

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."

October 23, 2009

We Interrupt This Series

Kevin T. Bauder

Sometimes ministry gets in the way of work. I'm not complaining though, because that's exactly the way it should be. If our work is not directed toward and interruptible by ministry to people, then it has become an idol indeed.

Medieval mystic Walter Hilton wrestled with this phenomenon. Somewhere—I believe in his *Scale of Perfection*—he pondered the desirability of the contemplative life over against that of the active life. In the end, he argued for what he called the "meddled way," the middle path. He offered the observation that, if we are on our knees in prayer, and a brother or sister interrupts us with a need, we should respond just as if the Lord Jesus had interrupted us Himself.

By the way, I like the medieval mystics. At least, I like some of them. There is a reason that the older Fundamentalists used to read Thomas à Kempis. And if you enjoy Tozer, then you are getting nothing but a modern paraphrase of the medievals.

That's beside the point, however. The point is that my work is being interrupted by ministry. That is why there is no *In the Nick of Time* on Fundamentalism this week.

Wait. Another digression. We who are vocational ministers need to plan for our work to be interrupted by ministry. We need to build ministry interruptions into our schedules. I work in a Christian institution (Central Baptist Theological Seminary) that is housed by a Christian church (Fourth Baptist Church) of which I am a member. I could literally go for months on end and never have a serious conversation with an unbeliever. In fact, other than the supermarket and the gas station attendants, I would never even talk to an unbeliever.

I have to plan to make contact with non-Christians. For example, I have become a chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol (the auxiliary of the United States Air Force). Chaplaincy is attractive to me, not because I get to wear a uniform or pin ribbons on my chest, but because it puts me in direct contact with unbelievers. It leads to serious conversations, often of a spiritual nature.

For the same reason, Roy Beacham (our Old Testament professor) volunteers as a police chaplain. This ministry gives him access into the lives of police officers from the bottom of the department to the top. It also puts him in direct contact with people from the community who are experiencing definite needs. It's a wonderful door of ministry for him.

Some churches try to program ministry by having a calling night or some such event. Calling is not bad (and it still works better than some suggest), but it allows little opportunity to develop relationships with unsaved people and to become involved in their lives. Perhaps we should stop looking at "confrontational" evangelism and "friendship" evangelism as mutually exclusive options.

Anyway, back to my main point. The ministry with which my work is being interrupted today is *not* directly ministry to the unsaved. It is ministry on another continent. It is the ministry of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Romania.

Central Seminary established a work in Romania in the early 1990s, shortly after the collapse of Communism. We have operated a campus in Arad, Romania, for a decade and a half. We began by offering a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies and then established a Master of Divinity program. We are now training Romanian professors through the Ph.D. level.

Over the years, our students have typically been men who are already pastors—sometimes of as many as five or six churches. Romanian pastors rarely minister in a single church because there is a shortage of pastors and an inability on the part of the churches to support them. Needless to say, they are busy men.

Most of them have also been men who survived Communism. They came to us with little biblical or theological training, but with tremendous spiritual depth. From the very beginning, we have taken the attitude that our work in Romania is an exercise in mutual learning. We can teach doctrine and Bible to the Romanian pastors. They teach us what it means to walk with God.

We've carefully tried not to export our Americanism to Romania. The Romanian Baptists managed to endure the persecution of both the Nazis and the Communists. They have their own forms, traditions, customs, and hymnody. They really don't need to know how we do church over here—especially in view of the disaster that we Americans have made out of Christianity. The last thing that Romanian Christianity needs is Americanism.

In fact, American consumerism is doing what Communism could not do. It is destroying the churches. For the first time, Romanians have been tempted to shift their worship to appeal to the worshipper. This is occurring at the very moment when the appetites of the worshippers themselves are being debased by Western influences. The effect upon Romanian Christianity has been devastating.

Still, Romanian Baptists have an honorable heritage of serving the Lord and upholding His name. Even when the Communists attempted to manipulate the Baptist leadership, the rank-and-file stayed true to their Lord. Many times they paid a terrible price.

When we arrived in Romania, we found Christians who were devout and sincere but poorly instructed in the text of Scripture. Over the past fifteen years, God has allowed us to train a significant

proportion of the Baptist pastors in Romania: at the last count, nearly twenty percent. Not all of our graduates have ended up as we wish that they would (which school could ever claim *that?*), but the great bulk of them are doing a faithful work for the Lord.

This Sunday, October 25, the Romanian campus of Central Baptist Theological Seminary will graduate (their word is *absolve*) more than twenty pastors from our programs. We rejoice that God has allowed us to pursue this ministry. In fact, we wonder whether it may not turn out to be the most important thing we've ever done. Certainly, it is a ministry that is well worth pursuing, even if it means interrupting our normal work. ✠

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 Prayer

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

My Soul doth pant tow'rds thee
My God, Source of eternal life:
Flesh fights with me,
Oh end the strife
And part us, that in peace I may
Unclay
My wearied spirit, and take
My flight to thy eternal Spring;
Where for his sake
Who is my King,
I may wash all my tears away
That day.
Thou Conqueror of Death,
Glorious triumpher o're the Grave,
Whose holy breath
Was spent to save
Lost Mankind; make me to be stil'd
Thy Child,
And take me when I dye,
And go unto my dust, my Soul
Above the sky
With Saints enroll,
That in thy arms for ever I
May lye. Amen. ✠

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