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Your Men Shall See Visions

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“YOUR MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS”

BAPTISTS are reckoned to be the largest Protestant denomination in the world. In the United States in particular they are numerically a very great company.

Can we Baptists ever become that, in the British Isles, in the Colonies, in the nations of the Commonwealth? The question is a vital one and I shall try to answer it in two ways.

I

As regards the immediate future the answer must be *No*.

In Britain the denominational pattern, and the proportionate size of the pieces in it, is more or less fixed. No striking change is at present likely. That is true also of Australia and, I believe, of Canada and South Africa. A survey of South-east Asia would probably lead to a similar conclusion about our position in India and Pakistan. In the British family of nations we are, in comparison with some Christian groups, a relatively small company. And so, for a while, we shall remain. It is not in our spirit deliberately to proselytise among other believers. We do not, as some think, set out to steal and dip other sheep.

None the less, we are of great importance. We have a witness to give to the whole Church, in Britain and in the Commonwealth. Our testimony about baptism, by which we mean the immersion of believers on profession of their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, recalls the Church to the authority of her Head, to the finality of her scripture, to the central theme of her Gospel, to the scope and purpose of the mission committed to her by her ascending Master, to the nature of her membership as a fellowship of converted souls.

That witness, in the current ecclesiastical scene, is beyond measure significant. The modern slogans of the Church are the words ECUMENICAL and EVANGELICAL. We have something to say about the first, for we are members of a world-wide denomination. We have even more to say about the second; for the marks of a true evangelical Church is the power to make disciples for Christ and the will to baptise them in accordance with His word, and we have those marks.

Moreover, we note with pardonable elation, that our convictions about believers' baptism are being studied now with deeper respect. Infant baptism, in its validity and value, is being questioned even by many who still practice it. The tide of Christian opinion flows to-day from the font to the baptistery. Sound exegesis of the scripture, and sound tactics in the evangelistic battle, require the use of that pool which is "hewn out of the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture."

I hold, therefore, that few though we may appear in the British family of nations, our God-appointed task is to maintain the Baptist witness with absolute confidence, to teach it with all

authority, to uphold the claim of it in all conversations about Church union and to press acceptance of it upon all who are converted to Christ under our own ministries. A clear, resonant Baptist note will not only maintain the position and morale of our own churches. It will keep alert the spirit and conscience of the entire Church.

II

As regards the remoter future, my answer is *Yes*.

We *can* become, in Britain, in the Colonies and in the Commonwealth, numerically a great denomination. The present pattern of denominations, so slow to alter, occupies only a fraction of the total picture. Outside it, in the area we are considering, are vast numbers of people who have no link with any church and are to be reckoned as a mission field. Millions are like sheep without a shepherd. They have to be evangelised. Any denomination which can, and will, gather them in to the Lord Jesus Christ is capable of rapid and indefinite expansion. And I believe that in the future such expansion is possible for us.

Only one power can wake men out of spiritual death to spiritual life, the power of Him Who died and rose again. Only one power can change men from carnal corruption to moral health, the power of Him Who died for our sins and rose for our justification. Only one power can demolish the middle walls of partition that divide class from class and race from race, the power of Him at whose death the temple veil was rent in twain and at whose rising the stone was rolled away. That power, in its source and in its effect, is symbolised in our baptisteries and in our baptismal ordinance. That power, given through the Holy Spirit, works through the kind of Gospel preaching that leads to the baptistery. That power, the power of God unto salvation, is the only thing relevant to modern man's desperate need. We are set to proclaim it and transmit it. For, as of old, the Holy Spirit broods over baptismal waters. And at that point now, in the chaos of present life, He will surely manifest again God's redemptive and creative energy in Christ.

One hundred and sixty years ago we Baptists led the churches into the then Christless Orient. The historic commission of our Lord for us still stands. We must be *goers*—into the world of men. We must be *makers*—of disciples. We must be *baptisers*—by immersion of those who come to believe in Christ. We must be *teachers*—of creed and conduct and churchmanship and citizenship, training men to live and work for their Lord. We must be *seers*—our spiritual eyes fixed on Him Who is with us always, even unto the end of the world. We *can*, and *must*, lead the churches to-day into the Christless multitudes of east and west.

Is this naught but a grandiose dream? I believe not. We are planning to assemble, during the Festival of Britain in 1951, to consider this vision and wait on God for the power, a great

Congress of Baptists from all over the British Empire and the Commonwealth. The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Baptist Missionary Society have cordially approved a plan laid before them by the Baptist Commonwealth and Colonial Society for the calling of such a Congress. A tripartite committee is already at work. Letters to the forty Baptist groups in Commonwealth and Empire are eliciting cordial replies and promises of co-operation. I invite the interest and prayers of all members of the Baptist Minister's Fellowship, that 1951 may find a great company "all with one accord in one place," at the centre of the Empire, and blessed by a great outpouring of the Spirit of God. Meantime, let every minister be an evangelist, every church a fellowship for the furtherance of the Gospel, every baptistery open and in use, every union and association vigilant and adventurous in church extension. We are at the turn of the century. We are beginning to see a turn of the spiritual tide. May our opened baptisteries receive their heavenly flood!

W. D. JACKSON.

BAPTIST WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

BAPTIST work in South Africa (which includes also the Rhodesias) is divided into four sections: (1) European Churches, 8,000 members; (2) Coloured Churches and Missions, 600 members; (3) Indian Churches (Natal), 900 members; (4) Bantu Baptist Church (the Field of the S.A.B.M.S.), 12,000 members.

The purpose of these notes is to give a brief outline of the organisation of the European work of the S.A.B.U. This work must be considered against a background of

(1) *Immense Distances.* The area in which South African Baptists operate is about fourteen times the size of Great Britain. The Salisbury Church is about 1,300 miles from Cape Town;

(2) *Racial Problems.* Apart from the natives, who are everywhere, there are diverse European racial elements—Dutch, British, German, French, etc.

Scattered about this vast territory are 70 Baptist Churches (representing 108 places of worship). The ministers and people have to carry on their work without the blessings and encouragements of fraternal gatherings and fellowships. There are, of course, a few exceptions: Johannesburg, for instance, where there is a fine group of churches. There are seven associations affiliated to the Baptist Union, two of which are known as the Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk and the German Bund. Extension work on a big scale among the Afrikaans people would be undertaken, if financial resources were adequate, as it is recognised that development here would be a powerful factor in strengthening the denomination.

Contact between local groups of churches and the B.U. is maintained largely through the Association representatives on the