

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Occasional Essays and Other Stuff for Christian Students Presented by the President of
Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

"...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

May 15, 2009

Time to Speak Up

Kevin T. Bauder

On April 6-7, the South Regional Fellowship of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International met at The Wilds, a Christian camp in Brevard, North Carolina. One of the addresses was delivered by Pastor Dan Sweatt of Berean Baptist Church in Lilburn, Georgia. Pastor Sweatt's speech was entitled "Young and Restless." At this writing it is available at SermonAudio.com. It is also featured on the website of Pastor Sweatt's church.

The purpose of the speech is to encourage young men to remain in fundamentalism. Pastor Sweatt's thesis is that fundamentalist leaders need to be the kind of people whom young men would want to be like. So far, so good.

Pastor Sweatt is aware that younger fundamentalists today are following people like MacArthur, Piper, Dever, Sproul, Mahaney, Mohler, and even Driscoll. The obvious question is, why do young men *want* to be like Piper et al, but they do *not* want to be like many of the fundamentalist leaders to whom they have been exposed? This is the question that Pastor Sweatt really needs to answer.

Instead, Pastor Sweatt attempts to deflect criticism away from the fundamentalist leadership. He suggests that many of the current criticisms stem from a caricature based upon a mistaken impression of past fundamentalist "giants," such as Jack Hyles, John R. Rice, Bob Jones, Jr.,

Lester Roloff, and Bob Gray. These men, says Sweatt, were larger than life. In their defense he opines that it is impossible to judge a generation unless we lived through it.

Sweatt insists, however, that under these fundamentalist leaders, tens of thousands of souls were saved. Great churches were built. Fundamentalist institutions were filled. Missionaries and evangelists were sent to the field and there was a passion to reach the lost. Evidently, Pastor Sweatt believes that these leaders, whatever their “excesses,” were justified by the results that they achieved.

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Pastor Sweatt suggests that we must live through a generation in order to judge it, but this notion cannot be applied with any consistency. If we cannot judge Hyles, Rice, Jones, Roloff, or Gray, then we cannot judge Ockenga, Carnell, Henry, Lindsell, or Graham. For that matter, Pastor Sweatt is not even permitted to judge people like Calvin, Beza, Knox, Edwards, or Spurgeon.

Pastor Sweatt hopes to excuse the excesses (a better word is “brutality”) of these earlier fundamentalist leaders by appealing to the results of their ministries. The numerical success of fundamentalism, however, was never as impressive as that of the New Evangelicalism. The Graham crusades, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship certainly reached tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of people. When faced with those successes, though, fundamentalists have always been quick to point out that faithfulness matters more than results.

I am old enough to remember every one of the “giants” on Pastor Sweatt’s list. I watched them during their public ministries. Their leadership and spiritual insight never impressed me. These were not the men I wanted to be like then, and I do not want to be like them today. Indeed, when I was a twenty-something, they and their kind were the greatest hindrance to my becoming a fundamentalist. Along the way, however, I discovered that such men did not and do not represent mainstream, historic fundamentalism. They may have been “giants” in terms of their public image, but they contributed little to biblical fundamentalism. Indeed, they are among the very heavy liabilities that fundamentalism has had to bear.

I am grateful to have been reared in a version of fundamentalism that was led by men who refused to become “giants.” You have probably never heard their names, because they were not trying to create or control empires. They were willing to stand up to bullies, however, and in some cases they were savaged by the very “giants” whom Pastor Sweatt identifies. They were men of faith and strength, but also men of kindness and gentleness. They were genuinely and biblically meek. They fought the battles of their day, but they did it for the most part without losing the sweetness of their spirits or the freshness of their walk with Christ. They were honest and fair and charitable, but they had backbone when they needed it. They revered the Word of God, and when they preached, they delighted to expound the Scriptures. As a young man I

wanted to be like those leaders, and I still do. I chose their fundamentalism because it was a fundamentalism worth saving.

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Besides attempting to deflect the criticisms of the younger fundamentalists, Pastor Sweatt engages in an astonishing diatribe against Calvinism. He actually suggests that Calvinism is going to force a reopening of the question of biblical inerrancy. He argues that Calvinists refuse to acknowledge the authority of Scripture because they do not believe the Bible until it is interpreted through their theological system.

Besides claiming that Calvinism attacks the authority of Scripture, Pastor Sweatt also avers that Calvinism attacks the Bible's clarity. He thinks that Calvinism lures people away from the simplicity that is in Christ. Calvinists take away the Book, says Pastor Sweatt. They also take away the gospel.

Pastor Sweatt raises still more objections to Calvinism. He claims that it is incapable of supporting church growth and evangelism, and therefore cannot produce a durable movement. He states that it makes God the author of sin. Furthermore, he believes that it poses problems in dealing with people who lack assurance of salvation.

Why does Pastor Sweatt launch this diatribe against Calvinism? Why does he think that it is relevant? Part of the answer is obviously his own dislike of Calvinism, but there has to be more of a reason than that. Evidently, his rationale is that the men to whom the younger fundamentalists are being drawn—men like Piper, Dever, Mahaney, Mohler, MacArthur, and Sproul—are all Calvinists. Pastor Sweatt knows that if he can discredit Calvinism, then he can discredit the most influential wing of conservative evangelicalism.

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Pastor Sweatt fails to accomplish that task. His words reveal that he simply does not know what Calvinism is. He has not learned its history. He does not grasp its implications. Lack of knowledge is the most charitable explanation for Pastor Sweatt's accusation that Calvinists reject biblical authority.

It seems never to have occurred to Pastor Sweatt that people might choose Calvinism precisely because they think it is what the Bible teaches. They are drawn to it, not because it is systematic or philosophical, but because they see it as biblical. Every Calvinist I know thinks of himself as a Biblicist.

The same is true of every Arminian I know. Neither side in this debate is conscious of attempting to force a theological grid upon the scriptures. Neither side sees itself rejecting the

authority of the Bible. Both sides cling to their theology—often tenaciously—precisely because they think that they discover it in Scripture.

Therefore, it is a grave error to charge that Calvinism (or Arminianism) is going to reopen the inerrancy debate. By making this accusation, Pastor Sweatt is stepping well across the line of Christian decorum. To assert that Calvinists “take away the Book,” and that they also “take away the gospel,” is a violation of the Ninth Commandment.

The problem is not that Pastor Sweatt rejects Calvinism. Plenty of good men do. The problem is not that Pastor Sweatt wishes to argue about Calvinism. Such arguments can and should be a form of fellowship through which we strengthen one another. No, the problem is that Pastor Sweatt has used his privileges as an invited speaker to misrepresent and falsely accuse his brethren. He wants to treat an acceptable difference as if it were a heresy.

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The purpose of this essay is not to speak to Pastor Sweatt. Instead, I want to speak to sensible fundamentalists about the phenomenon that Pastor Sweatt represents. My intention is not to call Pastor Sweatt to repentance, but to ask how fundamentalists ought to respond to this kind of behavior. I wish to address two kinds of readers, and for those readers I have two distinct messages.

First, I want to reassure worried younger fundamentalists that Pastor Sweatt does not represent historic, mainstream fundamentalism. The question is not how popular his brand of fundamentalism is today. From the perspective of history, Pastor Sweatt’s fundamentalism is an aberration. It is not really fundamentalism at all. It is fundamentalist-plus. It is hyper-fundamentalism. It is “everythingism.” I have been watching this version of fundamentalism for forty years or so. It is filled with demagogues and bullies. I want nothing to do with it.

Fortunately, I do not have to look very far to find a better, more biblically faithful, and more historic species of fundamentalism. It is alive and well in several places around Minneapolis and throughout Minnesota. I’ve seen it in Wisconsin and around Detroit. Iowa has lots of it, centered just north of the capital city. It has been spotted near Philadelphia and in Virginia Beach and in the Appalachian mountains. Reports have it flourishing in Arizona and Colorado. It shows up here and there in the toxic climate of Illinois, and I’ve found it on the shores of Lake Erie. Experts even report that it is thriving in Greenville.

If you are a younger person listening to Pastor Sweatt, please do not think that you have to accept his perspectives in order to be considered a fundamentalist. Furthermore, if you are a Calvinist listening to Pastor Sweatt, please do not think that fundamentalism has no room for you. On the contrary, fundamentalism has always had a strongly Calvinistic strand, and it always will.

Whether you are Calvinistic or not, I am one fundamentalist leader who is willing to offer my hand to you in fellowship. I encourage every other thinking fundamentalist to do the same. Furthermore, I want you to know that there are institutions in which it is safe to be a Calvinist. The seminary at which I preside is one such place. It is also a safe place *not* to be a Calvinist. It is even a place in which it is safe (and fun) to debate about Calvinism and lots of other questions.

As I said, my first purpose was to address younger fundamentalists. My second purpose is to address my generation of fundamentalist leaders, and especially the leadership of the Fundamentalist Baptist Fellowship International.

Gentlemen, we did not create this problem. I am absolutely certain that the leadership of the FBFI did not invite Pastor Sweatt to deliver a rant against Calvinism. I can only imagine how they must have cringed as they heard Pastor Sweatt's address unfolding.

We did not create the problem, but it is up to us to solve it. It happened on our watch. If we do not say something to make this right, then the damage becomes our fault and the opprobrium becomes ours to bear. We shall have no one to blame but ourselves when we see a mass exodus of younger men from fundamentalism.

I am thankful that there is room within fundamentalism to overlook mistakes and to forgive sins. I am grateful for other fundamentalist leaders who have been charitable and kind with me when I have done stupid things (and I have!), and who have extended genuine forgiveness when I have sinned (and I have!). Having been the recipient of grace from the Lord and His people, I do not wish to see Pastor Sweatt dismissed abruptly and abusively.

Nevertheless, Pastor Sweatt has placed us in a very difficult situation. In a public venue, as a spokesman for fundamentalism, Pastor Sweatt has impugned the doctrinal integrity of his brethren. He has made charges without evidence and uttered recriminations that are simply false. Those of us who are leaders within fundamentalism have a stewardship, and we cannot afford simply to sweep this scandal under the rug.

The need to confront the problem is all the more acute if any of us regard Pastor Sweatt as a friend. Younger fundamentalists want to know whether we fear God or men. We cannot say that we believe in rebuking and separating from erring brethren, which we clearly practice to our Left, and then ignore public error when it occurs among our friends. If we are that inconsistent, then young leaders are right to dismiss us as hypocrites.

The leadership of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International has been presented with a problem, but that problem is also an opportunity. The fellowship meets in June. This meeting provides an occasion to display the strength of our character, the very thing that will establish our credibility with young leaders. They want to know how we will respond to Pastor Sweatt's tirade. They want to know whether the FBFI is dominated by his vision of fundamentalism, or

whether it is staking out a position that is more doctrinally and practically balanced. Frankly, I would like to know myself.

Within the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International I have no power at all. The only thing that I can do is to appeal to the members of the board, whom I believe to be men of integrity and good will. Pastor Sweatt has handed you an opportunity to show what you really believe. If you wish to model the kind of fundamentalism that really is worth saving, then the time has come. ✘

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses. New subscriptions to this electronic newsletter can be requested at inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu.

The Father

Josuah Sylvester (1563–1618)

Alpha and Omega, God alone :
Eloi, My God, the Holy-One;
Whose Power is Omnipotence:
Whose Wisedome is Omni-science:
Whose Beeing is All Sovereigne Blisse:
Whose Worke Perfection's Fulnesse is;
Under All things, not under-cast;
Over All things, not over-plac't;

Within All things, not there included;
Without All things, not thence excluded:
Above All, over All things raining;
Beneath All, All things aye sustayning:
Without All, All conteyning sole:
Within All, filling-full the Whole:
Within All, no where comprehended;
Without All, no where more extended;
Under, by nothing over-topped:
Over, by nothing under-propped:

Unmov'd, Thou mov'st the World about;
Unplac't, Within it, or Without:
Unchanged, time-lesse, Time Thou changest:
Th' unstable, Thou, still stable, rangest;

No outward Force, nor inward Fate,
Can Thy dread Essence alterate:

To-day, To-morrow, yester-day,
With Thee are One, and instant aye;
Aye undivided, ended never:
To-day, with Thee, indures for-ever.

Thou, Father, mad'st this mighty Ball;
Of nothing thou created'st All,
After th' Idea of thy Minde,
Conferring Forme to every kinde.
Thou wert, Thou art, Thou wilt be ever;
And Thine Elect, rejectest never. ✠

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