

Hark, How the Watchmen Cry!

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Hark, how the watchmen cry!
Attend the trumpet’s sound;
Stand to your arms, the foe is nigh,
The powers of hell surround.
Who bow to Christ’s command,
Your arms and hearts prepare,
The day of battle is at hand —
Go forth to glorious war.

See, on the mountain-top
The standard of your God;
In Jesus’ name ‘tis lifted up,
All stained with hallowed blood.
His standard-bearers now
To all the nations call:
To Jesus’ cross, ye nations, bow;
He bore the cross for all.

Go up with Christ your Head;
Your Captain’s footsteps see;
Follow your Captain, and be led
To certain victory.
All power to him is given;
He ever reigns the same:
Salvation, happiness, and heaven
Are all in Jesus’ name.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Seventies: Part Three

Kevin T. Bauder

In 1970 American evangelicalism was divided into three main camps. A minority on the far right called for separation from all forms of apostasy, including the liberal denominations and the Roman Catholic Church: these were the separatist fundamentalists. A minority on the left believed that the Lord’s work could be furthered by tolerating religious liberals in their organizations, by cooperating with liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics in the Lord’s work, and by infiltrating ecumenical endeavors with evangelical influence. Adherents to this position called themselves *neoevangelicals*. In the middle was the broad sweep of evangelicalism, which both groups sought to influence and control.

Fundamentalists of the day were represented by figures such as Bob Jones, Jr., John R. Rice, Jack Hyles, and especially Carl McIntire. Leading organizations included the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, the Bible Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, and the American Council of Christian Churches. Schools within the fundamentalist camp included two Baptist Bible Colleges (Springfield, MO and Clarks Summit, PA), Cedarville College, Grand Rapids Baptist College, and Bob Jones University.

Neoevangelicals followed the leadership of individuals like Harold John Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry, Edward John Carnell, and especially Billy Graham. The leading neoevangelical organization was the National Association of Evangelicals, though many of its members were mainstream evangelicals rather than neoevangelicals. Billy Graham’s crusades were the most visible neoevangelical enterprise. The fountainhead of neoevangelicalism was Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

Most of evangelicalism lay in between these poles. The majority of evangelical leaders and institutions probably still thought of themselves as fundamentalist, though they may have been uncomfortable with the label. They were uneasy about cooperative evangelism as Billy Graham practiced it, but they were also impressed with Graham’s results and reluctant to distance themselves from him. Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee was one such individual. Schools like Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary



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fit into this position. Arguably, by the 1970s the bulk of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America stood just about here.

The most separatistic fundamentalists insisted that majority evangelicals must separate, not only from apostates, but also from neoevangelicals. For their part, neoevangelicals didn't ask anybody to separate from anyone. The difference was disastrous for fundamentalists, who gradually lost influence within the evangelical world. Fundamentalist influence had been waning through the 1960s, but during the 1970s the fundamentalist movement began to see itself as increasingly distinct from the rest of the evangelical world.

This situation was worsened by other influences. The first was the success of the Charismatic Movement, which took hold during the 1960s but reached full stride during the 1970s. Unlike the older Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement operated within mainline denominations and even in the Catholic church, giving those apostate organizations a patina of spiritual vitality. Charismatics were genuinely interested in God, and most of them were even interested in the Bible. Nevertheless, the movement as a whole was deeply flawed.

Probably the best known Charismatic leader of the 1970s was the healing evangelist Oral Roberts. An old-time Pentecostal, Roberts made the transition into the Charismatic movement in 1968 when he joined the United Methodist Church. Besides personal campaigns of preaching and healing, Roberts hosted a widely-heard radio program and television broadcast. He shocked the nation in 1977 when he announced that a 900-foot-tall Jesus had told him to build a hospital. Roberts also lived in opulence, drawing upon the millions donated to his ministry. Fundamentalists were incredulous at his popularity.

In spite of antics like those of Roberts, Charismatics were generally welcomed within the broader evangelical world. Fundamentalists, however, believed that the Charismatic view of miraculous gifts was seriously deficient. Consequently, Charismatics began to swell the ranks of broader evangelicalism while simultaneously changing the doctrinal and practical atmosphere of the evangelical world, thus increasing the distance between fundamentalists and the rest of evangelicalism.

Hand in hand with the Charismatic movement came the Jesus Movement, which was almost exclusively Charismatic. The Jesus People were young adherents to the counterculture who responded to the gospel by professing Christ. They carried the energy of the counterculture into the evangelical world, but they also carried many of its social priorities as well. They became a hinge that turned parts of evangelicalism in a direction that would eventually become the Evangelical Left. In particular, Jesus People formed a large contingent of the crowd at Explo 72 in Dallas.

Within evangelicalism in general, Explo 72 was seen as a resounding success. It was followed immediately by Key 73, which was a nationwide, ecumenical evangelistic emphasis. Key 73 grew out of a meeting called by Carl F. H. Henry in 1967. Its stated purpose was "Calling the Continent to Christ," but its ecumenism tended to water its message down to a vague religiosity. I can remember a liberal church in my community promoting Key 73 while simultaneously conducting seances in its basement.

Indeed, the 1970s seemed to be a time for quirky evangelical innovations. For example, in 1976 people started to see billboards, bumper stickers, and buttons with the slogan "I FOUND IT" printed in big letters. These were the product of a campaign launched by Campus Crusade. Hypothetically, people were supposed to ask "What did you find?" and you were supposed to reply, "I found new life in Christ." Instead, other bumper stickers started showing up: "I LOST IT," or alternatively, "I NEVER LOST IT." One even said, "I DONT GET IT." In fact, most people didn't.

For their part, fundamentalists tended to mock these campaigns as misguided, charging that they missed the real point of redemption. As one preacher said, "It wasn't lost, I was." Another commented, "I didn't find anything. God found me and saved me." At the time, nearly every fundamentalist organization was flourishing and growing. The best attended churches in the world were fundamentalist churches.

Much that was done by evangelicals during the 1970s was supposed to help promote the gospel. The overall effect, however, was to muddy the waters and to obscure the message of the gospel, secondarily creating confusion around the concept of *evangelical*. Were you an evangelical because you believed the gospel? Because you spoke in tongues? Because you put a bumper sticker on your car? By the end of the 1970s, it was no longer possible to say exactly what an evangelical was.

This vagueness or fuzziness was compounded by other events. The inerrancy debate looms large in that list, and it deserves separate discussion. So does the election of a putatively evangelical president of the United States. But those discussions are for another time.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research 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.
