

Psalm 31

New Version of the Psalms of David (1696), Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady

My hope, my steadfast trust,
I on Thy help repose;
That Thou, my God, art good and just,
My soul with comfort knows.

Whate'er events betide,
Thy wisdom times them all;
Then, Lord, Thy servant safely hide
From those that seek his fall.

The brightness of Thy face
To me, O Lord, disclose;
And as Thy mercies still increase,
Preserve me from my foes.

How great Thy mercies are
To such as fear Thy name,
Which Thou, for those that trust Thy care,
Dost to the world proclaim!

O all ye saints, the Lord
With eager love pursue;
Who to the just will help afford,
And give the proud their due.

Ye that on God rely,
Courageously proceed;
For He will still your hearts supply
With strength in time of need.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Notes at the Beginning of the School Year

Kevin T. Bauder

Perhaps I should begin by saying that I am not speaking for Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Only our president, Matt Morrell, has the right to do that. My goal is not to articulate policy or to represent the institution.

What I am doing is reflecting upon the difference that I see between the Central Seminary of today and the Central Seminary to which I came over twenty-five years ago. The differences are significant. They are shaping the direction of our school. And, for the most part, they are unavoidable.

To be clear, the differences are not theological. The board, administration, and faculty at Central Seminary still hold the same principles and distinctives that we always have. We are Baptists without apology. We are fundamentalists and separatists. We are cessationists with respect to the miraculous gifts. We are young-earth, solar-day creationists. We are complementarians. We are dispensationalists, committed to both premillennialism and pretribulationism. We teach expository preaching and progressive sanctification. These statements apply to all of us. None of that has changed and I hope that none of it ever will.

Nevertheless, we are changing. I see those changes reflected in three primary areas. These are accreditation, demographics, and delivery.

When I became a professor at the beginning of 1998, Central Seminary was not accredited. One of the reasons I was brought in was because the school wanted to go after accreditation, and my degrees would help to secure it. For the next six or seven years we examined different options, finally deciding to work toward accreditation with the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS). Once we started the process, we took three or four years to achieve accredited status. It was a major undertaking, and one in which we had to create many processes and procedures for the institution.

Seven or eight years ago, we decided to work with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). We acknowledge our indebtedness to TRACS, but ATS is the standard accrediting body for theological seminaries, and degrees accredited by ATS are more widely recognized. We are now coming up on



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900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

our first reaffirmation with ATS. When we have completed our self-study and been reaffirmed, we should not have to do another for a decade. Among other things, that means that this accreditation cycle is the last I am likely to see.

Central Seminary is a stronger institution because of accreditation, but that is not the only way in which we have changed. Another change involves the demographics of our students. The student population of 2023 looks very different when compared to the student population of 1998.

My first classes at Central Seminary were populated mainly by young graduates of Bible colleges or other Christian institutions. Most of our students came from Northland, Maranatha, and Pillsbury. We had several from other Christian schools, and always a handful from secular colleges and universities. They would move to Minneapolis, settle here for three or four years, and become active in area churches (especially Fourth Baptist Church).

Over the intervening years, several of our kindred colleges and seminaries have closed their doors: Pillsbury, Northland, and Clearwater, among others. Other colleges have started their own seminaries and chosen not to allow us on their campuses to talk to their students. Fewer young men are preparing for ministry than was once the case. The stream of young, recent college graduates has nearly dried up.

It has been replaced by a stream of older students, most of whom are already engaged in some form of ministry. They bring their experience with them into the classroom, enriching the conversation for all who are involved. But they do not bring their families to live in the Twin Cities. They stay in their pastorates and on their mission fields—and we like that.

Even though our current students tend to be more experienced in life and ministry, they do not have the background in Baptist dispensationalism that we used to assume of our incoming classes. When I began to teach at Central Seminary, I had to expose my students to divergent points of view. Now they come with divergent points of view and I have to work to expose them to Baptist dispensationalism.

The altered demographics of our student population stem partly from the third change at Central Seminary. We have now made almost a complete shift to distance education. This was a shift that I resisted during my years as president of the seminary, partly because the only way to do it well was to invest in very expensive and dedicated Polycom equipment. With the advent of Zoom, however, distance education has become relatively cheap and easy.

We do only synchronous education. What that means is that we operate virtual classrooms where students actually converse with the professor and each other during class sessions. We began experimenting with this form of

delivery several years ago, and it proved both effective and popular. When COVID came along, that disease forced our entire operation onto Zoom for the duration. It changed the entire education industry. Students can still sit in our physical classrooms, but they usually choose not to.

In one way, it's eerie to experience empty hallways and classrooms. When we teach, however, our computer screens are now filled with faces of students from around the world. I have just begun teaching a course on Christology and Soteriology, and I believe that a majority of my students live in Africa. It is an astounding opportunity.

Ten years ago, none of us could foresee what Central Seminary would look like today. We have been led here—and in some ways driven here—by circumstances that were purely providential. We had no control over sister institutions closing. We had no control over COVID. We had to accept what God gave us.

Those changes, however, have been good for us. They have forced us to rethink what really matters. They have brought us a growing student population and an increasing donor base. We find ourselves wondering what other changes God may have in store for us as we assist local churches in equipping spiritual leaders for Christ-exalting, biblical ministry.



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.
