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# THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

VOLUME XXV ISSUE 5

JUNE 20, 2001

## The New, American, Standard Compass

Discardable Preachers,  
Dispensable Services,  
Disposable Doctrine

Recent conversations with pastors have instigated a line of disturbing thoughts that has repeatedly interrupted this aging preacher's mediation. Disturbing thoughts, in the nature of things, are disjointed and disorganized, yet maintain a distinct, observable union; therefore, this article may be more rambling than usual, yet I hope by threading together these unrelated transactions to accomplish two results: (1) to expose a philosophy that has subtly permeated the thinking of believers, and (2) to challenge you *and me* that, having identified it, we

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# this and that

Editors

Jerald L. Manley  
Dorothy Gundersen

Gary Roland  
Jody Wolf

By the time this issue of The Baptist Heritage is mailed, Timothy McVeigh will most likely be in eternity. The opponents of the death penalty have been almost universally silent about this first federal execution in thirty eight years. I understand that McVeigh lays claim to being an agnostic. If he had had a copy of the New Testament on him when arrested, we would have been assured by the media that his belief system led him to his despicable act. However, the fact that he does not know that he will be accountable to the Eternal God, might have re-

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moved the restraint on his conscience will not be discussed. *The Bible creates psychos is an acceptable headline; agnosticism created the murderer of 168 men, women, and children is unacceptable. The first is a lie; the second is the truth..*

The great unnoticed tragedy of this young man is that few Americans seem to have understood that he is, above all else, a pragmatist. He speaks of the children who

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# this and that

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died as "collateral damage," exactly the term used by a recent administration concerning Ruby Ridge, Waco, Iraq, Kosovo, and the aspirin factory workers in Africa. The newspaper described "decorated soldier" learned his terminology and philosophy from the government. There was nothing personal in his act; he did not hate his victims. It was simply the most "practical way," in his warped pragmatic view, to make Americans see how dishonest the government really is. Sadly, the government of the United States did not shine the brightest in his trial.

Though I do not believe that the medical profession ought to be involved in executions via lethal injections, Timothy McVeigh admits his guilt and deserves his penalty. But, he is not the only one guilty. Charles Pierce, William James, and John Dewey, the three men who introduced America to the philosophy of pragmatism will have a great many things to answer for at the Great White Throne Judgment. They now also have Timothy McVeigh on their ledger. —Pastor Manley

## THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

(428-290)

is published monthly by  
THE HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH  
of PENSACOLA,

2200 West Michigan Avenue,  
Pensacola, Florida 32526-2379.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID  
AT PENSACOLA, FLORIDA.

THE BAPTIST HERITAGE is sent without charge to the members of the church and, by request, to interested friends of this church.

There are no subscription charges and no paid advertisements are accepted.

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ISSUE NUMBER 6 for JUNE 20, 2001.

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commentary containing meat, you likely will have to find it in a used bookstore. One such retail establishment advised that King James Bibles were a special order item and non-returnable.

Once preachers searched for 'the' biblical quotation to justify or to condemn conduct, attitudes, goals, or teachings; now George Barna and other "lightening rods" are cited. Proof texts were abused; but presently there seems no longer even a pretext of biblical justification desired. Conduct, attitudes, goals, and teachings are malleable by the opinion polls of scriptural illiterates and spiritual fools.

No longer anchored to the rock of biblical pattern and example, the enterprise or center or fellowship (how seldom churches are called churches today) is now established in opinion driven pragmatism, which uses the term "common sense" or "practicality" while meaning "expediency."

One of the reasons for the rise of pragmatic Christianity is that too many Baptist preachers have followed *liberty*, instead of doctrine, and have lost all sense of direction among the twisting, bending, overshadowing *willow* and are drifting in the wrong creek.

—Pastor Jerald Manley

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remove it from any acceptance in our own thinking.

Over the past month, these normal, typical, and most welcomed exchanges have coalesced in my mind and have assumed the nature of a frightful collage, depicting, what is to me, a serious change in the foundation of thought and practice for an ever growing number of believers. The philosophy (by which use I mean "the foundation of thought and practice") of life that a person accepts as ABSOLUTE TRUTH determines the nature of the life that will be lived.

Many are the voices invading the minds and hearts of believers and clamor for recognition and domination. Few of us remain uninfected, fewer still unaffected, by the near omnipresent chosen media of propagation: television-- antichristian secular television and especially unchristian "Christian television"; and the proliferation of unbiblical material by formerly Conservative Christian publishers. These sources, quite successfully, seek to entice the believer to mingle biblical truth with the vain philosophies conceived by men inspired by Satan or their own ungodly nature. None of us can escape their touch and we avoid their corruptive influence only by the most diligent of watchcare. Fatalism, materialism, Epicureanism, secularism, even socialism join the sensualist, the humanist, the rationalist, even the pantheist (especially through the environmental movement) to ensnare the unwary believer; but the greater danger may come from the subtle inroads gained by pragmatism among Conservative Chris-

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tians. It is of the latter danger that I am developing the greatest fear.

A tendency toward a pragmatic approach in every facet of the Christian life is becoming more apparent daily. In simple terms, the question being asked by believers is not "Is this biblical and therefore right?" Instead, the only issue of concern is "Does this (course of action, program, agency, policy, practice, movement, publication, sermon, etc) produce results and provide a return?" The principle concern is not "Is it right?" but "Does it work?" I cannot imagine, if Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. were alive today, that he would restate his, "Do right! Even if the stars fall!" to "Produce results! Even if doctrine and principles fall!" I see and hear him even now, in memory, with hand to the side of his mouth, leaning into the pulpit shouting, "It is never right to do wrong, even to get a chance to do right," and "Don't sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate." That philosophy is not very pragmatic; but it is most assuredly biblical.

I believe I know why this generation of preachers rising from a heritage of godly faithfulness has adopted the philosophy of pragmatism over the doctrine of the word of God. The American pastor of the last thirty years has become an administrator and is no longer a biblical pastor. His concern is not the sheep, but the organization. The average pastor does not "give" himself "to prayer and the ministry of the word" rather he is "busy here and there."

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tising nut devised this word for a preaching service?) Some use only electronically generated music—as artificial as the preaching it joins.

Expository preaching worked for centuries, but it is seldom heard in the modern pulpit, --which is in most gatherings no longer a pulpit, but a stage. Sermons have been replaced by performances. Christian choreography must surely be a major in some former Bible college. I wonder what J. Frank Norris, Billy Sunday, and Bob Jones would have said regarding services being choreographed? Fred Astaire on his best day could not have choreographed Billy Sunday.

The pastor no longer preaches; he motivates or enables. A recent mailing from a former sister church listed among the pastoral staff a "worship pastor." The transformation from song leader to Music Director to Minister of Music to Worship Pastor has developed all in my lifetime. Evolution is alive and well—in the ministry—or, as one preacher asked, "Is it devolution or *devilution*?"

Christian fiction and Christian romance novels have replaced the commentaries on the shelves of pastors and believers alike. A visit to the average Christian bookstore is a trip to Bunyan's Vanity Fair. There will be t-shirts and necklaces, pictures for the wall, dinnerware for the table, rugs for the floor, pillows for the couch, and sundry beads and baubles. All, of course, sanitized and spiritualized with a religious emblem, expression, or image—preferably multi-faith and cross confessional. If you want a

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tures to direct. Frankly, the buses and bubblegum of the 1960's and 1970's are piddling matters unworthy to be compared with the issues of 2001. The obvious truth is that biblical mandates, increasingly, are no longer considered the basis of orientation for preachers or churches. The cardinal points of the new, American, standard compass float, while the needle now remains fixed. The floating arrow of the pocket compass lines up with magnetic north so the traveler may know his position and fix his course based on an authority. However, the arrow of the spiritual and moral compass of American is fixed and the authority, the standard, now floats to wherever popular opinion might sway it.

The reasoning for any course of action carefully is couched in precisely chosen terms, but always, somehow, reflecting the theme of involving "new ways for new days." As faithful Athenians, the devotion of this new age of preachers (not to be confused with new age preachers) is to "nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing."

Preachers, whose spiritual fathers fought the "moving picture show" and later the television as if these devices were the devil himself, could not conduct a service without their video projectors. The battle fought in music during Spurgeon's day was over bringing a piano into the house of God. Churches today have thrown away the hymns in favor of "worship choruses." Instruments formed into bands once reserved for "dives" and dancehalls supply the music for today's celebration. (What adver-

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[One would shudder, I imagine, to know the average amount of preparation time for a sermon that is given to actual Bible study by Baptist preachers. Baptist preachers are good golfers, but they are poor expositors. I receive many invitations to fellowships, conferences, and other preacher gatherings that now fashionably provide for 'golf tournaments.' *I have yet to receive the first one that requests attendance at an all night prayer meeting the night before the opening session or even a prayer meeting.*]

This aspect of the change in the pastorate will have to be addressed in a later edition; so, I reluctantly return to the topic for this printing: the rise of pragmatic Christianity.

. . . . .

I spoke first with an old warrior, whose sword now rests in its scabbard because of an extended siege of debilitating illness. It will not be a long season before he will be "received up" into the presence of the Chief Shepherd, Whom he has tried with earnest faithfulness to represent for more decades than many of my readers have been alive. Pastor, "church planter," evangelist, friend to missionaries, widely known, greatly esteemed—all accurate descriptions of this now shelved servant. He did not quit; he did not disqualify himself; he is on the shelf

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none-the-less. He brought no shame to the Sacred and Most Holy Name; he deserted no post; he trimmed no sail; he was derelict of no duty; he fled no battle; his sword never grew dull; he is out of action even so. The public battles for him are over; the fight was fought; the faith was kept, and, for him, the race is nearly over.

Today, the warrior is on the shelf, no longer engaged in battle, and no longer running in the race; he is only keeping the faith.

When the Captain of the Host of the Lord summons this warrior home to his eternal barracks, he will be remembered down here on the battlefield with flowery eulogies and specially delivered condolences. The pastor and preachers delivering the final salute will have much to recall of the days when his sword was wielded with great power—midnight hours when he was summoned for counsel, aid, and comfort—Sunday sermons and revival messages when sinners cringed in conviction as he described their future and saints rejoiced in hope as he preached of heaven and home—times when hundreds, if not thousands, were comforted by just knowing he had them on his list for prayer. Without doubt, his name will be mentioned in publications and pulpits as distinguished men of God repeat a favorite story here, a treasured remembrance there, and then relate the influence he so unselfishly gave to their lives. His favorite songs will be sung. His treasured passage will be read. Thousands that day could, undoubtedly several will, call him their spiri-

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It is obvious that Conservative Christianity, as a movement, is shifting from the bedrock of Scripture to the sands of consensus. Churches that lay claim to a heritage of biblical conservatism, of evangelical orientation, even of fundamentalist connection and preachers that were educated in institutions of orthodoxy, trained by men of character, and ordained by churches of sound doctrine began in the 1960's to shift from a practice based upon "what is right" to a philosophy based upon "what is working." "Right" as a noun is a fixed absolute. "Working" as a noun is an evolving function. The bitter fruit of the seeds sown by my generation of preachers as reaped by the present generation is now showing an abundant harvest. They are indeed twofold more a child of pragmatism than the preachers of my generation were or, hopefully, are. The 'new vision' of churches and preachers is "if it is working as evidenced by its popularity and success, it must be right."

Today's preacher travels far beyond a practical, pragmatic approach attempting to discover the simplest and most effective methodology to accomplish the biblical mandates of education of saints and the evangelism of sinners. Certain of the methods used in the 60's and 70's were definitely misguided; others were misdirected; but they were honest attempts to accomplish a scriptural directive. Sometimes it was difficult to separate the circus and the church; but, again, the effort was devoted to what the preacher or church understood the scrip-

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leges advocated selective, principled recruiting—until becoming established. Mission boards, printing companies, tract producers, and Bible publishers—all justify their actions by phraseology that simply spells pragmatism.

In churches, in institutions, the grandfathers waged war; the fathers fought battles; the sons engage in dialogue.

Historical Revisionists have arrived on the campuses of the fundamentalist schools. Positions that were formerly preached as “battle-line” doctrine are now re-titled “the unfortunate past.” History is recomposed to appease the donors. Citadels of conservative Christianity are now havens of heresy. This pattern has always been the practice. Heresies have always infiltrated and apostates have always crept in. Thus what I am witnessing is not “new under the sun.” For the past forty years, I have seen individuals and institutions deviate from truth and follow pernicious ways so I have not suddenly awakened from a Van Winkle snooze. However, I do not recall such a winnowing as now exists. It is also something to observe the departure from the faith of an unknown or mere acquaintance; it is another to endure the pain of seeing close friends fall prey to the wiles of Satan. The pragmatism that steered the *practices* of the past generation of preachers is now the anchor for the *doctrine* of the present generation.

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tual father. Some will tearfully declare that without his concern, his persistent plea, and his sincere prayers, they would still be lost and hell-bound and they will thank him that day for directing them to their eternal salvation.

Today, however, he patiently waits on the shelf for the trip home.

There will be a crowd gathered that tribute day to revere his memory. The service will require one of his state’s largest church auditoriums. Undoubtedly, the choir will sing twice. There also must be, since he was a lover of good music, additional solos and a quartet. A multitude will assemble from many states and that could include many nations—gladly giving a day to honor his character and to pay their respects. Tapes of the service will circulate; some periodicals will carry the key message. A meeting and meal will be held after the service for a time of recollection. “How we will miss him,” will be repeated often that solemn day when numbers come from distant states, even foreign lands, just to say, “He meant something special to me.” “His kind are gone forever,” some will bemoan as they visit among the great and the small that will alike come to the funeral that day.

Today, however, he sits by himself, alone on that shelf.

His pastor, who once was proud to advertise his membership in the church, has not ‘bothered’ him in nearly two years. One of the nation’s greatest churches, *his church*, and one of the leading pas-

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tors of the land, *his pastor*, has not darkened the doorway of his room in over seven hundred days. The doorbell does not sound. The telephone does not ring. The mailbox is empty.

He sits by himself, alone on that shelf.

He cannot preach. His strength of legs and back has failed him. His strength of voice and power of lungs have left him. His strength of mind and force of logic have slipped away. His resources have withered and shrunk. It seems that he is no longer an asset or a contributor.

He sits alone on the shelf and he sits there by himself.

In my musings, I have wondered if an honest conversation with his pastor might not be something like this:

"Have you seen old preacher Joe lately?"

"I haven't even thought of old Bro. Joe for—well, I just do not know when. I don't remember preaching his funeral so he must still be alive."

"Have you thought about having old preacher Joe preach?"

"Why, he was in such bad shape the last time I saw him, I didn't think he would last this long. 'Have him preach' you ask? He preached too long when he was in his prime, what would he do now? That old fellow could not stand in the pulpit and an old man sitting in a chair gathers no crowd. Even if I let him preach, the old man's message would be delivered so quietly,

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ble society no longer was able to mention the Trinity or the Deity of the Lord Jesus during its annual fund-raising endeavors.

It is axiomatic that the larger and more effective the organization becomes, the farther the institution drifts from its original moorings. It is far easier, it is alleged, to take a "hard-nosed" position on doctrine or separation when the budget is mere thousands of dollars than when it requires millions. Many a church, that forty years ago preached 'hell-fire and brimstone' in the storefront, now, from within stained glass, proclaims, "the Gospel of love," which that same pulpit, those forty years ago, called "the social gospel." Somehow, the faith that enabled a congregation to maintain doctrine and practice when the budget required \$100,000 finds it impossible to refrain from following 'enlightened openness' with a \$1,000,000 overhead. Separation was an absolute, when the preacher wore suits from Sears or Pennys; but wearing a Hart, Schaffner, and Marx, the same preacher calls the separation he once espoused, "legalism." Churches that were founded upon the tithes and "sweat-gifts" of factory workers and widows now have enough gold jewelry present on any given Sunday to have purchased their first buildings.

Institutions of Christian education born in the firestorm of separation from compromise now lightly speak of "trolling for students" in churches openly opposed to the very separation that produced the institution. Several conservative Bible col-

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Explaining a particular, unexpected and seemingly vastly out-of-character course of action taken by a mutual friend, a preacher said during our conversation, "You do not realize the pressure he faces to raise the millions of dollars required to operate every day. He has to give consideration to what the donors want." It seems the defense to be offered is that our friend was just being "pragmatic." There was no concern expressed as to the rightness or wrongness of the action, just that it was the practical course to take: a situation of doing what is necessary (even if wrong) in order to get a chance to do right.

A New York pastor of the 1850's wrote a telling indictment of a particular Bible society. It began with a stated purpose. To accomplish that purpose a staff was assembled and facilities were acquired. Excursions into new ventures were soon required to keep the staff busy and to fully utilize the facilities. The greater the growth, the larger the demand for funding became. The more pressure for funding increased the greater need to expand the base of support. The greater the need to expand the potential contributors became, the wider the pool of possible givers was necessitated. The more widely the solicitation of funding became, the less the original purpose of the society was emphasized and pursued. The result, as cited by this preacher was that the Bi-

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so slowly, and so falteringly that no one would listen. And, if anyone did, the old guy would repeat himself, until I would have to stop him. 'Have *him* preach?' not a chance; it would be an embarrassment. Of course, there is nothing personal in this, you know."

This particular pastor involved in this sorry case of "elder (used in the biblical sense of pastor) abuse" has himself used the oft repeated (never sourced) story that when the apostle John was so old and feeble that he could no longer preach, the deacons of the church of Ephesus would carry him to the assembly, where he could barely say in an quivering, faltering voice, "Love one another." Remarking that, "Just the presence of old John and his simple message was a challenge to the faithful," the pastor has often encouraged his congregation to stay faithful right through to the end. Yet, apparently (based upon a record of two years of neglect), he does not believe that the presence of this old warrior would be an encouragement to his congregation. This old elder's "love one another" is not desired. One is tempted to say that since the old preacher has no contribution to make and nothing materially left to leave to the church, the feeling is that there is no use to waste time visiting him. It is just a matter of pragmatic judgment.

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A particular trend has been called to my at-

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tention by pastors from various sections of North America who have commented regarding conservative, fundamental Baptist churches near them that are ending the Sunday evening service. Contemporary America, it is accurately cited, does not want to go to church on Sunday night. Monday begins such a stressful week, that American Christians need a good night's rest behind them. One pastor declared that it was the will of the people to end the service. His people, he said, "voted with their feet" by not showing up. What his feelings are regarding the Wednesday service I am not privy. Apparently, two or three gathered together are not to expect him to be present with them.

This lack of interest, it is said, produces a low attendance and the low attendance, it is further said, makes the service no longer worthwhile. The amount of time involved in preparation (music, sermon, janitor, etc.) is out of proportion to the results received, therefore making the Sunday evening service not a worthwhile venture. Fewer sermons means the ability to give more concentration on the sermons heard by the most and reduces the waste of good messages preached to empty pews. The same is true with the music. The janitor has one less service to prepare for also. The minimal participation (and that of mostly "old folks") actually makes the service a financial liability; it is simply not "cost effective." It takes more for the utilities than the evening offering produces. Thus, it is neither worthwhile nor profitable. It is just a matter of pragmatic

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judgment.

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A recent article in a publication I receive focused on the best, 'new' method of church planting—the creation of a 'user-friendly' church. One visits the community with a questionnaire seeking answers to "What kind of a church would you attend?" "When should the service times be? On which day?" "What kind of music do you want to have?" "How long should the service be?" "What should the sermon contain?" All of these questions are intended to be asked of unsaved individuals for the purpose of "meeting the needs of the community." It is "design a church" by the inclinations of the unchurched. I am certain that the Apostle Paul would have built larger churches if he had only been wise enough to survey to find out what the ungodly wanted to hear and how and when they wished to hear it. What a ministry the apostles might have had! Why, they might even have "turned the world upside down." I wonder why the Lord Jesus did not say "Be thou pragmatic unto death?"

How has it come to the place where the world defines what a church should be or what a preacher should preach? God-called preachers and God-ordained churches will remain about the task of telling the world what God says the world should hear and must do. *It is NOT just a matter of pragmatic judgment.*

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