

Round the Lord in Glory Seated

Richard Mant (1776–1848)

Round the Lord in glory seated,
cherubim and seraphim
filled his temple, and repeated
each to each th'alternate hymn:
"Lord, Thy glory fills the heaven,
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto Thee be glory given,
Holy, holy, holy, Lord."

Heav'n is still with glory ringing;
earth takes up the angels' cry,
"Holy, holy, holy," singing,
"Lord of hosts, the Lord Most High!"
"Lord, Thy glory fills the heaven,
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto Thee be glory given,
Holy, holy, holy, Lord."

With His seraph-train before Him,
With His holy Church below,
thus conspire we to adore Him,
bid we thus our anthem flow:
"Lord, Thy glory fills the heaven,
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto Thee be glory given,
Holy, holy, holy, Lord."

Thus Thy glorious name confessing,
with Thine angel hosts we cry,
"Holy, holy, holy," blessing
Thee, the Lord of Hosts Most High.
"Lord, Thy glory fills the heaven,
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto Thee be glory given,
Holy, holy, holy, Lord."

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

It's Not a Cadillac! Part Five: A Personal Testimony

Kevin T. Bauder

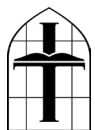
When I was thirteen, my father became convinced that the Lord was calling him to pastor. He moved our family across several states to attend Bible college. He took his first pastorate while he was still a student. That put me in a position to hear the week-by-week results of his classroom learning. I saw firsthand how preparation shapes ministry.

Dad graduated from college the same spring I graduated from high school. I then attended the same college, an invaluable help as the Lord led me into vocational ministry. During my junior year I wrote my first serious research paper. It was my first attempt to dig into the biblical text, deal with theological constructs, and put the ideas together. I loved the work.

After my professor read the paper, he suggested that I might want to think about seminary. I found myself drawn to the idea, but I didn't want to wait to get into a real pastorate. That spring I met the president of a seminary in Colorado. He told me about his school's one-year M.A. The program looked like it could satisfy my urge for further study without unduly delaying pastoral ministry. That summer I visited the seminary, then a year later moved to Denver to pursue the degree. I discovered that the level of instruction and mentorship was far beyond my college preparation. Within a week I knew that I wanted as much of it as I could get.

That fall I was called to a church as pastor of youth and music, a responsibility that I held through my M.Div. and Th.M. years. Then I taught briefly at the college affiliated with my seminary. My heart still leaned toward pastoral ministry, however, and after two years of teaching I took a full-time pastorate in Iowa.

This new ministry came with a greater weight of responsibility. I now had to answer for an entire church, establishing its direction and priorities. I discovered that one of a pastor's greatest challenges is what his people think they know. Another is what they know they want. These two are connected. People who have been mistaught or untaught will want the wrong things, and they will expect their pastor to provide these things.



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Some of my people had been mistaught. More than a few had accepted aberrant doctrines, or were living unruly lives, or were indulging disordered affections. What is more, this problem existed partly because the church's previous leaders had either not seen fit to address it or because they had actually contributed to it. While trying to rectify these issues, I found myself asking, "How did we get here?" A large part of the answer was that some of the church's leaders had been ineffective while others had been effective at the wrong things. In both instances, the core of the problem was a lack of adequate preparation.

I was not the only fundamentalist pastor in that community, but I am fairly sure that I was the only expository preacher. As I formed acquaintances with the other conservative pastors, I discovered that they didn't think explaining scripture should be a significant pulpit activity. Most of them couldn't do it anyway. One was a self-help guru. One was a feel-good motivational speaker. One was a screamer. But so far as I can remember, none helped their people to understand the Word of God. Furthermore, none seemed to have a clear idea of what the church was or what it was for. Most seemed convinced of two ideas: (1) the church's duty was to attract the world, and (2) the way to do this was to be as much like the world as possible.

The same could be said of the preachers that my people were hearing on the radio or watching on television. These preachers were no help—they were part of the problem. So were the authors my people were reading. So was the larger evangelical network, including much of the fundamentalist network. All of these seemed to be conspiring to thwart New Testament Christianity. I didn't want my people involved with this network. I wanted to protect them from it.

A few years later, while beginning doctoral studies in Dallas, I was treated to a year-long tour of Southern fundamentalism. My family and I visited church after church, hoping to find a congregation where whatever the pastor said for half-an-hour or forty-five minutes would have something to do with the text that he read before he began. We finally joined a church that almost met this minimal standard, only to discover that it was already disintegrating over issues of pastoral leadership.

When that church fell apart, we planted a new one. I found that the people who came to us (even the unbelievers) already had expectations about what a church ought to be, and these expectations were often unbiblical. We baptized a number of people during those years. Others came to us as refugees from other religious organizations that called themselves churches. Still others moved in from remote parts of the country. In every case, the ones who stayed were thirsty to hear the scriptures preached. Not much of that was going on around us.

I accepted my first pastoral charge in 1979. I did not become a seminary professor until 1998. Pastoral ministry convinced me that American Christianity has fallen on very hard times. The causes are multiple, but many of them come back to a common denominator. Most American pastors cannot understand the Bible for themselves. If they care at all, they rely on what others tell them it means. Their grasp of the system of faith is tenuous at best. Consequently, they cannot apply biblical principles to the challenges that arise in contemporary ministry. They cannot see how their theology ought to affect their philosophy of ministry, partly because they hardly have a theology to begin with. They are prey to every new trend and fad.

That is why I became convinced that preparation is the key. With rare exceptions pastors, even those with Bible college schooling, cannot learn what they need to know in less time than the traditional M.Div. offers. They need everything that the traditional curriculum includes—languages, hermeneutics, exegesis, biblical and systematic theology, counseling, preaching, and philosophy of ministry. They need to learn these disciplines from the right perspective. They need teachers who are skilled in their disciplines but who have spent years as pastors themselves. They need churches and seminaries working together to prepare them for the real challenges and choices of ministry.

I really would like to work myself out of a job. I love the idea of churches preparing their own future pastors. Nevertheless, I realize that most churches are years away from being able to offer everything that future pastors need. For now, the best alternative is a seminary under the oversight of a local church (or group of churches) that exists to assist local churches in equipping spiritual leaders for Christ-exalting biblical ministry. A young man who wishes to prepare for ministry should settle for no less.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
