

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."

November 7, 2008

What Next?

Kevin T. Bauder

The election is over. The candidate who was favored by most Christian conservatives did not win. So what comes next?

In one way, the election of Barack Obama is very good news for biblical Christians. It gives us the opportunity to demonstrate how our Christianity affects real life. We simply have to live what we say we believe.

For example, we say that we believe in the providence of God. Without ever negating genuine human freedom, God superintends and governs all that occurs. His will is sovereign, not only within the world of nature but also within the world of human events. Nothing ever happens without His knowledge and permission, and He permits nothing that does not advance His plan, display His glory, and (at least eventually) produce great good for His people.

Specifically, God is sovereign in setting up nations and appointing their rulers. He raised up Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of discipline for Judah. He humbled Nebuchadnezzar when that most powerful of kings became arrogant. Then God raised him up again and established him on his throne. God appoints people like Cyrus, Alexander, and even Nero. He exalts them for a moment and then topples them at His pleasure. We should never fall into the conceit of thinking that we simply choose our own leaders.

Each ruler is appointed by God, which means that each is a minister of God for good. They may not always be good people, but we are better off with them than we would be without them. Nothing is worse than anarchy. Without laws and the power to enforce them, the powerful are free to prey upon the weak. Restraint vanishes and only brutality remains. Even a very wicked ruler who persecutes the church is better than no ruler at all. Diocletian tried to stamp out Christianity, but he also maintained the very conditions that (humanly) allowed it to survive.

Because civil authorities are also God's appointees, Christians owe them certain duties. First, we owe them our prayers. In fact, we are explicitly commanded to pray for kings and for all those who are in authority. Our opportunity to enjoy quiet and peaceable lives is directly connected to these prayers.

Christians also owe submission and obedience to civil authorities. Because their offices are established by God, they have a right to our honor, fear, tribute, and custom. At minimum, the office itself must be treated with deference and respect, regardless of the worthiness of the individual who holds the office.

Respect for the office is not merely a moral concern, but also a pragmatic one. In order to perform rightly the functions of the office, the person who occupies it must have the ability to govern. Once the office is held in contempt, then the official either loses this ability (thus permitting anarchy to flourish) or else sustains it through the use of force.

Something like this has happened in the recent history of the American presidency. William Jefferson Clinton brought scandal to the office—not so much through his philandering, which has been typical of many powerful men, but through his willingness to perjure himself in order to cover it up. Many conservatives saw an opportunity in the president's weakness. In order to thwart his agenda, they attacked his person. Whether or not this strategy was justified, the net result was a weakening of the office of president. Personal attacks upon the president turned out to be an excellent way of thwarting presidential leadership. During the subsequent presidency of George W. Bush, political discourse has been transformed from disagreement over the president's policies into abuse of the president's person.

This trajectory has to be stopped, and conservatives are in the ideal position to stop it. President Obama's policies may be good or they may be bad, but he must be treated as an honorable man. More than that, his office must be given the respect and deference that it needs and deserves. He must be given the opportunity to succeed, knowing that he has the loyalty and support of the American people behind him—and that includes American Christians.

Does this mean that we are obligated to support specific policies when we believe them to be wrong? The answer to that question is an obvious "No." But we must resurrect the lost notion that was once called "loyal opposition." We will no doubt oppose certain policies, perhaps vigorously. But opposition to the policy must not be turned into opposition to the man or

opposition to the office. The president has to be left with the ability to govern. If he loses that ability, then the entire country loses, including Christian conservatives.

The presidency tends to run through cycles. The scandals of Richard Nixon were followed by the ineptness of Jimmy Carter, but Ronald Reagan brought dignity back to the office. Now the scandals of Bill Clinton have been followed by the ineptness of George W. Bush, and we are waiting for the man who will again raise the office of the presidency to its rightful dignity. Perhaps Barack Obama is that man. Certainly he must be given the opportunity to succeed.

We do not know how President Obama will govern. We do know that some of his proposals will be objectionable, and we conservatives shall oppose them. Nevertheless, it is time to remember that we have no right to order a nation if we cannot discipline ourselves, and self-discipline means acting with restraint even when facing strong disagreement.

When Barack Obama is inaugurated, he will not simply be the president of the Democrats, the liberals, or the minorities. He will be the president of the entire nation, the president of these United States. He will be my president, and I intend to fulfill my biblical obligations toward him. ✕

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.

An Acclamation

Sir John Davies (c. 1569-1626)

Oh what is Man, great Maker of mankind,
That Thou to him so great respect dost bear,
That Thou adornst him with so bright a mind,
Mak'st him a king, and even an angel's peer!

Oh what a lively life, what heavenly power,
What spreading virtue, what a sparkling fire!
How great, how plentiful, how rich a dower
Dost Thou within this dying flesh inspire!

Thou leav'st Thy print in other works of Thine,
But Thy whole image Thou in Man hast writ;
There cannot be a creature more divine,
Except, like Thee, it should be infinit.

But it exceeds man's thought, to think how high
God hath rais'd Man, since God a man became:
The angels do admire this mystery,
And are astonisht when they view the same.✠

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