With the fading of missionaries from the scene, the standard of Christian education declined largely because of the poor theological training of pastors, the misconception about the role of Sunday school in the church as intended for children only, and the high regard given to preaching by pastors – at the expense of teaching – as the focal point of their call to ministry.

A consoling feature is that Christian literature used so far, confirms the existence of a problem in Christian education in general, so that the Convention is not alone in its need for a solution. With the implementation of strategies laid down in the eighth chapter of this dissertation, the situation in the Baptist Convention of South Africa and the Church of Jesus Christ the world over, can be remedied, and effective Christian education embraced.



This thesis is dedicated to my wife

Busisiwe P. Matshiga,

my three children,

Msebenzi, Thokozani, and Thembinkosi

and to the

Baptist Convention of South Africa



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NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, all Biblical quotations were taken from the New International Version, 1978, copy right New York International Bible Society, USA.
2. To avoid being cumbersome, I have used '*he*' and '*his*' for both female and male characters. It was only in specific cases where a female character was in question that '*she*' and '*her*' were used.
3. Though a sample of a questionnaire was used in the personal interviews, at no point in the thesis, were responses recorded verbatim. This is due to the fact that the responses to the interview questions were recorded in my own words.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

B. C. S. A.

Baptist Convention of South Africa. It refers to all the Baptist churches that constitute the Convention. For purposes of this thesis I have chosen to use "Convention" in the place of "BCSA" to refer to all Baptist Convention churches.

B. U. S. A.

Baptist Union of South Africa. Among the 1820 British Settlers were Baptists. When they arrived in South Africa, they started churches among their own people. In 1877 the white churches were constituted as the Baptist Union of South Africa in Grahamstown. Having come from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, it is understandable why they constituted themselves as the Baptist Union of South Africa. I have preferred to use "Union" in this thesis to refer to this constituency.

S. A. B. M. S.

South African Baptist Missionary Society. This is the missionary wing of the Baptist Union of South Africa. It was established in 1892 with a view to doing missionary work among natives of South Africa.

T.S.A.B.H.B.

The South African Baptist Hand-Book. This is the written primary source that was used for this discourse. It entails among others, transactions of annual Baptist Union Assembly minutes and resolutions, as well as missionary and church reports.

Association

In the Baptist context, association refers to a group of churches in a given area, within a specified proximity. Usually it is churches within a given district, e.g. all the

churches in and around Pretoria may constitute an association. As these churches multiply, other associations come into being. These associations are there to facilitate the work of the Convention as a whole; certain responsibilities have been assigned to associations while others are carried out by the Convention. Associations also provide fellowship for the individual churches. Problems of churches are first referred to the association executive committee before they can be passed on to the Convention executive committee. Lately, the name 'Association' has been replaced with 'Region'.

Business Assembly

Once a year, Convention churches meet in an assembly through their delegates to transact their business as a Convention. In this business assembly reports of different associations (regions) are given. Other reports are those of ministries (e. g. children, youth, men, women, social, etc) on a national level. The financial report of the Convention forms an important part of the assembly reports.

Family Bible Hour

This is the time for the whole family to come together for teaching on Sundays shortly before the main worship service. Each age group meets separately from others and teachers are appointed to instruct those groups. The groups range from six years old children to aged parents. The family Bible hour used to be called Sunday school. It was changed to *All Age Sunday School* so as to include all ages, not children only, as it was initially the case. It eventually came to be known as *Family Bible Hour*, meaning that all members of the family are to be involved.

Laity

This is the word that has been derived from a Latin word "Laikos" which meant people. It was rendered in Greek as "laos" and it referred to all God's people. In our context it is used to mean all members of the Church excluding trained pastors. Only pastors may not be called laity.

Discipleship

The term refers to the practice of winning and building people for Christ. A disciple is a person who has accepted Christ as his Saviour and Lord; a person who is being taught and trained in the way of living for Christ and serving Him in making other disciples. The aim of teaching him is that he may be more and more like Christ.

Southern Baptist Convention

This is the largest Baptist denomination in the United States of America. They are predominantly in the southern part of America and have missionaries all over the world. Some of their missionaries operate in South Africa, working with various Baptist groups.