

Lord, We Adore Thy Vast Designs

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Lord, we adore thy vast designs,
Th' obscure abyss of Providence,
Too deep to sound with mortal lines,
Too dark to view with feeble sense.

Now thou array'st thine awful face
In angry frowns, without a smile;
We, through the cloud, believe thy grace,
Secure of thy compassion still.

Through seas and storms of deep distress
We sail by faith, and not by sight;
Faith guides us in the wilderness,
Through all the briers and the night.

Dear Father, if thy lifted rod
Resolve to scourge us here below,
Still we must lean upon our God,
Thine arm shall bear us safely through.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Goodbye, Uncle Myron

Kevin T. Bauder

Edmund Burke, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, spoke of the “unbought grace of life.” What he meant was that we receive from our forebears a patrimony of ideas, perspectives, habits, attitudes, and sensibilities that together make life more humane. We pay nothing for this patrimony: it is given to us freely. Our duty, then, is to preserve it as best we can and to hand it along to those who come after us.

As we grow older, we ought to grow increasingly aware of how indebted we are to people whom we shall never be able to repay. Part of piety (in the proper sense of the term) involves recognizing these individuals and crediting them for the “unbought grace” with which they have gifted us, sometimes at significant cost to themselves. We cannot pay our debt, but we can and should acknowledge to whom it is owed.

One of the individuals to whom I owe much is Myron Houghton. The first time I saw Myron I was in college and he was on our college’s chapel platform, pretending to be his twin brother, George. He introduced George as, “my brother, Doctor Houghton.” George then stepped forward and introduced Myron as, “my brother, Doctor Houghton.” Finally Myron explained that they were “womb mates.”

A couple of years later I became Myron’s student at Denver Baptist Theological Seminary, where he taught systematic theology. The first day of class he introduced his students to “six characteristics of my theology,” a summary of his theological method. He repeated these six characteristics in every theology course that he taught. He explained that his theology was exegetical (centered upon the right handling of Scripture), evangelical (gospel-centered), fundamentalist (church-centered), devotional, philosophical, and historical. Years later I took a doctoral course on theological method and discovered that Myron’s “six characteristics” required almost no revision. They still summarize my theological method.

Myron was a learned man. He had a diploma from Moody Bible Institute, a bachelor’s degree from Pillsbury Baptist Bible College, an MDiv from Grand Rapids Baptist Theological Seminary, a ThM from Grace Theological Seminary, a PhD from Dallas Theological Seminary, an MLA from South-



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

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

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

ern Methodist University, an MA from Saint Thomas Seminary in Denver, and a ThD from Concordia Seminary in St Louis. He completed a certificate program (equivalent to the MDiv) for Saint Stephen's Course of Study in Orthodox Theology. He also studied at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis and Covenant Seminary in St Louis where (as one alumnus told me) he was remembered as something of a legend. Myron collected diplomas like some people collect stamps.

For Myron, however, the attraction did not lie in the degrees themselves. Rather, he was fascinated with systems of thought, especially theological systems. He wanted to be prepared to respond to them, and he was convinced that a good response had to be based on an accurate understanding. He pursued this diversity of educational experience so that he could converse intelligently with a wide array of theologians. As a professor Myron taught us that we did not understand an opponent until we could describe his position so well that he recognizes himself in it.

He carried this emphasis on listening and understanding into his teaching. For example, though he seldom used the term, Myron was a moderate (4.5 point) Calvinist, but he was not content merely to expose his students to Calvinism. When I took his soteriology course he required every student to read an entire ThM thesis arguing for an Arminian understanding of divine election and human freedom. He wanted us to be informed, and above all, he wanted to be fair.

Myron continued this emphasis in his book on *Law and Grace*. In his argument Myron followed Edward Fisher (*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*) in a particular Reformed view of the relationship between law, gospel, and grace. To ensure that other views receive fair treatment, however, Myron quoted their exponents at length—sometimes for pages at a time. If these quotations slow down his argument, they also clarify the issues.

Myron Houghton was probably the most widely respected theologian to represent contemporary fundamentalism in the marketplace of ideas. Certainly he was the only one to gain much of a hearing outside fundamentalism itself. This recognition was not so much the product of his writing as of the conversations in which he engaged. Through meaningful discussion he helped many to clarify their thinking, and he also drew many to a fuller understanding of the truth.

Teaching at Denver Baptist Bible College and Seminary, then at Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary, Myron Houghton communicated a sound system of theology. More importantly, he taught his students to think theologically, to love ideas, and to love conversation about those ideas. He supplemented his teaching with good humor and a personal interest in his students, whom he often hosted at some local restaurant.

With declining health, Myron retired from teaching only a year ago. Last week he tested positive for COVID-19. This week he passed into heaven. His departure is a stunning loss for the Church Militant.

In and out of the classroom, Myron was a man of conviction who understood and advocated the ideals that distinguish fundamentalists from other evangelicals. He also exhibited the ability to understand and converse charitably with theological opponents while never surrendering his commitment to the truth. This combination, so rare among fundamentalists, may be his most important legacy.

The apostle Paul notes that we do not have “many fathers” in Jesus Christ. Myron, however, was certainly a well-loved theological uncle. He was the thinker who first made me put shape to my theology. I am not alone in my admiration for him as a scholar and a man of God. Many of us owe Myron a debt that we shall never be able to repay, a debt for the “unbought grace of life.”



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.
