

**Come to the Ark**

Christian Hymn Book, 1841

Come to the ark, come to the ark;  
To Jesus come away:  
The pestilence walks forth by night,  
The arrows fly by day.

Come to the ark: the waters rise,  
The seas their billows rear;  
While darkness gathers o'er the skies,  
Behold a refuge near!

Come to the ark, all, all that weep  
Beneath the sense of sin:  
Without, deep calleth unto deep,  
But all is peace within.

Come to the ark, ere yet the flood  
Your lingering steps oppose;  
Come, for the door which open stood  
Is now about to close.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

*In the Nick of Time***A Pastor's Reading Plan, Part One: Periodicals***Kevin T. Bauder*

Pastors work with people, so they need personal skills. Pastors work with churches as organizations, so they need administrative skills. More than anything else, however, pastors work with ideas. They do the work of the mind. At minimum, they seek to grasp the meaning of God's Word and to communicate it to their people, applying it carefully to the issues of the day. Consequently, they need both information and intellectual skill.

That skill comes largely through reading. No amount of listening to podcasts or watching videos on YouTube will take the place of reading. If you are a pastor, reading is what will give you something to say.

Of course, you will do a certain amount of reading as you prepare for preaching. You will read your text; in fact, you will translate it. You will read the principal grammars that address issues within your text. You will read commentaries that explore your text (preferably after you have already drawn your own tentative conclusions).

Besides all that, you will be reading the Bible straight through. Maybe you won't read it through every year, but you will read through the Bible regularly. Over time, you will read through all the principal translations (I'm presently reading through the NET Bible).

If a pastor is going to know how to apply the Bible's teaching to the questions of the day, he needs to know what those questions are. He needs to know what events are affecting the spiritual, intellectual, and moral environment of the people to whom he preaches. He needs to know how those events are being perceived by the communities in which his church members live.

Probably the worst place to gain that information is through standard news reportage, whether in print, broadcast, or internet. The press has exactly two jobs: (1) get the facts, and (2) tell the truth. It consistently fails in both departments. The problem is not that the news outlets are biased or incompetent; the problem is that they pretend they aren't. Because their bias is hidden, it is poisonous.



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The better alternative is to seek news coverage from outlets that admit their bias up front. In other words, the journals of opinion will do far more to help a pastor understand both the events and how they are being perceived than any putatively objective news source. The key is to read journals that speak from a variety of perspectives. Happily, almost all of them are available online, and in most cases you can access them for free.

Because liberalism keeps changing, knowing the liberal perspective from week to week can prove daunting. The journals on the Left will help you track its current manifestations. The *New Republic* has taken a liberal slant for generations, as has the *Nation* (though years ago it had a conservative editor). *Mother Jones* is a newer journal on the Left, and *Slate* is newer still. A radically secular and anti-religious variety of liberalism appears in the *Humanist*. The perspective of mainline, liberal “Christianity” can be found in the *Christian Century*. You can read a fair representation of the Evangelical Left in *Sojourners*.

On the conservative side of the spectrum, *National Review* is the granddaddy publication. Founded by William F. Buckley, Jr., it has been the conservative flagship for over six decades. As might be expected, it represents a generally paleo-conservative perspective. For a more neo-conservative point of view with a religious flavor, *First Things* is the place to go. Other periodicals like the *American Conservative* and the *American Spectator* are more populist in their approach, but still register on the conservative side of the spectrum (though the *American Spectator* is closer to the edge). Unfortunately, evangelical conservatives do not publish a responsible journal of opinion—the kind of thing that *Christianity Today* was founded to be but hasn’t actually been for decades. In the absence of something strictly evangelical, an acceptable alternative is probably *Touchstone*, which is published by a team of “mere Christians” who are evangelical, Orthodox, and Catholic.

A journal that does not neatly fit any mold is the *New Criterion*, which gives significant coverage to arts, letters, and serious cultural trends. It does not aim to be strictly conservative. If anything, it represents an antique version of liberalism. Its editors, however, still hold a commitment to meaning, beauty, and (strangest of all) to norms. Consequently, it often seems conservative by comparison. It’s worth reading, and it has become my go-to journal for cultural discussion since *Harpers* and *Atlantic* have gone down as ideological shells.

What should you look for in these journals? The short answer is, whatever interests either you or the people to whom you minister. Certainly you should scan the reviews of books and movies: you would never watch *Cuties*, for example, but you’d better know what it represents. You should also skim the headlines of the feature articles. You can concentrate on articles discussing trends that will affect churches, ministries, and families. Ignorance of these things is not a virtue.

When I was a pastor I would try to spend two to three hours every week checking these and similar publications. In those days I had to drive to the public library to do this reading. Now I can do the same job directly from my computer.

These sources won’t give you the late-breaking news, but they will help you follow the major stories. Each one will also give you a unique perspective on the events that it covers. Knowing those perspectives can be useful to a pastor, even when they are wrong. A couple of hours every week spent glancing through these periodicals is a worthwhile investment in knowing what you’re talking about.



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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.

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