

**Dear .....**

Baptist Christians in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory have decided to implement the following resolution: *“Marriage is a covenant relationship ordained by God as a lifelong faithful union of one man and one woman. Sexual intimacy outside such a marriage relationship is incompatible with God’s intention for us as his people.”*

What sounds acceptable is, in fact, unfriendly. It is not directed against Christian young people who live, eat and sleep together; and it is not directed against Christian divorcees (big issue in churches 50 years ago).

It is not even directed against people who identify as LGBTQ. It is directed against churches, ministers and Baptist Christians who want to show hospitality to gay and lesbian people and allow them what we claim for ourselves, to celebrate their love for each other in a lifelong faithful union.

This is a bad decision.

Indeed, for those of us who want to live with open arms and practice their discipleship in a Baptist community, it is *unfriendly, unbiblical, unchristian, untheological, unbaptistic, uncharitable, and unbecoming.*

### **Unfriendly.**

It is unfriendly to those gay and lesbian Christians who seek Christian communion (*koinonia*) in our midst. But it is also unfriendly to those of us who have served our calling to Christian ministry in Baptist churches in NSW and the ACT. We will be disassociated, kicked out. And it is unfriendly against the 40% of Baptists in NSW/ACT who may agree with the surface of the motion but not with its intention.

### **Unbiblical.**

The Bible is part of God’s communication with God’s people. God communicates through God’s word. Faith therefore occurs when God’s word is spoken into our lives in the power of God’s Spirit. Faith comes from hearing, as the apostles Paul and John say.

The word of God has four dimensions: Jesus, the Bible, the sermon/testimony, “in and among us.”

“The Bible does not point to itself; it tells the story of Jesus.”

The order is important. “Jesus is Lord!” the early Christians confessed when the narrative began. The Bible does not point to itself; it tells the story of Jesus. The sermon/testimony interprets a biblical text; and the word that dwells among and within as comes from the witness of God’s people.

If the order is unhinged, then faith becomes distorted. What the assembly has done is disturb the order. They have replaced Jesus and a person-centered faith with the Bible and thereby made the Bible into a book of rules and laws. They have changed a personal and liberating faith into a controlling and legalistic attitude. It no longer reflects the compassion of a welcoming God, but the Bible is misused as a collection of moral texts.

### *Unchristian.*

If Christianity has anything to offer to a needy, unfair and violent world, it is the narrative of a good and compassionate God who welcomes all who have become lost in the stony desert of life. God says to us “fear not” and brings joy and liberation into our lives. God carries our burden, forgives our sin and grants us hope. Violence, coercion and control cannot be the work of God’s Spirit.

### *Untheological.*

The Christian identity symbol is the Cross/Resurrection and the doctrine of the Trinity — not marriage and sexual intimacy. In the Cross/Resurrection God has reconciled a needy world with God’s self, and in the doctrine of the Trinity Christians have summarized that God has revealed who God is and what God does in the story of Jesus and spoken this divine hospitality into our lives in the power of the Spirit. God lives with open and welcoming arms, not with clenched fists and controlling minds.

“When what was intended to be friendly and encouraging has become controlling, it is unbaptistic.”

### *Unbaptistic.*

Traditionally Baptists have stood for taking the Bible seriously, and they tried hard to be worthy friends of Jesus. They have emphasised separation of church and state, the priesthood of all believers, freedom of conscience and the autonomy of the local church. When local churches join an assembly, they intend not to surrender their autonomy, but to help each other and do together what individual churches can't do on their own, like running schools, universities, hospitals, mission and aid organizations. When what was intended to be friendly and encouraging has become controlling, it is unbaptistic.

### *Uncharitable.*

Christians are called to mirror the charitable nature of God, not to be haughty and controlling. The authority form of the gospel is the request, the wooing, not controlling. It is uncharitable to disassociate those who try to reflect the depth of God's love and the wideness of God's mercy.

### *Unbecoming.*

We can do better than this. It is unbecoming of a Christian church who wants to have a good word to say to society. People of good will do not listen to bigots. Baptists have a long history of disobedience.

Let us go into the streets protesting for life and love and welcoming the stranger, but not against each other and against people who simply accept who they are and try to make the best of it.

*Quo vadis* Baptists in NSW/ACT?

I feel sad. Betrayed. The community that has enriched my life for more than 60 years now wants to kick me out. I am not alone, however. Knocked down, but not knocked out. Bruised, but welcomed where it counts.

*Thorwald Lorenzen, Sydney, Australia*