The Baptist Opportunity and Program in Europe

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THE BAPTIST OPPORTUNITY IN EUROPE

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As I see the matter, no greater opportunity ever came to Baptists than confronts them at present in the European countries which have been taken over by our Foreign Mission Board as a result of the London Conference last summer. I mention some of the facts which I hope will make good this statement.

The opportunity arises largely out of the chaotic conditions now prevailing in Europe. All the forces of civilization are in a state of ferment. Changes are going on in every department of life. Radical ideas are arising, and men are championing them openly. There is need, therefore, for the molding and guiding hand of the religion of Jesus Christ.

Another phase of the situation which makes Europe unique as a Baptist opportunity is the present changing status of religious liberty in all European countries. The old order has been broken, and the new order has not arrived in regard to religious liberty. In all European countries there is a new appreciation of the importance and value of freedom to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience. Forces are in operation which may be utilized to bring about a complete change in the old order and bestow upon European peoples this priceless boon of religious liberty. Baptists are the one denomination in the world best quali-

fied to guide this movement. There is a marvelous thrill to a Baptist in the thought and challenge of this situation. I felt it a thousand times during my recent tour, and whenever I reflect upon it I am overpowered with the magnitude of the opportunity.

Baptists Have Truths Europe Seeks

Again, the opportunity grows out of the fact that Baptists have precisely those spiritual truths which Europe is seeking blindly. Many Europeans have wants and needs which they have not defined to themselves. For the most part, they are craving political, social and economic rights. All of them run back to the right of the individual to receive just treatment at the hands of his fellowmen. Baptists are individualists and have the message which meets all these implicit needs of Europeans. The Europeans themselves fail to see the religious basis of the rights which they seek. Baptists can bring to them the great truth that these civil, political and economic rights are grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Again, this opportunity is seen in the failure of sacramentalism to regenerate European countries. Centuries ago men converted the simple ordinances of the New Testament into sacraments. They were regarded as having regenerating and saving power. Inevitably a group of custodians, called priests, arose to take care of these sacraments. Salvation was then limited to those who received the sacraments at the hands of the priests. Infant baptism came in because it was necessary to administer the sacraments

lest the infant die in infancy and be lost. The consequence of this was the rise of enormous state churches filled with a false ideal of salvation. Baptists are meeting this situation because their interpretation of the ordinances makes them symbols of truth. They fall back upon the Spirit of God and the truth of the Gospel. Their message is exactly adapted to the needs of the situation. No religious body which practices infant baptism or takes the sacramental view of the ordinances can possibly meet the needs of the Europeans.

Failure of Autocracy Baptist Opportunity

Again, the failure of autocracy in church and state constitutes a thrilling Baptist opportunity. The papacy has been the religious autocracy of the world for centuries, and corresponding to it have been the Kaiser, the Czar and other autocrats in the political sphere. The war has overthrown the political autocrats. In principle it has destroyed the papal autocracy. Temporarily, indeed, there is a new accession of papal power, owing to the political exigencies of the new situation, but ultimately democracy will be triumphant as the outcome of the war. Baptists are best qualified to lead this movement. Political democracy is grounded in religious democracy. There is no way to conceive of a government of the people, by the people and for the people except on principles of morality and righteousness, and there is no way to secure such a foundation save as the truths of the Christian religion are introduced to the various peoples.

Baptists have before them, therefore, one of

the greatest opportunities that ever confronted them. In meeting a situation which historically is unparalleled, the doors of the world have been flung open, and the hands of democracy beckon the most democratic of all religious bodies to come in and possess the land.

Individual Comes into His Own

Corresponding to the downfall of autocracy is the rise of the individual. The old theory of European civilization was that the state is everything and the citizen nothing. The citizen exists for the state, not the state for the citizen. The state is like a tree that endures through generations. The individual citizens are like the leaves on the tree that come and remain a while and then wither and fall away and perish in the autumn. The state is like the ocean that endures through the centuries. Individuals are like the waves that rise and fall on its bosom. This was the theory in Germany, Austria and Russia and other European countries prior to 1914. All this has now been changed. The individual is coming to his own. In some places, indeed, he is abusing the new freedom which has come to him and he needs to be restrained. The only restraining power which is capable of coping with the situation successfully is the power of Christianity. And the form of Christianity which Baptists hold is the form which can best accomplish the result. What is needed is a power to touch the individual heart, to change it and restrain it. Baptists preach a gospel to the individual. Their aim is to save individual men. These individuals become associated in democratic churches, and

these churches in turn become the leaven of society. They are made up of regenerate men and women, and therefore they transform their environment by bringing the saving Gospel to other individuals. Thus the Baptists have an open door in the rise of individualism throughout Europe.

People Tire of State Church

Again, there is what is called an "inner movement" in many European countries which is most favorable to the Baptists. In Germany, in Sweden, in Norway, in Austria and other European countries there is a movement inside the state churches looking to a deeper and more genuine form of religious life. Men and women have grown weary of the husks on which they have been fed in the state churches. In Germany and Sweden and Norway these spiritual people have formed societies within the state churches, hold meetings separately, conduct mission work of their own, have their own plans for Bible study and preaching, and have gone back to the New Testament for their instruction and guidance. In many instances they have become practically Baptists. They only need a very few additions to their practices to make them thorough Baptists. These movements constitute a great opportunity for our Baptist people. If we enter these countries with a clearcut message, with a sane, wise and adequate evangelism, coupled with a corresponding educational program, and if we supply leaders who are competent to take care of the great situation, we shall make a powerful appeal to this group in all these countries. Wher-

ever the human heart hungers for a spiritual religion, and wherever the individual soul craves fellowship with God, there is an opportunity for the Baptist who understands his message and knows how to deliver it.

Again, the spread of socialism in various countries in Europe constitutes an element in the opportunity for us. Of course, we oppose what is known as state socialism, and must pray that it may never be adopted in these European countries. But socialism emphasizes the democratic aspect of society. It is misguided at some points, but in so far as it does emphasize the value of the individual, and in so far as it makes a plea for individual human rights it constitutes a movement which Baptists may utilize to advantage. Of course, I do not mean that Baptists should in any formal way take hold of socialism and try to wield it as an instrument of power. I mean merely that the existence of a party seeking these aims and objects presents a considerable group favorable for the progress of the Baptist message.

Baptists Have Good Beginning

Once more, a large part of the Baptist opportunity in Europe consists in the fact that there is already a considerable family of Baptists in practically every European country. In Germany and Sweden the Baptists have become a great host. In other countries they are not so numerous, but they are by no means insignificant, and they constitute a very earnest and devoted body of believers. They will be found to be tre-

mendous allies for Southern Baptists in their work in Southern Europe. In Roumania there is a group of fifteen or twenty thousand Baptists who are as earnest and devoted and efficient as any similar group in the world. In some respects I believe they are more so than any similar group in the world. In Hungary there is another group not quite so large but equally devoted and full of possibilities. In Italy our work is making progress, and in Spain there is a wide open door of marvelous opportunity.

If Baptists were to weaken in their efforts to meet their pledges in the $75,000,000 Campaign, it would be an unspeakable disaster. We are bound to carry forward our program in Europe, and if nothing else appeals to the hearts and consciences of our people, this wide open door is a challenge to us to make all sacrifices that it is possible for us to make to meet our obligations.

If Baptists were to fail to meet their obligations to the $75,000,000 Campaign, and if the five-year period should pass without the proper undertakings in the European countries allotted to us, we would have lost the opportunity of the centuries.

Therefore, in conclusion, I am making an appeal containing all the force that it is possible for me to concentrate into it, urging every Baptist man, woman and child who has made a pledge to the $75,000,000 fund that, whatever else he fails to do, let him not fail to meet his obligations to this great cause. It is the cause of Christ, it is the challenge of Christ, it is the opportunity of the ages come to our door. Let us not fail to enter it in a great way.

THE PROGRAM CALLED FOR IN EUROPE

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Concurring fully in the estimate Dr. Mullins puts on Baptist opportunities in Europe, it falls to me to suggest what, in the light of the facts, would be a reasonable program for Southern Baptists to lay out for themselves on these new fields. First of all, the program ought to be large. The fields are large. We are called on to minister to 128,000,000 people in the fields we are asked to assist. To a degree almost unthinkable, they are ready to hear the word from us. The fields are ripe, very ripe to harvest. There are seed times and harvest times. This time is both. The reapers overtake the sowers. Waiting is wasting. In not a few places there are many workers, willing to go afield, but are hindered for lack of what we can supply.

A wise program must fit into the several situations as they actually exist. Happily we have in all the lands allotted to Southern Baptists a seed of Baptists of the New Testament faith and order. They are unspoiled by vain philosophies. There are no fundamental errors to eradicate. They are anxious for knowledge. They are in many places very enthusiastic. They believe in the Holy Ghost. Everywhere there is need for training and a great desire for it. No program will fit the needs of these fields that does not provide for a sound and comprehensive system of Christian education, a system

varied to meet the special needs of the Baptists today and tomorrow and on. Action now to strengthen the things that are and will be is exceedingly urgent because everything is so plastic and growing. Every care should be taken to see that every school planted is founded on the truth and safeguarded from the invasions of error. If American Baptists had from the beginning adopted Christ's program---evangelize, baptize, teach---and followed this program consistently, we would never have had the Hardshell and Campbellite defections and would have saved ourselves many weaknesses which have afflicted us throughout our history. The situation does not call for the most elaborate schools to start with, but schools adapted everywhere to the state of development in which the people are found.

European Program Must Be Broad

A worthy program for Europe must be broad. Along with evangelizing, baptizing and teaching must go the benevolences of the gospel. Orphans must be cared for. The old and feeble must be succored. In short, on these wide open fields two great commissions ought to be worked along side by side. First, "Go preach to everybody, baptize believers, gather them into churches and train the churches, and on." Second, "As you have opportunity do good unto all men, specially to the household of faith." This program should look all the time to re-enforcing and helping the native Baptists to evangelize their own people. The training of native leaders is pre-eminently wise. It is not for us to

take over the work anywhere, but to become fellow-helpers of the truth with the redeemed on the fields. The right program will call for large sums of money, year by year. A skimping policy will be wasteful at both ends, abroad and at home. It has been often said and many times demonstrated, that with a free people acting on the voluntary principle, as Baptists always must, it is easier to do a big thing than a little thing. The 75 Million Campaign proved that. Southern Baptists are able to put on and sustain a strong comprehensive program. The fields call for it. The people are ready for it.

Pauline Leadership Demanded

I would mention last that this program would inevitably demand a strong Pauline leadership. The leader should be a scholar, for he would need to deal with many men of learning and make plain to them the New Testament messages. He should be a man able to stand before kings and rulers so as to deal skillfully with governments as they have to do with religion. He should be evangelical and intensely evangelistic. And he should know how to manage business matters. The right leadership on these new fields now is of the first importance. We need another Paul to work where Paul worked.

I have outlined in brief what seems to me a winning program for our new mission fields. It is feasible. It does not call for too much. It will win as modern missions have won nowhere else, if the power of the Highest will go with us in the working of it. And we have the promise of the divine presence if we go.