

Lord, if Thou Thy grace impart,
Poor in spirit, meek in heart,
I shall as my Master be,
Clothed with humility;

Simple, teachable, and mild,
Changed into a little child,
Pleased with all the Lord provides,
Weaned from all the world besides.

Father, fix my soul on Thee;
Every evil let me flee,
Nothing want beneath, above,
Happy in Thy precious love.

O that all may seek and find
Every good in Christ combined!
Him let Israel still adore,
Trust Him, praise Him evermore.

TΩ KPONOΥ KAIPΩ

In the Nick of Time

A Conversation With a Friend

Kevin T. Bauder

After two days of the rioting in Minneapolis, I had occasion to visit with a friend—I'll call him Simon. Simon is nearly my age and has recently retired from two simultaneous careers: as a police detective and as a platoon sergeant in the National Guard, with whom he served multiple deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo. Simon is also African-American. While I did not transcribe our conversation word for word, I believe that I can give you a summary of it. You may find it interesting. Simon explained the riot as follows:

"There are basically three groups involved. The first is the protestors. They are concerned primarily about justice. But about 8:00 in the evening the flavor of the protest changes when the radicals move in. They include vandals, troublemakers, anarchists, and white supremacists. You can feel the atmosphere change. This is the group that riots. Then you have another group who are just opportunists. They wait until the police are overwhelmed by the rioters in one place, then they'll bust up the stores for free stuff in other places."

What Simon said next surprised me.

"I don't agree with the violence, but I can understand the anger that's directed at the police. Minneapolis does have a problem with racism in the police force. That's one reason that I left the Minneapolis PD for another department. But to some extent that's true of policing in general, and even of our society as a whole. Right now there is terrible frustration if you are a person of color."

I asked where that frustration comes from.

"Well, I grew up as a poor kid in the inner city, reared by my grandmother. I was sent to Catholic schools. I can remember as a teenager hiding in the back seat of the car while my white friend would go to the door to pick up my white date for me. Not a day went by when I didn't get racial slurs, and often worse.

"When I became a cop I would be sent to help victims who wouldn't believe I was a police officer. I was in a marked patrol car, wearing a uniform, and I



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

had victims call the police department to report a Black man impersonating a police officer. A Black man has to be constantly aware of how he's being perceived. There's a stereotype that Black males are lazy, stupid, angry, and criminal. A Black man has to make sure that he doesn't do something that will play into that stereotype, because most people are ready to apply it. The only time I didn't have to worry about it was when I was in Iraq and Afghanistan. It just wasn't an issue there.

"I've talked to my sons about this. One son came to me the other day and complained that his employer thinks he's always angry. But that's how people perceive African-American men. They'll hold Blacks accountable for behavior that they'd overlook in a White man."

I commented that I had only ever felt that kind of pressure a very few times when I was in a neighborhood of color and could tell by the stares and expressions that what people expected from me did not fit who I am.

Simon replied, "But you see, I live my whole life among people who are not my color. What you felt for a little while, I feel almost every day. Listen, I'm a Black man and a cop. I've walked both sides of the street. I understand what a cop puts up with and what decisions a cop has to make. But I can take off the uniform and I'm not a cop any more. I can't take off being a Black man. I'm always Black."

I asked about the violence, and Simon surprised me again.

"Of course I don't agree with the violence. But there's a strong feeling—and I do understand it—that nothing will ever change without violence. The Revolutionary War. The Civil War. Think of the really big, major changes. Almost all of them involved violence."

Simon certainly has not been part of the violent crowd (though it would not surprise me to learn that he had been a protestor). In his everyday relationships he is about as peaceable an individual as you could ever meet. I did not understand him to be advocating violence. Instead, it seemed that he was resigned to watching it happen and hoped for something good to come of it.

Simon and I have known each other for more than twenty years. He was one of the first people outside the Central Seminary orbit who befriended me when I moved to Minnesota. We are unlike in many ways. We have different politics, different religions, and different tastes. In spite of those differences, I've always thought that Simon had my six. Furthermore, he's been willing to share some of the hard issues in his life. Whatever a true friend is supposed to be, that's what he has been with me. I have also tried to be that kind of friend to him.

Consequently, I don't believe that Simon was trying to propagandize me. He has never, ever tried to fake it with me or to give me a sales pitch. Instead, I think that he needed to be able to say these things to somebody. He wanted somebody to understand what he felt. I have no question at all that he was telling the exact truth as he believed it to be from his perspective.

Granted, Simon's perspectives might be skewed and some of his conclusions might be mistaken. I don't think that I'm obligated to agree with his every word simply because he is my friend. Yet I've seen some right-wing pundits try to dismiss the recent civil unrest as nothing more than radicalism and reverse racism. I have no doubt that anarchism, socialism, and critical theory are behind a good bit of it. But I can't dismiss Simon so easily. He is not a radical, an anarchist, or a socialist. He is not anti-America. He is a genuine patriot. I have to take what he says seriously because I take *him* seriously and because his beliefs are genuine.

So what should we—and by *we* I mean *we conservative Christians* (of whatever ethnicity)—do with Simon's perceptions? We should certainly not ignore them, and we (or at least I) cannot dismiss them. Over the next few weeks, two professors from Central Baptist Theological Seminary are going to be discussing this question: what should we do with these perceptions? What does the Lord expect from us now?



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of 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.
