

Thou Only Sov'reign of My Heart

Anne Steele (1717–1778)

Thou only sov'reign of my heart,
My refuge, my almighty friend,—
And can my soul from thee depart,
On whom alone my hopes depend?

Whither, ah! whither shall I go,
A wretched wand'rer from my Lord?
Can this dark world of sin and woe
One glimpse of happiness afford?

Eternal life thy words impart,
On these my fainting spirit lives;
Here sweeter comforts cheer my heart,
Than all the round of nature gives.

Let earth's alluring joys combine,
While thou art near, in vain they call;
One smile, one blissful smile of thine,
My dearest Lord, outweighs them all.

Thy name my inmost pow'rs adore,
Thou art my life, my joy, my care:
Depart from thee—'tis death—'tis more,
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair.

Low at thy feet my soul would lie,
Here safety dwells, and peace divine;
Still let me live beneath thine eye,
For life, eternal life is Thine.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Future of Fundamentalist Education: Students

Kevin T. Bauder

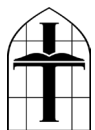
By every indicator, historic, mainstream fundamentalism is a shrinking movement. Churches are shrinking. Fellowships are shrinking. Mission agencies are shrinking. Schools have closed and those that remain are scrambling for students.

Furthermore, the churches are producing fewer young people who feel any sense of calling toward vocational ministry. From an educational perspective, not only is the pond shrinking but the number of fish in the pond is declining. This situation confronts Bible colleges and seminaries with a difficult question: how can they continue to train students for ministry in mainstream fundamentalist churches and mission fields? Various institutions have adopted different strategies.

First, some schools aim to attract new students by broadening their offerings. Institutions that used to identify themselves as Bible colleges have transitioned into liberal arts colleges and even universities. Among those that remain Bible colleges (which means that they require all students to major in Bible), the curriculum has been expanded to include supplementary majors in education, counseling, nursing, history, business, humanities, and other disciplines. Seminaries, too, have diversified their offerings, hoping to attract students who wish to become more effective in their Christian service as ordinary church members—but not as vocational ministers. Many schools have launched into higher levels of education, with colleges starting graduate schools and seminaries, and seminaries offering post-graduate programs. These changes are so common that finding an institution that has not implemented at least some of them is nearly impossible.

This approach does succeed in attracting more students than would otherwise attend the school. For some, it provides an alternative to secular colleges and universities. Nevertheless, because it draws students to non-ministry emphases, it accomplishes little by way of producing the next generation of pastors and missionaries. For those who wish to equip Christian leaders, this strategy must be judged a failure.

A second strategy that some schools have tried is to broaden their constituencies by seeking acceptance from the more conservative wing of mainline



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

evangelicalism. These schools have begun forging ties to groups like the Southern Baptist Convention or the Presbyterian Church of America. To expand their circle of fellowship, however, they have sometimes abandoned distinctives that they have held for generations. They feature speakers who have not previously been allowed on their platforms. They soften their dress codes and their codes of conduct. These changes are not made so much in the effort to be more biblical as in the effort to appeal to a different kind of student. They are pragmatic changes rather than principled changes.

What occasionally happens is a sort of slingshot effect. Sometimes the velocity of change has been so rapid that the institution overshoots any target that might be taken as biblical or even reasonable. In rejecting dated or unsupportable aspects of their ethos, these schools may begin to reject whatever appears to be simply inconvenient. They lose old identity but have not built up a new one. They alienate their older constituents as they stake their future on the support of the new constituents they are courting, but who are reluctant to support them because of past hostilities. This strategy is a gamble that has already closed more than one college and seminary. It alienates the older constituents, who direct their support to other institutions that still uphold the old ethos.

That phenomenon has contributed to a third strategy. Some schools attempt to capitalize on the exodus of supporters from these broadening institutions. By emphasizing their older standards of fellowship and conduct, they try to portray themselves as trustworthy in a “last man standing” sort of way. Furthermore, just as a broadening institution usually seeks support from its Left, these reactionary institutions often appeal for support to their Right.

This strategy is the mirror image of the last, and it turns out to be just as pragmatic in its approach. It upholds older standards, but often not for principled and biblical reasons. For example, one school—which insists that it is not King James Only—requires its students to use the King James Bible in their churches, even if their churches (including their home churches) use something else. Given a choice between deferring to the King James Only crowd and deferring to its students’ home churches, this institution made the pragmatic choice.

These pragmatic strategies (both to the Left and to the Right) may actually succeed in attracting ministerial students who would not otherwise have come. This kind of pragmatism, however, risks producing graduates who will subvert the churches in which they minister. Depending upon the direction in which the school faces, it will attract students from one side or the other of mainstream fundamentalism. Because it has had to compromise in order to gain those students, it will lack the ability to steer them toward a completely biblical system of faith and practice.

The fourth strategy also involves openness to ministerial students from outside mainstream fundamentalism—whether from the Left or the Right. The difference is that an institution that adopts this strategy is not willing to alter its own ethos to appeal to those students. If it is a separatist school, it teaches robust separatism winsomely and persuasively. If it is a Baptist school, it teaches Baptist distinctives without blushing. If it is a dispensational school, it teaches dispensationalism with clarity and force. It allows other students into the institution, but it aims to transform them. It does not modify its principled commitments to appeal to those on either side.

What would attract outside students to such an institution? That question has many answers. Smaller classes. Personal attention and care. Professors who combine pastoral experience with rigorous academics. Course structures that are designed for the convenience of students and not administrators. Genuine devotion to God. Commitment to Scripture. Theological sobriety. Prioritizing the local church and its ministry. In short, *excellence*.

There are no guarantees for any fundamentalist school. All of them wish to survive—and I personally hope that all of them do. What they must not do, however, is to purchase their survival at the expense of principled and biblical positions. Let them flourish by adopting the strategy of excellence.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of 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.
