

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 today's 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.”

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Captain's Log Part One: Ship to Shore

Kevin T. Bauder

Once upon a time there was a young ship's captain named Apores. He was new to his ship, having just completed Command School. He knew a good deal about detecting pirates and how to fire canons, but not much about navigation. In Command School he had been told that there were stars, and he knew that he ought to steer by them, but he had no real idea of how that was to be done. Mostly, the captains whom he knew steered in the wake of other captains, and they in the wake of yet others. He had heard about the Old Captains, and how they sought to navigate directly by the stars, but he had never learned the craft himself.

As a new captain, Apores supposed that he would imitate his fellow-captains. He would find a successful captain of a large vessel and would steer as that captain steered. Before he had properly embarked, however, he was confronted with a problem.

His ship was an older vessel, and all of the crew had been recruited under other captains. Those captains had all steered differently, for each of them followed some different successful captain. Each crewman wished the ship to be steered just as the captain who recruited him had done.

The senior officers had been recruited by Captain Pragmatius. They could remember days when the ship's berths had been crowded. In those days, they had a great deal of fun attracting new passengers. Pragmatius had kept order aboard the ship by making sure that the crew stayed busy. The officers hoped that Apores would sail as Pragmatius had done.

Some of the crew had been enlisted by Captain Sympatus. A tender man, he could never bring himself to enforce order. He was always concerned for every crew member, however. If a sailor got a blister from hauling the ropes or a splinter from the yardarm, Sympatus was sure to take time to commiserate. Some of the crew hoped that Captain Apores would be like that, visiting their quarters every day and enquiring after their needs and wants.

The most recent members of the crew had been brought aboard by Captain Demagogus. While he made sure the crew got good rations, he had governed the ship with an iron hand. The crew had finally threatened mutiny, and Demagogus wisely abandoned ship. Nevertheless, he left behind him a few crew members who had a taste for good rations and a desire for an orderly vessel.

What Apores quickly learned was this: whatever direction he tried to take the ship, whatever rations he had prepared for the sailors, and however he set the sail and lashed the rigging, at least two thirds of the crew was bound to grumble. If he attempted to sail through waters into which none of the previous captains had ventured, the entire crew would come close to mutiny. He could make no move and chart no course without some sailor abandoning ship.

Apores decided that the solution lay in getting advanced training in navigation. He went to the most renowned captains of his day, men who commanded imposing warships in the Big Fleet. What he discovered was that those men also navigated by following other captains. The captains they followed, however, were not captains of the Fleet, but pirates. Without realizing it, they were sailing their ships directly into the buccaneers' harbor, where they would be easy prey.

The situation was desperate. Then one night, when all seemed lost, Apores lifted up his eyes and saw the stars above him. In a moment his resolve hardened. He must learn to navigate for himself. He must learn to follow the stars, and not to follow captains who were following captains who were following captains. Most of all, he must learn where the Admiral of the Fleet wanted his ships to be sailed.

But the sky, though dazzling, was terribly bewildering. How could one make sense of it? By what star should he steer?

He found himself driven back into the *Mariner's Handbook*, originally authored by the Admiral of the Fleet. There he found new answers—new to him, at least, because they answered questions he had never before thought to ask. He found a clear description of the Destination—so clear that his heart began to break with longing for it. He found words about the stars, and the Star. These were words that his peers had not heeded for generations, given as they were to following other captains.

He also opened the logs of the Old Captains. What he discovered there was breathtaking. These were captains indeed, ancient mariners who had set the prows of their vessels upon the Star and had sailed straight into uncharted waters. They had fought pirates and weathered storms. And they had reached the Destination.

Apores was filled with admiration for these Old Captains, because they loved the Star and the Destination and the Admiral of the Fleet. He longed to follow them, for to follow them was to follow the Star and to reach the Destination.

But then he would look upon his leaky ship with its ragtag crew. Could he ask them to sail with him into the high seas? Could he bring them under the dangers of rapacious pillagers and raging weather? And his heart would fail, for he knew of no other ships that sailed by the Star. How could he be right, when no others saw what he saw? How could he ask his crew to risk so much when he was still uncertain?

Some years had gone by, and the crew had now grown accustomed to Apores. Many young sailors had even enlisted under his watch. Apores had learned to love the leaky old vessel. He had talked to its crew about the Star and the Destination. A few seemed interested, but to most it seemed as if he spoke a foreign tongue. The ship was still drifting. If Apores set sail for the star, the crew might mutiny. The ship might be destroyed. He was himself uncertain of truths that he had but newly learned.

And so he became convinced that the ship would be better off with another captain, one who at least would sail the vessel no worse than it had been sailed before him. He spied an island, and thought that he might land there. He imagined that, untroubled with the burdens of leadership, he could gaze upon the stars, and especially the Star. He could ponder the words of the Admiral of the Fleet as they were written in the Mariner's Handbook. He could read further from the logs of the Old Captains. And perhaps after a time he could find a coracle, and by himself begin to paddle toward the Destination.

Apores told the ship to put him ashore on the island. Their parting was tearful, more so for Apores even than for the ship's crew. And there, surrounded by his books and charts, and under the starry night sky, he pondered the Destination and sought to discover how best one might follow the Star. ✕

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.

The Pursuite

Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)

Lord! What a busie, restles thing
Hast thou made man?
Each day, and houre he is on wing,
Rests not a span;
Then having lost the Sunne, and light
By clouds surpriz'd
He keepes a Commerce in the night
With aire disguis'd;
Hadst thou given to this active dust
A state untir'd,
The lost Sonne had not left the huske
Nor home desir'd;
That was thy secret, and it is
Thy mercy too,
For when all failes to bring to blisse,
Then, this must doe.
Ah! Lord! And what a Purchase will that be
To take us sick, that sound would not take thee? ✕

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