

O Thou, Who Didst Ordain the Word*E. H. Chapin (1814-1880)*

O Thou, who didst ordain the Word,
 And its strong heralds send,
 We draw the holy veil of prayer,
 And in Thy presence bend.
 To this young warrior of the cross,
 Who takes his station here,
 Be Thou a teacher and guide,
 And be Thy Spirit near.

A pure disciple, let him tread
 The ways his Master trod,—
 Giving the weary spirits rest,
 Leading the lost to God,
 Stooping to lend the suffered aid,
 Crushed sorrow's wail to hear,
 To bind the widow's broken heart,
 And dry the orphan's tear.

For war with error make him strong,
 And sin, the soul's dark foe;
 But let him humbly seek for truth
 Where'er its waters flow;
 And when, O Father, at the grave
 He lays his armor down,
 Give him the victor's glistening robe,
 The palm-wreath and the crown.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***It's Gratifying***Kevin T. Bauder*

Central Seminary typically offers two weeks of modular classes in the middle of each semester. During those weeks, professors do not teach their usual courses, but they don't just take the time off. We have plenty of other responsibilities to keep us busy.

One of the activities that commonly occupies our time is hearing defenses. This semester I've listened to three of those. One was by a Doctor of Ministry student who was defending his major project. The other two—which I listened to this Wednesday—were by graduating Master of Divinity students.

During their systematic theology courses, all students in all master's programs are required to submit doctrinal statements for each discipline that they study: bibliology, theology proper, Christology, pneumatology, angelology, anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Then, as Master of Divinity students approach graduation, they compile all ten of their individual statements and revise them into one comprehensive doctrinal statement. They receive help in crafting these statements and clarifying the language. Beginning in April, each graduating MDiv student must defend his or her (yes, we have women in the MDiv program) doctrinal statement before a committee of professors.

We have found that this exercise helps students in multiple ways. It gives them an opportunity to pull together the strands of the system of faith so that they can view it as a whole. It helps them to come to conclusions on issues that they may have been pondering. It also helps them to learn to say things in careful and precise ways. For some students, this is the point at which they move from passively being taught theology to genuinely doing theology for themselves.

The process also helps the faculty. If we find that students are less able to respond to particular questions, or that they have articulated certain areas poorly, we take these results as an indication that we need to strengthen our teaching at those points. Sometimes a confused result indicates that students are getting caught in the crossfire of professors' divergent opinions without really being helped to think through an issue. We professors are all more



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

concerned that our students fully understand the issues than that they come out on our side of intramural debates.

When they present their statements, we expect students to articulate their own views rather than simply to parrot what they have been told. Consequently, their doctrinal defenses sometimes bring surprises. Occasionally, a student may deviate from the theology that is taught at Central Seminary. As long as students remain orthodox (committed to the fundamentals of the Christian faith), these deviations will not prevent them from graduating. Such deviations do, however, trigger examination of the ways in which those topics have been taught.

Central Seminary tries to emphasize certain points of theological distinctiveness. We are fundamentalist and separatist. We are Baptist. We are cessationist. We are dispensationalist, premillennial, and pretribulationist. We teach progressive sanctification. We hope to persuade our students of the correctness of those positions. In fact, we expect all our graduates to know how to defend these positions. If, however, having learned the positions and the defenses, a student remains unpersuaded, those disagreements will not prevent the student from graduating.

Some of our students come from different backgrounds. Some come from other denominations: for example, we have had Pentecostals, Presbyterians, and conservative Lutherans graduate from Central Seminary. Some are more broadly evangelical than we are. Some are uncertain about whether miraculous gifts are available today. Few have been exposed to a robust dispensationalism, and many incoming students are hesitant about pretribulationism and even premillennialism. Whatever the variation, the majority of students who graduate from Central Seminary end up holding positions that are closer to ours when they graduate than they held when they matriculated.

The two defenses that I heard on Wednesday were both competently done. One student had transferred in from a sister seminary. He had already taken most of his theology in that seminary. He also has several years of experience as a senior pastor, and he has already stood before an ordination council to defend his beliefs. His experience gave him an obvious advantage, and it showed.

The other student is a graduate of a university that does not share our faith tradition. He has an excellent education, and he is a bright guy who has no trouble conversing about intellectual, philosophical, historical, or theological issues. Because his educational background was not in biblical or theological studies, he came into the MDiv program at a bit of a disadvantage. His defense, however, showed that he has approximated the level of theological competence that a pastor should have to minister confidently.

As I listened to these two men presenting and defending their beliefs, it occurred to me how very blessed I am to have played a role in their preparation. To be clear, I have been only one voice in their development, and not even the most important one. Still, it is gratifying to see evidence of one's influence upon another who does well. This is one of the most fulfilling parts of my vocation. I am grateful for students, whether present or past, who have learned well.



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.
