

Pragmatism

Pragmatism has a number of facets and can mean various things to different people.

A dictionary use of the word states “A doctrine that it is only by their actual consequences that the truth or otherwise of beliefs or philosophical theories can be demonstrated.”

Or “To consider or represent as real that which is not, to rationalise.”

For the pragmatist there are no absolutes, nothing is absolutely good or absolutely true.

Truth and morality are judged by human experience.

A pragmatist feels no responsibility to cherish truth for its own sake.

“Truth” is there to serve people at that moment or in certain situations but they have **no** obligation to serve it at any time.

Whatever is useful for the user is true even if it is not useful for other people.

The truth of any idea is its ability to produce desirable results for the believer, if it cannot show desirable results it is false.

Whatever will get things done immediately with the maximum of efficiency and a minimum of undesirable side effects must be good and the true way to act.

It is useless to plead with a pragmatist that what a person can do is less important than what they are.

When it comes to wars to be won, forests to be cleared, rivers to be harnessed, these are deeds you can see.

Such things have practical applications and are a means to a visible end, let's get the job done.

So who then cares about ideals, character and morals?

Such things are for poets, philosophers and nice old ladies!

This philosophy of pragmatism has had and is having a powerful influence upon Christianity, so to me, and I hope to my readers, it is a matter of great concern.

The nervous compulsion to get things done is found everywhere within the Christian fellowship.

There is a deep inner necessity to accomplish something that can be seen, photographed and evaluated in terms of size, numbers, speed and distance.

An astonishing amount of religious literature is published, vast sums of money is used to construct or repair and maintain church buildings and centres.

Christian leaders even compete with each other in the field of impressive statistics.

In such an atmosphere we find that pragmatic philosophy flourishes.

No embarrassing questions are asked of such visible success about the wisdom of what is being done or even about the morality of it.

When the Church discovers something that works, it soon finds a Biblical text to justify it, and “consecrates” it to the Lord and plunges ahead with the activity.

Then follows a religious magazine article written about this activity, then a book.

After this, any question about the scripturalness of things, even the moral validity of the activity, is complete swept away. The method works, therefore it must be right and good.

The weakness of all this pragmatism is its tragic short-sightedness.

It never takes the long view of religious activity, indeed it dare not do so, but continues to believe that because it works it is both true and good.

Within evangelical circles we see today the influence of pragmatism.

Religious methodology is geared to pragmatism, it appears large in youth meetings, magazines and books constantly glorify it and conventions are dominated by it.

What can we do to break this power of pragmatism?

The simple answer is we must acknowledge the right of Jesus Christ to control all the activities of His Church.

The New Testament contains full instructions, not only about what we are to believe, but what we are to go about doing.

Any deviation from these instructions are a denial of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over His Church. [Ephesians 1:20-23]

The answer may be simple, but it will not be easy to execute, for it requires total obedience to Jesus Christ rather than human beings, and that always brings down the wrath of the religious majority.

It is not the question of knowing what the Church should do, we can easily learn this from scriptures.

It is the question of whether or not we have the courage to do it.