

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 30, 2009

We Interrupt This Series, Part Doi

I'm Back

Kevin T. Bauder

Romanians know how to hold a graduation service. Combined with a Sunday morning worship service, the commencement lasted, non-stop, somewhere north of four hours. It featured two full-length sermons and a half-dozen or more exhortations and extended testimonies, including one in which the Old Testament professor quoted the entire first psalm in Hebrew from memory. A mixed choir and a mandolin orchestra each presented three musical selections. The service, which ended at 1:00 PM, was followed by a formal dinner and then an afternoon service at 4:00. Uncharacteristically, the Romanians kept the afternoon service under two hours in length, but compensated with another feast afterwards.

Twenty-one men received seminary degrees. These men were almost all pastors, and they came from all across the country of Romania. They minister in different contexts: some to Romanians, some to Hungarians, some to the Roma. A few of them are assistant pastors or co-pastors of large churches, but most of them pastor multiple congregations.

Most Baptists in Romania are affiliated with that nation's Baptist Union. American missionaries often prefer to limit their contact with Baptist Union pastors. As an educational institution, however, we have chosen to train pastors of Baptist Union churches. The line between Union and unregistered churches was not clear, even under communism. One pastor might be ministering to Baptist Union churches and unregistered churches at the same time. After the dictatorship was overthrown, virtually all of the unregistered churches entered the Baptist Union. Today, Romania has few unaffiliated Baptist churches except those that have been organized under foreign (usually American) auspices.

In fact, Romanian law makes unaffiliated churches impossible. Only recognized church bodies have a legal right to hold property or perform “churchly” functions such as baptism and communion. These laws are not always enforced, but they are on the books. In order to organize unaffiliated churches, missionaries often register them as “religious associations,” a separate, non-church category under Romanian law. Most Romanian Baptist pastors view this tactic as deceitful and unethical, so they prefer to maintain a connection with the Baptist Union.

Communism kept Western influences out of Romania. One of those influences was liberal theology, which was almost absent among Romanian Baptists. Over the past decade or so, however, some pastors (including a few of our early graduates) have sought postgraduate training in non-evangelical institutions. The result is that non-conservative theologies are just beginning to show themselves, leaving the Romanian Baptist Union in about the position in which Northern Baptists in America found themselves before 1920.

Central Seminary trains its students to spot liberal theology and to resist denominationalism and ecclesiastical power-mongering. For that reason, we are very unpopular with some Baptist Union leaders. Our rejection of Arminian theology and our advocacy of dispensational premillennialism make us even less popular.

The Baptist Union operates its own seminary across the country in Bucharest. While it recently opened graduate programs, that seminary has typically functioned at the level of a Bible college or even institute. It has been theologically vague and exegetically weak. Graduates of the Baptist Union seminary will often come to Central Seminary after they graduate. They know that we will teach them to handle the Bible.

In our history, American fundamentalists lost the battle with liberalism almost everywhere that they encountered it. There are exceptions, however. One of them is Minnesota, where R. V. Clearwaters and Minnesota Baptists managed to save not only the faith, but also the furniture. We would like to give Romanian Baptists an opportunity to keep their associational structures as well as their theological integrity.

Monday after graduation we drove into Serbia, where we met Ondrej Franka. Dr. Franka pastors a Baptist church outside of Novi Sad, and he is the president of the Baptist Union of Serbia. Interestingly enough, Dr. Franka was trained at evangelical institutions in the United States—Moody, Trinity, and Westminster. He is the rarest of all things in Eastern Europe: a Baptist who is intelligently conservative, non-Arminian, and dispensational.

The Serbian Baptist Union comprises only about seventy churches, concentrated mainly in the northern part of the country. Under Dr. Franka’s leadership, these churches have set the goal of planting ten new congregations over five years. Their church planting efforts will concentrate in the region south of the capital, Belgrade.

Dr. Franka also hopes to reestablish a training institution for pastors. The Baptist Union used to operate a seminary, but the school had to be closed, ostensibly for doctrinal deviation. Dr. Franka would like to see a school opened that would start at the institute level and eventually progress to the baccalaureate and graduate levels. He is trusting the Lord for help from America to make the school a reality. If such a training institution can be opened, it could become a center for conservatism, eternal security, and dispensationalism.

Of course, working with the Baptist Union in Serbia would be a step beyond what Central Seminary does in Romania. We work with Baptist Union pastors, but not with the Union itself. Pastor Franka is

hoping for assistance that will give the Baptist Union of Serbia its own pastors' school. Any institution that takes up this challenge will be working directly with the Serbian Baptist Union itself.

Into the 1980s it seemed impossible that the gospel could ever have free course in Eastern Europe. Then came the revolutions of 1989. At this moment, effective doors of ministry are wide open in many formerly communist countries. To be permitted to work in those fields is a remarkable blessing indeed. ✠

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.

On the Conversion of S. Paul

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

Full of wrath, his threatning breath
Belching nought, but chains and death:
Saul was arrested in his way
By a voice and a light,
That if a thousand dayes
Should joyn rayes
To beautifie one day,
It would not shew so glorious and so bright.
On his amazed eyes it night did fling,
That day might break within;
And by those beams of Faith
Make him of a childe of wrath
Become a vessel full of glory.
Lord curb us in our dark and sinful way,
We humbly pray,
When we down horrid precipices run
With feet that thirst to be undone,
That this may be our story.
Allelujah. ✠

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