

A Sov'reign Protector I Have
Augustus Toplady (1740–1778)

A sov'reign Protector I have,
 unseen, yet forever at hand,
 unchangeably faithful to save,
 almighty to rule and command.

He smiles, and my comforts abound;
 His grace as the dew shall descend;
 and walls of salvation surround
 the soul He delights to defend.

Inspirer and hearer of pray'r,
 Thou Shepherd and Guardian of Thine,
 my all to Thy covenant care
 I sleeping and waking resign.

If Thou art my Shield and my Sun,
 the night is no darkness to me;
 and fast as my moments roll on,
 they bring me but nearer to Thee.

Kind Author and Ground of my hope,
 Thee, Thee, for my God I avow;
 my glad Ebenezer set up,
 and own Thou hast helped me till now.

I muse on the years that are past,
 wherein my defense Thou hast proved;
 nor wilt Thou relinquish at last
 a sinner so signally loved!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Roger Olson on Fundamentalism: Part Five

Kevin T. Bauder

In a recent blog post, Roger Olson discusses the relationship between fundamentalism and secondary separation. In the comment stream that follows the post, Olson includes the following remarks as a critique of secondary separation.

[W]hen the Conservative Baptist Association of Churches split away from the Northern Baptist Convention fundamentalist leader Clearwaters of Fourth Baptist Church in Minneapolis (I don't recall if he was GARBC or something else) wrote a book I have read called "The Great Conservative Baptist Compromise." It was a harsh attack on the CBA for not practicing secondary separation and not requiring belief in young earth creationism, etc. The CBA is a truly conservative evangelical denomination and in some cases I would say even "fundamentalish." Why did Clearwaters feel it necessary to attack fellow evangelical Christians that way?

Here Olson asks a fair question, and it deserves a fair answer. Before I get to that answer, a couple of preliminary comments are in order. One is that the book is less *written* by Clearwaters than *edited* by him. To be sure, several of the chapters are his work. But others are reports by other figures. One is an address delivered by W. B. Riley. Second, the chapters of this book represent discrete documents prepared over a process of some decades. Some were written in the heat of conflict; others were written in retrospect. Third, this book was never intended to be read by the general public, including Olson. It was aimed at a particular readership at a particular time within a particular set of circumstances, and it assumes a certain level of background knowledge. Without this knowledge the book is often puzzling and is likely to be construed as a tirade toward innocent bystanders. It was nothing of the kind.

The book is about the Conservative Baptist Movement, and it was written by and for people who went through a conflict within that movement. The purpose of the book was to explain the conflict and to justify the principles of one of the parties to that conduct. The book was not intended as an attack but as a defense. The actions and character of Clearwaters and his co-laborers (people like B. Myron Cedarholm, Bryce Augsburg, and sometimes



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Chester Tulga) were being undermined by an insidious and unscrupulous attack against their principles, methods, and character. The book was meant to set the record straight.

The Conservative Baptist Movement emerged as an identifiable entity during the early 1940s when the Fundamentalist Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention renamed itself the Conservative Baptist Fellowship. Because of the so-called Inclusive Policy that the NBC applied to foreign missions, the CBF led in organizing a Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society. In response, the NBC virtually expelled all supporters of the new society. The CBF then led in organizing the Conservative Baptist Association in 1947, and then the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society in 1948.

Since many CBA churches were still fighting their way out of the NBC, the CBA did not immediately require churches to separate from the convention. Nevertheless, in 1953 the boards of all four organizations (CBF, CBA, CBFMS, and CBHMS) authorized a manifesto at Portland, Oregon, stating that the Conservative Baptist Movement was “separatist in spirit and objective.” At that time, the Conservative Baptist movement was also firmly committed to church autonomy, premillennialism, and the direct, divine creation of the historical Adam.

That picture began to change after the organization of Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver (now the Denver Seminary). For the first few years, the seminary supported the goals and objectives of the movement. That changed after the dean was ousted and a new faculty member became dean and then president of the school. The new dean/president was committed to the neoevangelical rejection of separatism, and he eventually became a firm supporter of cooperative evangelism that partnered with gospel-deniers. He used the seminary’s power to threaten pastors who would not participate in these cooperative evangelistic endeavors. He and others downgraded the importance of premillennialism, and they argued that some version of “progressive creationism” (which amounted to theistic evolution) was compatible with the biblical creation accounts.

These same attitudes also began to surface within the CBFMS and then within the Eastern Regional of the CBA. Those who held the new attitudes were determined to control the whole Conservative Baptist Movement and to bring it into line with their thinking. They intended to force many of the older leaders (such as Clearwaters) to comply or be ruined. On one occasion the Denver Seminary president even conducted a private seminar in Minnesota, instructing sympathetic pastors how to take over the Minnesota Baptist Association. He even had sympathizers in Fourth Baptist Church who worked to oust Clearwaters.

The neoevangelical party talked much about love, but at the very same time they were whispering slanders about the older leaders who still supported

the Portland Manifesto. On one occasion, a henchman of the neoevangelical threatened Clearwaters, claiming that he would produce evidence of wrongdoing unless Clearwaters knuckled under. Clearwaters publicly begged him to tell everything he knew in front of everyone, promising that if he had committed sins then he wanted to apologize for them on the spot. No accusation could be made.

In the long run, neoevangelicals did succeed in controlling the Conservative Baptist Movement. They dismantled older statements favoring separatism, they distanced their institutions from premillennialism and dispensationalism, and they opened the doors to varieties of progressive creationism. They were able to succeed in these things by using the power of their institutions to force pastors to act contrary to their convictions. Finally, the CBF organized another new mission agency, the World Conservative Baptist Mission, to uphold these older commitments. When that happened, the Conservative Baptist Association, influenced by the CBFMS and neoevangelical sympathizers, kicked the new mission out of the movement. This action in turn led the supporters of the new mission to organize a new association, The New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches.

The point of the story is not so much whether separatism, premillennialism, church autonomy, or direct creation are the correct biblical positions. The point is that the movement was originally committed to these positions, and that commitment was subverted by a minority of individuals who saw an opportunity for themselves. Rather than founding institutions that were in sympathy with their beliefs, they took over existing institutions and worked from within, leading them to act contrary to their original commitments. In *The Great Conservative Baptist Compromise* Clearwaters was detailing the original position of the Conservative Baptist Movement, narrating the steps and methods by which that original position was subverted, and defending the older leaders against some of the charges of which they were accused.

Even if *The Great Conservative Baptist Compromise* was not a perfect book (and only one book is perfect), it is hardly the nadir that Olson seems to think. Reasonable and godly men are allowed to defend themselves. Reasonable and godly men are allowed to object when their life’s work is being twisted and turned against them.



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.
