

Teach Me, My God and King*George Herbert (1593–1633)*

Teach me, my God and King,
 in all things Thee to see,
 and what I do in anything,
 to do it as for Thee.

To scorn the senses' sway,
 while still to Thee I tend;
 in all I do be Thou the Way,
 in all be Thou the End.

All may of Thee partake;
 nothing so small can be,
 but draws, when acted for Thy sake,
 greatness and worth from Thee.

If done t'obey Thy laws,
 e'en servile labors shine;
 hallowed is toil, if this the cause,
 the meanest work divine.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Further Thoughts on Building Community***Kevin T. Bauder*

[This essay was originally published on April 12, 2013.]

In order for a church to function as a community, its members must develop relationships that touch all of life. The development of these relationships requires Christians to share interests outside of the purely devotional and ecclesiastical. The question arises, however: will not the sharing of secular interests result in secularized Christians who have less interest in spiritual things? Specifically, do not secular interests constitute a distraction from God's work?

The Greatest Commandment requires us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk. 12:30). This description means that we must love God with every fiber of our being, so exhaustively that no love is left for anything else. Yet the Second Greatest Commandment requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mk. 12:31). The juxtaposition of these commands creates a paradox: if we must love God so exhaustively, how is it not a distraction to love our neighbor, our wives (Eph. 5:25, 28), our enemies (Lk. 6:27), or the lost?

The answer lies in the distinction between loving something as a means and loving it as an end. We must love God as an end, as He is in Himself, for no other reason than that (and what) He is. An ordinate love for God is absolute and unconditioned. If we love God as a means to an end—if we love Him for His gifts—we do not really love Him, but the gifts. We force God to serve our true loves, which is idolatry.

By contrast, we must never love any created thing as an end. Our love of finite goods must never be absolute and unconditioned. Yet we ought to love them, whenever and however God loves them. Part of loving God is learning to love what He loves. Thus, we must love our neighbors, our wives, our enemies, and any other love-worthy thing, not for their sakes, but for God's. We love them in order to honor and glorify the God who loves them. The moment our love for them becomes detached from our love for God, they become idols.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

For the Christian who loves God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, nothing is ever secular. Absolutely every department of life becomes an extension of love for God. Whatever cannot be loved for His sake should not be loved at all. Whatever cannot be done for His glory should not be done at all. For the true lover of God, all of life becomes worship. All of life is an offering to Him.

This does not mean, however, that all of life becomes a tract. It does not mean that every ordinary activity must attach a verse or have an explicitly devotional message. In fact, by attempting to spiritualize some things in these ways, we debase them.

God is most glorified when we use His gifts according to the purpose for which they were given. A surgeon in the operating room glorifies God best by operating skillfully, not by distracting the surgical team with religious platitudes (or, for that matter, skillful expositions). A mechanic glorifies God best by skillfully repairing cars, not by pasting religious stickers on their bumpers. A husband who is kissing his wife glorifies God best by focusing his attention upon his wife—and if he fails to kiss her often enough or lovingly enough, he not only fails in his love toward her, but in his love toward the God who made them male and female.

This insight applies to all non-ecclesiastical interests and activities. For example, a woman who pursues quilting as an end, who loves it for itself in detachment from God, is an idolater. On the other hand, for a skilled quilter who loves God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength, quilting may well become an act of worship. In neither case is it a secular activity. It either glorifies God or it replaces Him.

A quilter who loves God and who wishes to glorify Him may decide to stitch some Bible verse or spiritual truth onto a quilt. But the quilt most truly glorifies God when it is a thing of beauty, when its seams hold tight without puckering, and when it keeps people warm at night. Better a well-made quilt that warms the sleeper than a shoddy quilt that tries to be a tract. The former can redound to the glory of God, but the latter is simply vulgar.

Of course, it is perfectly normal to use vocations or avocations as occasions for explicitly Christian witness. The point is that the activities do not need to be justified by some artificial attachment to spiritual truth. God made humans as embodied beings who live in the world, and He has constituted all of life in the world as our legitimate interest. To ignore the world (in the sense of the created order), or to treat it as somehow inferior, is to slight the God who made it and gave it to us.

There is, of course, another sense of *world*. Often Scripture presents the world, not as the created order or even as the human ordering of culture, but as the perspective of those who are depraved. Their perspective is antithetical to God's, and sooner or later they work their contempt for God into

everything that they do. This sense of *world* is constantly evil and is always condemned in Scripture. Understood in this ethical sense, the Christian must never love the world or even the things that are in the world. The friendship of the world is enmity with God.

These two senses of *world* sometimes overlap, but they are nevertheless distinct. The problem for Christians is knowing when we are using the world (the created order) as an instrument to bring glory to the God whom we love, and when we are naively adopting the perspectives of the world (the ethical system) in such a way as to subvert our message about God.

Christians face at least two problems as they work out their Christianity in life. The first is that they may allow ordinary activities to overwhelm their interest in God. This problem is corrected by loving God absolutely and loving other things only instrumentally. The second is that Christians may integrate false perspectives (the world, in the evil, ethical sense) into their pursuit of ordinary activities. This problem is corrected by understanding how God views each activity of life. Christians must help each other to address both of these problems—indeed, this mutual help is the very essence of fellowship. In order to pursue this fellowship, Christians must focus together upon their mutual interests (the ordinary pursuits of life) as well as upon their interest in God.

None of life is secular. Loving God has implications for everything else. Helping each other work out these implications is one of the most important things we can do. Everything that we do will serve the God whom we love, or else it will serve idols that we love in His place. Nothing is secular.



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.
