

O That the Lord Would Guide My Ways

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

O that the Lord would guide my ways
To keep His statutes still!
O that my God would grant me grace
To know and do His will!

Order my footsteps by Thy word,
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.

Assist my soul, too apt to stray,
A stricter watch to keep;
And, should I e'er forget Thy way,
Restore Thy wand'ring sheep.

Make me to walk in Thy commands;
'Tis a delightful road:
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
Offend against my God.



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In the Nick of Time

The Bible Faculty Summit

Kevin T. Bauder

This past week, Central Seminary was privileged to host the annual Bible Faculty Summit. This meeting has been going on for about thirty years now. It grew out of a collaboration between David Doran and Bob Jones III. Both men led institutions of higher learning, and both wanted to provide ways for their professors of Bible and theology to sharpen one another.

In those days, few fundamentalist schools had sought accreditation. Fewer still encouraged participation in the learned societies such as the Evangelical Theological Society, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, the Society for Biblical Literature, or the American Academy of Religion. Exceptions did exist: Maranatha Baptist Bible College gained regional accreditation at about that time, and schools such as Faith Baptist Bible College and Central Baptist Theological Seminary had professors who participated in the societies. Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary was also publishing a peer-reviewed journal. Still, a need existed for conversation and friendly critique between schools who shared fundamentalist commitments.

The effort was an instant success. When I first heard about the Faculty Summit, I was a doctoral student and church planter in Texas. My first thought was how much I wished I could attend and to interact with the best minds in mainstream fundamentalism.

It was only a few years later that I became a professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. One of the blessings of that employment was that the seminary paid the way for teachers to attend the Faculty Summit every year. The first one I went to was at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, which was then under the presidency of Rolland McCune.

During those years, a different school would volunteer to host the Summit each year. The host school would provide housing and meals for all participants. It would also decide which sister schools to invite. Topics for papers would be approved ahead of time, and anybody was welcome to submit a suggestion.

Naturally, the Summit moved around quite a bit. Besides Detroit, I remember meeting at Bob Jones University, Clearwater Christian College, Piedmont Baptist College, Maranatha Baptist Bible College (later University), Faith Baptist Bible College, International Baptist College, and Northland Baptist Bible College (later University). I also recall meetings at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, and at Calvary Bible College in Kansas City. Participating institutions included most of the schools in mainstream Baptist fundamentalism, plus several interdenominational schools, Presbyterians like Geneva Reformed Seminary, and Wesleyans like God's Bible College.

The meetings of the Summit provided an unprecedented platform for theological conversation among fundamentalists. They also provided an occasion for professors from different schools to form lasting friendships. I am grateful for the individuals who I met and for the relationships that developed mainly because of these exchanges. It was at the Faculty Summit that I first met Rolland McCune, Bob Bell, Ray Pratt, Jonathan Pratt (who is now my dean), Robert McCabe, Philip Brown, Rod Decker, William Combs, Gerald Priest, Clay Nuttall, Carl Martin, Reggie Kimbro, and many others. Knowing these men has enriched my life, and I am deeply grateful for them.

Several years ago, it appeared that the Summit meetings were flagging. The problem was the lack of any ongoing organization or structure. The continuity of the meetings depended upon institutions volunteering to plan and host the event year by year. Thanks to the energetic efforts of Jeff Straub and Mark Ward (among others), a permanent committee was created to plan the meetings year by year. Since then, most of the work has been done by Mark Ward.

Under Mark's leadership, the Summit broadened its constituency slightly. A few pastors with research PhDs have begun to participate. Some postgraduate students from our schools have presented their current research. We have included more teachers from missionary schools in foreign countries. Simultaneously, the standards for presenting papers have tightened. These moves have been carefully thought through, and they have been effective in improving the meetings.

Now Mark has stepped down from that responsibility. This year, the group asked itself whether the ongoing meetings were still necessary. After all, most of our institutions interact with far more outside influences than they used to. Most of us are accredited. Most of our faculty members are active in learned societies, and most of them publish through a variety of venues.

The result of that discussion was that we do need to continue the Bible Faculty Summit. Even though other meetings are available to our professors, there is still great value in sharing perspectives and concerns

that are unique to our little corner of the ecclesiastical world. We still value the opportunity to engage in mutual learning and critique, and we still want to grow personal and professional relationships between our institutions.

We do not know exactly the form that the Faculty Summit will take in the coming years. As with all enterprises, money is a concern. To this point, the host institution has had to bear the costs. When I was president of Central Seminary, we hosted the Bible Faculty Summit on two different occasions. That was a long time ago, but even then, the cost was over ten thousand dollars. The figure is much higher now. That is a substantial investment for schools whose financial margins are razor-thin to begin with. Furthermore, some schools can no longer provide transportation to the event for their professors.

So I'll make a plea. If you know of someone who wants to promote responsible scholarship within the most conservative colleges, universities, and seminaries, and who has the financial capacity to provide serious help, please ask them to contact me. I would love to connect them with the planners of the Bible Faculty Summit. Their support will, in the long run, be a blessing to every church pastored by a graduate of a participating institution.

In the meanwhile, I'm glad that the Summit will be continuing. I have presented papers at different meetings, and I have regularly appreciated the critique. Every time I attend, I hear papers that introduce me to aspects of our disciplines that are entirely new to me. I enjoy renewing old friendships and networking with colleagues. I love seeing the new crop of professors joining our institutions year by year. These are all reasons to continue a good work.



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.
