

Hosanna, With a Cheerful Sound

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Hosanna, with a cheerful sound,
To God's upholding hand;
Ten thousand snares attend us round,
And yet secure we stand.

That was a most amazing pow'r
Which raised us with a word,
And every day, and every hour,
We lean upon the Lord.

The evening rests our weary head,
And angels guard the room;
We wake, and we admire the bed,
That was not made our tomb.

The rising morning can't assure,
That we shall end the day;
For death stands ready at the door
To take our lives away.

Our breath is forfeited by sin
To God's avenging law;
We own thy grace, immortal King,
In every gasp we draw.

God is our sun, whose daily light,
Our joy and safety brings;
Our feeble flesh lies safe at night
Beneath his shady wings.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

A Response to Criticisms: Preface

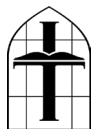
Kevin T. Bauder

Ten years ago I authored a chapter and three responses for the book *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, edited by Andy Naselli and Collin Hansen. My job was both to help readers understand fundamentalism and to respond to the positions represented by other evangelical authors. My approach overall was to argue that fundamentalism is deeply interested in the unity of the Church, but that the Church's unity is grounded in the gospel. Wherever the gospel is denied, the unity of the church is fractured: those who deny the gospel must not be reckoned as Christians or as within the Church. In other words, a genuine concern with unity compels the biblically obedient Christian to practice ecclesiastical separation.

I also made the case that ecclesiastical separation must extend further than only those who overtly deny the gospel. According to the apostle John, those who make common cause with gospel deniers incur a share in their evil deeds. That being so, at least some limitation of fellowship is necessary toward gospel believers who extend Christian fellowship to gospel deniers. This is a position that is sometimes called "secondary separation," and in one of my responses I argued that the willingness to pursue secondary separation is what distinguishes fundamentalism from even the most conservative evangelical alternative.

When I published the chapter and responses I expected criticism, and I fully anticipated that the harshest criticism would come from self-proclaimed fundamentalists. I had two reasons for expecting this response. One is that fundamentalists have been wrangling over the meaning of their position since at least the 1970s. Pejoratives like *neo-fundamentalist*, *pseudo-fundamentalist*, and *cultural fundamentalist* have been hurled back and forth as some who wore the label attempted to deny its rightful use to others. Since I was unavoidably taking a position in this long-standing debate, I could hardly hope to be ignored (and I did not want to be—what author does?).

Second, while fundamentalists have often manifested the virtue of temperance when praising others, they have moderated their objections less frequently. Fortunately, some noteworthy and happy exceptions to this rule do exist. Nevertheless, one of the quickest ways to make a name within some branches of fundamentalism—especially hyper-fundamentalism—is by



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www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
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attacking some evil. Of course, the evil cannot be challenged in the abstract, but requires castigation of the persons who are perceived as advancing it. If an ambitious hyper-fundamentalist cannot find a genuine evil, then an invented evil just might do the trick.

It was well that I had anticipated such complaints, for they were not long in coming. Even before publishing my chapter and responses I had decided to ignore most of them. There is no use in providing a platform for attention seekers and truth twisters, and that is what I anticipated that most of the critics would be. They are like the comment stream on an Internet news story—no good ever comes from reading it, let alone interacting with it.

My determination to ignore the most unreasonable criticisms, however, does not mean that I wanted to ignore all disagreement. I will be the first to acknowledge that my work contains flaws, and I am eager to correct them. The best way of finding out what they are is to converse with those who express reasonable disagreement. That kind of disagreement can come from opponents, but it can also come from friends. Indeed, one of the marks of a true friend is the willingness to confront and disagree.

Unfortunately, the shrillness of the unreasonable disagreement tended to block the possibility of responding to the reasonable ones. As the rhetorical temperature began to rise, I found that my acquaintances imagined some obligation to express themselves as either “pro-Bauder” or “anti-Bauder.” For a while, it seemed as if no middle ground was possible within fundamentalism. Some fundamentalist organizations even began to pass resolutions either for me or against me.

In the midst of the uproar came a sharply critical resolution from the American Council of Christian Churches. That surprised me for three reasons. First, I was and am an individual member of the ACCC. Second, the ACCC is my endorsing agency for military chaplaincy. Third, the executive secretary of the ACCC, Ralph Colas, was a close personal friend.

I called Dr. Colas about the resolution and asked why the ACCC had found it necessary to speak so sharply about me. He told me that the resolution was driven by a few of the younger men while he was away from the meeting. Apparently, they had listened to some of my more extreme critics, then allowed their fears about what I *might* be saying to override their reading of what I actually *did* say. I assured Dr. Colas that my commitment to separatism had not changed. Soon, the ACCC retracted that resolution, issuing a revised resolution that expressed concern about certain trends, but without naming me.

Other than a brief clarification I chose not to pursue the episode. As I say, I am a member of the ACCC. I believe what it believes. I value what it does. I have no wish to hurt the organization and every desire to encourage it.

The ACCC is certainly not one of those hyper-fundamentalist institutions to which I referred a moment ago.

Ralph Colas was already dying of cancer when that incident took place. After he stepped out of leadership, the ACCC published a “whitepaper” entitled *The Bible Doctrine of Separation*. Again I found myself singled out for disagreement, though it now took a much more reasonable and even charitable tone. As soon as I saw the “whitepaper,” I knew that I should respond. It advanced several ideas that are worthy of conversation. I hesitated, however, because I still did not wish to be perceived as opposing the ACCC.

About a year ago the ACCC decided to serialize the “whitepaper” on its web site. The organization’s leadership has a perfect right to do that. By and large I believe that the document is a helpful one. Nevertheless, it does involve a few misunderstandings that I believe could be balanced out or even corrected.

Beginning next week, that is my goal. I will be responding to some of the criticisms in *The Bible Doctrine of Separation*, and I will be engaging some of its principal ideas. From the outset I want it understood that I am not trying to provoke a quarrel, but to clarify some of the issues that the ACCC has seen fit to raise. I continue to hold the ACCC in high regard. I intend to support the organization. After the lapse of nearly a decade, however, I also think a reasonable conversation should be possible. My aim is to conduct such a conversation.



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.
