

One There Is, Above All Others*John Newton (1725–1807)*

One there is, above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end;
They who once His kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love!

Which of all our friends to save us,
Could or would have shed their blood?
But our Jesus died to have us
Reconciled in Him to God;
This was boundless love indeed!
Jesus is a Friend in need.

Men, when raised to lofty stations,
Often know their friends no more;
Slight and scorn their poor relations
Though they valued them before.
But our Savior always owns
Those whom He redeemed with groans.

When He lived on earth abased,
Friend of sinners was His name;
Now, above all glory raised,
He rejoices in the same;
Still He calls them brethren, friends,
And to all their wants attends.

Could we bear from one another
What He daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother
Loves us though we treat Him thus;
Though for good we render ill,
He accounts us brethren still.

O for grace our hearts to soften!
Teach us, Lord, at length to love;
We, alas! forget too often
What a Friend we have above;
But when home our souls are brought,
We will love Thee as we ought.



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In the Nick of Time

Liberalism Is Alive and Well

Jeff Straub

As I sat and listened to the talk, I could well have been in the early years of the twentieth century listening to an old liberal like George Burman Foster or Shailer Mathews, noted modernists of the University of Chicago. Though Foster and Mathews have long been dead, the ethos of their theological liberalism is alive and well on the fringes of modern day evangelicalism. To be clear, the presenter spoke as if the term “evangelical” no longer describes him. But he was at one time a professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary — until his book *Inspiration and Incarnation* was published, leading to his (forced) resignation. Today, he is at Eastern University.

I am writing about Peter Enns. The Enns story is old news in evangelicalism, his departure from Westminster coming nearly ten years ago. But Enns happened to be in town last week speaking at St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. The church is just a few miles from Central Seminary. Several of us went to the hour-and-a-half presentation, in which Enns lectured for forty-five minutes and fielded questions for the rest of the time. In the lecture, he gave us a sampling of his views. In the Q&A, he took questions mostly on the implementation of those views into the world of today. It was enlightening to be sure.

Enns is an engaging speaker. His was no dry lecture of boring research, painfully presented. He is humorous, self-effacing and light-hearted — just the kind of guy you want to lead a movement. He is controversial on several levels, which also makes him interesting. His publications, most notably *Inspiration and Incarnation* and *The Evolution of Adam*, evidence a very low view of Scripture. The Bible simply cannot be taken at face value. It is full of myths that need to be measured and interpreted. It does not tell us information about human origins, and its presentation of God is, in many places, deeply flawed. Last week, Enns did nothing to mitigate his writings. The crowd of several hundred, for the most part, just soaked in his words without objection.

Because of the theological transformation that has occurred in his life, Enns has had to learn to live with a significant amount of uncertainty. In fact, the only thing that Enns was “certain” about was the “uncertainty” of most ev-

everything else. We just need to learn to live with the clouds of doubts. He has and so should we. Several of us who attended the lecture met the following day for lunch to discuss what we had heard. It was “certainly” a stimulating discussion as we discussed the illogical nature of Enns’s certainty about uncertainty.

As you can imagine, Peter Enns’s uncertainty leads him into other more serious theological problems. One statement he made was particularly telling. He would not believe in “a God who would kill Jesus to keep from killing us.” The notion of the vicarious, substitutionary death, long held in Protestant circles, is detestable to Peter Enns. While this is the core of the doctrine of the atonement, it has long been a theological sticking point for liberals. Many could accept the moral influence theory of atonement or the governmental view of the atonement. But the penal substitutionary view? They find this abhorrent.

Beyond his uncertainty and his view of the atonement, Enns peppered his lecture with comments on creation/evolution. Again, there were no surprises here. Enns has been denying the biblical declarations here also. The creation account is merely a myth, not to be taken literally. But what does denying the biblical witness on creation say about the rest of the Scriptures? How often does God tie his work back to creation? What does denying the Genesis record do for one’s acceptance of Colossians 1:15 that declares that by Jesus “all things were created”? I know Enns has answers to these questions, but when you begin to slice off parts of the Bible, you must face questions like “how much is left?” and “where will all this lead us?”

To his credit, Enns is forthright. When a man comes out and tells you what he actually believes, you have something to work with. In the early days of theological liberalism, there was a certain amount of obfuscation. Liberals in general and the Chicago men in particular were careful to dissimulate in such a way that they sounded orthodox, keeping their heterodoxy under the radar. An exception was George Burman Foster, whose plain speech brought the University of Chicago under continual fire. He was kicked out of the Chicago Baptist Ministerial Association and William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, finally transferred him out of the Divinity School into the University. However, his influence on the students continued unabated until his death. In the end, he abandoned any semblance of orthodoxy and became, at best, a Unitarian. To really understand the trajectory of a man like Enns, one need only to read Foster’s *The Finality of the Christian Religion*. Foster there argues that Christianity need not be the final human religion. Like everything else, religion evolves. Enns implied as much at the end of his talk when he suggested that the doubts of some might lead them beyond Christianity. Lead them where?

Let’s be clear what we are talking about here. What Peter Enns said last week in Plymouth, Minnesota, is nothing less than new iteration of old theo-

logical liberalism. Casting doubt on the Genesis record, disputing the supernatural nature of the Scriptures, and denying the work of Christ was the stuff of the liberalism of the latter nineteenth century. Such liberalism raised the ire of the evangelicals who became fundamentalists in response to the error. Enns’s views are unvarnished liberalism, pure and simple. Certainly, there are some missing elements of old liberalism in its modern permutation (e.g. a post-millennial optimism), but its theological essence abides. It was a failed theology in the early twentieth century and it will be a failed theology now. H. Richard Niebuhr’s summary of the old liberalism seems apropos: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross” (*The Kingdom of God in America*, [1937], 193).



This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
