

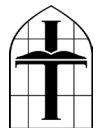
**Come, and Let Us Sweetly Join***Charles Wesley (1707–1788)*

Come, and let us sweetly join,  
 Christ to praise in hymns divine!  
 Give we all, with one accord,  
 Glory to our common Lord;  
 Hands, and hearts, and voices raise;  
 Sing as in the ancient days;  
 Antedate the joys above,  
 Celebrate the feast of love.

Strive we, in affection strive:  
 Let the purer flame revive,  
 Such as in the martyrs glowed,  
 Dying champions for their God:  
 We like them may live and love;  
 Called we are their joys to prove:  
 Saved with them from future wrath;  
 Partners of like precious faith.

Sing we then in Jesus' name,  
 Now as yesterday the same;  
 One in ev'ry time and place,  
 Full for all of truth and grace:  
 We for Christ our master stand,  
 Lights in a benighted land;  
 We our dying Lord confess;  
 We are Jesus' witnesses.

Witnesses that Christ hath died;  
 We with him are crucified:  
 Christ hath burst the bands of death;  
 We his quick'ning Spirit breathe;  
 Christ is now gone up on high;  
 Thither all our wishes fly:  
 Sits at God's right-hand above;  
 There with him we reign in love.



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**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***The IFCA International***Jon Pratt*

Have you ever attended a conference with a large number of people and you were hardly acquainted with anyone there? That was my experience when I visited my first IFCA International annual convention in 2018. On the opening night following the first general preaching session, the IFCA invites everyone to a reception. While hundreds of people were milling around renewing old acquaintances and enjoying the dessert and coffee, I received a warm greeting from the Executive Director himself, Les Lofquist, who served in that role for 20 years. Les has now retired and joined the faculty at Shepherds Theological Seminary, but his warm greeting that evening gave me a glimpse into the kind of fundamentalism the IFCA believes and practices. His welcoming stance was not an aberration among the conference-goers. As I ate meals with folks, manned the Central Seminary booth, and gathered together for the general sessions and breakout seminars, I made many friendships which have continued and grown in subsequent years.

Representatives from Central Seminary attend many regional and national conferences. We do this 1) to introduce our seminary to those who were previously unaware of our existence, 2) to foster relationships with believers who share our same doctrinal commitments and values, and 3) to renew friendships with alumni and supporters.

Since that first 2018 meeting I have represented Central Seminary at the annual IFCA International convention, held this summer in Covington, KY. Besides the three benefits mentioned for attending such a conference—institutional exposure, relationship development, and friendship renewal—I myself have received spiritual encouragement and refreshment from the general session addresses and breakout seminars.

IFCA International was founded in 1930 in Cicero, IL, as the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA) and later changed its name to IFCA International in 1996 to reflect its worldwide focus. Though baptistic in its doctrine, the fellowship actually had its roots in a group of pastors and churches who were opposed to the apostasy in their non-Baptist churches. In 1923 this group formed the American Conference of Undenominational Churches; 7 years later the ACUC joined a group of disaffected Congrega-

tional pastors from the Chicago area (led by Pastor Billy McCarrell) to form the Independent Fundamental Churches of America. McCarrell was elected as the first Executive Secretary of this association. Its primary characteristics included *independency* (individuals and churches could not belong to a denomination) and *fundamentalism* (members must adhere to biblical fundamentalism).

Ninety-four annual meetings later, the IFCA has a membership comprised of nearly 1,000 churches in the US and 3,000 churches outside the US; they also have 1,000 individual members. A few parachurch organizations including 6 Bible colleges, 11 home mission societies, 9 church planting agencies, and 8 foreign mission agencies are officially affiliated as well. Not incidentally, the IFCA also serves as an endorsing agency for military chaplains.

The doctrinal statement, which all members must affirm annually, includes orthodox statements of all the major doctrines of the Christian faith. It also contains strong affirmations of separation from apostasy and worldliness, of complementarianism, cessationism, dispensationalism, and the biblical view of marriage “between one man and one woman (as genetically defined)” ([ifca.org/page/what-we-believe](http://ifca.org/page/what-we-believe)). Furthermore, the statement disapproves of ecumenism, ecumenical evangelism, neo-orthodoxy, and new evangelicalism.

In order to learn a little more of the ethos of the IFCA, it is helpful to note that its three main characteristics include an emphasis on fundamental doctrine, evangelistic zeal, and missionary vision ([ifca.org/page/who-we-are](http://ifca.org/page/who-we-are)). I found these qualities on display in both the theme of this year’s conference (“Fight the Good Fight: Reclaiming Biblical Fundamentalism”) and the exhibitors approved to represent their ministries.

Regarding the conference theme, all of the general session speakers addressed issues related to biblical fundamentalism. I found their approach to this important subject refreshing and reasonable. For example, the opening sermon (based on 2 Corinthians 10:1–5) was delivered by the Executive Director of the IFCA, Richard Bargas; it expressed five aspects of biblical fundamentalism, which he distinguished from “cultural” fundamentalism. These qualities include the following actions and attitudes: 1) responds with the virtues of Christ, meekness and forbearance; 2) knows who the enemy is—Satan; 3) knows how to wage war by using divine power to destroy strongholds; 4) fights with the Lord’s power and not our own; and 5) stands in the confidence of Christ. Another speaker, Dave Deets, cited our own Kevin Bauder from a February *Nick of Time* essay, as he described the kind of fundamentalism we should embrace.

Besides Central Seminary, there were 37 other exhibitors present at the event, and they included many familiar colleges and seminaries such as Ap-

palachian Bible College, Bob Jones University, Calvary University, Southern California Seminary, and Shepherds Theological Seminary. Several mission agencies and evangelism ministries had displays, including Biblical Ministries Worldwide, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Friends of Israel, Slavic Gospel Association, and a number of IFCA-affiliated church planting groups. Each of these exhibitors shared the same three characteristics as the IFCA, and I could see why the conference organizers were happy to support our presence at the annual convention.

While I am not writing to endorse the IFCA as an association our readers should join (after all, I am not a member myself), I think it is helpful for fundamentalists to be aware of organizations that support the doctrines and ethos they would approve. IFCA International is certainly one of those organizations. Their doctrinal position, opportunities for ministry partnerships, encouragement at both the regional and national levels (note: all IFCA members are part of one of the 32 geographic regionals across the country), and theologically-informed resources provide good examples of the benefits IFCA members enjoy. To expand on this last element, the IFCA produces a 50-page printed magazine, *The Voice* (6 issues annually), for each of its members, and they also publish *Chera Fellowship*, a 10-page quarterly magazine for widows and widowers. Both of these magazines are available for free on the IFCA website ([ifca.org/page/publications](http://ifca.org/page/publications)). One can also benefit from two blogs and a bi-weekly podcast, *Advancing the Cause*.

Just as Dr. Bauder concluded his recent essay on the FBFI, I “can’t think of a single unpleasant thing about [this meeting].” The preaching was encouraging, the atmosphere joyful, and the friendships uplifting. And what other conference could provide me with the opportunity to play Candyland, Uno, and Chutes & Ladders with one of our Central students’ children (the Bonebright kids were wonderful!)? I am already looking forward to attending next year’s convention in Arkansas, and I hope to see the children again too.



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This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament 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.

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