

## Awake, My Soul, Stetch Ev'ry Nerve

*Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)*

Awake, my soul, stretch ev'ry nerve,  
and press with vigor on;  
a heav'nly race demands thy zeal,  
and an immortal crown.

A cloud of witnesses around  
hold thee in full survey;  
forget the steps already trod  
and onward urge your way.

'Tis God's all-animating voice  
that calls thee from on high;  
'tis his own hand presents the prize  
to thine aspiring eye;

That prize, with peerless glories bright  
which shall new lustre boast,  
when victors' wreaths and monarch's gems  
shall blend in common dust.

Blest Saviour, introduced by thee  
have I my race begun,  
and crowned with vict'ry, at thy feet  
I'll lay my honors down.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### A Second Conservative Resurgence in the SBC?

*Jeff Straub*

As interesting as this may sound, a second conservative resurgence may be afoot in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). For the record, my roots are in the SBC. Before college, I was a member of an SBC church. I was baptized in one, married in another one, and earned a PhD from an SBC school. Much of my family is there now. I have many friends in this world, good orthodox men who love God and wish to stand faithfully for His Word. I have lived with and studied the SBC since the mid-1970s. I left the SBC in the 70s, like many others, when things looked bleak. However, beginning in 1979, a conservative movement in the SBC abandoned, pushed out, or otherwise removed the old theological liberalism that had come to dominate their movement. By 2000, the seminaries had returned to orthodoxy in general and inerrancy in particular. The convention presidency was firmly in the hands of the conservatives as were the six seminaries. The SBC looked as though things were recovering. By 2000, it was no longer accurate to call the SBC "liberal." Sure, there were "mopping up" operations in state conventions to rescue state schools, but at the national level the SBC was not liberal.

Nearly two decades later, a new group of SBC pastors and laymen are calling for a second conservative resurgence. The Conservative Baptist Network, this new group, has identified Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Justice as the crucial issues in this second conservative resurgence.

**Critical Race Theory:** Last summer, much to the consternation of conservatives in the SBC, the SBC passed Resolution #9 affirming CRT as an "analytical tool." These men, under the leadership of Tom Ascol, tried to torpedo the resolution to no avail. Concerned that this embrace of CRT was evidence of theological and cultural drift in the SBC, the Founders sponsored a documentary to address the future of the convention. Their blog has tried to alert Southern Baptists of the dangers of CRT. Ascol and company have been laying the groundwork to attempt to repeal Resolution #9 at the annual SBC meeting in Orlando in 2020. Members of the 2019 resolutions committee have doubled down in their support of the original resolution. This dustup alone will make for a very interesting convention in Orlando.

**Social Justice:** A second issue raised by the Conservative Baptist Network is the emphasis on social justice within the SBC. This is a complex issue which has been developing over the past several years. Among the disputed actions was the hiring of Karen Swallow Prior by Southeastern Seminary's



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president Danny Akin. Prior was embroiled in the Revoice controversy over the category of Christian (celibate) homosexuals. Southern Baptist pastors are concerned over her influence in Southern Baptist life. Many pastors think this is another sign of SBC drift.

**Beth Moore:** A third issue raised in the cinedoc is the challenge of Beth Moore, a Southern Baptist women's Bible teacher and a popular speaker in SBC churches—sometimes from the pulpit and to congregations that include men. She preached the Mother's Day sermon in her son-in-law's church last year. This unleashed an internet firestorm with opponents and supporters speaking out on whether women should ever be preaching in SBC churches. This subject was debated before a Founders meeting held in conjunction with the annual 2019 SBC meeting. Compounding the problem, Moore, herself a victim of childhood sexual abuse, charged the convention with overemphasizing complementarianism (see the cinedoc at 10:40), thus contributing to the MeToo Movement hitting the SBC (especially the *Houston Chronicle* exposé of serious sexual sin among SBC churches). Just last week, the SBC Credentials committee disfellowshipped a church whose pastor is on a sexual predator watch list. The pressure from MeToo is raising the stakes in the debate over SBC complementarianism. R. Albert Mohler, president of Southern and expected to be elected president of the SBC this summer, has also written and spoken against women in pulpit ministry. The debate shows no sign of letting up with recent back and forth just last week. Also see this.

**The Pastors Conference:** Another reason for the recent repartee in the convention over its direction is the announcement a couple of weeks ago of the speaker lineup for the annual SBC Pastors Conference 2020. Pastor David Uth, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, and president of this year's Pastors Conference, announced an unusual speaker lineup including two Pentecostal-types, a woman who is listed as a pastor at her Los Angeles church doing a spoken word performance, and an SBC pastor who uses extreme tactics to draw a crowd (*Victorious Secrets! Seriously?*). When the internet controversy broke, Uth was unmoved. Last week the SBC Executive Committee (EC), a group of agency representatives who meet between the annual meetings to conduct the convention affairs when it is not in session, voted that without a change in the lineup there would be no official SBC support for this year's conference. Some Southern Baptists think this is EC overreach. Initially, Uth informed the SBC that his church would pay all the expenses rather than change the lineup. An ultimatum was given by the EC—make changes by February 24, or else—but the pastor deflected, insisting that God told him to fast and pray for 40 days before he could announce an answer. The SBC EC acquiesced, so things are at a standstill pending the 40 days.

**The ERLC:** Also raised during last week's EC meeting was the direction of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) led by Russell Moore.

The EC created a task force to study the ERLC to determine if it is fulfilling SBC needs or causing the SBC Cooperative Program (the SBC consolidated funding agency) to lose donations. Ultimately, this is about leadership. Moore has been under fire over alleged drift and his anti-Trump rhetoric which has offended prominent SBC pastors. The SBC is divided over Moore's leadership. Prominent churches have threatened to withhold funds to the CP over the ERLC. The board of the ERLC has objected to the oversight in the strongest possible terms as an intrusion into their work. Rumors have also circulated concerning Moore's connection to George Soros, a Democratic financier. The Conservative Baptist Network came out in support of the recent decisions of the EC.

As of today, I cannot predict where and when all this might end. I heard from an SBC friend that CP giving has indeed been affected significantly. Churches (also here) have recently left the SBC. Will more follow? It is too soon to tell. Will the existing problems rupture the largest Baptist body in the world? God only knows. Will the SBC circle the wagons at any cost? Ronnie Floyd, EC president, recently issued a call for evangelism at Vision 2025. It's a worthy call and pressing need. But can the SBC simply lay aside these tumultuous issues to do evangelism if they remain unaddressed? Can an otherwise divided body unite for evangelism?

The fight within the Northern Baptist Convention was initially a fight to reclaim the convention. When that did not happen, churches left. Are we watching a *déjà vu* moment? We need to pray for the SBC. We need to exercise caution in how we describe what is happening. We need to be charitable and ask God for mercy on their behalf. We need to be ready to welcome among us any church that might come our way. We need to be wary as our adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking those to devour! We could be next.

Fundamentalism, or what's left of it, has its own set of issues. We who live in glass houses need to be careful about throwing stones. Every generation is responsible to fight its own battles. Victories of yesterday are insufficient to ensure faithfulness today. God calls upon each of us to know His Word and stand upon His truth. I cannot fix what happened yesterday. I cannot foresee what will happen tomorrow, but I can determine to be faithful today. May God grant us His grace to stand on His Word and encourage others who do so.



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This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical Theology and Missions 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.

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