

Christ's Care of Ministers and Churches

Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)

We bless th' eternal Source of light,
Who makes the stars to shine;
And, through this dark beclouded world,
Diffuseth rays divine.

We bless the churches' sovereign King,
Whose golden lamps we are;
Fixed in the temples of His love
To shine with radiance fair.

Still be our purity be preserved;
Still fed with oil the flame;
And in deep characters inscribed
Our heavenly Master's name.

Then, while between our ranks He walks
And all our state surveys,
His smiles shall with new luster deck
The people of His praise.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Ending Another School Year

Kevin T. Bauder

Here at Central Seminary the school year draws to an end in May. It is a bittersweet time. The “bitter” side of bittersweet comes from two sources. One is because the season always involves intense work. Professors are always crunched to do final grading. We don’t get much else done for a couple of weeks. The registrar and office help must scurry in preparation for graduation activities, which include the semi-annual board meeting, graduation practice, a meal for graduating seniors and their families, and of course the commencement ceremony. During these weeks we tend to run on adrenaline.

The other part of the “bitter” in bittersweet comes from the departure of our graduates. Over the years we see them in class repeatedly. We develop relationships with them outside of class. We become friends, and our lives begin to revolve around each other’s. With graduation, however, the relationship changes. While the friendships don’t dissolve, they tend to become more distant for the simple reason that we don’t see each other as regularly.

But of course, that change leads directly into the “sweet” side of the bittersweet season. Students graduate because they have finished their preparation. They no longer need to be in class. Instead, they can devote themselves to the work that the Lord gives them. They are able to minister effectively on their own, and that is exactly why we invest in them to begin with.

One of the blessings of teaching is that you get to see your students go on to put their learning to use. I’m now in my 27th year of teaching at Central Seminary, and I am delighted to have former students who are ministering effectively around the United States and even around the world. It is a special pleasure to have seen numbers of them surpass me in various ways (for example, I work for two of my former students). Many of them are doing work that I never could, and that is cause for rejoicing.

For years our graduation regimen has stayed the same, but this Spring it is changing in multiple ways. In the past, the activities of graduation week were spread over three days, from Thursday when the board committees met until the Saturday commencement ceremony. This year, however, we are trying to fit it all into one day. Friday will begin with board meetings



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until about noon. After a brief lunch the board will continue to meet while students attend the graduation practice. The graduation meal, which used to be a breakfast on Friday morning, will now become a dinner on Friday afternoon. The ceremony itself will be held on Friday evening.

The schedule is not the only change. Over the past several years we have shifted toward Zoom technology as the platform for delivering education. We are now at the point where few of our students are local. Many live in distant countries. For the first time, one of our graduates has been unable to get a visa to attend commencement. Due to these changes, Central Seminary will shift its commencement to include a significant livestream component.

We also have an unusually small graduating class this year. Partly that is because we went through a slump in recruiting several years ago (that has been corrected and we have a robust student population now). Partly it is because students are taking longer to complete their programs. Mostly, we don't know why the numbers have worked out as they have. At any rate, this is a good year to experiment with a new format for graduation.

Today I signed the final drafts of a major project for a Doctor of Ministry graduate. This week I will teach the final classes before Final Exam Week. Next week we will administer those exams, and the professors will have an accelerated schedule to submit grades for graduating students. Then on Friday, May 10, the school year will conclude. I anticipate waking up a week from Saturday to the first day of summer break.

The expression "summer break" hardly seems an adequate designation anymore. Although the graduates will have departed, we will nevertheless be offering courses through much of the summer. Those months will also involve a fair amount of travel as administrators and faculty represent the seminary at the annual meetings of various fellowships. In July most of our professors will travel to the Bible Faculty Summit to interact with peers from sister institutions. By August, each of us will be gearing up to face the faculty in-service meetings, which will conclude just before the next academic year begins. These days, teaching at Central Seminary keeps us busy all twelve months of the year.

Nevertheless, graduation represents a milestone, and not only for those who are graduating. Each commencement is a rite of passage, as much for teachers and administrators as for students. It marks an academic year coming to a close, a task accomplished once for all, and a new circle of students advancing into the next stage of their service for the Lord.



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.
