

THE REASON FOR THE DIFFERENCE  
A PAPER PRESENTED TO

THE JAMAICA FELLOWSHIP OF  
INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCHES

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by

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## THE AUTHOR'S TESTIMONY

At present there are fourteen churches in the Jamaica Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches. Most of these churches have been with the Fellowship since its inception in 1961. In those two and one half decades many things have happened, the most significant of which is the fact that the men who initiated and established that cause against modernism, are no longer engaged in active ministry. Significant too is the fact that throughout these years many have enlisted themselves in this holy cause. This writer is one such person.

My first introduction to a Fellowship church was in September of 1969 when I began to live in May Pen. The warmth of the small congregation and the forceful preaching of the Pastor compelled me to think that there were other warm-hearted Christians apart from the few evangelical Presbyterians that I knew, I being one of them. However, I felt certain that I would not be swayed from Presbyterianism. These Baptists had nothing over me, I felt. I was baptized by immersion, my then Pastor was as good a preacher as the Baptist Pastor and I shared the fellowship of some truly wonderful Christians. I tried not to break ties with the Presbyterians by visiting a church in the area. Two visits were enough to tell me that I needed another place for worship and fellowship. The place to go was the Baptist Church. I became a member and before long the Lord spoke to me "a second time" as He did at the first in the Presbyterian Church. In 1973 I began to prepare for the ministry with formal training at the Toronto Baptist Seminary. In 1977 I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Theology. During my last year in Seminary the Clarksonville Circuit of Baptist Churches issued a call to me to become their Pastor. After much prayerful consideration, I accepted the call. I assumed pastoral responsibilities in September of 1977.

Having assumed pastoral responsibility of the churches I was aware that I was then, as I am now, not a Baptist by convenience, but by conviction. However, I was not certain of my commitment to this group of Baptists though they did seem to have a cause in differing

from the other group of Baptists. I was a Baptist, I could be nothing else, but why was I not in the Jamaica Baptist Union? Why was I a member of the Jamaica Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches? I had to find a good reason. I like to be able "to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in (me) you." It was necessary therefore for me to do some research. This treatise is the result of some of that research.

These details seem foreign to the subject at hand, but I believe they are important for two reasons. Firstly, they show that the writer had to make an objective assessment of the entire situation. It is my opinion that I came to the right conclusion to remain with the Jamaica Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches based upon the evidences which were available to me. I do not ask you to judge the objectivity of my assessment, I only ask that you consider with me, in the words of C. H. Spurgeon, "Was There Not A Cause?"

Secondly, I believe that these introductory details serve to strengthen the case of the honest enquirers who have little knowledge or none at all of our present position. I have had young people come to me and say, "I don't know the difference." "Why are we in a different group? Why do we call ourselves Independent Baptists?" It is my opinion that they have a right to know - and they must be told. Furthermore they do well to ask these questions.

It is my hope that this paper will help to answer the many questions that have been asked by the members of our Fellowship churches. It is dedicated to the memory of the servants of God who marshalled the cause of the Jamaica Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches.

THE EARLY BAPTIST IN JAMAICA

The Baptist work in Jamaica began with the arrival in Kingston of George Lisle, in 1783. An emancipated slave, Lisle had been engaged in gospel ministry among his own people in Virginia, U.S.A., from which he came. Upon arrival in Jamaica he began to preach at the Race-Course in Kingston. Many poor people attended his meetings and heard the gospel. Before long he had many followers which led him to rent a house in the city and there he established a church. By 1790 over five hundred people were baptized on profession of faith. In 1793 he built and opened the first Baptist church on the island. This church, at the corner of Victoria Avenue and Elletson Road, was also the first dissenting church in Jamaica. The Church of England was then the established church.

Later, an ~~escaped~~ slave from the United States found his way to the island. He was, it is said, an ungodly man. Both he and his wife were converted through the witness of an old, godly black man. They were baptized by Lisle, whose church they joined. This man, Moses Baker, was to be moved, in the providence of God, from Kingston in the east to Adelphi in the west. A slave owner visited Kingston and bought slaves, some of whom belonged to Lisle's church. The slave owner, a Mr. Winn, who was interested in the welfare of his slaves, employed Baker to return with him to Adelphi to do spiritual work among them. He exercised a remarkable influence among them and with God as his helper, he was able to form a church at Crooked Spring. What was this church like? He described it thus: "We are of the Baptist persuasion because we believe it agreeable to the Scriptures. We hold to be baptized in a river or place where there is much water." On the matter of church discipline he had this to say: "If a brother become a swearer, a fornicator or covetous, we hold that he should be put away from us."

The hand of God should be seen in this early beginning. The commencement of a work in the east and one in the west could be no accident. These two testimonies from either side of the island were used of God to establish other testimonies across the island. Through representation made to the Baptist Missionary Society of England and

the arrival of missionaries from England the Baptist testimony on the island grew rapidly. By 1826 there were eight Baptist churches with over 5,200 members. Bearing in mind the restriction on slaves to attend church, the growth could be called rapid. All true Baptists in Jamaica have their beginning in the humble testimonies of those days. I say "true Baptists" because they are not all Baptists who bear the name. I rather like the statement of Mr. Baker, which I have just quoted: "We are of the Baptist persuasion because we believe it agreeable to the Scriptures." The historic Baptist position has always been this very thing. Our first fathers were men of the Bible, holding that it is God's inspired, infallible, and complete revelation to His people, the only rule of faith and practise. Whenever someone ceases to hold dear these truths he automatically ceases to be a Baptist.

I am satisfied to say that our early fathers were Bible believing, God honouring men. However, that position was not maintained by succeeding generations. We believe that there would be change of methods and other things of minor importance in succeeding generations, but there are some things which should not be changed. To change some old foundation principles would be tantamount to denying the very God which we profess to serve and a rejection of His inspired Word.

Changes have come about within the Baptist cause in Jamaica since those early years of its establishment. These changes and their resulting policy must be judged in the light of Scripture. From available evidence it seems clear that the architects of change in 1930-1940 were sincere in their desire for change. Here is what the editor of The Jamaica Baptist Reporter wrote in an editorial in the issue of January 1939:

The Jamaica Baptist Union from its earliest days, got together as a number of individuals, having the same object in view; and after much prayer and deliberation, solved a policy whereby the objects they contemplated were to be obtained. Those objects were stated in terms, the definiteness of which we shall never be able to improve upon. The point at issue today is, whether the policy of the Fathers and Founders of the Union for obtaining those objects, is applicable now, and under the new conditions of Church life and government that have arisen. The call is for an amended, if not

altogether new Constitution, setting out clearly our policy.

The call at the present time is for an amended J.B.U. Constitution, to suit our time and condition; but the question that confronts us is, are we capable of reconstructing so delicate a machine, and make it more efficient, for the obtaining of the objects concerning which, we are all of one mind. In the Spirit of the Fathers let us betake ourselves to prayer for guidance from God; and let us deliberate as men who have a mission, and who believe that there is a distinctive witness, that the Baptist Church has yet to bear in this country, and in this second century of Slave-Emancipation, which we have just commenced.

The fact that there is nothing wrong with change must again be emphasized. However the suggestive nature of the change would undoubtedly leave some Baptists a little concerned. Look well to the nature of the change as reported by Rev. J. W. Maxwell in the above mentioned Reporter:

Granting therefore that we have discovered that the Constitution of 1850 is too loose for our present-day requirements, are we now prepared as a Body, to sink all personal grievances, suspicion, petty divisions and jealousies, and for the good of the Union, to institute a governing Body, investing it with certain powers, which while retaining to us the principle of Congregational Government, shall prevent groups of members, whom we call churches, with their pastors, acting on important Union matters quite independently, and outside the spirit of mutual co-operation.

The length of this sentence leaves us a little troubled, but understanding from it that the independence of the local church is being threatened, leaves us far more troubled. This same editorial article entitled Proposed Policy of The Jamaica Baptist Union, has a section entitled "A Brief Summary" thus:

1. Name - That the Jamaica Baptist Union, shall henceforth be regarded as a big Church - The Baptist Church of Jamaica.
2. Membership - That each member of every recognized group of Baptists in this or in neighbouring lands, who join the Union, shall be reckoned as a constituent member of the Union.
3. Objects - (a) To promote unity in whatever may serve best the cause of Christ in general, and the Jamaica Baptist Union in particular.  
(b) To promote and prosecute Mission work in Jamaica and abroad.  
(c) To assist financially in the support of Calabar College.  
(d) To encourage the formation of Associations of Baptist groups throughout the Island.  
(e) To create a Central Fund, from which all the pastors of the Union shall be paid.

(f) To secure the incorporation of all Baptist Church property in the Island.

(g) To establish an old age and Superannuation Fund, and a Widow and Orphan Fund.

(h) To consider and deal with public questions in relation to the social and economic welfare of the country.

4. Management - The affairs of the Union shall be managed by a Governing Body, consisting of both Ministerial and Lay Members, and invested with certain executive duties, which are hereunder specified, and may be added to.

(a) It shall be the duty of the Governing Body to frame the rules and regulations for the administration of the affairs of the Union, and shall present them to the Union for discussion and confirmation.

(b) To administer the Central Funds.

(c) To co-operate in the settlement of pastorates.

(d) To supervise pastorless churches.

(e) To effect changes and removals where necessary.

(f) To enquire into disputes between pastors and churches, as well as into matters affecting the character of ministers and Churches of the Union, and to report the result of such inquiry, first to a Conference of Ministers, and then to the full Union.

(g) Any other duties that may be specified for addition to the foregoing, by the Union.

The question which confronts us as we examine these matters is this: Were these changes in accordance with Scripture, and as such, were they in the best interest of the churches involved? This and other questions will be answered in other sections of this paper. Another question which we do well to consider is the spirituality and commitment of the early Fathers and Founders. Rev. R. L. A. Knight, in the Jamaica Baptist Reporter of August 1937, had this to say of them: "These early pioneers were men of godly character, respected and well spoken of by men in position." There should be no doubt in our minds concerning the adherence of these men to the Scripture. It is my opinion that the policy of their days was carefully thought out and put into practice only because they believed it was in keeping with the Word of God and that it was in the best interest of the people of God. "Are we capable of reconstructing so delicate a machine, and make it more efficient, for the obtaining of the objects concerning which, we are all of one mind?" This question which was asked by Rev. J. W. Maxwell in 1939 is worth considering in 1986.

EVIDENCES OF SPIRITUAL WEAKNESSES  
WITHIN THE JAMAICA BAPTIST UNION

From documented evidences available to this writer it is clear that things were not all well within the Jamaica Baptist Union from as early as the 1930's. There was wide spread dissatisfaction on the part of many. This unsavoury situation was not kept within the confines of the Jamaica Baptist Union, but was brought to light to the wider public. In answer to a letter that was written to the editor of "The Daily Gleaner" and published some time in 1937, Rev. W. J. Mornan wrote to the editor of the above mentioned paper, a letter dated August 11, 1937. Because of the weight of this letter I am compelled to quote most of its contents. Apart from informing us that there was an unsatisfactory state, it goes on to tell us of the nature of the dissatisfaction.

I have read with much interest the very able article from the pen of the Rev. R. A. L. Knight, M.A., B.D., which was published in your issue of August 9. With most of what Mr. Knight says I am in heartiest agreement. As a Baptist, of many years standing and experience, I have always felt devoutly thankful for the splendid work done by our College, ministers, and churches in the glorious past, and no one more deeply mourns than I do over our present condition.

It is when Mr. Knight comes to deal with the reasons for the present unsatisfactory state of things, and to suggest remedies for our improvement, that I find myself differing entirely from him. In my opinion our present weakness is due to a departure from the principles and doctrines on which our early churches were built up. The ministers of a previous generation believed wholeheartedly in the full inspiration and authority of the Bible as the word of God, the one standard of faith and practice, and depended on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as the sole inspirer and guide in all Christian life and service. With this assurance they proclaimed the New Testament Gospel in all its fullness and power. The teaching of God's word on sin, its evil nature and universality, its terrible and eternal consequences; the only way of salvation by faith in the great and glorious Saviour - God's own Son - Who tasted death for every man, and in Whom alone the helpless sinner can get back into fellowship with God. They emphasized the need to be born again - or created anew in Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the word of God.

None was admitted into church membership who did not give satisfactory evidence in character and life that they had been truly converted to God. In all church affairs, work, and discipline the Bible was regarded as the sole authority and the Holy Spirit as the sole administrator and guide. It was this teaching and belief which led to the purity of life, zeal in Christian service, and that strong moral and spiritual influence which our churches exerted over the entire community.

When Mr. Knight says "Whatever therefore, has been achieved in the past



by us has been mainly the result of individual action, not of organized effort," he is entirely wrong. True there was no external organization that controlled the life and activity of our churches, but we were moved, guided and to a very large extent unified by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He made us all one in Christ Jesus and under His influence we were led to put forth united efforts for the salvation of the lost and the spread of the Redeemer's Kingdom in our own land, in Africa, and the countries around us.

This is the only unity some of us believe in. It is the only unity taught in the New Testament and is the only sure ground for real success in Christian life and work. The "Central Authority" which the leaders of the J. B. Union are endeavouring to establish is merely an unscriptural human invention and is foredoomed to spiritual failure whatever may be the outward and apparent result.

The present Baptist situation and the remedy proposed for it reminds one of Israel's request for a King. The people said "Make us a King to judge (rule) us like all the nations." This proposal was only made when Israel had "turned aside" from God's way and will and wished to be like the other nations. So today there is a cry among Baptist leaders for some visible external authority which will make us like all the other denominations. But again I say this will lead to no real spiritual benefit or blessing simply because it is not God's will or way for His church. Far better will it be for us to follow God's way - that set forth in the New Testament and followed by the early church. This produced a unity such as the world had never seen nor dreamt of before, and enabled the early Christians, most of whom were ignorant and unlearned, to turn the world upside down, and to win such amazing victories for their Great Master.

Although the 1930's saw the intensifying of the uneasy situation within the Jamaica Baptist Union, this was by no means the beginning of that which, no doubt, contributed to the problems. In his "Conquest of Christ In The West Indies", G. W. Smith states:

(H) The Baptist churches of Jamaica for the most part entered the new century in good spiritual condition under the care of watchful under-shepherds who were leading their flocks in "the old paths" (Jer. 6:16). But Satan, the enemy of Christ and the deceiver of men, had through the Baptist Missionary Society put into the presidential chair at Calabar College in 1893 Mr. A. James, B.A., a man whose gentlemanly bearing seemed to commend his critical views of the Old Testament (2 Cor. 11:14-15). He was sent out to succeed Dr. Jonathan East, a scholar who had honoured the Bible as the infallible Word of God during a teaching ministry of forty years in Jamaica. Thus the seeds of doubt and denial of the Word were being sown in the minds of the future ministers of the churches in the Jamaica Baptist Union during the closing years of the century of progress. Pastor W. J. Mornan made this plain in a letter to the Editor of the "Jamaica Baptist Reporter" which appeared in the May, 1932, issue: "The history of this decline of faith and confidence in the Word of God is well known to some of us. It began in our College in 1893 when the President of that day began to put the so-called 'assured results of modern scholarship' above the plain teaching of the Word itself."

The evil seed, having been sown, was sure to bear its evil fruit. It bore fruit in men like Rev. J. A. Dyer whom Satan used to propagate the evil seed in his generation. It was in December of 1936 that a letter by Rev. Dyer, entitled "Quem Diem" (Which Day), was published in The Jamaica Baptist Reporter. Unfortunately, I am left with only the front cover of that issue. However, Rev. W. J. Mornan, one of the champions for the cause of Christ in those days, replied to Rev. Dyer's letter in the issue of January 1937. I must add that the swiftness of the pen of Rev. Mornan is encouraging, and is a sure evidence of the fact that in the darkest days of spiritual decline, God has, and will, raise up His witness to shed His light. Rev. Mornan, G. W. Smith, J. W. Knight and S. J. Cummings, and others, were God's light in those dark days in Jamaica.

In his article, Rev. Dyer, seeking to deny the Genesis Record, called it "a fantastic piece of primitive cosmology - no longer tenable." I quote in part from Rev. Mornan's reply:

The older one gets the more disinclined he becomes to engage in controversy. At least this is my case. I feel impelled, however, to ask you to allow me to make a few brief remarks on Mr. Dyer's article in your December issue entitled "Quem Diem"...What amazes and grieves me is that in our BAPTIST REPORTER an article should be published in which a Scripture record is held to be "a fantastic piece of primitive cosmology - no longer tenable." An inspired Apostle assures us that "All scripture is God-breathed and is profitable." But now we have a Baptist minister, a graduate of a Baptist University, stating that at least some portion of the Scripture is "FANTASTIC", "PRIMITIVE" and "NO LONGER TENABLE." If this is the kind of teaching our churches are receiving then it is no wonder that they have fallen into the sad state of spiritual and moral weakness which is alarming some of us.

I fear that someone may ask, "Why are all these things being brought to light after so many years when these men are dead and gone to their reward?" The answer is that whether these things are pleasant or not, they make up the record of history. These are facts that must be told to succeeding generations, lest they forget. The truth becomes unpleasant to those who do not love the truth, so would these things hurt those who are less inclined to stand for the truth of God's Word.

Let me draw out another page from the record of history. Rev. J. W. Knight wrote a little booklet in the midst of the controversy

entitled "Is There Modernism In The Jamaica Baptist Union?" Rev. Knight is still alive to date and could speak for himself, but I quote from his booklet, pages 7 - 9:

We are now going to deal with some of the beliefs of one of the Modernist members of the J.B.U., that we may prove the presence of Modernism to those who still refuse to see. The holder of the views that we are about to deal with, is none other than the Rev. David Davis, B.A., B.D., Tutor in Calabar, the College where young men are trained for the Ministry....

We have before us the original of a communication written by Professor Davis on the 13th of July, 1931, to the Rev. Wilfred Smith....

"With regard to Jonah - Briefly my position is this - The essential difficulty is the reference to the book made by Jesus - The argument in the booklet you sent (and all such) seems to me to imply omniscience as an attribute of Jesus - I believe in the Incarnation and teach it constantly - If Jesus were omniscient in His earthly life the Incarnation would not be a reality - He directly disclaimed omniscience - Paul anticipated the difficulty in the doctrine of the Kenosis, Phil. 2:7, a doctrine which remained neglected and undeveloped until the development of human thought required it. Jesus certainly accepted the commonplace knowledge of His time along with the limitations of place and time involved in the fact of the Incarnation - I have always been puzzled to understand why the book of Jonah is given such prominence in this connection, but I suppose it is another case of credo quia absurdum - it is a test case to indicate a whole point of view."

Anyone whose spiritual eyes have been opened can see from these evidences that something was wrong within the Jamaica Baptist Union. At least, if the Bible is truly God's inspired Word, and we believe it is, then there were those who were definitely wrong.

NECESSITY FOR THE JAMAICA FELLOWSHIP  
OF INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCHES

People who have held to the old foundation principles of the Word of God have always been regarded as narrow in their view. If this is so we most certainly acknowledge the fact that there were some narrow minded men in the past. It is interesting that as I write this article, my eyes were drawn to the concluding lines of an address by the Chairman of the Jamaica Baptist Union, recorded in The Jamaica Baptist Reporter of April 1940. They are words from a very popular chorus in Jamaica:

We are not divided,  
All one body we;  
One in hope and doctrine,  
One in charity.

Unfortunately this is not always true of all who profess Christ. It most certainly was not true of all those who were in the Union when modernism began to creep in. Modernism with its ungodly doctrines stands in contradiction to the Word of God, and those who believe the Word of God. What is this Modernism? Rev. J. W. Knight in his booklet "Is There Modernism In The Jamaica Baptist Union?" gives "the simplest definition we can: It is that which denies one or more of the fundamentals of the Christian faith." He then goes on to describe the Fundamentals of Faith as the things which have to do with:

Belief in the One true God who has existed from all eternity in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, equal in every Divine perfection.

Belief that man was brought into being by the special, direct creation of God and not by evolution.

Belief in the Fall of Man into a sinful state through his wilful disobedience to the Word of God.

Belief in the Virgin Birth of Christ, the Deity of Christ, the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, the Bodily Resurrection of Christ, the Ascension of Christ in His Glorified Body, the Second Personal Visible Coming of Christ.

Belief in the Verbal-Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments.

It is obvious from this that the two positions or people who hold opposite views on these matters cannot agree. That is why Rev. Knight withdrew from the Union in 1934. There were those who were

seeking to persuade him to return. As such, he felt obliged to give an explanation as to why he withdrew and why he must stay out. He used the medium of The Jamaica Baptist Reporter of April 1940 to do so, in a letter which was a reply to one received from Rev. R. A. L. Knight. I quote in part:

We believe the Bible teaches separation from those who hold to evil doctrines, and if sound men will defend these, then there is nothing to do but separate from the whole lot. I ask you is that not the plain teaching of such scriptures as 2 Cor. 6:14-17 from which I quote a few words, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers....What concord hath Christ with Belial (the Devil)....Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord." So also Titus 3:10, "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." Our Lord commended the Church at Ephesus saying, "Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars" , Rev. 2:2, and He finds fault with the church at Pergamos because, "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam...so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate", Rev. 2:14-15. Again He finds fault with the church at Thyatira, "Nevertheless I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel...to teach and to seduce my servants", Rev. 2:20. Note that the church at Ephesus TRIED its false teachers.

The J.B.U. has refused to TRY its teachers of error when they were pointed out, though it cannot deny their presence in the midst. A Union Member can imply that Christ made a false statement and then excuse Him on the ground of His ignorance and the Union takes no notice! Others can deny the penal element in the Atonement and Verbal Inspiration and the Union takes no notice! We left the Union because it refused to take notice of these and other workers of iniquity and I hope we shall have enough courage to stay out so long as the Union exhibits this unconcerned spirit.

In an interview with Rev. Knight concerning his withdrawal and the events of the years following, he revealed that "those were lonely years." It was during these "lonely years" that the friendship of men of "like precious faith" became more precious. Friendship and kindred spirit in doctrine became a reality between J. W. Knight, S. I. Cummings, G. W. Smith, W. J. Mornan and later, A. L. McKenzie. There was also friendship and kindred spirit with Pastors of Independent Baptist churches, many of whom were missionaries of the American based Baptist Mid-Mission.

The churches which were pastored by J. W. Knight, S. I. Cummings and A. L. McKenzie had much difficulty in shaking off the shackles of the Jamaica Baptist Union. The major point of dispute at this time was whether or not the church has a right to the property after having