

And Now, My Soul, Another Year

Simon Browne (1680–1732)

And now, my Soul, another Year
Of thy short Life is past;
I cannot long continue here,
And this may be my last.

Much of my dubious Life is gone,
Nor will return again;
And swift my passing Moments run,
And few that yet remain.

Awake, my soul, with utmost Care
Thy true Condition learn;
What are thy Hopes, how sure, how fair,
And what thy great Concern!

Now a new Scene of Time begins,
Set out afresh for Heav'n;
Seek pardon for thy former Sins,
In Christ so freely giv'n.

Devoutly yield thyself to God,
And on his Grace depend;
With Zeal pursue the heav'nly Road,
Nor doubt a happy End.



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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

My Twenty-Sixth

Kevin T. Bauder

Tonight, Friday, May 16, 2025, is commencement at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. This will be the second year when we have held our graduation ceremonies on Friday evening rather than Saturday morning. We've moved the date because it presents fewer complications for both students and board, who can complete all end-of-semester activities and graduation festivities in a single day.

The event brings back memories of receiving my own seminary degrees in 1982 (MDiv) and 1983 (ThM). Completing seminary felt like climbing a mountain. Graduation day was like standing at the summit—a truly exhilarating experience. I can well understand the joy that our graduates and their families experience on this day and I rejoice with them.

Our commencement speaker is Dr. R. Bruce Compton. Dr. Compton is retiring from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary after serving upwards of forty years as a professor there. His presence at graduation also evokes memories for me. He sat on the platform as faculty when I received both of my seminary diplomas. He was the professor who taught me both Greek exegesis and Hebrew grammar and syntax. Amazingly, he hardly seems to have changed, while I have grown old.

This is my twenty-sixth commencement at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. I arrived at the school in January of 1998. Charles Hauser, dean at the time, had been a professor and academic vice president of the seminary where I took my degrees. He was the one who opened the door to a faculty appointment at Central Seminary. Tom Zempel was the Assistant to the President in those days, and he also played a key role in recruiting me for the faculty. Of course, Douglas McLachlan was the president (and pastor of Fourth Baptist Church) who was willing to take a chance on me.

Graduation day is also the day of Central Seminary's spring board meeting. The board assembles in the morning, breaks briefly for lunch, and finishes its business during the afternoon. Many board members join our graduates for supper and then stay for the commencement.

Central Seminary enjoys the blessing of a stable board that is very involved in the life of the institution. Some board members have served for decades. Since Fourth Baptist Church hosts Central Seminary, several Fourth Baptist members serve on the board. The majority, however, are members of other Baptist churches.

It was our board that first moved Central Seminary in the direction of distance education. That was one of the most timely moves the seminary has ever made. Setting up and testing the infrastructure took a couple of years. We had just gotten the system nicely running when COVID-19 hit. If we had not already made that transition, the seminary likely would not have survived. As it happened, we were able to make a seamless transition, eventually basing all our programs (including our doctoral program) on the Zoom platform.

That move has changed the complexion of the seminary. Twenty years ago, most of our students were recent graduates of Bible colleges. Now, most of our students are older, and they are already engaged in the ministries for which they are training. Before moving to distance education, we had very few foreign students. Now I teach classes in which most of the students reside outside of North America. Twenty years ago we were operating a campus in Eastern Europe. Now that second campus is unnecessary. We can and do reach students almost anywhere in the world. Interestingly, some of our brightest students hail from Africa and Asia.

The international flavor of our student population also complicates our graduations. North American students are required to attend in person, and most of them bring families with them. As the body of foreign students grows, however, an increasing number are graduating virtually rather than in person.

When so many students take their courses through distance education, the campus's student life also changes. We no longer have events like student cookouts and banquets. We are looking for other ways to build camaraderie among our students. I have been experimenting with alternative ways to do this. For example, I've provided a platform through which students can share their notes. We make Zoom rooms available for students who want to conduct study groups, especially to review for exams. I also encourage students to share resources as they write papers. Those who choose to participate in these activities seem to be forming strong bonds of fellowship that reach across oceans and that (I hope) will endure for years to come.

This is my twenty-sixth graduation with Central Seminary, but it is the seminary's sixty-ninth. Our first commencement was held in 1957. As we close out the present academic year, we begin our seventieth year. That, too, is cause for celebration.

Over the decades we have watched as more than a few of our sister institutions have closed their doors. Most of them were good schools that did a faithful job of training workers and leaders for the Lord's service. We don't hold ourselves to be any better than they were. Yet God in His mercy has granted us the privilege of continued prosperity. Today's academic environment offers few reassurances (just look up the expression "demographic cliff"). Yet by God's grace we will continue to serve Him as long as He sends us students and supplies our needs.



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.
