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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

AUGUST 20, 2004

What The Dead Man Wrote (concluded)

The July issue of The Baptist Heritage [essential to understand this article—copies available] provided the record of the perverted theology of the individual that I believe has exerted greater influence on contemporary Christianity than any other person, living or deceased. Multiplied preachers of yesterday and today have acknowledged his effect upon their lives, but his *superhuman* impact on the shaping of the practice and the theology of Christianity as it is practiced in America in 2004 is largely unrecognized. I use that term “superhuman” purposefully; his power of persuasion transcends natural explanations. One cannot understand the appeal of the philosophy of Mohammed, Confucius, Joseph Smith, Judge Rutherford, Mary Baker Eddy, the Rev. Moon, Jim Jones, David Koresh, or “what the dead man wrote” only in terms of personal charisma. The power of their words to attract followers is beyond the realm of the natural—there are spiritual influences at work. Placing as I do “what the dead man wrote” and the dead man who wrote in the same company with acknowledged cultists and false religionists will offend his adherents—exactly as it offends a

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this and that

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The Deadly Plague of Incrementalism

"One ship sails east, another west, with the self-same wind that blows. 'Tis the cut of the sail and not the wind, that determines where the ship shall go." As the winds of doctrine blow strongly in these troubled and troubling days, the greatest danger that we Baptists face in this politically correct, pluralistic, egalitarian society known as 21st Century America is not the potential of sudden onset apostasy. Rather, our danger is in falling under the influence of gradualistic heretical acceptance. Heterodoxy is the ultimate and certain end of compromise.

The only factual difference between compromise and surrender is the former is the beginning and the latter is the conclusion. Compromise involves the little; surrender involves the whole. No compromiser ever believed that he would surrender—but, baring repentance, every compromiser will surrender; the historical record is replete with examples, past and contemporary.

Do not succumb to the siren plea of "Can't we all just get along." Rodney King Theologians

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WHAT THE DEAD MAN WROTE

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link in the chain of their conversion, stand up! There are none to answer. The mission of amusement produces no converts. The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other as fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

—Charles Spurgeon

I do not believe that I am standing alone or that I have the only insight. I remain open to corrective instruction. I will be glad to read a reasoned response supporting Finney. I believe that Finney's philosophy of doctrine produced his innovations—the two, doctrine and practice, cannot be separated. It is my warning that those who vindicate his practices validate his doctrine. To do so is, in my view, not the pathway of faithfulness. To follow the philosophy of Finney in methodology will lead to the eventual acceptance of his philosophy of theology. Methods and doctrine cannot walk together except they are in agreement. Amos and I are in agreement.

—Pastor Manley

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will devour you. The apostle did not record, "Moreover in stewards, it is required that a man be successful." The crown is for lawful striving and not expedient compromise. Set your sails based on the destination and not on the winds that blow.

—Pastor Manley

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the searching nature of His teaching. I do not hear Him say, "Run after these people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick, Peter, we must get the people somehow!" Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them. In vain will the Epistles be searched to find any trace of the gospel amusement. Their message is, "Come out, keep out, keep clean out!" Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon. After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the Church had a prayer meeting, but they did not pray, "Lord grant Thy servants that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are." If they ceased not for preaching Christ, they had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They "turned the world upside down." That is the difference! Lord, clear the Church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her and bring us back to apostolic methods.

Lastly, the mission of amusement fails to affect the end desired. It works havoc among young converts. Let the careless and scoffers, who thank God because the Church met them halfway, speak and testify. Let the heavy-laden who found peace through the concert not keep silent! Let the drunkard to whom the dramatic entertainment has been God's

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Muslim to describe Mohammed as a false prophet or a Latter Day Saint to label Joseph Smith and Brigham Young as religious charlatans. The comparison in examples and in the case of the dead man who wrote is valid and the identification is eminently suitable.

Care was taken in the article that we did not wrest the comments of this man from their context to make the statements appear to suggest what he did not intend. My remarks were kept to what I felt was the very minimum essential to focus proper attention upon his thoughts. He was not misrepresented; his words were not twisted or embellished. He wrote what he wrote and defended it until the day of his death. I quoted him and allowed him to define himself. A Bible believer reading his words surely is disturbed at what that dead man believed. It is obvious that he re-defined the fundamental terms of Christianity (salvation, regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc.), denied the existence of a sinful nature in the individual human, placed God as the servant of the law of the universe, made salvation dependent upon the continual practice of holiness *even of the saints in heaven*, and described God as having the potential of sinning. Using the most elastic of terms, those beliefs cannot be defined as doctrines of orthodox Christianity. Yet, his writings—at least a form of his writings—are, in my opinion, the leading source for unsound doctrine and unwise practice in the American Christianity of 2004. Thus I will sub-title this article as

***The Indisputable Regrettable Debt
That Evangelicalism And Fundamentalism
Unfortunately Owe To***

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WHAT THE DEAD MAN WROTE

*(Continued from page 3)***"The Dead Man Who Wrote"**

Perhaps, the unique American contribution to humanity is the innovation of the assembly line with its accompanying humanistic progression of hourly wages and compensated leisure time. Mass duplication of a design that is a pragmatic compromise of cost, efficiency, safety, and aesthetics is as American as apple pie, hot dogs, and baseball. Longevity is not as important as functionality, which provides marketability, which translates as profitability and which effectively makes durability a revenue liability. For American business, quality is possible as a potential, but quantity is essential as a reality. Today the term, 'American craftsmanship,' is an oxymoron. Merchandized products, labeled "Made in the U.S.A." are increasingly difficult to find and when found are never the results of the labor of one individual. If a given item has ten parts and forty screws, the possibility that one person affixed all ten with those forty screws is a mathematical anomaly. Skilled tradesmen are so little regarded that diverse industries are employing robots (no sick leave, health care, vacations, workmen's compensation, holidays, overtime pay, retirement, or strikes—hence lower cost and higher profit) instead of living beings.

With the arrival of the industrial revolution on her shores and the accompanying advent and subsequent rise of capitalism to the economic control of America and its popular identification as synonymous with Americanism, America became the authority for commercial expansion. Unlimited ideas and limited funds provided for another insidious refinement—venture capitalism, with its competitive commingling of

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The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. From speaking out as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. If it is a Christian work why did not Christ speak of it? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." That is clear enough. So it would have been if He has added, "and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel." No such words, however, are to be found. It did not seem to occur to Him. Then again, "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry." Where do entertainers come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or because they refused? The concert has no martyr roll.

Again, providing amusement is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What was the attitude of the Church to the world? "Ye are the salt," not sugar candy—something the world will spit out, not swallow. Short and sharp was the utterance, "Let the dead bury their dead." He was in awful earnestness!

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into His mission, He would have been more popular when they went back, because of

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blessed gospel have been hidden under a false philosophy,' that the author, instead of presenting those trusts free from that false ingredient, should write a book which hardly pretends to be anything else than philosophy. The attempt to cure philosophy by philosophy is a homeopathic mode of treatment in which we have very little confidence."

Hodge charged that Finney extended to Finney's reasoning abilities greater authority than Finney attributed to Scripture. He rightly pointed to the fact that Finney always uses Scripture in a subordinate role of confirming what he is able to reason to be true rather than allowing Scripture to stand as the authority. Hodge's articles challenging Finney were written contemporaneously with the decades of Finney's zenith of popularity and were not alone in opposing the deviations in doctrine and the innovations in practices encouraged by Finney. In spite of the strong warnings of these men and their resistance to Finney, I recently received an advertisement for a Baptist college using Finney and several of the very men who exposed him during his lifetime as examples of heroes of the faith. Such ignorance is pathetic.

The following paragraphs were written a little later, but over one hundred years ago and yet, could have been written this morning.

Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats

An evil resides in the professed camp of the Lord so gross in its imprudence that the most shortsighted can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal rate evil for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments.

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production and marketing. The primary concern of American commerce became, remains, and, likely, until Armageddon, will be 'the return on the capital investment,' a.k.a. 'the bottom line.' Production without marketing is the certain pathway to bankruptcy and marketing without production is the sure road to the penitentiary. The symbiosis thus created developed an insatiable compulsion for expansion and gain. The pillage or pollution of resources and the manipulation and subjugation of individuals simply is 'the understood cost of doing business.' Any present protection of individuals or conservation of resources by American commerce is the result of a direct, adverse impact on earnings and has no relationship to any other principle.

In days now gone by, those residents in this nation who had a connection to the precepts and truths of Scripture, generally practiced conservation of resources and cultivated a respect of individuals—not because of great piety, but because such conduct proved to be good business practices. James Cash Penney founded his retail empire on the Golden Rule. Many other early capitalists found Bible truths to be 'profitable.' Few farmers practiced anything but rotation of crops and careful husbandry. The reader should not confuse the *environmentalism* of today, which is a religion, with the *conservationism* of the past, which was a lifestyle; the two concepts are not synonymous in purpose or in practice. The conservationist believed the earth was held in trust as an accountable stewardship before a Creator Who would sit in judgment for misuse of His world. The environmentalist considers the earth to be "the mother of us all" and that nature is "the force that judges us."

I believe that early on in our national experience, the

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philosophy of America became 'time is money' and that as a direct result, Americans acquired the characteristic philosophy of "quicker is good, more is better, and both are best." By the middle of the last century (1950), this new American tenet had all but eradicated the original American precepts. The special distinctives that once made America different from the other nations of the world were sacrificed on the altar of acquisition. The President took the unparalleled step of warning the nation of adopting the values of the "military-industrial complex." The nation inhaled the air of indulgence and, even as he left office, ignored his caution and began to "go where no man had gone before." America reached for the moon and caught it. Unfettered morality swept the sensual sixties with all the gusto it could grab. Five decades later, the toxicity of the atmosphere is apparent to all but the inebriated.

The underlying ethnic and religious character of the nation is changing. The stock of 'white Anglo-Saxon protestant' is no longer the base ingredient for the stew, in this melting pot of nations. The composition of the nation has been drastically altered in the last few decades through the rise of lower birth rates among the WASP population and a steady influx of immigration. This nation was founded on the plan of immigration and that in and of itself is not a problem. The crisis for the nation is that the new arrivals desire not to become merged into the stew, but to retain their old cultures and demand full recognition of those alien cultures as having the same authenticity of the tried and tested American way of life. The immigrants who arrived prior to the 1950's primarily learned English, became Americans and were absorbed into the communities.

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purloin techniques from sports and entertainment (because they know how to draw crowds) to bring the world to church, but *when* will it happen. With the number of pulpits being replaced with stages, the evidence is that the transition is in motion.

Joseph Smith knew how to lead people; Ellen G. White knew how to publish her doctrine; Finney knew how to get results—the real question is where did all of their thoughts originate and where did all three obtain their power of attraction? I deny that any of the three were anointed by the God of Heaven. Again, I know that there will be those who are so devoted to the conceptual Christianity of Finney that they will feel the need to defend him. I insist that the defenders of his practices are defending his doctrines because his practices rose from his doctrines. It is not a valid point of discussion to claim that results outweigh doctrine. That is pragmatism, not discernment. Practice reflects doctrine. In order to accept Finney's system, it is necessary to agree to his doctrine.

It will continue to be easier far for most to practice expediency than to exercise judgment. Yet, my voice is not the only one raised. Others in previous generations opposed the innovations and aberrations of Finney and others stand in opposition to his philosophy today. Charles Hodge described the beliefs expressed in Systematic Theology as conflicting with "the very vitals of Christianity, and if Mr. Finney is right, it is high time the church knew that religion is something essentially different from what has been commonly supposed." Hodge charged that

"It really seems strange when the first sentence of his preface informs the reader that 'the truths of the

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Finney and his role in contemporary Christianity far better than do the Baptist defenders of Finney.

Yet, I know without question that some will contend that I have made the proverbial mountain out of a paltry molehill. "Finney *may* have a few problems," they will admit even as they plead that he had a lot of good ideas. Stalin conquered almost half the world, am I then to assume that he must have done something right? Hitler built the greatest road system in the world, should I rejoice in his good ideas? Mohammed believed in monotheism and in the afterlife, should I afford him recognition as having two-points of righteousness? Finney could draw a crowd—so could P. T. Barnum; so does the NFL, and Madonna. Which of their practices are Baptist churches borrowing or following? I do not ask the question in jest, but with all seriousness. Some Baptist churches, this next Sunday, will have more entertainment by paid professionals than congregational singing—hymn books are an endangered species destined to follow the hand fan from the local funeral home. Responsive readings are as extinct as the Dodo. The congregation is not encouraged to bring a Bible to follow the preacher—they could not carry the full range of translations to be used anyway. The list of churches in any major city where the sermon will extend beyond 30 minutes or is based upon Bible exposition would not require a 3x5 card to record. In fact, the church growth experts discourage such. Many Baptist churches are already entertainment copycats. When the only adjudication of success is determined to be numerical growth and when the premise that one may borrow from any pattern that provides numbers is conceded, then the question becomes not *when* churches will

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Ethnic groups have always lived together when the numbers permitted it and lived as they chose when the numbers did not. Drive through any major city in America and the "old neighborhoods" with their stylistic houses and parks are evident. The current residents have, however, "cultured" the original neighborhood not in a manner to be a reminder of the "old country," but to be an extension of the "old country." The stew has been replaced by a smorgasbord. The Irish American, the Polish American, the German American, the English American and the other ingredients in the pot were Americans. They proudly remembered their ancestry, but they did not attempt to retain the language or the culture: they were Americans and thankful to be Americans. The new arrivals appear to be more interested in making America into the Old Country. No other nation permits that attitude—it is unconstitutional in France, if the news reports are correct, even to introduce foreign words into the language. The internal structure of the nation in composition, character, and convictions is transitioning. America of 2050, if the LORD Jesus has not returned, will in no wise resemble the America of 1850 or 1950. America may or may not then be united—it certainly will not be unified.

The "one nation under God" so designated by act of Congress and so easily identified in the 1950's has become a conglomerate of assorted national cultures, languages, and gods that is unable to project a cohesive identity in the 21st Century. A nation founded upon the noble principle of "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" became the place devoted to the pursuit of happiness, freedom from all restraint, and the

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unfettered enjoyment of living. Replaced by the land of the slave and the home of the addicted, the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave is deceased.

*And, in the middle of this mess
stand the local church and her pastor.*

America was once a nation of neighborhood churches. The decided majority of churches were small places of worship. Preaching services were held Sunday morning and Sunday evening, supplemented by one or two weeks every spring and fall when evangelism and revival were particularly emphasized. Generally, those annual meetings tangibly changed the lifestyles of individuals—backslidden believers were convicted of sorry living and plain old sinners were convinced that hell was real and that “Jesus saves.” Those small churches had respect in the community—not control, but respect. The beliefs of those churches were respected—the local governmental bodies legislated the sale and consumption of alcohol away from the physical location of churches and kept the area suitable for church folk to walk through. The preacher was a man of influence in the town; his position was respected to the extent that he could control the language in a room simply by approaching the door. All of that changed in the 1960’s along with the alterations in the rest of the nation. Suddenly, the size of the church was more important than the character of the members. Without judging motivation or assigning responsibility, one may trace the change in momentum from two seminal events: Dr. Elmer Towns published a book on the ten largest Sunday Schools in America and Dr. John R. Rice challenged Baptists to baptize 200 converts in a year. Regardless of the intent of either man, Baptist

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churchmen off balance. Self-taught, blunt, and immensely persuasive, Finney was successful as a volunteer lay missionary in towns along the Erie Canal. This success led the local Saint Lawrence Presbytery to ordain him as a minister in 1824, although he refused formal ministerial training and admitted that he had not even read the Westminster Confession. . . . He spoke in crude and vernacular speech. He used techniques of hard-sell persuasion . . . Finney’s “irregular” methods . . . Finney called for a Copernican revolution to make religious life audience-centered. . . . In casting about for new persuasive methods, Finney suggested exploiting good ideas wherever they could be found. “What do politicians do?” asked Finney. “They get upon meetings, circulate handbills and pamphlets, blaze away in the newspapers, send their ships about the street on wheels with flags and sailors, send coaches all over town, with handbills, to bring people up to the polls, all to gain attention to their cause and elect their candidate. . . . The object of our measures is to gain attention and you *must [italics in original]* have something new.”

. . . he made winning souls his highest priority. Toward that end he marshaled any talent, method, or institution to reach, meet the needs of, and inspire his audience.

Finney founded “audience-centered” Christianity—called seeker friendly today. The evaluation above, from a professor of history and the vice president for Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Notre Dame. Nathan O. Hatch, in his The Democratization of American Christianity, (pages 196-201), seems to define

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fringe leader gathering a following and infiltrating the institutions of religion and the churches. He was not a Baptist and opposed the distinctive doctrine and practices of Baptists—but some Baptists began to incorporate his practices while swearing to keep themselves doctrinally sound. Since practices are based upon doctrine, the ploy could not and did not work. In the same manner today, Baptists borrow terminology from Freud, Peale, and Schuler, techniques from Pepsi, Hybels, and Warren, and take an oath that their theology remains untainted. ‘Tain’t so, McGee! [*—as Molly often told Fibber.*] The applause of the charismatics, the music of the Beatles, the dress, drama, and dance of the theater, the systems of politicians and corporations, and the psychology of Jung and Freud have all been welcomed by Baptist preachers hoping to find the golden grail of growth and success—and with the introduction of their practices came their doctrine. Doctrine and practice cannot be separated because practice is the fruit of doctrine. At least Finney was honest—he openly admitted that he redefined the terms of doctrine. *Only with his definitions understood do his practices conform to the doctrine claimed.*

There is a valid reason why churches once named Baptist that have moved into the tent of Finney are removing the name. They had the name, but lost the nature. The preaching of Baptist doctrine will not survive the introduction of Charismatic practices. As Dr. Art Wilson said, “Some churches are changing their name from Baptist; others should.”

Charles Grandison Finney, a young lawyer from Adams, New York . . . From the time of his conversion in 1821, his unexpected maneuvers kept respectable

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preachers and Baptist churches modified themselves in response to the challenges to grow and did so dramatically. The rapidity of the growth, the results, became the only issue. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

When two pastors met at a gathering of preachers, the first two spoken words were, “How many?” Size became the measure of success—and every protest was derided as jealousy or Pharisaism. I have not achieved a comprehensive search, but thus far I cannot find a single Baptist church that filed for bankruptcy during the difficult, dark days of the Great Depression. There may have been such a church somewhere; but if so, it obviously was an exceptional situation. However, no web search is required for any Baptist preacher to identify a number of churches that he personally knows have gone through insolvency. In the last few years, some churches have acquired the reputation of being serial “chapter 7-11-ers” and yet are able to host super “how-to-do-Christianity” conferences instructing others in the art and craft of church growth. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

The reputation of the capacity of drawing giant crowds was the guaranteed designation as a movement spokesman. “God is interested in numbers,” pontificated one such leader. “He named a whole book ‘Numbers.’” That spokesman somehow overlooked the little detail that the Book of Numbers begins (1:46) with 603,550 numbered men of war and records (26:41) the total who were around to enter the Promised Land as 601,730—a decrease of 1,820. For all the lessons included and with all the applications suggested, the Book of Numbers is not a Book on numerical growth. Nonetheless, the

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pressure to increase was nearly universal among Baptists. Trying to duplicate the prominent pastors, Baptist preachers became pirates and plagiarists with unfettered zeal. Pragmatism became the byword. If it worked (always defined as enhancing the attendance) in Dallas, Lynchburg, or Hammond, it was used in Paducah, Peoria, and Pensacola. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

It was soon apparent, with *everybody* attending the commonly known gatherings, that new sources of motivational resources needed consultation. In their lust for success and in the search for novelty and innovation, Baptist preachers filched ideas from the growth seminars of the Crystal Cathedral, pilfered Napoleon Hill, and stole from Dale Carnegie. It seemed that no promoter of church growth could finish a lecture without including a statement that "soul winning is salesmanship." *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

Bouncing from one trendsetter to another, Baptist preachers became eager to hear the latest and the newest success story. The explosion of lifestyle evangelism became the rage. Presbyterian phenomenon Kennedy nourished almost a generation of Baptist preachers before non-denominational Willow Creek's entry into the "come learn, go grow" market was greeted by Athenian Baptists with enthusiasm. Even before WC's market share has faded, Southern Baptist affiliated-but-we-do-not-make-ado-about-that Saddleback's "purpose-driven forty days to success" has become the Baptist lemmings' destination of choice. Based on the progressive declension of the last forty years, Hybels and Warren will be footnotes in about six years. This is said speaking merely as an observer with no desire to be

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opposed in that day—but the results were used to justify the means and to silence the critics. Smith writes of this tactic [Page 61] in most interesting terms:

"Men like Knapp and Kirk and Schmucker clothed measures once regarded as human devices with the garb of divine sanctity. Their very efficiency seemed a mark of God's favor. The grater the uniqueness and emotional power of an awakening, the more easily was such supernatural agency affirmed."

Those who questioned the open doctrinal aberrations of Finney and his practical deviations were described as wedded to the traditions of the past and blinded to the value of new methods. To reach the masses, the needs of the masses must be studied and then the gospel must be presented in ways to convince the audience that the gospel meets those needs. The other men involved in similar efforts have largely passed into oblivion, but not Finney. He was at the forefront of the movement and was active before most of the other men. Finney led the way, others followed then and now: and his followers learned the tactics well and have moved today well beyond the boundaries breached by Finney.

Today, Christianity by the numbers produces "numbers" and "numbers" satisfy most preachers. The preacher who pleads for doctrinal purity is denounced as jealous. The preacher who questions the compromise of practices is chided as mean spirited. The preacher who contends for Baptist distinctives will find himself labeled as a "Baptist-brider." The preacher who opposes the introduction of the techniques and practices of the world into the worship services of the church will find himself increasingly alone.

Finney was an aberration in his day; an anomalous

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to think. Lordship Salvationists (generally Calvinists) eagerly follow his “entire sanctification.” His followers are as incongruous in their support of Finney as was he.

In his *evangelistic enterprises*, Finney swept aside the local church and engaged to remove doctrinal distinctions and promoted ecumenical revival efforts. According to Timothy Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, evangelists as we know them today seem to have first appeared in the same era as Finney, with Elder Jacob Knapp (the 1830’s) being the “first professional evangelist” among the Baptists [page 47]. I do not know the certainly of that claim; I do know that today many of the practices called evangelism do indeed show their first appearances in that era and many are identified most prominently with Charles Finney. He was a man way ahead of his time. Finney despised differences and touted uniting on “the essentials.” In spite of being unorthodox in that he had his own definitions for the fundamentals of the faith, Finney was the agency that actually prepared the way for the eventual ecumenicity of the fundamentalist movement. It is understandable why so many fundamentalists develop an ever broadening concept of cooperation. Baptists who follow Finney migrate—from *intradenominalism* [If that is not a word, it should be.] through *interdenominationalism* to *non-denominationalism*. The pattern is too obvious to challenge. Cooperative Evangelism was birthed by Finney—it is not surprising that Dr. Graham wrote the cover commendation for *The Memoirs*. Finney crusaded for the reformation of social morality—it is understandable that the founder of Moral Majority has listed Finney as an influence.

The innovations of Finney and others were strongly

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prophetic. The longevity of any one collection of success-growth concepts obviously endures only as long as it produces results and every promotional scheme has productivity for a finite span of time. The law of diminishing returns requires that the occasion of durability for each innovation is always less than the concept it superseded. Success ratios, therefore, are continually shrinking for similar techniques. The quest for bigger and better is also afflicted by the law of acquired immunity—that which appeals to the masses today will either have no attraction to them or will actually repulse them tomorrow. Therefore, the quest for the golden grail of quick-fix success is never actually achieved though the pursuit never ceases. New measures are continually required. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

Over thirty years ago, I was assured that I could paint like Leonardo da Vinci. All I needed to do was to follow the little gray numbers on the canvas. About the same time, the same philosophy penetrated Baptist thinking. Pastors were promised that if they would follow the little gray numbers, they too could duplicate Mona Lisa. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

The great Bible Conferences of the pre-1950’s disappeared as the appetites grew for the Pastor’s Schools and Super Conferences. Baptists were into the cloning business long before Dolly was conceived. A desire to discover the secret to growth, to find the right approach to winning the world with the least effort and the quickest response swept Baptist preachers as would a virus. That desire—sincerity is not at question—quickly became the tail wagging the dog. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

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The quest was, and is, for the perfect system: a dynamic combination of salesmanship, diplomacy, and psychology that is able to produce Christians in assembly line fashion. Mass producing converts with a minimal investment by unskilled laborers using a standardized pattern became the goal of nearly every preacher. Madison Avenue techniques of salesmanship were sanitized and sanctified. If Prudential used it to sell insurance, General Motors found it successful in selling vehicles, or Hollywood drew crowds with it—then churches ought to get on the bandwagon. The slogans and systems of corporate America were copied and churches grew in size until it became recognized as an established fact that “find a system—work the system” was the guarantee of success. *That concept originated with what the dead man wrote.*

The leading genius behind the development of this “Christianity by the numbers”—using a carefully designed system to produce Christians—was buried long before the dramatic shift of the 1960’s. I do not propose to handle the subject in this article, but it is quite intriguing to identify the dominant influences of the last half of the 20th Century and then to realize that the men who controlled the thinking of that world lived and died in the century before. Marx, Darwin, Freud, Dewey—and the list is not complete—all heavily impacted American Christianity from the 1960’s until the present hour and did (and do) so while their bodies lie moldering in their graves.

Among the persuasive voices that have seduced Baptists, no one man penetrated the defenses more effectively than that of the man whose amazing theological positions were presented in the last issue of

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what Finney taught or wrote one will have to set aside the edited versions. Simply put, unless Finney unabridged is being read, Finney is not being read. Moreover, unless unabridged Finney is being read *with his glossary at hand* the reader will be deceived—make no mistake, Finney requires translation.

From the wellspring of Finney as revealed in the extensive citations from his Systematic Theology in the July issue of The Baptist Heritage, flows a polluted stream that has divided into such divergent (even paradoxical) rivers as the anti-war protests, the ecological movement, the concept known as Lordship salvation and the introduction of Christianity by the numbers. The rise of gimmickry and salesmanship techniques as substitutes for Biblical soul winning, the insatiable hunger for new means to become ever bigger, the use of rock music and other entertainment media from the world, the substitution of need-orientated discussions for preaching, the appeal to emotional decisions, the very essence of what we know as Contemporary Christianity, and much more float on Finney’s waterway.

One should not stand amazed at the conflicting philosophies that can be traced to Finney. The man was an Armenian Presbyterian! It would seem that Finney should be the classic definition of a “contradiction in terms.” He opposed “an educated ministry” and yet was a professor of theology and a dominant force in Oberlin College. He himself was a walking oxymoron. Charismatics love to quote Finney, yet Finney opposed tongues and required that there be “no loud praying or pounding on the benches” so that inquirers would not be distracted by the noise but would have the opportunity

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modified views of Christian doctrine which had not been common, and was brought about by some changes in the means of carrying forward the work of evangelization, it was very natural that some misapprehension should prevail in regard to these modified statements of doctrine, and the use of these measures, and consequently that to some extent even good men might call in question the wisdom of these measures and the soundness of these theological statements and the ungodly men should be irritated, and for a time should strenuously oppose these great movements.

I have spoken of my name as connected with these movements, but . . . I am aware that by a certain portion of the church I have been considered an innovator, both in regard to doctrine and measures; and that many have looked upon me as rather prominent, especially in assailing some of the old forms of theological thought and expression, and in stating the doctrine of the Gospel in many respects in new language, and introducing other forms of thought."

That is carefully designed editing. The result is that the impressions conveyed by the two editions are not at all similar. The editing of The Autobiography is unreliable and inaccurate, but it does remove controversial material in the same fashion as did Fairchild. However, it does not contain nor does it convey the words of Charles Finney. It is more biography than autobiography. This condensation also removes the acknowledgment by Finney that he knew that he was not teaching traditional Biblical Christianity; therefore, it is also dangerous in its deception. If one wishes to know

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this publication. That man was the Reverend Charles Grandison Finney, (1792-1875). Some who made early inquiry have already found it difficult to believe that those multiplied hideous statements in the June issue of The Baptist Heritage, were all written by Charles G. Finney and published with his approval in his Systematic Theology. I am certain that certain of the readers of this issue will struggle with accepting that Finney was the author. Incredulity does not change truth; denial will not remove reality. Anger directed toward me alters not a word of what he wrote and simply reveals the addictiveness of Finney. The matter is not debatable: the assertion is unchallengeable. None of the weirdness was concocted; the page references were all duly given so that any one may obtain the book and verify the wording.

There are those who will continue to insist that within his corruption there lays so much that is good that his works should still be read and used. I find that argument to represent the certain evidence of the lack of spiritual discernment. That position has as much validity as does the guidance to gain marriage counseling by reading pornography. It also shows as much intelligence. In point of fact, that line of reasoning is diametrically opposed by Scripture. As an example, consider:

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit;
neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.
(Luke 6:43)

Corrupt fruit is evidence of a corrupt tree and no good fruit hangs on the limbs of a corrupt tree. Finney produced no good fruit. Finney should be repudiated, not recommended, denounced, not defended, and

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avoided, not *acclaimed*. Though he is elevated to near mythological status by many Baptist preachers, cited as a legend by church growth experts and teachers of evangelism, quoted as *the expert* by Christian teachers and professors, and honored as a gifted theologian by many, honesty insists upon the acknowledgment that Charles G. Finney denied the validity of nearly all that Bible believers claim to hold dear.

Reading his Systematic Theology, one is perplexed to explain how he acquired his reputation. One is more mystified as to how this status has been maintained in this age of easy access to information. The most probable charitable explanation is that those who advocate his materials (most notably and most frequently Revivals of Religion) have never read Finney's Systematic Theology. For a number of years, this volume was not easily obtainable; however, that is no longer true. The book [Finney's Systematic Theology, (being the unabridged text of the complete 1878 edition of Lectures on Systematic Theology) Bethany House Publishers, ISBN1-55661-514-0] is in print and is also available on a CD [Charles G. Finney Memorial Library, TruthInHeart.com]. Understand that I recommend the contents of nothing that Finney wrote; but I do recommend that Baptist preachers ought to know what the man did write. I give the information so that anyone who desires can verify the quotations I gave last month.

From his first messages to the final paragraphs of his memoirs, there is no soundness in him. His entire spectrum of theology was tainted with the corruption of his definitions and is but the wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores of human reasoning. Charles G. Finney was a brilliant man; that is granted. His mind pursued

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work of evangelization, it was very natural that some misapprehension should prevail in regard to these modified statements of doctrine, and the use of these measures; and consequently that to some extent even good men might call in question the wisdom of these measures and the soundness of these theological statements and the ungodly men should be irritated, and for a time should strenuously oppose these great movements.

I have spoken of my name as connected with these movements, but only as one of the many ministers of Christ, and others, who have shared prominently in promoting them. I am aware that by a certain portion of the church I have been considered an innovator, both in regard to doctrine and measures; and that many have looked upon me as rather prominent, especially in assailing some of the old forms of theological thought and expression, and in stating the doctrine of the Gospel in many respects in new language, and introducing other forms of thought. (Pages 1, 2 of Memoirs)

These two paragraphs are edited ("expunged" is probably more accurate) in The Autobiography to read:

It has pleased God in some measure to connect my name and labors with an extensive movement of the church of Christ, regarded by some as a new era in its progress, especially in relation to revivals. I am only one of many ministers and other servants of Christ who have shared in promoting these revivals (Page 5).

Read again what has been removed.

"... of religion. As this movement involved, to a considerable extent, the development of some

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that the lectures were presented as unedited transcripts of lectures; that is not a fully accurate impression to convey. The facts are that Revivals of Religion were first printed in The New York Evangelist as a series beginning in 1834 and then published in 1835. By 1840, thirteen editions had been published with translations in several languages. The edition used by Moody was published in 1868. Any "inaccurate" quotations were, by that time, included on purpose and were not oversights. Finney deliberately gave Scripture a "spin"; frankly, he needs the "spin" to prove his interpretation. Does no one notice that those who introduce new methods and new doctrines always authenticate their deviation through *selective selection* of translations? Reading carefully 40 Days of Purpose, for example, one quickly realizes that Warren *needed* the variety of translations to sustain his flexing of the Scriptures. Tragically, in this era of multiplied translations in the pulpit, very few in the pew have enough familiarity with the word of God to enable them to recognize the various twists that scripture is given in order to legitimize the new Christianity.

Finney begins the first chapter of Memoirs with little humility in evidence, but with more insight that the many Baptists who are his followers:

It has pleased God in some measure to connect my name and labors with an extensive movement of the church of Christ, regarded by some as a new era in its progress. Especially has this been supposed to be true in respect to revivals of religion. As this movement involved, to a considerable extent, the development of some modified views of Christian doctrine which had not been common, and was brought about by some changes in the means of carrying forward the

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logic to its ultimate perfection. He began with himself, made himself the ultimate validating authority, and fabricated his very own form of Christianity while denying the power thereof. One does not rationally reason Biblical Christianity; Biblical Christianity is accepted by faith, not logic. The foundation of Finney's form of Christianity is flawed. The lofty superstructure is therefore unsound.

The Reverend Finney denied the existence of a fallen nature and taught that both justification and sanctification are the responsibility of the individual and are obtained by human effort. He made so bold as to say that there was no guarantee of security for the believer in this life or even in that life to come after death in Heaven. Eternal effort, he believed, is required to gain eternal life. The man used the terms of Biblical Christianity, but he defined those terms according to his own perverted reasoning and twisted logic. His own words would convict him in any court in the land (except the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in California) of being an apostate Christian. He was unquestionably a heretic *and* a cultist. Moreover, if he believed what he wrote, and I most certainly believe that he did, Charles Grandison Finney was a spiritually dead man writing.

In spite of the overwhelming evidence—the indisputable and unimpeachable testimony—of his writings (much of it extant in his own handwriting) that the Reverend Finney denied the doctrinal positions of mainstream Christianity, Charles Finney is accorded the rank of "the 19th Centuries Leading Evangelist," titled "America's Foremost Evangelist," and identified by multitudes of Baptist pastors as the single greatest influence on their life. Baptist schools use his books as

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texts, encouraging unlearned students to drink of his polluted waters, describing Finney as the father of revivalism. Baptist preachers encourage their congregations to read his books—even promoting a cartoon-style publication of his “Lectures on the Revivals of Religion.”

Regardless of his acceptance, and directly in proportion to this popularity, the instigation of the various philosophies that are destroying Baptist churches today can be traced to an origination with Finney. He is the source, the fountainhead, of the battle cry for “new methods.” He was a pragmatist of the first water.

For nearly four years, I have been reading the works of Charles G. Finney with a view to understanding his influence on contemporary Christianity. The first lesson learned was that what he wrote could not be skimmed casually; it required diligent consideration. Every theological term or spiritual phrase must be viewed in the context of his special definitions to convey Finney’s particular view—no “Christian” term could be assumed to be used with the commonly understood meaning or relationship. Reading Finney is the equivalent of translating a foreign language. The greatest difference is that the only expert on Finney is Finney—he is his one and only authorized interpreter. Baptist preachers accept Finney because they fail to introduce themselves to Finney. Without the glossary of his definitions alongside his works, it is dangerous in the extreme to enter into Finney’s territory. One must have that guide or one will be deceived into believing that Finney is orthodox and sound. To defend Finney one must either be ignorant of Finney’s special definitions for common

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terms or one must be as much of a heretic as was Finney; there is no third option.

The second lesson was that I had to search for the actual writings of Finney. Most of the publications on the bookshelves purporting to be Finney’s works are carefully edited editions. James Harris Fairchild, chosen by Finney’s family to edit his manuscript (published as Memoirs) removed some “20 percent” of the material, including potentially controversial passages, embarrassing, or offensive material, and names of people involved; he “toned down” the language, which was “often forceful and colloquial.” (Pages xiii, xli, The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney, The Complete Restored Text, ISBN 0-310-21925-6) The restored Memoirs contains 637 pages of “original text” with a page size of 6 inches by 9 inches. The Autobiography of Charles G. Finney, edited by Helen Wessel, ISBN 780871230102, is a scant 230 pages, 5 inches by 8 inches and with larger type and wider spacing. It would seem that his promoters do not desire the words of Finney to be read—only some of the words of Finney.

Moody Press published a copyrighted edition of Revivals of Religion in 1962. The following statement is found opposite the table of contents:

Few changes, comparatively speaking, have been made in this printing of a condensation of the volume, Revivals of Religion by Charles G. Finney, published in 1868 in New York. Changes have been made to make Scripture references accurate rather than to allow them to remain as spoken in the Lectures.

I especially call the readers’ attention to the second sentence. Moody Press acknowledged that Finney was not accurate in his quotations of Scripture. Moody implies

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