

# ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

## “In the Nick of Time”

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Occasional Essays  
and Other Stuff  
for Christian  
Students

Presented by the  
President of

Central Baptist  
Theological  
Seminary of  
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,  
out of season;  
reprove, rebuke, exhort  
with all longsuffering  
and doctrine.”

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## Shall We Reason Together? Part One: The Challenge of Alogicality

Kevin T. Bauder

There once was a man who loved soup. So fond was he of soup that he decided to devote his meals entirely to the concoction. Soup, he reasoned, could supply him with every nutrient that he needed. So he forbade his wife to set anything on the table except soup. “Sola Suppa” was his motto.

At the next meal, however, he received an unpleasant surprise. He arrived at the table to find no utensils, no vessels, nothing but soup—and the table top was awash with it. “What is this?” he exclaimed. “It is Sola Suppa,” replied his wife. You want soup alone, you’ll get soup alone.

We must not confuse our food with the implements that we use to eat it. Bowls and spoons cannot nourish us, but without them, we will go hungry. True, spoons are not soup—but equally true, soup is not spoons.

You already know that this parable is not about soup and spoons. It is about revelation and reason. It is about the role that Scripture (as in “Sola Scriptura”) plays in our theology. We claim that Scripture is our sole and final authority in all matters of faith and practice. We moreover claim that Scripture is sufficient as a source of spiritual truth. We insist that the Bible alone is the Word of God, and it neither requires nor permits supplementation.

So exclusive is our devotion to Scripture that some have drawn an illicit inference from it. They have concluded that, since Scripture alone is God's word, the employment of reason or logic (they will usually say "human reason" or "human logic") is unnecessary and, perhaps, even harmful.

Not that they often say so in just those words. What they are more likely to do is to disparage some doctrinal or ethical conclusion, sniffing dismissively at inferences drawn through the use of "human logic." Somehow, reasoning soundly from biblical premises is supposed to be less authoritative than appealing to the straightforward statements of Scripture.

This is a philosophical position, but it has no name that I have ever heard. Therefore, I propose to call this philosophy "alogicality." Alogicals do not intend to be unreasonable or irrational, but they do want to put logic in its place. In their opinion, that place is an inferior one. They would much rather rely upon the plain statements of revelation than to stake anything upon an inference from those statements, however soundly it may have been drawn. If they do sometimes draw an inference, they will advocate it only in the most tentative terms. They also expect others to do the same.

Why is alogicality so appealing? I think there are three reasons. These reasons stem partly from legitimate concerns for the principle of "Sola Scriptura." They do not, however, justify the alogical philosophy, though they do explain why some people find it attractive. I would like to discuss these three reasons briefly before going on to say why I think alogicality is a false philosophy.

First, alogicals rightly insist that many—perhaps most—of our Christian beliefs had to be revealed. We never would have discovered most spiritual truths through the use of unaided reason. Were they not specially revealed, we would never have unearthed the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, the hypostatic union, or the way of salvation. These truths are not illogical or unreasonable, but they are supralogical in the sense that logic would never have got us to them. Left to itself, logic is like having a spoon but no soup. To be useful, it has to have something with which to work. For spiritual truth, the most important premises must be supplied by revelation.

Second, alogicals become offended because unbelievers sometimes enlist reason in the effort to sit in judgment over revelation. We know unbelieving thinkers who, because of some supposed logical difficulty, dismiss the entire Bible. Why, however, do we assume that the problem is with logic? Could it not be the case that the unbeliever is actually reasoning badly, and that the proper use of logic would resolve the supposed problem? To reject reason because some people reason badly is like refusing to eat with a spoon because some people dribble. And if you won't eat with a spoon, you'll never get to enjoy the soup.

This is probably the place to eliminate a confusion. People use the word *reason* to refer to different ideas. On the one hand, *reason* is a synonym for logic, whether deductive or inductive. That is the sense in which I am using the word. On the other hand, *Reason* (often capitalized) is sometimes understood to mean something like *plausibility*. In this sense, when people call an idea *unreasonable*, they mean that it seems far-fetched and unlikely. Whether or not a thing seems plausible will be influenced by any number of assumptions.

To the natural human, Christian truth is utterly implausible. Natural humans do not possess the categories within which Christianity makes sense. Any attempt to make Christianity seem more plausible by wrapping it in the trappings of a Sophistical system is doomed from the start. This

kind of substitution changes the whole meaning of Christian truths by putting them into the wrong categories. This is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 2.

In his epistles, Paul has nothing but disdain for Reason. Some have taken this to mean that Paul also rejected the use of reason, and this is a third factor that has made alogical philosophy appeal to some Christians. As we shall see, however, nothing could be further from the truth. Paul held worldly structures of plausibility in great contempt, but he showed nothing but respect for the sound use of logic.

Incidentally, there is no such thing as "human logic," any more than there is such a thing as human gravity or human mathematics. Humans did not invent logic; they discovered it and systematized its principles. Those principles are simply part of the way things are. They are an aspect of the order that God has worked into His creation. He could not have done otherwise, for He constantly reveals Himself as an orderly thinker. Even for God, contrary propositions cannot both be true, and He never could have created a universe in which they were.

Alogicality is a philosophy that wears a patina of humility, but its humility is false. It is the humility of those who refuse to take the responsibility of feeding themselves, as if it were the duty of the cook to put the soup into their mouths for them. In fact, alogicality is a philosophy that promotes irresponsibility. As I shall show, it is bad thinking, it is bad handling of Scripture, and it is bad theology. If we hold children responsible to eat soup with a spoon, then we should hold Christians responsible to draw sound inferences from Scripture. ✖

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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## Barnfloor and Winepress

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Thou that on sin's wages starvest,  
Behold we have the joy in Harvest :  
For us was gathered the first-fruits,  
For us was lifted from the roots,  
Sheaved in cruel bands, bruised sore,  
Scourged upon the threshing-floor ;  
Where the upper mill-stone roof'd His Head,  
At morn we found the Heavenly Bread,  
And on a thousand Altars laid,  
Christ our Sacrifice is made.

Those whose dry plot for moisture gapes,  
We shout with them that tread the grapes :  
For us the Vine was fenced with thorn,  
Five ways the precious branches torn ;  
Terrible fruit was on the tree  
In the Acre of Gethsemane ;  
For us by Calvary's distress  
The wine was racked from the press ;  
Now in our Altar vessels stored  
Is the sweet Vintage of our Lord.

In Joseph's garden they threw by  
The riv'n Vine, leafless, lifeless, dry :  
On Easter morn the Tree was forth,  
In forty days reach'd Heaven from earth ;  
Soon the whole world is overspread ;  
Ye weary, come into the shade.

The field where He has planted us  
Shall shake his boughs as Libanus,  
When he has sheaved us in His sheaf,  
When He has made us bear His leaf. -  
We scarcely call that Banquet food,  
But even our Saviour's and our blood,  
We are so grafted on His Wood. ✠

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Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis | [Contact Us](#)  
900 Forestview Ln N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 1-800-827-1043 | [www.centralseminary.edu](http://www.centralseminary.edu)