

Rise, O My Soul, Pursue the Path

John Needham (?-1786)

Rise, O my soul, pursue the path
 By ancient worthies trod;
 Aspiring, view those holy men
 Who lived and walked with God.

Though dead, they speak in reason's ear,
 And in example live;
 Their faith, and hope, and mighty deeds,
 Still fresh instruction give.

'Twas through the Lamb's most precious blood
 They conquered every foe;
 To His power and matchless grace
 Their crowns of life they owe.

Lord, may I ever keep in view
 The patterns Thou hast giv'n,
 And ne'er forsake the blessed road
 That led them safe to Heaven.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Libraries and Bookstores

Kevin T. Bauder

I learned to read in first grade. I loved it immediately. Being able to conjure meaning from black marks on a white page was like magic. I no longer had to rely on others to read stories to me. I could discover for myself what Dick and Jane, Sally and Spot were doing.

An aunt used to bless us with copies of the great children's books. Together with books that my parents gave us, my siblings and I had whole shelves of reading. These included the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys mysteries (we read them all, indiscriminate of gender). We had some volumes of the Bobbsey Twins, and I remember reading several Tom Swift books. We had abridged editions of classic literature, and I loved the Landmark historical series.

I must have been in fourth or fifth grade when my parents bought me a book of short stories by Edgar Allan Poe. That introduced me to horror. Though I did not find Poe particularly frightening, Algernon Blackwood's short story, *The Willows*, haunted me for weeks.

It must have been about that time—fifth or sixth grade—that our class went on a field trip to the Sage Library in Bay City, Michigan. The building looked like a castle, and inside were more books than I'd ever seen. Not just shelves of them, but whole rooms and even floors of them. I was enthralled. Sadly, I've never been back, but the event began a love affair with libraries.

By the time I was in seventh grade my parents had moved into the small town of Freeland, where I learned that the Saginaw County bookmobile visited every two weeks. I was ecstatic. I received my first library card and, as I recall, this was where I first read Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes.

Two years later we had relocated to Iowa so my father could attend Bible college. Soon my mother was managing the campus bookstore. I can remember helping my father build sections of bookshelves for the store, some of which may still be in use after fifty years. This was my first contact with a bookstore, and I learned to love the atmosphere of a room filled with books for sale.



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Mom's job also helped my father to build his library. It gave her a line on publishers' discounts and closeouts. We lived right across the street from the college, and Dad built a study in our basement. Soon it was packed with hundreds of books. I loved to sit at his desk and read his books. For example, Feinberg's commentary on Ezekiel helped me to understand the opening chapters of that prophecy.

Within another couple of years, Dad had accepted a pastorate in a small town. Now his study was in the church building, and he had even more books. This room was one of my favorite places. Perhaps that is where I first discovered that, even in solitude, one is never alone when one is surrounded by books.

When I was a junior in high school I accompanied my father to a bookstore in downtown Des Moines. He pointed out the writings of C. S. Lewis and encouraged me to get acquainted. He even bought me copies of *The Screwtape Letters* and *Out of the Silent Planet*. I could not have guessed what a turning point that day would become.

About that time, indoor shopping malls became the rage. Ames had the one that was closest to our home, but Des Moines had a bigger one. Inside those malls were shops like B. Dalton Booksellers and Walden Books. Later on, Borders Books and Barnes and Noble joined them. For the next twenty years, any trip to the mall meant checking the discount tables in those stores.

When I was in Denver for seminary, one of the big mail-order distributors of theological books had a retail store in the south part of town. Several classmates and I would visit that store to look for bargains every few weeks. It's where I bought my first copies of many of J. Gresham Machen's essays. That, too, was a turning point.

During my first pastorate I learned that some of the big publishers operated their own bookstores in Grand Rapids, Michigan. On a couple of occasions I traveled to Grand Rapids specifically to raid the stores at Eerdmans and especially Kregel. They were wonderful places.

When I moved to Dallas for doctoral studies I discovered a Half Price Books just a mile from our home. It wasn't huge, but it had a surprising selection of used books at good prices. The problem was that I had no money. I recall coveting a volume of Meister Eckhart's works for something like two years before finally making a lowball offer on it. And my offer was accepted! I went home feeling like a great hunter that day.

Dallas was home to the Half Price Books headquarters. Their main store was located near Central Expressway and Northwest Highway. It was in a rambling old frame building with board staircases leading to the second floor. My children loved it as much as I did, and they would beg to go to the "wooden bookstore."

Other bookstores were scattered around Dallas, and I got to know most of them. When I was planting a church in Sachse, we had to drive to Plano to copy our bulletins. My wife would make the copies at Office Depot while I took the kids next door to the bookstore. They would be too occupied ever to cause trouble. So was I, sometimes to my wife's exasperation.

Of course, both my study and my home eventually began to overflow with books. I could see a problem looming—where to find more space for shelves? But then the world changed. By about 2005, Amazon was pushing brick-and-mortar bookstores out of business. By 2010, Kindle and Nook were beginning to replace paper books, and Logos was providing an electronic platform that greatly enhanced theological study. Around 2012 I began to shift seriously toward electronic books.

I still have several thousand physical books, but fewer than I once did. I have more than double the volumes on Logos, and many times more for Kindle. I have begun to cull most physical books if I own an electronic version.

It's wonderful to be able to transport tens of thousands of volumes in a computer no larger than a clipboard. I love being able to read almost anything I wish, almost anywhere I want to read it. I'm more grateful than I can say.

But I miss bookstores. I miss their atmosphere. I miss the adventure of handling texts before buying them. I miss being able to leaf through the pages. I miss the *smell*. Sadly, those are experiences that are now receding into the past, and I feel sorry for the coming generations that will miss them.



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.
