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Johnny Cash: 'Man in Black'
Found His Way Back to God

By James Lee Young

NASHVILLE (BP)--Johnny Cash is billed as the "Man in Black." His life, as he tells it, made his friends, fans and family wonder more than once in times past, if they should ready their own black clothes in anticipation of his death.

This country-gospel singer and Christian, whose music is loved by fans from all generations, for a time was barely one step ahead of the "deceptive demons" of drugs and self destruction that threatened his life.

Cash sings a different tune now. He credits God with literally saving his earthly and spiritual lives.

But this entertainer, composer and singer of hits such as "Folsom Prison Blues," "I Walk the Line," "Hey, Porter," "Cry, Cry, Cry," and many others, once ran from God.

Now, he told Baptist Press, "I recommend Jesus Christ...When we find him, we find ourselves...We find a bond that holds..."

"I also heartily recommend church membership. There's a certain amount of security in being a part of a body of believers that can't be bought at any price," Cash advised, particularly aiming his comments at young people. Cash, raised a Baptist, now belongs to the independent Evangel Temple in Nashville, where Jimmy Snow, son of country musician Hank Snow, serves as pastor.

The personable singer made the comments as he left the Nashville Baptist Book Store where, surrounded by fans, he had just autographed copies of his autobiography, "Man in Black," Zondervan, 1975.

Johnny Cash's long journey to success, hitting bottom, then finding new purpose and strength in living through Jesus Christ, began in his boyhood days in Arkansas.

As a lad in Dyess, Ark., he would stay up long into the night listening to gospel music on the radio. As he picked cotton and worked in the fields, he would sing for hours to pass the time.

Young Cash made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ at age 12, during a Baptist revival meeting in Dyess. The invitation song was an old favorite, "Just As I Am," he recalls.

His story from there is one of always dreaming of making it big in music, of constantly being aware of God's hold on his life, even while running.

Cash cites at least three main positive influences in his younger years--his brother Jack and their mother and father. Jack, who was older and "saved" before Johnny, avowed he would be a minister, but that dream was not to be. He died after a tragic accident on a Saturday job, and his death left an empty place in young John's life.

Jack's influence had "taken" on Johnny, however--an influence for good that Cash was ultimately not to escape when his "pill popping" habit and drinking later brought him wildly and dangerously close to death--even after he made it big as a country and gospel music star.

During a stint in the U.S. Air Force, where Cash recalls the usual three-day pass was spent boozing it up, he first fell in with a group of airmen who shared his love for music. They spent their leisure time picking and singing. But finally, Cash succumbed to drinking on weekends and began to grow more distant from his family ties and Christian upbringing.

Honorably discharged on July 4, 1954, Cash tried door-to-door selling to support his first wife, a devout Catholic, and their growing family. But music was in his blood, and he began to badger people who could open doors for the career he really wanted.

He was introduced to Marshall Grant, a bass player and guitar player, Luther Perkins, son of a Baptist minister from Mississippi. The three were at home with gospel music.

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Their first public appearance was in a church in North Memphis, Tenn. None of the three had a nice suit and the "only colored suits we had alike were black.

" 'Black will be better for church anyway,' I said, so we wore black shirts and pants.

"To this day, when someone asks me why I wear black, I can never really think of a simple answer, so I often say, 'Black is better for church,'" Cash notes.

After several refusals for auditions by Sam Phillips, owner of Sun Record Company, who was then managing Elvis Presley, Cash finally sang for Phillips and was signed to a contract.

Johnny Cash hit the top then hit bottom. He will tell you that country and gospel music were not his undoing. In fact, one of the first country music stars Cash worked with after joining the music circuit was singer Sonny James. "...I knew him to be a truly committed Christian," among others in the field, Cash notes.

Rather, it was the pills and the drinking. Cash began to take amphetamines to stay awake and pep him up for the long road trips, long hours of sleeplessness and endless, energy sapping concerts--and barbiturates to bring him down again.

Cash's addiction to pills and his drinking began a long road and struggle of despair, the complete alienation of his family for a time, divorce, and near brushes with death.

Once, for example, he leaped from a truck he was driving just before it went over a 600-foot cliff in California. And there were others, he attributes to the pills and drinking. Cancelled concerts and a problem of laryngitis plagued the singer, already world renowned for his talent.

Country female vocalist June Carter--now Mrs. Cash--of the famed Carter Family, ministers and other friends prayed for and stood by him. Finally, after being jailed several times, a heartbroken sheriff who was a Johnny Cash fan released him from a cell, handed Cash his pills and told the singer he could make his own choice--to kill himself taking pills or let God help him straighten up.

Cash chose the latter. He ultimately "surrendered" himself to God and began the hard, slow climb back to health--with his faith in God, much prayer, and with June, a committed Christian, and others close by him.

Composer and singer of a thousand or more songs, Cash admits he fell back for a time after progressing substantially.

But Johnny and June Carter Cash did not give up. Today they both have the reputation of being committed Christians. A film they produced, "Gospel Road," on the life of Jesus Christ, has been widely distributed by 20th Century Fox and later by Worldwide Pictures, Inc., a subsidiary of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Cash has given his Christian testimony internationally through his music, in mass evangelistic crusades, through the film and now through his book.

It's the life of Johnny Cash--no holds barred. Just as he was, "Just as I am."

**Largest Percent Messengers
At SBC From Church Staffs**

NASHVILLE (BP)--A study of "messengers" attending the 1975 Southern Baptist Convention in Miami Beach in June indicates that the largest percentage were over 40 years old and came from churches with a membership below 1,000.

Other data indicates that the largest percentage of them--49 percent--work on local church staffs, 60.8 percent were male, 78.8 percent arrived at the convention by car and a large percentage had what might be considered small travel expenses.

The statistics are based on 4,694 responses out of 16,421 persons from 46 states who registered at the 118th annual session of the 130-year-old SBC.

"A check shows that the state distribution of the respondents closely matches the state distribution of the total registered messengers. This would indicate that the survey participants likely mirror the characteristics and views of all messengers quite accurately," said Martin Bradley, manager of research services for the SBC Sunday School Board. Bradley's department conducted the survey for the SBC Executive Committee.

Age differential, while falling predominantly in the over 40 category, was broadly spread, with 14.8 percent in the 45-49 category, 14.5 percent in the 40-44 category; 13.7 percent, 50-54; 13.3 percent, 60 and up; 11.4 percent, 35-39; 10.4 percent, 55-59; 8.8 percent, 18-29; 8.5 percent, 30-34; and 3.2 percent, under 18.

Data on church membership size of messengers revealed 28.3 percent in the 500-999 range; 24.7 percent in the 300-499 range; 22 percent in the 1,000 and up range; 13.1 percent in the 200-299 range and 10.3 percent up to 199.

Vocational background fell heavily into the local church staff category (49 percent), with only an additional 8.3 percent combined in the categories of home and foreign missions, associational staff, evangelists and state and SBC agency denominational workers. (More than one-half of the 8.3 percent--4.8 percent--came from associational staffs; 2.6 percent came from state convention staffs, 1.9 percent from home and foreign mission fields, and 1.2 percent from SBC agency staffs. Evangelists represented only 0.3 percent of the total.)

However, wives of men in all those categories tabulated 16.7 percent, increasing the percentage of persons affiliated with professional religious vocations to at least 74 percent.

But statistics showed that up to 26 percent probably fell into the category of laity--persons not affiliated professionally with a church or denominational agency. Homemaking ranked 6.5 percent, "secular"--other, 9.2 percent and not responding, 10.3 percent (26 percent total). Most of those not responding to that particular item, Bradley said, probably fall into the area of lay vocations and may not have understood how to indicate occupation on the computer card.

While the largest percentage (78.8) arrived by car, most of the others (21.2 percent) arrived by plane. The largest percentage of the travelers both traveled and lived frugally. Thirty-five percent said their estimated expense to and from Miami Beach was \$100 to \$200, with 20.5 percent in the \$50 to \$100 range and 16.4 percent in the \$200 to \$300 range.

The survey also indicated that 65.6 percent estimated they spent only \$100 to \$200 while in Miami Beach and 20.9 percent, \$200 to \$300.

The messengers were asked to respond, based on Southern Baptist churches they knew, about which two areas seem to call for the greatest attention at this time--outreach, doctrine, leadership training, social/moral issues, missions, new member orientation.

Outreach headed the list with 53.8 percent, followed by leadership training, 38.2 percent; doctrine, 33.2 percent; new member orientation, 25.8 percent, social/moral issues, 19 percent and missions 17.6 percent.

SBC Seminaries
Add News Personnel

NASHVILLE (BP)--Two Southern Baptist seminaries--New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville--have named news personnel to their staffs.

Jonathan W. Pedersen, will serve as news director at New Orleans Seminary, and Mike Diduit (pronounced Did-way) and Nancy Carter will serve as news director and feature editor respectively at Southern Seminary.

Pedersen, a native of Miami, Fla., has served previously as business review manager of the Miami Herald and minister of youth at First Baptist Church of North Miami Beach. He holds a degree in communications from the University of Tennessee and will continue his studies at New Orleans Seminary.

As news director, Pederson will also serve as editor of the alumni news publication, Vision.

Diduit, a native of Sandwich, Ill., is a graduate of Stetson University, Deland, Fla., where he served on separate occasions as editor and business manager of the Stetson Reporter. He has been a youth director and youth evangelist during summers between college years. He will serve as managing editor of The Tie, Southern Seminary's alumni publication, among other duties as news director.

Miss Carter, a staff writer for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Va., before accepting the Southern Seminary position, is a graduate of Westhampton College of the University of Richmond, where she edited the campus newspaper. She is a native of Cheseapeake, Va.

Both Diduit and Miss Carter will continue their studies at Southern Seminary.



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041

DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996

MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461

NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Gomer Lesch, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 254-5461

RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151

WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

Baptists-Mennonites
Meet in Switzerland

For possible use by
State Baptist Editors

By James Leo Garrett Jr.

ZURICH, Switzerland (BP)--Seventy-five Baptist and Mennonite leaders met together here exactly four and a half centuries after the Anabaptists first formed a congregation of baptized believers (1525) in the nearby village of Zollikon.

The setting for the bilingual conference on Anabaptists (Tauferkonferenz) was the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ruschlikon, founded by Southern Baptists in 1949 for the training of European Baptist leadership and today heartily endorsed by the various national Baptist unions in Europe.

More Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, were present than Baptists, despite the much larger membership of the latter. Planned by a joint Baptist-Mennonite committee in Europe, the conference had as invited participants three leaders of the Evangelical (Reformed) churches of Zurich and Basel.

The conference focused on three major papers, the formal responses that followed each of these, and various plenary and group discussions. All papers were related to the conference theme, "The Truth Shall Make You Free" (John 8:32).

In his initial paper on "The Conference Theme in Anabaptist Perspective," Heinold Fast, Mennonite pastor in Emden, West Germany, and scholarly author-editor of *Anabaptistica*, interpreted the break of the earliest Anabaptists with Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich as due to different views as to the practical implementation of the Reformation.

However, he contended, behind such differences as to the time-table for reform lay other basic differences such as whether the word of God is to be incarnate in a church of believers, the practice of love, and the bearing of the cross by believers.

Fast sought to limit true Anabaptism to the "Grebel to Sattler" line, or those Anabaptists who rejected any and all uses of the sword by Christians, thus excluding Balthasar Hubmaier from the circle of "true Anabaptists." He was challenged on this by James M. Stayer (U.S.A.), author of the recently issued "Anabaptists and the Sword," and by myself.

In his response to Fast, Gottfried Locher of the Reformed Church itemized the convictions common to Zwingli and the Anabaptists and insisted that Zwingli's actions were motivated by his evangelical convictions, not by fear of the magistrates or by a desire to spiritualize. He then pointed out three key differences between Zwingli and the Anabaptists: Zwingli's greater stress on the objective atoning work of Christ, his refusal to see any incarnation in the church or to retire from civic responsibility, and his making central the doctrine of one covenant, the foundation of his doctrine of infant baptism.

Locher urged that the heirs of the Reformed and of the Anabaptist traditions stand together today against sacramental, hierarchical Christianity and, admitting that the future belongs to the free churches, asked whether God does not intend to change our contemporary society.

In the second paper, "The Conference Theme in New Testament Perspective," Gunt r Wagner of Ruschlikon Seminary declared persons are set free from the bondage of sin with its defective knowledge of God and of self through the Word of Jesus, which liberation makes possible faith and obedience.

Wagner insisted that "freedom is not one gift of salvation alongside of others but is salvation itself." He developed an ecclesiology of freedom according to which the church is seen as "the fellowship of the freed," characterized by conciliarity, equality, brotherhood, unity, and mutual service.

Markus Barth, professor of New Testament in the University of Basel and son of the late world-famous theologian, Karl Barth, made the response to Wagner's paper. Agreeing with its basic content, Barth called for more attention to the Old Testament and to the current relation of Jews and Gentiles to and within the Christian church. Christians should attend Jewish Passover celebrations, he suggested, and should also tell their Jewish friends of the rights of Arab refugees.

In the discussion that followed, Samuel J. Mikolaski, a Baptist from the U.S.A., insisted that Christian freedom should mean the freedom to say "no" to the naturalistic, behavioristic and technocratic manipulations of man. Torsten Bergsten, Baptist from Sweden, raised the question as to nature of the witness of the free churches in permissive, pluralistic and materialistic societies wherein religious liberty is no longer an issue.

Mennonite Norman Kraus, U.S.A., who had spent the past year in Asia and Africa, called upon the conference to relate freedom to the hunger and injustice of today's world, especially since many Africans and Asians identify Western "freedom" with colonial bondage. Carl W. Tiller of the Baptist World Alliance, pointed out the hazards of American civil religion.

"The Conference Theme Today: Commentary of a State Church Member" was the title of the final paper by Hans-Heinrich Brunner, Zurich Reformed pastor and son of the late well-known theologian, Emil Brunner.

Brunner alluded to the probability that by 1983, by means of plebiscite, the Swiss federal constitution will be amended so as to bring about the complete separation of the Reformed and Roman Catholic churches from the state. If and when such action should occur, he said, the state churches would cease to be "public judicial corporations" and would lose their historic privileges: "the might of religious instruction in public schools, pastoral counseling in the army, financial subsidies from the state, and especially the right to collect church taxes via state organizations."

Brunner noted that membership withdrawals from the Reformed and Roman Catholic churches in his country have increased since 1968, the time of worldwide student revolt. He identified three contemporary issues for the Reformed: authority, fellowship, and freedom.

His assertion that there are now no serious church-state problems in Switzerland and that the real issues are between all the churches and the society was controverted by Samuel Gerber, Swiss Mennonite Bible school president, who referred to handicaps to free evangelization.

Brunner's contention that the state churches and the free churches have "the same task" and differ only on "structure," the one being more "diffused" and the other more "focused," did not find ready acceptance.

Three formal responses to Brunner's paper brought the conference to its most lively discussion. Adolf Pohl, president of the Baptist Seminary in East Germany, declared that a disestablished state church does not automatically become a voluntary church unless it baptizes on confession of faith. Pohl also warned of the "new bondage of non-lordship avantgardism."

H. D. Woelinga, Dutch Mennonite pastor, contrasted gospel freedom and the freedom of revolutionary movements and asked whether any free churches do actually exist today.

John H. Yoder, Mennonite theologian (USA), challenged Brunner's complementarity of state churches and free churches as replacing the question of truth with bipolarity. Yoder warned against "polite pluralism" and settling issues by sociological determinism. Brunner admitted that Yoder had permulated the issues more clearly than he himself had done.

Reports of present-day Baptist-Mennonite fellowship and cooperation revealed that in both East and West Germany cooperation and interchange on the congregational level frequently occur and that in the USSR most Mennonite congregations are either members of or somewhat related to the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

Of special interest to the Ruschlikon conference were the German-speaking emigrants from the USSR who have been recently settled in West Germany. These have Mennonite family backgrounds and have been identified with the Inisiativniki, or Reform Baptists, in the USSR.

Baptist-Mennonite cooperation in Switzerland and the Netherlands is quite limited. In the USA and Canada it has taken the form of scholarly research and publication, believers' church conferences, and cooperation in overseas relief and in public affairs.