

# 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."

January 1, 2010

Intermission

### The Future of the Bible College

Kevin T. Bauder

**B**ible colleges are being pinched these days. Many collegians are choosing to remain at home and attend community colleges. Others are opting for state universities. Of those who go off to Christian schools, a higher percentage than ever are choosing liberal arts colleges. The focus of ministerial training has shifted away from colleges and toward seminaries.

The question is being asked: Do Bible colleges still have a place? If they do, then what shape should they take?

Some Bible colleges are responding to this question by increasing their offerings in fields that are further and further from biblical education. They are offering programs in education, aviation, nursing, business, and a variety of other disciplines. To the extent that Bible colleges have pursued this strategy, they have begun to metamorphose into liberal arts colleges. Their approach seems to entail the recognition that the true Bible college has outlived its usefulness.

I disagree. I believe that the Bible college can and should still occupy an important role as a service organization to local churches. In order to be genuinely useful, however, Bible colleges are going to have to clarify what sort of education they intend to offer. They are going to have to present a viable alternative, not only to Christian liberal arts colleges and universities, but also to secular institutions.

Most obviously, Bible colleges must play to their strength, and that strength is biblical instruction. It goes without saying that good biblical instruction is (almost?) completely absent from secular institutions. More relevantly, Christian universities and Christian liberal arts colleges generally do teach the Bible with less excellence than the better Bible colleges. Christian education has to involve

more than tacking a few Bible survey courses onto a degree in broadcasting or physical therapy. It has to involve the intensive, concentrated study of the Bible itself.

The distinctive of a Bible college is that every student graduates with a Bible major. Every graduate will have studied biblical interpretation, surveyed the entire canon, gained familiarity with the most important introductory issues, focused specifically on the most important biblical books, and been introduced to the entire system of Christian doctrine. A graduate of a Bible college will also have been taught the dynamics of the life of faith and will (or, at least, should) have had his or her affections shaped by carefully chosen exposure to the best of Christian devotion. At the undergraduate level, no institution can do this work better than a Bible college.

Second, Bible colleges must realize their limitations. The day has passed when a four-year baccalaureate degree was adequate preparation for ministry. Ministry today is exponentially more complex than it was fifty years ago. Bible colleges must no longer envision their mission as one of producing pastors and missionaries, although they can certainly play a vital role in that process.

If Bible colleges do not exist to equip church leaders, then what is their mission? It is to prepare Christian workers. Bible college graduates should be ready to take up the needed roles of deacons and Bible teachers within local congregations. They should also enter their calling (whatever it may be) with the competence and conviction to carry their Christianity with them.

Christians do not need their own institutions to train doctors, lawyers, financiers, botanists, microbiologists, engineers, agribusiness persons, optometrists, disc jockeys, musicians, or educationists. What they need are institutions that will produce graduates who are competent in their faith and who can bring their Christian perspectives and values to bear upon whatever discipline or vocation they enter. If a Bible college can accomplish this task, then it will be well on the road to success.

Third, Bible colleges must offer genuine education, by which I mean liberal education, that is, education in the liberal arts. By this I do not mean simply general education. Christians have displayed an unfortunate tendency to misappropriate the term *liberal arts* to cover any category of education that is not explicitly biblical. Here, however, I am speaking of those arts properly designated as liberal. Music and drama are fine arts, not liberal arts. Business and finance are servile arts, not liberal arts. Physics and chemistry are sciences, not liberal arts.

To be sure, a genuinely educated person must be exposed to the sciences, the fine arts, and much more. By themselves, however, those disciplines will never constitute an education. The *sine qua non* of education is mastery of the liberal arts, and particularly of the Trivium.

The liberal arts (especially grammar, logic, and rhetoric) are the basic tools of thought. Any institution that neglects fostering of these disciplines will fail to educate its students. Mastery of the liberal arts is essential to any thoughtful life or ministry.

Liberal education has fallen out of favor these days. The liberal arts are not marketable. A graduate who masters the liberal arts does not acquire a saleable skill, and today's higher education is all about preparing people to make money. As the old quip goes, however, liberal education teaches you how to live, not how to make a living.

Christians profess that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. On that account, it is distressing to see Bible colleges turning more and more toward majors that amount to vocational training. We ought to be more concerned about the kind of people we graduate than we are about whether we have prepared them to make money.

The time has come for a renaissance of the liberal arts within Bible colleges. Our graduates cannot think biblically if they cannot think, and thinking is exactly the application of the liberal arts. Students who graduate from Bible colleges should be masters of logic, grammar, and rhetoric. They should be highly literate and textually focused. They should understand the broad outlines of the development of Western thought. They should know the perennial questions and the principal answers to those questions. They should have mastered at least one language beyond their own.

In brief, a truly excellent Bible college will not be content to offer outstanding biblical education. It will also strive to offer the best possible liberal education. It will aim to graduate men and women who are both competent, committed Christians and thoughtful, well-rounded human beings. Incidentally, such an education would also be the ideal preparation for future ministers who will be going to seminary.

Would it be possible for such a college to flourish? The main challenge to its survival would be the spirit of materialism that pervades American Christianity today. Christian students, like their secular counterparts, are more interested in finding out how to make money than they are in learning mental disciplines. For a truly great Bible college to flourish, pastors and parents are going to have to inculcate certain habits of mind and heart in their children: a love of learning, a longing for the transcendent, and a realization that life is more than stuff.

For those who share these values, Bible colleges such as I have described will have a powerful appeal. The college will need to offer superior biblical education, exceptional liberal education, and the normal orbit of general education that one gets in any decent college. It would not need a multiplicity of majors or a smorgasbord of elective courses. It could operate with a relatively small faculty in relatively modest facilities.

Graduates of such Bible colleges will have no trouble going on to master whatever fields they intend to spend their lives in. There is a place for all the disciplines—all are honorable and every calling is of God. For Christians, however, any other calling always presupposes a prior call to serve the Lord. Before Christians prepare for a vocation in commerce, science, or the arts, they should prepare to live a life of service to their God. We need schools of higher education that will help them in that preparation. We need a few outstanding Bible colleges. ✖

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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](mailto:inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu).

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## The Second Hymn; being a Dialogue between three Shepherds.

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

1.

Where is this blessed Babe  
That hath made  
All the world so full of joy  
And expectation;  
That glorious boy

That crowns each Nation  
With a triumphant wreath of blessedness?

2.  
Where should he be but in the throng,  
And among  
His Angel Ministers, that sing  
And take wing  
Just as may Echo to his Voyce,  
And rejoyce,  
When wing and tongue and all  
May so procure their happiness?

3.  
But he hath other Waiters now,  
A poor Cow,  
An Ox and Mule stand and behold,  
And wonder,  
That a stable should enfold  
Him that can thunder.. ✘

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900 Forestview Ln N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 1-800-827-1043