

Through Good Report and Evil, Lord

Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

Through good report and evil, Lord,
Still guided by Thy faithful word,
Our staff, our buckler, and our sword,
We follow Thee.

In silence of the lonely night,
In the full glow of day's clear light,
Through life's strange windings, dark or bright,
We follow Thee.

Strengthened by Thee we forward go,
'Mid smile or scoff or friend or foe,
Through pain or ease, through joy or woe,
We follow Thee.

With enemies on every side,
We lean on Thee, the Crucified;
Forsaking all on earth beside,
We follow Thee.

O Master, point Thou out the way,
Nor suffer Thou our steps to stray;
Then in the path that leads to day,
We follow Thee.

Whom have we in the heaven above,
Whom on this earth, save Thee, to love?
Still in Thy love we onward move;
We follow Thee.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Not Growing Up Fundamentalist

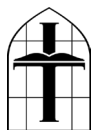
Jeff Straub

In recent weeks, my colleague Kevin Bauder has written a series reflecting on the fundamentalism of his youth. He expressed gratitude for those who he knew in his early life and their influence upon his future ministry. His exposure to fundamentalism happened early and was pretty good.

This got me thinking about my journey of *not* growing up in fundamentalism—actually, of not growing up in a Christian home at all. We were Christmas and Easter Christians. Oh yes, and I was an altar boy for a while as a kid, around the time of my confirmation as an Anglican. But I really remember little of my religious life before I was exposed to fundamentalism in my later teen years. My parents separated when I was fifteen and shortly thereafter my father died. I was living with him when he died and I returned to live with my mother, which was not a positive experience. I was placed in foster care and soon moved from Oregon to Georgia to live with my dad's brother. I occasionally attended his Presbyterian church (I am unsure of the group to which it belonged) but I was little impressed with it. A neighbor invited me to a Southern Baptist church near where I lived. It was into this church that I was baptized. The church was a warm, loving group of people, but soon I was attending a youth Friday night Bible study at another church. It was there as a junior in high school that I met a freshman, Becky, whose mother was a youth leader. Soon I was attending the larger SBC church with the active youth program.

I needed to find a different place to live as my uncle felt I was an unwholesome influence on his young children. He was right: I badly needed discipleship and mentoring. I was sent to a private college prep school in Rome, Georgia, where I graduated from high school and became attached to the family of a Christian man at this larger SBC church. Becky was dating Tommy, a boy about my age and member of the family.

When I came home for Christmas, I met an independent Baptist pastor from Indiana who was starting a youth camp. His philosophy was that “it is easier to build boys and girls than to repair men and women.” He allowed me to come and work at the camp for the summer. I quit smoking on the Greyhound bus headed to Indiana. At that camp, I met JD, a physical education major at Bob Jones University. I had never heard of the place. JD loved



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the Lord and had a zeal for God that was impressive for a young man. He became a mentor and a friend to me.

He also took me to a summer banquet in Indianapolis where I met the president of BJU, Bob Jones III. I had been planning to go to Auburn University to major in wildlife conservation, but after hearing him speak, I determined to attend BJU in the fall. When I told my SBC foster dad the good news, he told me I could not go and hung up the phone! When I was still committed to going after camp, he informed me that if I went, he would not support me. He was true to his word, financially at least. He said that BJU encouraged their men to lead their churches out of the SBC. Keep in mind, this was the summer of 1974, five years before the conservative resurgence in the SBC began. I had no idea what he was talking about.

As I prepared to go to college, Mr. C. took me to a clothing store to buy some clothes. I bought a couple of sport jackets (never having owned a suit nor even a jacket). He fussed at me for wasting my money. As it turned out, I needed a jacket for dinner! Seems you had to “dress up” for dinner at BJU. Remember, I had never visited there. I only knew one student, my friend JD. But I wanted what he had, and it seemed like BJU was the place to get it.

So now I had been around fundamentalists for the summer. As a busy camp worker, there was little time to appreciate my surroundings. As a student at BJU, things were different. We were told when to get up and when to go to bed. We could hang out with girls only in certain places on campus and at certain times. We couldn't even talk to them after supper. Since there was only one pay phone on each dorm hall, we couldn't call to the other side of campus either. The school wanted the phones kept free so parents could reach their students. No cell phones, texts messaging, or internet. How did we survive?

As a freshman at BJU, I met a wide assortment of men and women whom God would use to shape my life over the next six years. The man who hired me as a dishwasher in the dining hall was interested in my Christian life. Mr. Gillespie encouraged me and helped me navigate some of the University's rules. It really was only the grace of God that I was not expelled in my early years, though I tried hard. I received 74 demerits my first semester and 60 my second! Stupid things on my part—cleaning my room, or lack thereof, tardiness to class, horseplay—who me? I once went back to bed after my hall leader came into the room to ensure we were up. He told me *not* to return to the bed, but I did anyway. I was tired. A roommate turned me in. He even timed me. I was back in bed for 20 extra minutes! Did my hall leader give me grief! But I deserved it! I was careless and needed correcting. I survived with no scars and I smile as I remember these days.

My university days were filled with lots of new experiences and new friends. I met men in the early days with whom I have served Christ and

men who today are dear friends. We have walked together apart serving Christ. One dear brother I came to learn had been a drug dealer newly converted. We met in the weight room and became friends. Years later, he would invite me to Romania for my first overseas ministry. Because of this dear brother, I went on to earn a PhD and will soon complete my fifteenth year at Central. Thanks, Steve, for your influence!

There are many others like JD, Mr. Gillespie and Steve. I could speak of Mrs. Boyd, my French teacher who helped me discern the will of God to go to Canada and spent the summer on an Indian reserve. I had been accepted into a Baptist Mid-Missions missionary apprentice program and planned to go to France. I soon heard about a ministry team headed to Manitoba. I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. In speaking of my plans to Mrs. Boyd, she gently suggested that my French was too rudimentary to be of much service that summer in France. I should wait until my skills were better before embarking on a summer ministry there. I heard her counsel and chose the Canadian ministry team. I would later return to that spot when the missionary I had worked with over the summer retired. It was the beginning of nearly twenty years of serving Christ in Canada! Thank you, Mrs. Boyd, for godly counsel!

I didn't go to BJU because it was a fundamentalist school. I went there because I met a committed Christian whom I wanted to emulate. I did not hang out with people who were “defenders of the faith” though perhaps they were that too. I met men and women, some my age and others my teachers or supervisors, whom God used to help shape my life. “A man's steps are ordered by the Lord” (Ps 37:23). In my case, the steps took me to Bob Jones University and into fundamentalism. Thank you, Lord, for your kind direction.



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.
