

Who in the Lord Confide*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

Who in the Lord confide,
 And feel his sprinkled blood,
 In storms and hurricanes abide
 Firm as the mount of God:
 Steadfast, and fixed, and sure,
 His Zion cannot move;
 His faithful people stand secure
 In Jesus' guardian love.

As round Jerusalem
 The hilly bulwarks rise,
 So God protects and covers them
 From all their enemies.
 On every side he stands
 And for his Israel cares;
 And safe in his almighty hands
 Their souls forever bears.

But let them still abide
 In thee, all-gracious Lord
 Till every soul is sanctified,
 And perfectly restored:
 The men of heart sincere
 Continue to defend;
 And do them good, and save them here,
 And love them to the end.



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In the Nick of Time

Roger Olson on Fundamentalism: Part One

Kevin T. Bauder

Roger Olson has been writing on fundamentalism again. Olson likes to write about (and usually *against*) fundamentalism. His remarks are helpful for several reasons. First, Olson is one of the most accomplished authors in the evangelical theological world. He co-wrote one of the best short surveys of twentieth century theology. He is a well-known advocate and defender of Arminian theology. Second, Olson grew up in a Pentecostal movement that was a kissing cousin to fundamentalism. Consequently, he sometimes shows a measure of sympathy with some fundamentalist concerns. Third, Olson is generally a good interlocutor. In our interactions he has always been personally gracious. When he taught at Bethel Seminary, Olson regularly brought professors such as Rolland McCune and Charles Hauser to his classes to present their views.

Olson blogs on *Patheos*, and he recently published a post entitled, “What Is ‘Fundamentalism?’” The post contains some valuable insight. It also contains some unwarranted criticism. In any event, it begs for a response from a fundamentalist.

According to Olson, the defining feature of fundamentalism is secondary separation. He claims that during his seminary training, he “was encouraged to think that the main difference between us and ‘them’ (the fundamentalists) was something called ‘secondary separation.’” He also lists other features of fundamentalism, such as young-earth creationism, profession of the inerrancy of Scripture, rejection of Pentecostalism, and an insistence upon interpreting the Bible as literally as possible (is he referring to dispensationalism?). These features, however, are only mentioned in passing. The thrust of Olson’s post is toward secondary separation as the distinguishing feature of fundamentalism.

Before proceeding to summarize Olson’s argument, I need to get one mild criticism out of the way. Learned as he is, Olson seems not to have studied the relationships among fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and neo-evangelicalism very deeply. The consequence is that he tends to get events and people a bit jumbled. He states that Bob Jones refused to join the National Association of Evangelicals, but Bob Jones was actually a founder of the NAE who later left the organization. He has fundamentalists objecting to

Billy Graham and then the founding of Fuller Seminary. The reality is that Fuller Seminary was founded as an anti-fundamentalist institution in 1947, at which time fundamentalists were still firm supporters of Billy Graham. The split between Graham and fundamentalists didn't come until nearly a decade later with Graham's 1957 New York City crusade.

These criticisms, however, do not detract from Olson's main point, which is that secondary separation is what distinguishes fundamentalism from other species of evangelicalism. On this point, Olson and I agree. What we disagree about is how to understand secondary separation and whether we believe that it is biblically required. That is the direction I want to go in this conversation.

First, however, I need to say something about the matter of definition. Definitions can be formed in different ways. To be technical, Olson's definition of fundamentalism is *intensional*, and it works by way of *genus and differentia*. This kind of definition specifies what a thing is like (its *genus*) and then states how it is different from what it is like (*differentia*).

Fundamentalism belongs to the genus *evangelical*. To be evangelical is to be gospel-centered. To be gospel-centered is, among other things, to believe the teachings that are essential to the gospel. In other words, one cannot rightly claim to be evangelical while denying fundamental doctrines. Affirming the fundamentals never makes anyone a fundamentalist. It just makes one evangelical. Belief in the fundamentals, along with certain other beliefs and practices, may be necessary conditions of fundamentalism but they are not sufficient conditions.

For example, one teaching that is fundamental to the gospel is the inerrancy of Scripture. This is not to say that people must believe in inerrancy to be saved. Nevertheless, if God can make mistakes or speak falsehoods, then He cannot be trusted. If the Bible is His word, then it must be inerrant in all that it affirms. This was the near-universal consensus of American evangelicalism until the emergence of the Evangelical Left, which, as Harold Lindsell argued, is properly *not* evangelical for that very reason. Inerrancy is a belief shared by all true evangelicals, and not just by fundamentalists.

So fundamentalism belongs to the genus of evangelicalism. How, then, does it differ from other evangelical streams? The answer lies in how fundamentalists weigh the gospel. They consider affirmation of the true gospel to be essential to recognition as a Christian. Since the fundamentals are essential to the gospel, they are also essential to Christian recognition. Anyone who denies a fundamental doctrine cannot rightly be recognized as Christian. Furthermore, fundamentalists believe that extending Christian fellowship to people who must not be recognized as Christians is a hypocritical act that usurps the authority of Christ. To put it in other terms, the *differentia* of fundamentalism is separatism.

Olson notes that, "Fundamentalists, in the beginning, simply wanted to expel true liberal theology...from their denomination's seminaries." Actually, they wanted to expel liberals (whom they saw as non-Christian) from their entire Christian fellowship, including their denominational machinery. Call that "purge out" separatism.

Olson continues, "But the[n], in the 1920s, American fundamentalism took a sharp turn in the direction of separation and many conservative members of mainline Protestant denominations separated...." He is correct about this change in direction. Call this exit from the denominations "come out" separatism. It became necessary when fundamentalists found that liberals so controlled the councils of their denominations that they were irremovable.

The point that Olson seems to miss is that both "purge out" and "come out" are legitimate separatist options, depending on the circumstances. For example, Baptists in Minnesota never did have to come out of the state convention. They had sufficient strength to remove liberal theology from the organization. What is now the Minnesota Baptist Association is the renamed Minnesota Baptist Convention. It represents one of the few instances when, as R. V. Clearwaters used to say, fundamentalists managed to save the furniture along with the faith.

Not every evangelical wanted either to purge out or to come out. Not all evangelicals were separatists; not all evangelicals were fundamentalists. Some were convinced that gospel believers could continue in Christian fellowship with people who denied fundamental doctrines. That was the group that later organized a new movement in reaction against fundamentalism. That movement was called *neoevangelicalism*. The core of neoevangelical thought was that one could be loyal to the gospel while extending fellowship to gospel-deniers. Neoevangelicalism was represented by several individuals and institutions that Olson names: Fuller Seminary, *Christianity Today*, Billy Graham.

The key difference between fundamentalists and neoevangelicals was over separatism, and that difference gave rise to a dilemma. It is a dilemma that all separatists must face at some point. The dilemma can be phrased as a question: what do you do with people who believe the gospel, but who want to extend Christian fellowship to people who do not? That is the dilemma that gives rise to the debate over secondary separation.



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.
